

Classics of Mystical Literature

THE ORIGIN OF WESTERN MYSTICISM

SELECTED WRITINGS OF PLOTINUS



Edited, with Introduction and Commentaries,

by S. Abhayananda

**PLOTINUS:
THE ORIGIN OF WESTERN MYSTICISM**

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PLOTINUS:
The Origin of Western Mysticism

by Swami Abhayananda
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Preface

This book is a product of my deep love and admiration for Plotinus, who is one of the greatest philosophers who ever lived, and of my desire to share him with those who may have found him heretofore inaccessible. Philosophers, we should note at the beginning, are of two kinds: there are those speculative philosophers who are given to the study and consideration of various theories of cosmology, ontology, epistemology, etc.; and who are commonly to be found among the academic professors, theoreticians, and historians of philosophy. At a more advanced level, philosophy becomes a thing not so much taught, as lived, and leads to the direct realization of the nature of reality. Those who have attained such a direct realization are philosophers of the second variety, commonly known as “mystics.” Those who have reached this ultimate level of philosophy have sought and realized within themselves, through contemplative prayer or meditation, the union of the individual mind with the universal Mind, or as we may say, the individual soul with the universal Soul. This “mystical” experience is referred to variously as “the mystic marriage,” “the vision of God,” or simply “enlightenment.” And those who have reached that interior experiential knowledge do so, not by learning, reason or speculation, but by a divine inspiration called “grace”, that draws the soul as if by a magnet toward the interior revelation of its Divine Source.

Even those who acknowledge that such a thing as “enlightenment” exists and is possible of attainment often find themselves helpless to acquire the one-pointedness of mind prerequisite to its attainment; and even those who are capable of reaching such a state of focused devotion at some time in their lives often find it impossible to retain it for a prolonged period. Why some are so divinely inspired while the great majority of men are devoid of such inspiration is a matter that can only be explained from the standpoint of evolutionary soul-development and/or “divine grace.”

The third-century Roman, Plotinus, was such a divinely inspired philosopher and mystic. He was most certainly a highly advanced soul, possessing the rare gift of divine grace coupled with a fierce determination to give all his attention exclusively to its call. Late in his life, in order to share his revealed knowledge with future generations, he wrote fifty-four treatises of various length expounding diverse elements of his mystical vision. These were then edited and presented by his disciple, Porphyry, in a series of six books, each containing nine treatises, which he called *Enneads* ("Nines").

These treatises were not presented by Porphyry in the order in which they were written by Plotinus, nor was Plotinus' philosophy systematically presented in this written collection of treatises. In fact, a clear understanding of the whole of Plotinus' philosophy may be obtained only by a laborious search, ferreting out from amongst his fifty-four treatises the common meaning of various terms and the interconnection of each element of his metaphysical vision. This, of course, presents a great obstacle and difficulty for the uninitiated student attempting to obtain from a casual reading of the *Enneads* an overall comprehension of Plotinus' metaphysics. An additional difficulty is added as a result of Plotinus' lack of economy and continuity of expression, which may be partially explained as a result of his failing eyesight, which prevented him from editing or even rereading what he had written in his spontaneous outpourings of thought.

This book therefore attempts a systematic presentation of Plotinus' thought, with selections from his own writings on distinctly separate elements of his metaphysics, in order to facilitate an understanding of his integral vision. I have arranged these selections topically, and while each topic may certainly be read independent of the rest, they are arranged in an order from first to last that seems to me to best conduct the reader progressively to a clear understanding of Plotinus' metaphysics. I have left out of my selections

much of what may be considered obscure or redundant, and also a great deal more in the interest of keeping this book focused and succinct. Thus, it reflects to a great degree my own judgment of what is of most value in Plotinus, and what is of secondary value. Above all, I have attempted to form a coherent, readable, and hopefully instructive and illuminative collection of excerpts from his writings for the benefit of those students interested in mystical philosophy.

All of the texts herein included are based on the translations from the original Greek by Stephen MacKenna, to whom I offer my thanks and acknowledge my indebtedness. Where his phrasing, punctuation or terminology seemed to me archaic or obscurative of the meaning, I have corrected it to form what seems to me a simpler and more intelligible expression of Plotinus' thought.

— Swami Abhayananda

Introduction

Mystical Origins

As everyone knows, mysticism was born in the East. The mystical philosophy which first entered the “Western world” from “the East” was primarily in the form of the *Upanishads*, the *Bhagavad Gita*, and, later, the teachings of the early representatives of Buddhism. From the earliest of times, Greek citizens, entering into Persia and India, had interacted with residents of those lands, and no doubt brought back something of that foreign metaphysics to their own lands. Also, Brahmins and Buddhists from India had moved into Greece, bringing their mysticism with them, and had doubtlessly shared their teachings with at least some residents of their adopted land. Socrates was said to frequent gatherings of such Brahmins.

There were other so-called Westerners before Socrates who appear to have taught what might be called a mystical philosophy—such as Pythagoras from the island of Samos (c. 570-490 B.C.E.), Heraclitus of Ephesus (540-480 B.C.E.), Xenophanes of Colophon (570-475 B.C.E.), Parmenides of Elea (b. 515 B.C.E.), and Anaxagorus of Ionia (b. 500 B.C.E.). But we have only inconclusive fragments and hearsay by which to judge in these cases, and certainly nothing like a personal account of mystical experience. Socrates (469-399 B.C.E.), himself, is a likely candidate for the label, “mystic”; but we have only accounts of his teachings from Plato and Xenophon, and though they suggest his possession of a “mystical” knowledge, we have no personally written declarations of his mystical experience to which to refer. It remains to say something about the various possible mystical influences existing from the time of Plato to Plotinus: Zeno of Citium in Cypress (335-265 B.C.E.), the founder of Stoicism, seems by all accounts to have taught a philosophy based on mystically perceived

revelations; but, again, we can only surmise, as we have no actual personal account of mystical experience from his hand. The same is true of his followers, Cleanthes of Assos (b. 330 B.C.E.), Chrysippus of Cilicia (280-205 B.C.E.), and the later Stoic philosopher, Poseidonius of Apamea (135-51 B.C.E.). Epictetus of Hierapolis (50-138 C.E.), whose writings, though still extant and containing many mystical elements, still makes no mention of personal mystical experience.

The writings of the Alexandrian Jew, Philo Judaeus (20 B.C.E. to 40 C.E.) were plainly mystical in nature, and they may indeed have been read by Plotinus. He was most certainly acquainted with the teachings of the martyred Nazarene, Jesus (4 B.C.E. to 30 C.E.), and those of his followers, the Christians. The clearly mystical texts of the Hermetic tradition which surfaced in the 1st century C.E., claiming to be an ancient Egyptian legacy; and the various writings of the Gnostics, with claims to mystical knowledge, also made their appearance at this time. These latter, for the most part, fostered a Dualistic philosophy to which Plotinus greatly objected.

Other mystical influences of the time include that of the Neo-Pythagorean, Appolonius of Tyana (1st century C.E.), who was revered as a God-man, and no doubt taught a mystical philosophy, but we know little of his thought and that only from a later biographer. Numenius of Apamea (Syria), who lived in the latter part of the 2nd century C.E., was reputedly one of Plotinus' major influence, along with Ammonius, but we possess nothing of the writings of either of these men. And so, we come to the time of Plotinus.

In Rome, by the middle of the 3rd century of the Current Era, the great Greek philosophers of the golden age were merely a distant memory, and the last of the Roman Stoics, the Emperor Marcus Aurelius (121-180), had long since passed away. It was now the time of the Christian theologians, Clement of Alexandria (ca. 215), Origen (185-251), and Tertullian (150-

225); and Christianity, while still in its birth throes, was gathering wide public support, as were the Gnostic and Hermetic sects of the time. The ancient civilizations were in a period of decline; the revolt of Maximus (ca. 235) marked the beginning of an endless series of civil and foreign wars, domestic calamities, plagues and famines, which depopulated and impoverished the Roman empire, and put an end to culture, learning, and philosophy, along with the elite who had the leisure to pursue them.

Amidst this dark and unhappy period of political transition and religious tumult in Rome, Plotinus (205-270) stands out as a singular guiding light—the first great Western representative of mystical knowledge. There is no doubt that he must be regarded as the Father of Western mysticism and counted as one of the most influential mystical philosophers who ever lived. He was, indeed, a great Sage, a World-Teacher, whose fame, reputation and influence grows brighter with every passing age.

The Life of Plotinus

According to tradition, Plotinus was born at Lycopolis (the modern city of Asyut) in Upper Egypt, and he lived much of his early life at Alexandria. We are told by his biographer, Porphyry (237-304), that at the age of twenty-eight, Plotinus made a decision to follow the life of philosophy. He no doubt had some kind of spiritual awakening at this time—a not uncommon age for this to occur if we think of the Buddha, Jesus, and other major religious figures. At this time, Plotinus read and heard the teachings of many philosophers, but found no one he wished to take as his mentor until he heard the teachings of Ammonias Saccus, who was known as “the God-taught.” After hearing one of Ammonias’ lectures, Plotinus said to a friend, “This is the man I’ve been looking for.”

Ammonias was well learned in the Persian and Indian philosophical traditions, and his philosophy was highly compatible with the mystical philosophy taught in those lands. After studying for eleven years with Ammonias, Plotinus, having heard so much of the philosophy of Persia and India, decided he would like to learn more of the thought of those peoples first-hand. With this object in mind, he joined up with the invading forces of Emperor Gordian which were en route to Persia. He got as far as Mesopotamia, when the Emperor was assassinated, and the expedition was halted. Plotinus managed to escape to Antioch and then to Rome, where he arrived in the year 245 of the Current Era, at which time he was forty years of age.

For the next twenty-five years, Plotinus seems to have stemmed his travel urges, and remained in Rome, teaching his mystical philosophy. His lectures were free and open to the public, and he apparently lived solely on the favors of his wealthy students and patrons. He taught from his own mystical experience, but he usually framed his thoughts in terms familiar to students of Plato; and for that reason, he became labeled in much later times as “the founder of Neoplatonism (the new Platonism)”. This is a misleading title, however, for it tends to detract from the fact that, though Plotinus regarded Plato’s philosophy as the foundation of his own, his message was ultimately founded on his own personal realizations.

In the first ten years of his life in Rome, Plotinus wrote nothing, but by the time Porphyry had become his follower in the year 263, he had completed twenty-one treatises. In answer to the questions of his later students, he wrote thirty-three more, which were circulated without titles among his closest followers. And, after Plotinus’ death, Porphyry gathered these fifty-four treatises together into a book of six sections, containing nine treatises each; hence the title, *Enneads* (“Nines”), by which Plotinus’ book is known.

In his meetings with his friends and students, Plotinus would explain in an imaginative and compelling manner the truths of the spiritual life. Says Porphyry: “When he was speaking, the light of his intellect visibly illuminated his face; always of winning presence, he became at these times still more engaging: a slight moisture gathered on his forehead; he radiated benignity.”¹ “Plotinus,” said Porphyry,

“lived at once within himself and for others; he never relaxed from his interior attention unless in sleep; and even his sleep he kept light by an abstemiousness that often prevented him taking as much as a piece of bread, and by constantly concentrating on his own highest nature.”² ...He was gentle, and always at the call of those having the slightest acquaintance with him. After spending twenty-six years in Rome, acting, too, as arbiter in many differences, he had never made an enemy of any citizen.”³

Plotinus taught and wrote and discussed questions with his devoted students, but much of his time was spent in solitary contemplation, leading his soul to union with its divine Source. Porphyry states that, during the time he knew him, Plotinus attained that exalted state of awareness four times. When, in his later years, he became gravely ill, suffering from malign diphtheria, Plotinus retired to the estate of a nobleman disciple in Campania. A friend who visited him there, reports that Plotinus, weak and scarcely able to speak, whispered, “I am striving to give back the divine in me to the divine in all.” He died soon thereafter at the age of sixty-six.

All Western mystical philosophy after Plotinus bears the stamp of his vision. His was the model on which Jewish, Moslem, and Christian theology in the Middle Ages was founded. The great Christian theologian, St. Augustine (354-430) was greatly influenced by Plotinus, as were the Spanish Moslem philosophers Al-Farabi (870-950), Avicenna (980-1037), and Averroes

(1126-1198); and the Jewish philosopher, Ibn Gabirol (1021-1070), as well as Meister Eckhart (1260-1328), Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), and the Christian Scholastics of the 13th century. In 1492, Marcilio Ficino resurrected the metaphysics of Plotinus by translating him into the Latin of his day, thereby greatly shaping the philosophical milieu of the Renaissance. Thus, his influence through the centuries has been, and continues to be, immense.

The Mystical Vision

Plato before him had hinted of the possibility of attaining "the vision of God," but Plotinus was the first Western philosopher to make an explicit declaration of his own mystical experience, asserting that he had directly known God and the nature of Reality, and describing the nature of that experience. He made it clear that, under certain rare circumstances, one is able to reverse the outward direction of one's conscious attention, turning it inwardly, so as to have clear and direct experience of one's original emanating Source. It is Plotinus' discussion of this return to union with the Divine Source which comprises some of the most inspiring and elevating passages in his written works. He was one of the great Adepts, proficient in this "return"; and what he has to say about the nature of God, and about the means to attain direct knowledge of Him, comprises one of the greatest treasures of Western philosophy.

Great mystics, such as Plotinus, write to let us know that they have actually known the ultimate Truth, experienced it, "seen" It, with a subtle sight that is directed inward; and that we too—following upon them, attending to their directions—we too may obtain that direct knowing of whence we came, and who we truly are. We cannot come to this knowledge by discursive thinking, nor by the study of philosophy, though both are valuable insofar as they lead us in the right direction. The words of those who have "been

there" can, however, inspire us, and resonate within us to awaken us to the truth of that pure Divine Self that is the perennial object of our quest. Plotinus had, on numerous occasions, attained intimate "vision" of the universal creative process through contemplative union with the One, but as he himself declared, "The vision baffles telling." What is "seen" in that mystical revelation, while it must be forever etched into the soul in perfect clarity, cannot be explained so as to show it to others; one can only hope, by suggestion, to evoke some inner recognition in one's hearers, inspiring them to obtain that vision for themselves.

In that "vision" one sees, from the vantage point of identity with the transcendent One, that all this vast universe and all that is included in it, "emanates" from that One in a way that can be characterized as "Thought," but is quite beyond and quite superior to what we know in ourselves as the manifestation of a thought. Though it is often referred to as an "emanation," this universal manifestation has no exact corollary in the world with which it can be compared; it bursts forth in a manner entirely unique to itself, and therefore cannot be explained in any terms comprehensible to the intellect. Plotinus describes it as a spontaneous radiation—as the sun radiates its heat, or as love radiates from a loving heart. This creative outflow is experienced in the mystical vision at its eternal source, and the mystic perceives, through the upliftment of his soul to identity with that eternal One, the expansive outpouring of the creative Thought-energy which becomes manifest as the vast universe in which we live.

While Plotinus was the earliest Western seer to elaborately express the content of mystical experience, he is not alone in that vision. All who have experienced their oneness with the Eternal One say that, from the standpoint of the Eternal, the creative production of the universe is of the nature of thought; that is to say, that it is an "image," or "projection" which

emanates from the Creative Power of the One. And yet, while the Creative Power is produced from the one Reality, it is not that Reality Itself.

The One, the Real, transcends Its own manifestory Power. It is the ultimate Self of all beings, and It exists alone, giving birth to all that is below It. Though It is often spoken of figuratively as "the Father of all," and Its Creative Power, Its Thought-generating aspect, is often spoken of as "the Mother of all," they are not really two, but a One with two aspects. The One, the absolute Consciousness, remains distinct from, i.e., transcends, the "Creative Power," even though that Creative Power is Its own. It is the Creative Power which generates and manifests the temporal universe, though it has its own source in the unmanifest One.

When we, who live within this thought-world, try to take the world apart to examine it and discover what it is made of, we find nothing substantial; we find only emptiness wed to invisible force, creating the image of form. To discover its essence by empirical methods is as futile as it would be if we were characters in a dream attempting to discover what *that* reality was made of. In such a case, our only hope is to awake from the dream to discover that we are the Dreamer, the One in whom this Mind-production has its source.

Is it truly possible to awake from this dream-like world to know the one eternal Self who is its producer? Yes, it *is*; but its occurrence is rare. Elsewhere,⁴ we have treated of some of those individuals who have thus awakened to realize this common eternal Self. It occurs, they say, quite unexpectedly in a moment of concentrated awareness focused inwardly. The mind ascends, as it were, to its subtler state, and from there to what Plotinus calls the "All-Soul," all the while drawn on by its inherent thirst to know its Source. When it comes inwardly to a perfect, concentrated stillness, it emerges from its time-bound isolation as an individual creature, and it

awakes to its identity as an all-inclusive creative Power. And yet above that creative Power, at a yet subtler stage of consciousness, it knows itself as the eternal One from which the creative Power takes its origin. It knows This, not as an object is known to a knowing subject, but as its own primary and eternal Identity, much as one knows the existence of his own integral consciousness while aware also of his inherent capability for multiple thought-production.

Man, Plotinus asserts, is an evolute of the One, containing within himself all levels of manifestation, from the absolute Unity to the creative Energy, to the soul, to mind, and finally to the gross physical body; and is capable of returning in consciousness to his Origin. It is in relation to man that this out-flowing radiance from subtle to gross is described in the Eastern yogic tradition as well. Man, who is at his center the unqualified Self (*Atman*, or *Brahman*), manifests from the supra-causal (*Turiya*), to the causal (*Prajna*), to the subtle or astral (*Tajasa*), and lastly as the gross physical body (*Vishva*).

The levels of human reality, from the gross physical body inward, have been variously named and described; and in all true metaphysical systems the primary teaching has been that one is able to reach to and experience that Self by way of the inner journey only, seeking it by way of self-examination, purification, contemplation and selfless devotion. Self-examination reveals to us that we are more than the physical body with which the immature consciousness identifies. We are more than the effusive mind with which some others identify, more than the intellect which reasons and oversees the mind, more than the individual soul which, through an evolutionary process of purification, evolves from lifetime to lifetime.

The soul, seeking God, scans the inner darkness, as though to discover another, as though awaiting something external to itself to make its presence

known. But as one's concentration focuses within, the mind becomes stilled, and suddenly the seeking soul awakes. No external has made its appearance; it is the soul itself, no longer soul, which knows itself to be the All, the One. Like a wave seeking the ocean, the seeker discovers that it is, itself, what it sought. Through contemplation and selfless devotion to that highest Self, we discover that we are the Life in all life, the integrated Whole of which all manifest creatures and things are a part. And, at last we awake to the supremely ultimate Identity, knowing ourselves as the one Light of existence, the Source of all manifestation, the one God who is the true Self of all, and from Whom all else follows.

From the standpoint of the human experience, the various levels of our being are not clearly separated off from one another with clear demarcations to indicate where one ends, and another begins, but they tend to merge one into the other in a gradual and vaguely perceived manner. We are aware of being identified with one or another level of being according to the activities which follow upon it. When we are identified with the physical body, we are operating almost solely through our senses, and we find our gratification in things of sense. When we identify with the mental realm, we are conscious of the inner play of random thoughts and images, and we delight in the play of thought. When we ascend a bit to the intellectual realm, we identify with the critical intelligence which discriminates, censures, and deliberates; thereby elevated in concentration above the rambling mind, we take pleasure in the clarity of discernment. Above this intellect, we experience our soul, not only as the bearer of our highest moral directive and purpose, but as the driving impetus guiding us toward our own Source with a heartfelt longing, like the yearning of a moth for the flame. The soul is drawn to the Light within it, and looks, not below to the realm of mental activity or the realm of sense, but above toward the Divine whence it comes.

Those who have risen yet higher (or more inwardly) toward their Source have experienced themselves no longer as individual separate identities, but rather as ideational wave forms on the one integral ocean of Cosmic Energy. They no longer identify with the composite of body, mind, and soul, but know themselves as having their real identity in the entire undivided ocean of creative Energy in and on which these temporary forms manifest. The conscious awareness focused on this clear vision of the subtler level of its own reality then moves, as one moving through a fog comes to a clearing where the fog is no more, to the ultimate and final level of subtlety, the Divine Source, the Unmanifest. Then, it knows the pure unqualified Consciousness that is the Father, prior even to the creative Power which acts as creator; and it knows, "I and the Father are one."

From that vantage point in Eternity one sees God's own creative Power manifesting all that has manifest existence in a cycle of creation and dissolution. There is a bursting forth, just as the spreading rays of the Sun burst out from their source, and then a returning to that source in a cyclic repetition, much as the cycle of the breath's inhalation and exhalation. One witnesses this from that transcendent vantage point, aware of one's Self as the Eternal One, totally unaffected and unaltered by the expansion and contraction of the out-flowing creative Force—as a man might watch the play of the breath or the imagination without being at all affected by its rise and fall. That One is the final irreducible Reality, and It is experienced as identity. Nothing could be more certain than the fact that It is who one really is, always was, and always will be.

The Philosophy of Plotinus

Plotinus wrote explicitly of his own mystical experience and the metaphysical understanding gleaned from it. Metaphysics, I should remind the reader, pertains to the knowledge of that which transcends the physical.

Webster's Dictionary defines it as: "the branch of philosophy that deals with first principles and seeks to explain the nature of being or reality (*ontology*) and of the origin and structure of the universe (*cosmology*)..." Metaphysics, therefore, is generally recognized to be the province of those who have entered deeply into the subtleties of reality and, through their own efforts, have obtained intimate experience of the subtlest substrata of reality; i.e., it is the province of the mystics.

Throughout history, mystics have attempted to describe in word and symbol the unitive relationship revealed to them between the transcendent eternal Reality and the immanent temporal reality. Many, in their desire to explain what they have come to know through mystical experience, have attempted to formulate a complete metaphysical system; that is, an explanation of the entire process of manifestation from the First Principle (God) to the phenomenal world; from the One to the many; from the eternal unitive Consciousness, which is the source of all, to Its manifestation as soul, mind and body in this temporal and phenomenal world. Naturally, given the nature of the mystical experience and the unfitness of temporally-based language to speak of what is eternal, some conceptual differences exist between the various Eastern and Western mystical traditions; nonetheless, all are agreed that the eternal Reality is the source of what we regard as phenomenal reality and that that eternal Reality is capable of being directly known.

While Eastern and Western philosophies developed separately, and were insulated to some degree from each other, it is difficult to find significant differences between the metaphysical philosophy of India, known as Non-dualistic Vedanta, and that metaphysical philosophy expounded by Plotinus. Vedanta originated from those Indian mystic-seers who wrote the *Upanishads* (c. 1000 B.C.E. to 100 C.E.), while Plotinus was an Egyptian-born Roman citizen of the third century with roots in the Platonic tradition.

Naturally, their terminologies were different, as their languages were different; and we must assume that, while there was some cultural interchange between East and West going back to at least the fifth century B.C.E., these two philosophic and mystical traditions, appear, for the most part, to have developed independently.

Yet despite their linguistic differences, their vision of reality is virtually identical. And this is to be attributed to the fact that both Plotinus and the authors of the Upanishads had entered deeply into the nature of their own reality through contemplation, and they had experienced their own natures as identical with ultimate Reality. We will find the same metaphysical philosophy whenever we look into the expressed thought of any of those throughout man's history who have experienced Truth in its fullness through inward contemplation: whether it be the Taoists, Jesus, the Buddha, Shankara, or any of those others who have reached the summit of human attainment known as enlightenment.

In such a mystical tradition as the Vedantic (yogic) or the Neo-Platonist, God is not thought of as someone or something that is extraneous to man, but is rather one's own innermost identity, one's subtlest (highest) Self—remote from one's normal, worldly awareness, but *never separate* from one's individual conscious existence, as it is the substratum of the individual soul. God, called "Brahman," "Shiva," "the One," or any number of other names, was never regarded by these traditions as *other*, as "a being" extraneous to man, high above him in some actual heaven, as in the Judaic Biblical tradition, but was always regarded as lying inward or upward at the subtlest degree of human consciousness. This was the mystical teaching of Jesus of Nazareth as well: "The kingdom of God is within you," he taught; "You (i.e., the real *You*, the inner, eternal *You*) are the Light of the world."

All those who have seen into the subtlest levels of Reality agree that in the Eternal, the One, there is a creative faculty, much as in our human consciousness there is a faculty of thought-production, which, while not separate from the consciousness in which it inheres, has a capacity unlike that of its source. In the One, the Eternal, the unchanging primal Consciousness, such a distinct faculty resides. It may be called "the Creative Power." Thus, the One and Its Creative Power compose a duality that is truly a Unity, as the one is inherent in the other.

Though there were some pre-Socratic philosophers who hinted at such a duality-in-Unity, it was Plato (431-351 B.C.E.) who gave it detailed expression in his Dialogues. He explained the "projection" or emanation of the world from God as the manifestation of "Ideas" produced by His Creative Power, which he called the *Demiurge*. This Power (referred to in the Vedantic tradition as *Shakti*, *Maya*, or *Prakrti*), is referred to by Plotinus as *Nous* (a word used first by Anaxagorus), which is sometimes translated as "The Intellectual Principle," but which I have rendered as "The Divine Mind." *Nous* manifests the entire universe of animate and inanimate forms, of all intelligible objects as well as all sense objects, including all souls and all animate and inanimate forms, while the eternal One, from whom the *Nous* manifests, remains transcendent, uninvolved and unchanged.

One of the peculiarities of Plato's metaphysics was his assertion that the forms in the material world correspond to the Ideational forms in the subtler Spirit-world, and approach perfection as they approximate those Ideal forms. His concept of these "Ideas" or Ideal Forms which, according to him, exist as perfect archetypal images of every single material form that exists on earth or in the heavens, was, even in his own time, a hotly controversial concept. Aristotle (384-348 B.C.E.), though a disciple of Plato in his youth, found this concept "unnecessary," and challenged it in his *Metaphysics*.

Plotinus, who lived more than 500 years after the death of Plato, found in Plato's explanation of reality his own model; and, though he occasionally departed slightly from Plato's description, he wholeheartedly adopted most of Plato's metaphysics and terminology. In fact, all of the subjects treated in the following collection by Plotinus had been treated much earlier in a similar fashion by Plato. And so, while it is true that Plotinus speaks from his own experience, it is also true that he casts his expression in the mold of Plato's metaphysics and Plato's terminology. Utilizing Plato's already established cosmology, he elaborates upon what, from his own visionary experience, he had "seen" in the depths of contemplation.

Plotinus, in order to explain the transition from Thought in the Mind of God to material universe, depicted the process of world-manifestation figuratively as subtle layers or phases of Divine Thought emanating out from the center, each phase unfolding at a greater remove from the source, each more deeply enwrapped in complexity, and therefore cognitive darkness, than its predecessor. At the center he placed the absolute Consciousness (The One), which precedes the creative Power (the Divine Mind) just as our own pure consciousness precedes and gives birth to our thought-producing faculty. From the Divine Mind comes the All-Soul, in which exist all the subtle forms of spirits, angels and individual souls, which manifest on three levels of activity: the intuitive, the intellectual, and the sensible; and, finally, the world of "matter," which he viewed as the darkness at the outermost reaches of the illuminating emanation from the Divine. Today, of course, we see the universal manifestation as occurring nearly fourteen billion years ago, as a "Big Bang" or "Great Radiation", corresponding to the flash of Thought-energy from the Divine Mind, the light of which evolved to become the "material" particles that make up all the forms within our expanding universe.

Plotinus retained Plato's vision of the multiple "Ideas" inherent in the Divine Mind, and he speaks frequently of the "Intelligible" or "Spiritual" world, the realm of the subtle Ideational reality, which is eternal and unified, while still containing individual forms (the levels of reality described in yogic terms as the causal and astral realms). We may understand the "Ideas" of Plato and Plotinus better if we look to the Indian Yogic tradition for comparisons. According to the yogis who have perceived the subtle levels of reality, there is a "body" subtler than the physical, called the "astral body"; and, at a level more subtle still, is the "causal body." Beyond that is the "supra-causal body" which is synonymous with the Divine Itself. The "causal" body is what is referred to by Plato and Plotinus as the "Ideas" of which the astral and physical bodies are grosser manifestations. (For a comprehensive exposition of the subtle "bodies" as "Ideas" from the Yogic perspective, see Paramahansa Yogananda's *Autobiography of a Yogi*, Chapter 43, "The Resurrection of Sri Yukteshvar.")⁵

To those who have not experienced these subtler realms of reality, such concepts remain mere concepts. But those who *have* experienced them declare unanimously that it is the ideational products of the Divine which give form and substance to the individual soul and the physical body. Plotinus had ascended to the vision of that world of Spirit, a rare accomplishment, and was extremely cognizant of the inability of reason to discover it, and equally cognizant of the inability of language to represent the beauty of that subtler "Spiritual" world. The "art" by which The One manifests the phenomenal universe from Himself is an ineffable one, and it cannot be satisfactorily explained. As Plotinus himself warned, "You who make the venture [to explain the nature of Reality] will throw forward all your being, but you will never tell It entire."

As to his "method" of contemplation, Plotinus offers little in the way of instruction. In his treatise on Dialectic, he states that his contemplative

method is one of dialectic, by which he does not intend the ordinary kind of dialectic consisting of a reasoned consideration of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis, but rather what we might regard as "discrimination," such as is indicated by the term *viveka* in the Indian yogic system: the discrimination between the Real and the unreal, the Eternal and the non-Eternal.⁶ But, of course, this is only one of the elements which he describes as essential to the process of attaining union with the One. The process he describes is a gradual one consisting of conformity to virtue,⁷ purification and disengagement from the sensual,⁸ one-pointed love for God,⁹ the receipt of Divine grace (implied, though not stated),¹⁰ and a contemplative focus on the "Intelligible" realm.¹¹ He offers no breathing techniques, no postures, no focusing of the gaze, no devotional chants or hymns, nor any of the other "yogic" methods found in the Eastern traditions; rather, he may be said to be a *bhakta*, a lover of God, and at the same time an already accomplished *jnani*, or knower of God, who, through intense concentration and keen discriminative vision, makes his way boldly to the inner Spiritual realm and beyond.

To sum up: Plotinus describes the original Source of all as the absolute and transcendent Existence, the unmanifest One. He states that It is beyond all predication as it cannot be described in terms indicative of any qualities at all. It is the Source of all, and yet is Itself unmoving, inactive; or, more accurately, beyond motion or activity. His description, if it can be called that, is identical to the description offered by the *Upanishads*, the *Tao Te Ching*, and all those other authentic mystical texts of antiquity. Such descriptions come not from the requirements of logic or discursive thought, but from direct experience. The mystical vision, culminating in the experience of union with the absolute One, reveals the nature of this First and ultimate Reality. Sometimes Plotinus argues for Its existence as the First Principle by citing his own personal experience of It as a perceived Reality known through mystical union with It; at other times he argues

merely from the philosophic point of view of logical necessity, in order to persuade his readers through reason.

This Reality, (The One) self-contained, unqualified, contains within Itself a principle of Movement, which Plotinus calls *Nous* (the Divine Mind), the second Hypostasis of Divinity. It has been called in other traditions, *Shakti*, *Maya*, *Prakrti*, *Teh*, and any number of other names. It too is perceived in the experience of Unity. Whereas The One maintains eternally Its transcendence and detachment, It is the source of the Divine Mind which contains within itself all that follows upon it. They are two aspects of one Reality.

Plotinus then posits a third stage of emanation within this one Divinity: the universal Soul (the All-Soul), which is the active projection of all that is contained within the Divine Mind. This universal Soul appears particulate as each individual soul; what we call matter, including all corporeal bodies, results as a later evolute of this process of universal manifestation. Again, let us remember, these stages of emanation (*hypostases*) are not separate individual entities, or gods, but are "evolutes" or "levels of manifestation" of the One, originating in and from the One, never being severed from It.

These three: *The One*, *The Divine Mind*, and the *Soul*, are treated extensively by Plotinus in the following first three sections. In subsequent sections, he treats of love, divine beauty, the soul's free will, its ultimate purification and return to Unity, and the freedom and joy inherent in the soul's awakening to God-consciousness.

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I. THE ONE

Introduction to The One

The revealed knowledge of a transcendent Source of all that is manifest is an experience common to all mystical traditions. That Source has been given many different names, but It is recognizably the common experience of all. In the Vedantic tradition It is variously called *Brahman*, *Shiva*, or *Purusha*. Here are some illustrative passages from the *Upanishads* describing It:

There is a Spirit who is amongst the things of this world and yet He is above the things of this world. He is clear and pure, in the peace of a void replete. He is beyond the life of the body and the mind, never born, never dying, everlasting, ever One in His greatness ¹

His existence is the Source of all existence, the seed of all things that in this life have their life. He is beyond time and space, and yet He is the God of infinite forms. ²

This is the truth: As from a flaming fire thousands of sparks come forth, even so, from the Creator an infinity of beings come forth, and to him return again. But the Spirit of Light is above form, never-born, within all, outside all, in radiance above life and mind, and beyond this creation's Creator. ³

He is beyond thought and invisible... He is everlasting and omnipresent, infinite in the great and infinite in the small. He is the Eternal whom the sages see as the Source of all creation. ⁴

The *One* of Plotinus is synonymous with *Brahman* of the Upanishads. It is also synonymous with the *Shiva* of Shaivism, the *Tao* of Taoism, the *Purusha* of the Bhagavad Gita, the *Dharmakaya* of the Buddhists, the *Haqq* of Ibn Arabi, and the *Gotttheit* of Meister Eckhart. However, it is best to limit our comparisons; too many would be tedious. We may think of it—although, as has often been stated, It is beyond conception—as a pure Consciousness, prior to Thought, which, since It is the primal Source of all that is manifested by Thought, is by extension, the Self of all, our own eternal Identity.

It may be termed "pure Consciousness," but even this is inaccurate as It is Consciousness prior to the act of being conscious of anything. Even to say, "It is," is misleading, since It is beyond Being; even the word, "prior," connotes causal or temporal sequence, and It is beyond both Time and Causation. Nothing can be rightly said of It, but we must settle upon a name in order to speak of It, and so we may choose "Consciousness," "the Self," "The One," "The First," or "The Good," despite their inadequacy.

The One, we must remember, is not something standing behind the manifold, as a separate thing, but is the One by which, in which, and from which all that is manifest exists. The manifest universe comes forth from the Divine Mind, which is the active, creative Power of The One. But we must not think that The One and the Divine Mind, because they are separately named, are two different and separate realities; they cannot truly be separated. They are two aspects of the same one Reality. Nonetheless, they must be spoken of separately because they are not the same. While all that depends upon The One for existence has movement, The One has no movement; in relation to what could It move? It retains a constancy which exists nowhere else; It remains constant whether there's a manifested universe or not. It remains constant when the universe is expanding; It remains constant when it is contracting; It remains constant when there is no

universe at all. It is the same constant One even when the universal manifestation is only latent potentiality.

Though it is undoubtedly difficult to imagine a One which has none of the qualities of its parts, the One, in fact, possesses no qualities precisely because It alone is. Nothing at all of what applies to the manifold may be predicated of It—not being, not movement, not knowledge, not substance, not temporal or spatial relation. It has nothing outside of Itself with which to relate. It is the absolutely Alone. Just as our own consciousness, while being the source of mind and mentation, containing its potentiality within it, yet stands silently, detachedly, above mind and mentation, so does the One, while being the source of the Divine Mind, stand wakefully above it. And, just as, while our own consciousness contains nothing of what is contained in the mind—since it is the source of mind, and It may yet be said to contain those contents in a transcendent sense—so does the One contain nothing of what is in the Divine Mind, and yet It may be said to contain all potentially, as It is the source of the Divine Mind. Plotinus, in concession to Plato, also terms it "The Good," as it is the final irreducible good to which all souls aspire.

What is amazing is that the One, that pure transcendent Consciousness, may be directly known as the sole Source and sole Identity of those individualized souls who 'emanate' from and are contained within It. Because in an ultimate sense It is everything, everything may trace its being There. It is Consciousness, and all within It is consciousness. It is the Self of all.

Those of us who have experienced this eternal Self continue, even in these days, to speak of It, declaring the truth of this experiential knowledge, and adding our voices to that of Plotinus in confirmation of his declarations. Because this supramental knowledge comes to but those few who are

“graced” by its uncommon revelation, it has always been almost impossible for those who have not experienced it to grant credence to the declarations of those who have. Yet, the knowledge of The One ever continues to reveal itself to those who have been drawn by grace to receive it; and all continue to acknowledge the words of Plotinus to be some of the best that man can produce to suggest it.

Here, in the following written selections, Plotinus describes the One he has experienced in the depths of contemplation. This is no metaphysical speculation; though he oftentimes speaks in a way so as to appeal to reason, he is speaking of what he has known first-hand. And, therefore, what he has to say about the Source of all is worthy of our rapt attention.

Plotinus on The One

When we speak of The One and when we speak of The Good, we must recognize an identical nature. We must affirm that they are the same—not, it is true, as venturing any predication with regard to that [primal] Person, but simply as indicating it to ourselves in the best terms we can find.

Even in calling It “The First” we mean no more than to express that It is the most absolutely simplex. It is the Self-Sufficing only in the sense that it is not of that compound nature which would make it dependent upon any constituent. It is The Self-Contained because everything contained in something other must also exist by virtue of that other.

Deriving then from nothing other, entering into nothing other, in no way a comprised thing, there can be nothing above It.

We need not, then, go seeking any other Principles. This—The One and The Good—is our First. Next follows the Divine Mind, [which is] the Primal Thinker. And upon this follows Soul. Such is the order in nature. The Spiritual realm allows no more than these and no fewer.⁵

He [the One] has no task, we hold, because nothing can present itself to Him to be done. He is sufficient; He need seek nothing beyond Himself, He who is over all. To Himself and to all He suffices by simply being what He is.

And yet this "He is" does not truly apply: The Supreme has no need of Being. Even "He is good" does not apply since it indicates Being. The "is" should not suggest the existence of [some] thing; it is [merely] to state identity. The word "good" used of Him is not a predicate asserting His possession of goodness; it conveys an identification. It is not that we think it exact to call Him either good or The Good; it is [just] that sheer negation does not indicate [anything at all; and so] we use the term "The Good" to assert identity without the affirmation of Being. ⁶

The One is all things and none of them. The Source of all things is not all things; and yet It *is* all things in a transcendental sense ...But [how can there be] a universe from an unbroken unity, in which there appears no diversity, not even duality?

It is precisely because there is nothing within the One that all things are from It. In order that Being may be brought about, the Source must be no Being but Being's generator, in what is to be thought of as the primal act of generation. Seeking nothing, possessing nothing, lacking nothing, the One is perfect and, metaphorically, has overflowed, and Its exuberance has produced something new. This product has turned again to its begetter and been filled and has become its contemplator and therefore a Divine Mind. ⁷

The only reasonable explanation of act flowing from It lies in the analogy of light from a sun. The entire Spirit realm may be thought of as a kind of light with the One in repose at its summit as its King: but this manifestation is not cast out from It—that would cause us to postulate another light before the

light—but the One shines eternally, resting within Itself. The Divine Mind, not identical with its source, is yet not severed from It nor of so remote a nature as to be less than Real-Being; it is no blind thing, but is seeing, self-knowing, the primal knower.

The One, as transcending Mind, transcends knowing. Above all need, It is above the need of the knowing which pertains solely to the Secondary nature. Knowing remains a unitary thing, but defined; the First is One, but undefined. A defined One would not be the One-Absolute. The absolute is prior to the definite.

Thus, The One is in truth beyond all statement. Any affirmation is of a thing; but "all-transcending, resting above even the most august Divine Mind"—this is the only true description, since it does not make It a thing among things, nor name It where no name could identify It. We can but try to indicate, in our own feeble way, something concerning It. When in our perplexity we object, "Then It is without self-perception, without self-consciousness, ignorant of Itself," we must remember that we have been considering It only in Its opposites.

If we assume that It possesses within Itself the distinction of knowing and known, we make It a manifold; and if we allow intellection in It, we thereby make It needful. Even if It were accompanied by intellect, Its intellection would have to be superfluous.⁸

This accepted, it follows that anything that is to be thought of as the most utterly simplex of all, cannot have self-intellection; to

have that would mean being multiple [i.e., It must become an object to Itself in order to be the subject]. The Transcendent, thus, neither knows Itself nor is known in Itself.

How, then, do we ourselves come to be speaking of It?

No doubt we are cognizant of It, but we do not describe It; we have neither knowledge nor intellection of It.

But in what sense are we even cognizant of It when we have no hold upon It?

We do not, it is true, grasp It by knowledge, but that does not mean that we are utterly void of It; we hold It not so as to describe It, but so as to be able to speak about It. And we can and do state what It is not, while we are silent as to what It is. We are, in fact, speaking of It in the light of Its sequels; unable to state It, we may still possess It.

Those divinely possessed and inspired have at least the knowledge that they hold some greater thing within them, though they cannot tell what it is. From the movements that stir them and the utterances that come from them they perceive the power, not themselves, that moves them. In the same way, it must be, we turn towards the Supreme when we hold the Divine Mind pure. We know the Divine Mind within, that which gives Being and all else of that order; but we know, too, that other [the One], know that It is none of these, but a nobler principle than anything we know as Being; fuller and greater; above reason, mind, and feeling; conferring these powers, not to be confounded with them. ⁹

What then must The Unity be? What nature is left for it?

...The soul or mind reaching towards the Formless finds itself incompetent to grasp That which is unlimited or to take impression where the impinging reality is all-encompassing. In sheer dread of holding to nothingness, it slips away. The state is painful; often it seeks relief by retreating from all this vagueness to the region of sense, there to rest as on solid ground, just as the sight distressed by trying to see the minute rests with pleasure on the bold.

The soul must see in its own way; this is by absorption, unification; but in seeking thus to know the Unity it is prevented by that very unification from recognizing that it has found; it cannot distinguish itself from the object of this knowing. Nonetheless, this is our one resource if our philosophy is to give us knowledge of The Unity.

We are in search of unity; we are endeavoring to know the principle of all, the Good and First; therefore, we may not stand away from the realm of Firsts and lie prostrate among the lasts. We must strike for those Firsts, rising from things of sense which are the lasts. Cleared of all evil in our intention towards The Good, we must ascend to that Principle within ourselves. From many, we must become one; only in doing so may we attain to knowledge of That which is Principle and Unity. We shape ourselves into the Divine Mind; we make over our soul in trust to the Divine Mind and set it firmly in That. Thus, what That sees the soul will waken to see. It is through the Divine Mind that we have this vision of The Unity. It must be our care to bring over nothing whatever from sense, to allow nothing

from that source to enter into the Divine Mind. With a pure intellect, and with the height of intellect, we are to see the All-Pure.

...The Unity, then, is not the Divine Mind but something higher still. The Divine Mind is still a being but that First is no being but precedent to all Being. It cannot be a being, for a being has what we may call the form of its reality, but The Unity is without form, even spiritual form.

Generative of all, The Unity is none of all: neither thing nor quantity nor quality nor intellect nor soul. It is not in motion, not at rest, not in place, not in time. It is the self-defined, unique in form or, better, formless, existing before Form was, or Movement or Rest, all of which are attachments of Being and make Being the manifold it is.

...When we speak of this First as a Cause we are affirming something happening not to It but to us; [we are affirming] the fact that we derive from this Self-Enclosed. Strictly speaking, we should put neither a "this" nor a "that" to It. We hover, as it were, about It, seeking the expression of It in an experience of our own, sometimes nearing this Reality, sometimes baffled by the enigma in which It dwells.

The main source of the difficulty is that awareness of this Principle comes neither by knowing nor by the intellection that discovers the Spiritual Beings, but by a presence over passing all knowledge. In knowing, soul or mind must abandon its unity; it cannot remain a simplex. Knowing is taking account of things; that accounting is multiple. The mind thus plunging into number and multiplicity departs from Unity. ¹⁰

Think of The One as Mind or as God, you think too meanly. Use all the resources of understanding to conceive this Unity and, again, it is more authentically One than God, even though you reach for God's unity beyond the most perfect unity you can conceive. For This is utterly a self-existent, with no concomitant whatever. This self-sufficing is the essence of Its unity. Something there must be supremely adequate, autonomous, all-transcending, most utterly without need.

...The sovereignly self-sufficing principle will be absolute Unity, for only in this Unity is there a nature above all need, whether within Itself or in regard to the rest of things. Unity seeks nothing for its being or Its well-being or Its safehold upon existence. Cause to all, how can It acquire its character outside of Itself or know any good outside? The good of Its being cannot be borrowed: This is The Good. Nor has It place; It needs no place to stand as though It were incapable of sustaining Itself. What calls for such underpropping is the soulless, some material mass that must be firmly founded or fall. This [the One, the Good] is foundation to all, cause of universal existence and of ordered placement. All that demands place is in need; a First cannot go in need of its sequents. All need is effort towards a first principle; the First, principle to all, must be utterly without need. If the Unity be seeking, It must inevitably be seeking to be something other than Itself; [in other words,] It would be seeking Its own destroyer. Whatever may be said to be in need is needing a good, a preserver; nothing, therefore, can be a good to The Unity.

Neither can It have will to anything; It is beyond good, not even to Itself a good but to such beings only as may be of quality to have part with It. Nor has It intellection; that would imply diversity. Nor has It movement; It is prior to movement as to intellection.

To what could Its intellection be directed? To Itself? But that would imply a previous ignorance. It would be dependent upon that intellection in order to have knowledge of Itself. But It is the Self-Sufficing. Yet this absence of self-knowing, or self-intellection, does not imply ignorance; ignorance is of something outside—a knower ignorant of a knowable—but in the Solitary, there is neither knowing nor anything unknown. Unity, self-present, It has no need of self-intellection. Indeed, this "self-presence" were better left out, the more surely to preserve the unity. We must eliminate all knowing and all association, all intellection whether internal or external. It is not to be thought of as having but as being Intellection. Intellection does not itself perform the intellectual act but is the cause of the act in something else and cause is not to be identified with caused. Most assuredly, the Cause of all is not a thing within that all.

This Principle is not, therefore, to be identified with the good of which It is the source; It is good in the unique mode of being The Good above all that is good. ¹¹

As one wishing to contemplate the spiritual nature will lay aside all the representations of sense and so may see what transcends the sense-realm, in the same way one wishing to contemplate what transcends the spiritual attains by putting away all that is

of the intellect, taught by the intellect, no doubt, that the Transcendent exists but never seeking to define It.

Its definition, in fact, could be only "the Indefinable"; [for] what is not a thing is not some definite thing. We are in agony for a true expression; we are talking of the untellable. We name, only to indicate for our own use as best we may. And this name, "The One," contains really no more than the negation of plurality. ...If we are led to think positively of The One, [as] name and thing, there would be more truth in silence. The designation as "The One" is a mere aid to inquiry, and it was never intended for more than a preliminary affirmation of absolute simplicity to be followed by the rejection of even that statement. It was the best that [is] offered, but it remains inadequate to express the nature indicated. For this is a principle not to be conveyed by any sound; it cannot be known on any hearing but, if at all, by vision; and to hope in that vision to see a form is to fail of even that.¹²

That Source, having no prior, cannot be contained. It is not "within" any of those other forms of being which are within It; It is orb'd round all, but not so as to contain them as constituents. It possesses but is not possessed. Holding all—though Itself nowhere held—It is omnipresent, for where Its presence failed, something would elude Its hold. At the same time, in the sense that It is nowhere held It is not present. Thus, It is both present and not present; not present as not being circumscribed by anything; yet, as being utterly unattached, not inhibited from presence at any point. ...Void of nothing, yet containing no particular, God is sovereignly present through all. We cannot think of something of God here and something else

there, nor of all God gathered at some one spot. There is an instantaneous presence everywhere, containing nothing and [yet] leaving nothing void, everything therefore fully held by the Divine. ...The First is neither remote from things nor directly within them. There is nothing containing It; It contains all. It is the Good to the universe if only in this way, that towards It all things have their being, all dependent upon It, each in its mode, so that thing rises above thing in goodness according to its fuller possession of [that] true Existence.¹³

Now it is clear that we cannot possess ourselves of the power of this Principle in its concentrated fullness; to do so one must be identical with It. But some partial attainment is within our reach.

You who make the venture will throw forward all your being, but you will never tell It entire—for that, you must yourself be acting as the Divine Mind—and at your utmost success It will still pass from you or, rather, you from It. When you see The Good [the One], see It entire. Later you may think of It and identify with The Good whatever you can remember.

It is The Good since, being a power, It is the cause of the intelligent and intellectual life as It is of all life and intellect. For these grow from It as from the source of essence and of existence, the Source as being one, simplex and first because before It, nothing was. All derives from This. It is the origin of the primal Movement, which It does not possess, and of the Repose which is but Its absence of need; for neither rest nor movement can belong to That which has no place in which either could occur. Center, object, ground, all are alike

unknown to It, for It is before all. Yet Its being is not limited; what is there to set bounds to It? Nor, on the other hand, is It infinite in the sense of magnitude; what place can there be to which It must extend, or why should there be movement where there is no lacking? All Its infinitude resides in Its power. It does not change and will not fail; and in It all that is unfailing finds duration.

It is infinite also by right of being a pure Unity with nothing towards which to direct any partial content. Absolutely One, It has never known measure and stands outside of number, and so is under no limit either in regard to any external or within Itself; for any such determination would bring something of the dual into It. And, having no constituent parts, It accepts no pattern, forms no shape.

Reason recognizing It as such a nature, you may not hope to see It with mortal eyes, nor in any way that would be imagined by those who make sense the test of reality and so annul the supremely Real. For what [appears to us and] passes for the most truly existent is most truly non-existent—the thing of extension least real of all—while this unseen First is the source and principle of Being and sovereign over Reality.¹⁴

God has no need of anything that derives from Him; He ignores all that produced realm, never necessary to Him, and remains identically what He was before He brought it into being. So too, had the secondary [the Divine Mind] never existed, He would have been unconcerned, exactly as He would not have grudged existence to any other universe that might spring into

being from Him, were any such possible. Of course, no other such could be since there is nothing that has not existence once the All exists.

But God never was the All; that would make Him dependent upon the universe. Transcending all, He was able at once to make all things and to leave them to their own being, He above.

... Thus, we rob It of its very being as The Absolute Good if we ascribe anything to It, existence or intellect or goodness. The only way is to make every denial and no assertion, to feign no quality or content there but to permit only the "It is" in which we pretend to no affirmation of attributes which are non-existent. There is an ignorant praise which, missing the true description, drags in qualities beneath Its real worth and so abases It. Philosophy must guard against attaching to the Supreme what is later and lower. Moving above all that order, It is the cause and source of all these, and is none of them.

...Thus, is revealed to us the primarily Existent, the Good, above all that has being, good unalloyed, containing nothing in itself, utterly unmingling, all-transcending, cause of all. ¹⁵

The integral omnipresence of unity is universally recognized; for all men instinctively affirm the God in each of us to be one, the same in all.

...In virtue of that unity the Good may be regarded as truly inherent. Hence the Good is not to be sought outside; it could not have fallen outside of what is. It cannot possibly be found

in non-Being; within Being the Good must lie, since It is never a non-Being.

If that Good has Being and is within the realm of Being, then It is present, self-contained, in everything. We, therefore, are not separated from Being; we are in It; nor is Being separated from us. Therefore, all beings are one. ¹⁶

[How did The One come to be?] There has been no "coming" so that you can put it to the question, "How does this come to be? What chance brought It here or produced It?" Chance did not yet exist; there was no "automatic action": these imply [the existence of] something before themselves and occur [only] in the realm of [the creative] process. ...The Principle of All must be of higher quality than anything that follows It. It is therefore in a sense determined—determined, I mean, by Its uniqueness and not in any sense of being under compulsion. Compulsion did not coexist with the Supreme but has place only among secondaries and even there can exercise no tyranny; this uniqueness is not from outside.

This, then, It is; This and no other. Simply what It must be, It has not "happened," but is what by a necessity prior to all necessities It must be. We cannot think of It as a chance existence; It is not what It chanced to be but what It must be—and yet without a "must."

All the rest waits for the appearing of the King, to hail Him for Himself; not a being of accident and happening but authentically King, authentically Principle, The Good authentically; not a being that acts in conformity with

goodness—and so, recognizably, a secondary—but the total unity that He is, not molded upon goodness but the very Good itself.

...Can we conceivably say, "Apparently, It just so happened to be"? Neither "so" nor in any mode did It happen to be. There is no happening; there is only a "so, and not otherwise than so." And even "so" is false; it would imply limit, a defined form. To know This is to be able to reject both the "so" and "not-so."...

The One, therefore, is beyond all things that are "so." Standing before the Indefinable you may name any of Its sequents but you must say "This is none of them." At most It is to be conceived as the total power towards [the existence of] things, supremely self-centered, being what It wills to be or rather projecting into existence what It wills, Itself higher than all will, will [being] a thing beneath It. In a word, It neither willed its own "so"—as something to conform to—nor did any other make it "so."

...Since there is nothing before Him who is the First, we must call a halt; there is nothing to say. We may inquire into the origin of His sequents, but not of Himself who has no origin. ¹⁷

But this Unoriginating, what is It?

We can but withdraw, silent, hopeless, and search no further. What can we look for when we have reached the furthest? Every inquiry aims at a first, and that attained, rests.

Besides, we must remember that all questioning deals with the nature of a thing, its quality, its cause or its essential being. In this case the Being—insofar as we can use the word—is knowable only by Its sequents. The question as to cause asks for a principle beyond, but the Principle of all has no principle. The question as to quality would be looking for an attribute in That which has none. The question as to nature shows only that we must ask nothing about It but merely take It into the mind if we may, with the knowledge gained that nothing can be permissibly connected with It.

The difficulty this Principle presents to our mind insofar as we can approach to conception of It may be exhibited thus:

We begin by positing space, a place, a Chaos. Into this container, whether conceived in our imagination as created or pre-existent, we introduce God and proceed to inquire. We ask, for example, whence and how He comes to be there. We investigate the presence and quality of this newcomer projected into the midst of things here from some height or depth. But the difficulty disappears if we eliminate all space before we attempt to conceive God. He must not be set in anything either as enthroned in eternal immanence or as having made some entry into things. He is to be conceived as existing alone, in that existence which the necessity of discussion forces us to attribute to Him, with space and all the rest as later than Him—space latest of all. Thus, we conceive, as far as we may, the spaceless; we abolish the notion of any environment. We circumscribe Him within no limit; we attribute no extension to Him. He has no quality since no shape, even intellectual shape;

He holds no relationship but exists in and for Himself before anything is. ¹⁸

...He is the First, the Authentic, immune from chance, from blind effect and happening. God is the Cause of Himself. For Himself and of Himself, He is what He is, the first Self, the transcendent Self. ¹⁹

II. THE DIVINE MIND

Introduction to The Divine Mind

To make clear the meaning of "The Divine Mind," it may be helpful to reiterate what was said in the Introduction about the similarity between the philosophy of Non-Dualistic Vedanta and the philosophy of Plotinus. Like the great Vedantic seers, Plotinus sees The One (i.e., *Brahman* or *Shiva*) as the transcendent First Principle which is beyond predication—prior to all movement or change—and yet which is the Origin and Source of all that follows. What follows initially, he explains, is "the Creative Power": what the Upanishads call *Maya*, *Shakti*, *Prakrti*, etc., and what Plato calls the *Demiurge*. Plotinus' name for it is *Nous*, which is translated as "the Divine Mind." From this, or rather as an extension of this, comes "Soul," which is both one and many; one at its highest level, but appearing as many at its more manifest level. And Soul, being merely an extension of the Divine Mind, is in essence and in reality, the Divine Itself, possessing the same freedom and bliss as God. This is the basis for Plotinus' assertion (in subsequent chapters) of the freedom of the individual soul. This is what makes possible the soul's return in awareness to its Source; i.e., the soul's liberation. For, as that great Vedantin, Shankaracharya, stated, "*jivo brahmaiva napara*" ("The soul is none other than Brahman"). Indeed, the whole of Plotinus' philosophical scheme is identical to that of Vedanta, and yet it is stated in that rather difficult language of philosophical reasoning typical of the early Greek and Roman philosophers.

When Plotinus speaks of the Divine Mind, the creative Power inherent in the One, it is important to remember that it *is* inherent; it is not a new category of thing that is produced from the One, and it does not really "go out" from the One, despite the metaphor of emanation. By the fact that it is given a new name, "The Divine Mind," it appears to be something other than the

One; but it is merely the active and creative faculty of the One, which Itself remains unmoved. We may understand this by analogy with our own mind, which is a limited version of the Divine Mind. The individual mind, by which we mean the thought-producing faculty of our consciousness, arises from that consciousness in a spontaneous, indeterminable manner. It is simply the nature of consciousness to manifest as mind. And yet, with the addition of mind, the consciousness is not altered or diluted or diminished. Our consciousness is an undivided unity; only with the arising of mind, its other aspect, does duality arise. There exists a duality between the static witnessing consciousness and the active form-producing mind, where before mind there was only unity. This duality is reflected in The Divine Mind as Thinker and thought, or subject and object, even though they remain within itself. From the profusion of this form-producing faculty all manner of sub-realities come into being, having in themselves a similar duality of consciousness and form, of subject and object, as they are ultimately constituted of that self-dividing Mind.

We may think of the Sun, by analogy—and it is indeed this very analogy which Plotinus most frequently alludes to; though the analogy fails in some respects, since the radiation of the Sun actually "goes out" from it, and, of course, there are multiple suns in the universe, while the One is alone and contains all within Itself. Where the analogy holds, it is because the Sun is a thing of multiple phases of radiation also: there is the condensed mass at the center; an outer gaseous plasma; and from that a radiating corona; and finally, the heat and light that radiates outward, reaching far into space, where it eventually fades into coldness and darkness. In a roughly similar way, the One, as Divine Mind, images forth from itself several phases of reality, whose ability to fully reflect their source diminishes in proportion to their "distance" from their source, eventually becoming almost blindly unreceptive at the outermost level of manifestation.

The Divine Mind represents the creative Power by and from which is initiated the bursting into manifest activity of the Ideational Universe which is inherent within it. The Divine Mind may therefore be thought of as God, the Creator. The One we must think of as above the Creator, as Godhead, or Father, prior to the activity of creation. Like the One, the Divine Mind is eternal; for it is the indwelling Power of the One. It is the Potentiality of all multiplicity, and it holds this potential multiplicity within it, not yet thrusting outward into manifestation; that subsequent act of manifestation is the activity which Plotinus labels "Soul" (which will be discussed in a subsequent chapter).

Plotinus on The Divine Mind

There exists a Principle which transcends Being; this is The One, whose nature we have sought to establish insofar as such matters lend themselves to proof. Upon The One follows immediately the Principle which is at once Being and the Divine Mind. Third comes the Principle, Soul. ...Thus, our soul, too, is a divine thing, belonging to another order than sense; ...¹

There is, we may say, something that is the Center; about It, a circle of light shed from It; then, around Center and first circle alike, another circle, light from light; outside that again, not another circle of light but one which, lacking light of its own, must borrow.²

...All that is fully achieved engenders. Therefore, the eternally achieved engenders eternally an eternal being. At the same time, the offspring is always minor. What then are we to think of the All-Perfect but that It can produce nothing less than the very greatest that is later than Itself? This greatest, later than The Unity, must be the Divine Mind, and it must be the second of all existence, for it is that which sees The One on which alone it leans while the First has no need whatever of it. The offspring of the prior to Divine Mind can be no other than that Mind itself and thus is the loftiest being in the universe, all else following upon it—the Soul, for example, being an utterance and act of the Divine Mind as that is an utterance and act of The One. But in Soul the utterance is obscured, for Soul is an image and must look to its own original. That Principle [the Divine Mind], on the contrary, looks to the First without mediation—thus becoming what It is—and has that vision not as from a distance but as the immediate next with nothing intervening, close to the One as Soul [is] to it.³

...From such a Unity as we have declared The One to be, how does anything at all come into substantial existence—any multiplicity, dyad, or number? Why has the Primal not remained self-gathered so that there be

none of this profusion of the manifold which we observe in existence and yet are compelled to trace to that absolute Unity? ⁴

... [In other words, how does there come to be] a universe from an unbroken Unity, in which there appears no diversity, not even duality?

It is precisely because there is nothing within the One that all things are from It. In order that Being may be brought about, the Source must be no Being but Being's generator, in what is to be thought of as the primal act of generation. Seeking nothing, possessing nothing, lacking nothing, the One is perfect and, in our metaphor, has overflowed; and Its exuberance has produced something new; [and] this issue has turned again to its begetter and been filled and has become its contemplator and so a Divine Mind.

That which perceives The One establishes Being. That vision directed upon the One establishes the Divine Mind. Looking to the One for the purpose of vision, it is simultaneously Divine Mind and Being; and attaining resemblance in virtue of this vision, it repeats the act of the One in pouring forth a vast power. This second outflow is an image or representation of the Divine Mind as the Divine Mind represents its own prior, The One. This active power sprung from the Divine Mind is Soul. ⁵

The Divine Mind in its mentation thinks itself; the object of the thought is nothing external: thinker and thought are one. Therefore, in its thinking and knowing it possesses itself, observes itself and sees itself not as something unconscious but as knowing. In this primal knowing it must include, as one and the same Act, the knowledge of the knowing. And even the logical distinction mentioned above cannot be made the case of the Divine; the very eternity of its self-thinking precludes any such separation between that intellectual act and the consciousness of the act. ⁶

...He [The Divine Mind] will know himself to be a unity existing by virtue of the one Eternal Life, and in this sense unlimited. And his knowledge of the Unity will not be as of something seen from outside but as of something embraced in true knowledge, for this Unlimited is an

eternal indweller within himself—or, to be more accurate, eternally follows upon him—and is seen by an indwelling knowledge. God knows his own unlimited life, and, in that knowledge, knows the activity that flows from him to the Cosmos; but he knows it in its unity, not in its process.⁷

The duality [between The One and the Divine Mind], is [in fact] a unity; but how is this unity also a plurality?

The explanation is that in a Unity there can be no seeing [for seer and seen require at least the semblance of Duality]. In Its contemplation the One is no longer a Unity; if it were still a Unity, the Divine Mind would not exist. The Highest began as a Unity but did not remain as it began; all unknown to itself, it became manifold. It became pregnant, so to speak: desiring universal possession, It flung Itself outward, though it were better had It never known the desire by which a Second came into being. ...This Being is limitless and in all the outflow from it there is no lessening, neither in its emanation, since this also is the entire universe, nor in itself, the starting point, since it is no assemblage of parts [capable of being diminished]. ...The Divine Mind is the earliest form of Life: it is the Activity presiding over the out flowing of the universal order...

In its character as Life, as emanation, as containing all things in their precise forms and not merely in the agglomerate mass, ...it must of necessity derive from some other, from one that does not emanate but is the Principle of Emanation, of Life, of Intellect, and of the Universe. ...And what will such a Principle essentially be? ...This Principle on the thither side of Life is the cause of Life [and not the manifester of Life]—for that manifestation of Life which is the universe of things is not the First Activity; it is itself poured forth, so to speak, like water from a spring.

Imagine a spring that has no source outside itself; it gives itself to all the rivers, yet is never exhausted by what they take, but remains always integrally as it was; the tides that proceed from it are at one within it

before they run their several ways, yet all, in some sense, know beforehand down what channels they will pour their streams.

Or think of the life coursing throughout some mighty tree while yet it is the stationary principle of the whole, in no sense scattered over all that extent but, as it were, operating in the root. It is the giver of the entire and manifold life of the tree, but remains unmoved itself, not manifold but the principle of that manifold life. And this surprises no one—though it is, in fact, astonishing how all that varied vitality springs from the Unvarying, and how that very manifoldness could not be unless before the multiplicity there were something all singleness. For the Principle is not broken into parts to make the total; on the contrary, such partition would destroy both [the many and its originating Principle]; nothing would come into being if its cause, thus broken, up, changed character. Thus, we are always brought back to The One.

Every particular thing has a one of its own to which it may be traced; the All has its one, its prior but not yet the absolute One; through this we reach that absolute One, where all such reference comes to an end. Now when we reach a one—the stationary principle—in the tree, in the animal, in Soul, in the All—we have in every case the most powerful, most precious element. When we come to the One in the authentically Existing Beings—their Principle and source and potentiality—shall we lose confidence and suspect it of being—nothing?

Certainly, this Absolute is none of the things of which It is the source—Its nature is that nothing can be affirmed of It—not existence, not essence, not life—since It is That which transcends all these. But possess yourself of It by the very elimination of Being and you hold a marvel. Thrusting forward to This, attaining, and resting in yourself, seek to grasp It more and more—understanding It by that intuitive thrust alone, but knowing Its greatness by the Beings that follow upon It and exist by its Power.

Another approach:

The Divine Mind is a Seeing, a Seeing which sees itself; therefore, it is a potentiality [within The One] which has become effective.

This implies the distinction of matter and form in it—as there must be in all actual seeing—the matter [and form] in this case being the Intelligibles [i.e., the Thought-forms] which the Divine Mind contains and sees. All actual seeing implies duality; before the seeing takes place there is the pure Unity. That Unity acquires duality, and the duality is a Unity.

Now as our sight requires the world of sense for its satisfaction and realization, so the vision in the Divine Mind demands, for its completion, The Good [i.e., the One].

It cannot be, itself, The Good, since then it would not need to see or to perform any other act; for The Good is the center of all else, and it is by means of The Good that every thing has act, while The Good is in need of nothing and therefore possesses nothing beyond Itself.

Once you have uttered "The Good," add no further thought: by any addition, and in proportion to that addition, you introduce a deficiency.

Do not even say that It has Intellection [i.e., Thought]; you would be dividing It; It would become a duality, The Good and The Divine Mind.

...

The transcendent Being [The Good, the One] neither strives, since It feels no lack, nor attains, since It has no striving. And this marks It off from the Divine Mind, to which characteristically belongs the striving, the concentrated strain towards its Form.

Yet, The Divine Mind—beautiful, the most beautiful of all; lying lapped in pure light and in clear radiance; circumscribing the nature of the authentic existents; the original of which this beautiful world is a shadow and an image; tranquil in the fullness of glory since in it there is nothing devoid of intellect, nothing dark or out of rule; a living thing in a life of blessedness—this, too, must overwhelm with awe anyone who has seen it, and penetrated it, to become a unit of its Being.

But as one who looks up to the heavens and sees the splendor of the stars thinks of the Maker and searches, so whoever has contemplated the Intelligible [i.e., Spiritual] universe and known it and wondered about it must search after its Maker too. What Being has raised so noble a fabric? And how? Who has begotten such a child, this Divine Mind, this lovely abundance so abundantly endowed?

The Source of all this cannot be an Intellect; nor can It be an abundant Power: It must have been before Intellect and abundance were; these are later and things of lack; abundance had to be made abundant and Intellection needed to know.

These [i.e., Intellect and abundant Power] are very near to The Un-needing, to That which has no need of knowing; they have abundance and intellection authentically, as being the first to possess [them]. But, there is That before them which neither needs nor possesses anything, since, needing or possessing anything else, It would not be what It is—The Good.⁸

Here [in the Divine Mind] is contained all that is immortal: there is nothing here but Divine Mind; all is God; this is the place of every soul. Here is rest unbroken: for how can that seek change, in which all is well? What need that reach to, which holds all within itself? What increase can that desire, which stands utterly achieved? All its content, thus, is perfect, that itself may be perfect throughout, as holding nothing that is less than the Divine, nothing that is less than Intellective. Its knowing is not by search but by possession, its blessedness inherent, not acquired. For all belongs to it eternally and it holds the authentic Eternity imitated by Time which, circling round the Soul, makes towards the new thing and passes by the old. Soul deals with thing after thing—now Socrates, now a horse: always some one entity from among beings—but the Divine Mind is all and therefore its entire content is simultaneously present in that identity. This is pure Being in eternal actuality. Nowhere is there any future, for every then is a now; nor is there any past, for nothing there has ever ceased to be. Everything has taken its stand forever, an identity well pleased, we might say, to be as it is. And everything, in that entire content, is Divine

Mind and Authentic Existence; and the total of all is Divine Mind entire and Being entire.

Divine Mind by its intellective Act establishes Being, which in turn, as the object of intellection, becomes the cause of intellection and of existence to the Divine Mind ... Now while these two are co-existents, having their existence in common, and are never apart, still the unity they form is two-sided [i.e., has two aspects]: there is the Divine Mind as against Being, the intellectual agent as against the object of intellection. We consider the intellective Act [as subject] and we have the Divine Mind; we think of the object of that act and we have Being. Such a differentiation must be if there is to be any intellection. But similarly, there must also be identity [wherein, ultimately, subject and object are one]. ...Thus, the Divine Mind is ...shaped in a certain sense by The One and in another sense by itself, since its potential vision becomes actual [because of the apparent separation]. Intellection is, precisely, an act of vision in which subject and object are identical.

But how and what does the Divine Mind see and, especially, how has it sprung from That which is to become the object of its vision?

The mind demands the existence of Being, but it is still in trouble over the problem endlessly debated by the most ancient philosophers: from such a Unity as we have declared The One to be, how does anything at all come into substantial existence, any multiplicity, or dual principle, or quantity? Why has the Primal [The One] not remained self-gathered so that there be none of this profusion of the manifold which we observe in existence and yet are compelled to trace to that absolute Unity?

In venturing an answer, we first invoke God Himself, not in loud word but in that way of prayer which is always within our power, leaning in soul towards Him by aspiration, alone towards the Alone. But if we seek the vision of that great Being within the inner sanctuary [of the soul]—self-gathered, tranquilly remote above all else—we begin by considering the images stationed at the outer precincts... How the Divine Mind comes into being must be explained:

Everything moving has necessarily an object towards which it advances; but since the Supreme can have no such object, we may not ascribe motion to It. Anything that comes into being after It can be produced only as a consequence of Its unfailing self-intention. And, of course, we dare not talk of generation in time, dealing as we are with eternal Being. Where we speak of origin in such reference, it is in the sense, merely, of cause and subordination. Origin from the Supreme must not be taken to imply any movement in It. That would make the Being resulting from the movement not a second principle but a third, [since] the movement would be the second phase (*hypostasis*).

Given this immobility in the Supreme, It can neither have yielded assent nor uttered decree nor stirred in any way towards the existence of a secondary.

What happened, then? What are we to conceive as rising in the innards of that immobility?

It must be a circumradiation—produced from the Supreme but from the Supreme unaltering—and may be compared to the brilliant light encircling the sun and ceaselessly generated from that unchanging substance.

...The Divine Mind stands as the image of The One, firstly because there is a certain necessity that the First should have its offspring, carrying onward much of its quality, in other words that there be something [of Itself] in Its likeness as the sun's rays tell of the sun. Yet the One is not an intellective principle; how then does It engender a Divine Mind? Simply by the fact that in Its self-searching, It has vision: this very *seeing* is the Divine Mind. [All seeing is within itself, as within a closed circle] ... Of course, the divisibility belonging to the circle does not apply to The One; here [in a circle], to be sure, is a unity; but there [in The One] is the Unity which is the potentiality of all existence. ...The perfection entails the offspring; a power so vast could not remain unfruitful.⁹

For the moment let us define the Nature of the Good as far as the immediate purpose demands:

The Good is That on which all else depends, towards which all existences aspire as to their source and their need, while Itself is without need, sufficient to Itself, aspiring to no other, the measure and Aim of all, giving out from Itself the Divine Mind and Existence and Soul and Life and all Thought.

All until The Good is reached is beautiful; The Good is beyond beautiful, beyond the Highest, holding kingly state in the Intellectual [Spiritual] World, that realm constituted by a Principle wholly unlike what is known as intelligence in us. Our intelligence is nourished on the propositions of logic, is skilled in following discussions, works by reasonings, examines links of demonstration, and comes to know the world of Being also by the steps of logical process, having no prior grasp of Reality but remaining empty, all intelligence though it be, until it has put itself to school.

The Divine Mind we are discussing is not of such a kind. It possesses all. It is all. It is present to all by Its self-presence. It has all by other means than having, for what it possesses is still itself, nor does any particular of all within it stand apart; for every such particular is the whole and in all respects all, while yet not confused in the mass but still distinct, apart to the extent that any participant in the Divine Mind participates not in the entire as one thing but in whatsoever lies within its own reach.

The Divine Mind is the first Act of The Good and the first Existence; The Good remains stationary within Itself, but the Divine Mind acts in relation to It and, as it were, lives about It.

And the Soul, outside, circles around the Divine Mind, and by gazing upon it, seeing into the depths of it, through it, sees God.¹⁰

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III. THE SOUL

Introduction to The Soul

If we hold to the analogy already referred to, comparing our own individual consciousness to The One, and comparing the mind in us which creates images to The Divine Mind, the flow of created images in our mind is analogous to The Soul. And, to continue the analogy, the acts resulting from our thoughts could be compared to the manifestation of the physical universe. While such an analogy is imperfect, it is nonetheless useful in helping us to comprehend Plotinus' vision of the nature of Reality to this point. For Plotinus, the material content of the universe is accounted as a failure of soul to remain in its place; it is a willful turning away from the attraction of the higher Principle of Being, and a subsequent grasping toward illusion or non-being. Matter, therefore is thought of as having no positive being, but is rather a lack, a turning away from the Light by the soul, requiring the soul's eventual realigning of its attention and subsequent escape from the realm of matter.

Plotinus explains that the emanation from the Divine Mind, the Principle of Soul, is two-fold: the higher, the Celestial Soul, includes the entire Spirit-realm of gods, angels, demons, and all individual souls; and the lower, the Generative Soul, produces the world of animate and inanimate matter. Thus, there are two distinct impulses inherent in the Cosmic Soul: one cognizant and adoring of its source; and the other, looking away from its source, producing by its attraction to illusion a world of matter. The soul's "couplement" with the body is therefore the source of its bondage; and its turning back to the Light from which it came, and which constitutes its true joy is the means of its release.

Soul, at its highest level of awareness, is focused on what is above it; at its lowest level of awareness, it is focused on what is below it. When drawn

downward by the promise of pleasure toward the body and matter, it becomes identified with that, and suffers the consequences of that "couplement". When escaping from that downward pull, no longer identified with the body, but lifting itself by its aspiration toward its true country, it reenters the realm of the All-Soul, and looks lovingly and longingly toward God, its true source and being.

The individual soul and matter come forth from the one All-Soul, and so are One at their source, while yet having their own independent manner and function of existence. We may think of them as analogous to water and ice, which, likewise, are one in essence while having different forms and different modes of activity. Each existing in its own way, the soul and the material body combine together to make life, and then separate as the individual soul transmigrates from body to body, gaining experience and wisdom. Eventually, each soul learns to liberate itself from matter in order to rise in awareness to know itself, in essence, as the Divine Mind, its true source and being:

When the soul awakes to its true identity as the Divine Mind, it knows that it, and the body as well, are God's. In fact, there is no more individual soul or individual body, but all is God's very Self, since, ultimately, He is the only One who is. The division of these two principles, body and soul, spirit and matter, exists only in the dark lower level of temporal worldly existence. In the Divine Mind, all such duality ceases to be, and only Unity is. At its highest level of awareness, Soul knows itself as the Godhead, the One who is the ultimate Reality, standing as the pure unqualified Consciousness from which the Divine Mind and all that follows is ushered forth.

Plotinus on The Soul

The authentic Reality [the One] gives life to the Intelligible [Spiritual] realm. The Divine Mind is the noblest of Its content, but It contains also souls, since every soul in this lower [earthly] sphere has come from there. *There* is the world of unembodied spirits, while to our world belong those that have entered body and undergone bodily division. *There* the Divine Mind is a concentrated all; nothing of it is distinguished or divided. And in that unitive realm all souls are concentrated also, with no spatial discrimination.

...The Divine Mind is forever repugnant to distinction and to partition; however, Soul, though without distinction and partition there, has a nature lending itself to divisional existence, and this division is secession, entry into body. [And so] in view of this seceding and the ensuing partition we may legitimately speak of it as a partible thing.

But if so, how can it still be described as indivisible?

[It remains indivisible] in that the secession is not of the entire Soul; something of it holds its ground: that in it which recoils from separate existence. The entity described as "both the undivided soul and the soul divided among bodies," is a Soul which is at once above and below, attached to the Supreme and yet reaching down to this sphere, like a radius from a center.

Thus it is that, entering this [earthly] realm, it possesses still the vision inherent in that superior [indivisible] phase by virtue of

which it maintains its integral nature unchanged. Even here [on earth] it is not exclusively the partible soul: it is still the impartible as well... ¹

The nature, at once divisible and indivisible, which we affirm to be soul has not the unity of an extended thing. It does not consist of separate sections; its divisibility lies in its being present at every point of the recipient, but it is indivisible as dwelling entire in the total, and entire in any part. To have penetrated this idea is to know the greatness of the soul and its power, the divinity and wonder of its being, as a nature transcending the realm of "things."

Itself devoid of mass, it is present to all mass. It exists here and yet is [still] There, and this not in distinct phases but with unsundered identity. Thus, it is "parted and not parted," or, better, it has never known partition, never become a parted thing, but remains a self-gathered integral, and is "parted among bodies" merely in the sense that bodies, in virtue of their own sundered existence, cannot receive it unless in some partitive mode. The partition, in other words, is an occurrence in body and not in soul. ²

...Soul is, in the degree indicated, one and many, parted and impartible. We cannot question the possibility of a thing being at once a unity and multi-present, since to deny this would be to abolish the principle which sustains and administers the universe. There must be a principle which encircles and supports all and conducts all with wisdom, a principle which is multiple since existence is multiple, and yet is always one Soul, since a container must be a unity. By the multiple unity of its

nature, it will furnish life to the multiplicity of the contents of an All; by its impartible unity, it will conduct that Total to wise ends.

...Soul, therefore, is, in this definite sense, one and many; the Ideal-Form [soul] residing in the body is many and one. Bodies themselves are exclusively many; the Supreme is exclusively one.³

All is one universally comprehensive living being, encircling all the living beings within it, and having a soul, one Soul, which extends to all its members in the degree of participant membership held by each. Secondly, every separate thing is an integral part of this All by belonging to the total material fabric—unrestrictedly a part by bodily membership, while, insofar as it has also some participation in the All-Soul, it possesses in that degree spiritual membership as well. [It is] perfect where participation is in the All-Soul alone, partial where there is also a union with a lower soul.

But, with all this gradation, each of the several things is affected by all else in virtue of the common participation in the All, and to the degree of its own participation. This One-All, therefore, is a sympathetic total and stands as one living being... Where all is a living thing summing to a unity, there is nothing so remote in point of place as not to be near by virtue of a nature which makes of the one living being a sympathetic organism. ...It is not merely one living organism; it is also a manifold.⁴

...There is one identical Soul, every separate manifestation being that Soul complete. ⁵ ...What is thought of as a part must in reality be no part but the identity of an unparted thing. But if this is the true account of the unity of Soul, we must be able to meet the problems that ensue: firstly, the difficulty of one thing being present at the same moment in all things; and, secondly, the difficulty of soul in body as against Soul not embodied.

We might be led to think that all soul must always inhabit body. This would seem especially plausible in the case of the Soul of the universe, not thought of as ever leaving its body as the human soul does. There exists, no doubt, an opinion that even the human soul, while it must leave the body, cannot become an utterly disembodied thing; but, assuming its complete disembodiment, how comes it that the human soul can go free of the body but the All-Soul not, though they are one and the same.

...The one Soul holds aloof, not actually falling into body. The differentiated souls ...issue from the unity while still constituting, within certain limits, an association. They are one Soul by the fact that they do not belong unreservedly to any particular being; they meet, so to speak, edge to edge. They strike out here and there, but they are held together at the source much as light is a divided thing upon earth, shining in this house and that, while yet remaining uninterruptedly one identical substance.

The All-Soul would always remain above, since essentially it has nothing to do with descent or with the lower, or with any tendency towards this sphere. The other souls would become

ours [i.e., our individual souls] because their lot is cast for this sphere, and because they give attention to a thing [the body] which requires their care.⁶

...In the absence of body, soul could not have gone forth, since there is no other place to which its nature would allow it to descend. Since go forth it must, it will generate a place for itself; at once body, also, exists.

While the Soul (as an eternal, a Divine Being) is at rest—in rest firmly based on Repose, the Absolute—yet, as we may put it, that huge illumination of the Supreme pouring outwards comes at last to the extreme bourne of its light and dwindles to darkness. This darkness, now lying there beneath, the Soul sees and by seeing brings to shape. For in the law of things this ultimate depth, neighboring with soul, may not go void of whatsoever degree of the Divine it can absorb, the dimmed principle of reality at its faintest.⁷

...The souls of men ... have entered into that realm in a leap downward from the Supreme. Yet even they are not cut off from their origin, from the Divine Mind. It is not that they have come bringing the Spirit down in their fall; it is that though they have descended even to earth, yet their higher part holds forever above the heavens.⁸

The rise of all these forms of being, their destruction, and their modification, whether to their loss or gain, all goes to the fulfillment of the natural unhindered life of that one living being. For it was not possible for the single thing to be as if it stood alone. The final purpose could not serve to that only end,

intent upon the partial; the concern must be for the whole to which each item is member. Things are different both from each other and in their own stages, and therefore cannot be complete in one unchanging form of life. Nor could anything remain utterly without modification if the All is to be durable; for the permanence of an All demands varying forms.⁹

Let every soul recall ...the truth that Soul is the author of all living things, that it has breathed the life into them all—whatever is nourished by earth and sea, all the creatures of the air, the divine stars in the sky. It is the maker of the sun; itself formed and ordered this vast heaven and conducts all that rhythmic motion. And it is a principle distinct from all these to which it gives law and movement and life, and it must of necessity be more honorable than they, for they gather or dissolve as Soul brings them life or abandons them, but Soul, since it never can abandon itself, is of eternal being.

How life was purveyed to the universe of things and to the separate beings in it may be thus conceived:

That great [Generative] Soul must stand pictured before another [Celestial] Soul, one not mean, a Soul that has become worthy to look [toward the Higher, away from the lower], emancipate from the lure, from all that binds its fellows in bewitchment, holding itself in quietude. Let not merely the enveloping body be at peace, body's turmoils stilled, but all that lies around, earth at peace, and sea at peace, and air and the very heavens. Into that heaven, all at rest, let the great Soul be conceived to roll inward at every point, penetrating, permeating, from all sides pouring in its light. As the rays of the sun throwing their

brilliance upon a louring cloud make it gleam all gold, so the Soul entering the material expanse of the heavens has given life, has given immortality. What was abject it has lifted up; and the heavenly system, moved now in endless motion by the Soul that leads it in wisdom, has become a living and a blessed thing. The Soul domiciled within, it takes worth where, before the Soul, it was stark body—clay and water—or, rather, the blankness of Matter, the absence of Being ...

The Soul's nature and power will be brought out more clearly, more brilliantly, if we consider how it envelops the heavenly system and guides all to its purposes: for it has bestowed itself upon all that huge expanse so that every interval, small and great alike, all has been ensouled.

The material body is made up of parts, each holding its own place, some in mutual opposition and others variously separated. The Soul is in no such condition; it is not whittled down so that life tells of a part of the Soul and springs where some such separate portion impinges. Each separate life lives by the Soul entire, omnipresent in the likeness of the engendering Father, entire in unity and entire in diffused variety. By the power of the Soul the manifold and diverse heavenly system is a unit; through Soul this universe is a god. And the sun is a god because it is ensouled; so too the stars: and whatsoever we ourselves may be, it is all in virtue of Soul ...

This, by which the gods are divine, must be the oldest God of them all: and our own soul is of that same Ideal nature, so that to consider it, purified, freed from all accrument, is to

recognize in ourselves that same value which we have found Soul to be, honorable above all that is bodily.

...If, then, it is the presence of Soul that brings worth, how can a man slight himself and run after other things? You honor the Soul elsewhere; honor then yourself.

The Soul once seen to be thus precious, thus divine, you may hold the faith that by its possession you are already nearing God. In the strength of this power make upwards towards Him. At no great distance you must attain; there is not much between.

But over this Divine, there is still Diviner: grasp the upward neighbor of the Soul, its prior and source.

Soul, for all the worth we have shown to belong to it, is yet a secondary, an image of the Divine Mind. [In man] reason uttered is an image of the reason stored within the soul, and in the same way Soul is an utterance of the Divine Mind. It is even the total of its activity, the entire stream of life sent forth by that Principle to the production of further being. It is the forthgoing heat of a fire which has also heat essentially inherent. But within the Supreme we must see energy not as an overflow but in the double aspect of integral inherence with the establishment of a new being. Sprung, in other words, from the Divine Mind, Soul is intellective, but with an intellection operating by the method of reasonings. For its perfecting it must look to that Divine Mind, which may be thought of as a father watching over the development of his child born imperfect in comparison with himself.¹⁰

Once pure in the Spirit realm [within the Divine Mind], the soul too possesses that same unchangeableness: for it possesses identity of essence. When it is in that region it must of necessity enter into oneness with the Divine Mind by the sheer fact of its self-orientation, for by that intention all interval disappears; the soul advances and is taken into unison, and in that association, becomes one with the Divine Mind—but not to its own destruction: the two are one, and [yet] two. In such a state there is no question of stage and change. The soul, motionless, would be intent upon its intellectual act, and in possession, simultaneously, of its self-awareness; for it has become one simultaneous existence with the Supreme.

But it leaves that conjunction; it cannot suffer that unity; it falls in love with its own powers and possessions, and desires to stand apart; it leans outward, so to speak: then, it appears to acquire a memory of itself [as an individualized soul]. ¹¹

But we must examine how soul comes to inhabit the body [in the first place], a question of no minor interest: ¹²

The souls peering forth from the Divine Mind descend first to the [astral] heavens and there put on a body. This becomes at once the medium by which, as they reach out more and more towards magnitude [physical extension], they proceed to bodies progressively more earthy. Some even plunge from heaven to the very lowest of corporeal forms; others pass, stage by stage, too feeble to lift towards the higher the burden they carry, weighted downwards by their heaviness and forgetfulness.

As for the differences among them, these are due to variation in the bodies entered, or to the accidents of life, or to upbringing, or to inherent peculiarities of temperament, or to all these influences together, or to specific combinations of them.

Then again, some have fallen unreservedly into the power of the destiny ruling here: some often yielding [to that destiny], some holding to their own. There are those who, while they accept what must be born, have the strength of self-mastery in all that is left to their own act. They have given themselves to another dispensation: they live by the code of the aggregate of beings, the code which is woven out of the Reason-Principles and all the other causes ruling in the cosmos, out of soul-movements and out of laws springing in the Supreme; a code, therefore, consonant with those higher existences, founded upon them, linking their sequents back to them, keeping unshakably true all that is capable of holding itself set towards the divine nature, and leading round by all appropriate means whatsoever is less natively apt. In other words, all diversity of condition in the lower spheres is determined by the descending beings themselves.

The punishment justly overtaking the wicked must therefore be ascribed to the cosmic order which leads all in accordance with the right. But what of chastisements, poverty, illness, falling upon the good outside of all justice? These events, we will be told, are equally interwoven into the world order and fall under prediction, and they must consequently have a cause in the general order. Are they therefore to be charged to past misdoing?

No. Such misfortunes do not answer to reasons established in the nature of things; they are not laid up in the master-facts of the universe, but they were merely accidental sequents. A house falls, and anyone who chanced to be underneath is killed, no matter what sort of man he be; two objects are moving in perfect order—or one if you like—but anything getting in the way is wounded or trampled down. Or we may reason that the undeserved stroke can be no evil to the sufferer in view of the beneficent interweaving of the All or again, no doubt, that nothing is unjust that finds justification in a past history.

We may not think of some things being fitted into a system with others abandoned to the capricious; if things must happen by cause, by natural sequences, under one Reason-Principle and a single set scheme, we must admit that the minor equally with the major is fitted into that order and pattern.

Wrong-doing from man to man is wrong in the doer and must be imputed, but, as belonging to the established order of the universe [it] is not a wrong even as regards the innocent sufferer; it is a thing that had to be, and, if the sufferer is good, the issue is to his gain. For we cannot think that this ordered combination proceeds without God and justice; we must take it to be precise in the distribution of due, while, yet, the reasons of things elude us, and to our ignorance the scheme presents matter of censure.

Various considerations explain why the souls going forth from the Spiritual realm proceed first to the heavenly [astral] regions. The heavens, as the noblest portion of sensible space, would

border with the least exalted of the Spiritual realm, and will, therefore, be first ensouled, first to participate as most apt; while what is of earth is at the very extremity of progression, least endowed towards participation [in the Spiritual realm], remotest from the unembodied.

All the souls, then, shine down upon the heavens and spend there the main of themselves and the best; only their lower phases illuminate the lower realms. And those souls which descend deepest show their light furthest down—not themselves the better for the depth to which they have penetrated.

There is, we may put it, something that is [at the] center; about it, a circle of light shed from it. Round center and first circle alike, another circle, light from light. Outside that again, not another circle of light but one which, lacking light of its own, must borrow. The last we may figure to ourselves as a revolving circle, or rather a sphere, of a nature to receive light from that third realm, its next higher, in proportion to the light which that itself receives. Thus, all begins with the great Light, shining self-centered; in accordance with the reigning plan [of progressive emanation], this gives forth its brilliance.

The later beings [souls] add their radiation—some of them remaining above, while there are some who are drawn further downward, attracted by the splendor of the object they illuminate; these last find that their charges need more and more care. The steersman of a storm-tossed ship is so intent on saving it that he forgets his own interest and never thinks that he is recurrently in peril of being dragged down with the vessel. Similarly, the souls are intent upon contriving for their [bodily]

charges and finally come to be pulled down by them. They are fettered in bonds of sorcery, gripped and held by their concern for the realm of Nature.

If every living being were of the character of the All-perfect, self-sufficing, in peril from no outside influence—the soul now spoken of as indwelling would not occupy the body; it would infuse life while clinging, entire, within the Supreme.¹³

Now comes the question of the soul leaving the body: where does it go?

It cannot remain in this world where there is no natural recipient for it; and it cannot remain attached to anything not of a character to hold it. It can be held here only when it is less than wise, containing within itself something of that which lures it. If it does contain any such alien element, it gives itself, with increasing attachment, to the sphere to which that element naturally belongs and tends.

The space open to the soul's resort is vast and diverse; the difference will come by the double force of the individual condition and of the justice reigning in things. No one can ever escape the suffering entailed by ill deeds done; the divine law is ineluctable, carrying bound up, as one with it, the fore-ordained execution of its doom. The sufferer, all unaware, is swept onward towards his due, hurried always by the restless driving of his errors, until at last wearied out by that against which he struggled, he falls into his fit place and, by self-chosen movement, is brought to the lot he never chose. And the law decrees, also, the intensity and the duration of the suffering

while it carries with it, too, the lifting of the chastisement and the faculty of rising from those places of pain—all by power of the harmony that maintains the universal scheme. Souls, body-bound, are apt to body-punishment; clean souls no longer drawing to themselves at any point any vestige of body are, by their very being, outside the bodily sphere. Body-free, containing nothing of body—there where Essence is, and Being, and the Divine within the Divinity—among Those, within That, such a soul must be. ¹⁴

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V. PROVIDENCE

Introduction to Providence

Plotinus thought of matter as utter darkness, the very outermost limit to which the Divine radiates Its light into universal manifestation. He equated it with evil, as it is that illusory reality by which the soul is deceived and diverted from its true nature as supersensual joy, lured to chasing what can never satisfy it. Nonetheless, he acknowledged that it, too, is a product of Soul, and serves as a school for individualized souls to return them eventually to their innate Divinity. He recognized that all that may be said to exist has its source in the one transcendent Divinity, and therefore, is ruled by the divine laws inherent in their being and activity. He also understood the interrelationship of all constituents within the living Whole and their dependence upon a ruling principle. He called this principle, the *Logos*, or "Reason-Principle"; and viewed its operation throughout the universe as "Providence."

The Logos is a function of the Divine Mind; it is an intelligent principle of order by which all existence is one living, correlated whole. All within this whole is provided for according to its place within the whole through the operation of this inherent principle. The Logos is not something mechanical, without intelligence, apart from the Divine Mind, from God; it is a principle operating within His emanation, in which His intelligence, intention and providence inhere. This Logos, this principle of manifest will, operates as causal order, assuring that effect follows upon cause in an intricate universal continuum, all interrelated, with nothing falling outside this rational order. Thus, Providence is synonymous with what has been called in other traditions, "the law of karma." Karma is translated as "actions," and the law of actions is the law of cause and effect which extends from the subtle, spiritual, realm to the gross, material realm, leaving no possibility of chance or accident in all of this vast extent.

It seems appropriate to mention here the existence of the traditionally opposed view of life everywhere prevalent today which denies the existence of such a providential principle at work in the universe. Modern-day scientists and spokesmen for the common materialist view would have us believe that life came about solely as a product of the combination of several chemical components in the early stages of an accidental manifestation of the universe. According to this theory, the origin of being was the result of a fortuitous expansion (or explosion) from a compressed primal mass which, in turn, resulted in the creation of numerous particles which, in their random combination and interaction, produced more complex structures, eventually becoming living creatures. The first of these were one-celled organisms which were capable of reproduction, cognition, and evolution. These, in turn, combined to form more complex forms of life, which developed the ability to process information, giving rise to thought. Thus, over a great period of time, the evolution of this process led to the existence of vertebrates, reptiles, mammals, primates, and eventually human-kind—all by a sort of unintentional "natural" process. It is the current position of biological science in our time that living organisms can be described completely in terms of their chemical elements, plus their "natural" tendency to network and organize. Thus, they are autopoietic (i.e., self-making) organisms.

In this way, scientists claim to have determined that there is no logical necessity to posit a transcendent Creator, a guiding Intelligence, or even a soul. All, from this perspective, is but the natural outcome of the random activity of the various elements of matter which just happened to come to be, and the "natural selection" of living species according to their inherent instinct for survival. However, this theory leaves out of account the long heritage of human experience of a transcendent Intelligence as source of the

universe, the existence of souls, and a universal principle of justice, which, if admitted, would utterly shatter the foundations of this theory.

Science today takes a very dim view of the positing of existents which are not subject to empirical methods of verification. It regards with unyielding disdain all such "metaphysical" talk as not only beyond its domain, but unworthy of serious attention. Scientists have narrowed the field of knowledge and even existence itself to matter alone, without a source of its existence or an intelligent guiding principle. In the words of another tradition, their analysis is confined to *Maya* alone, regarding *Brahman* as an unnecessary and non-existent factor in the production of life. They pride themselves on their ability to view things from a "holistic" or "general system" perspective; but they do so only by leaving out of their consideration the greater part of the "whole" of human experience.

Had no man ever experienced the One and seen Its means of production, had no one ever experienced a disembodied soul, or known the subtle realms of universal manifestation, their theories might have some plausibility. But many have known the spiritual side of life, and testified regarding it, and some have seen into the heart of the outer and inner reality and declared it to be Divine. But, as Plotinus observed many centuries ago, "Those who make sense the test of reality . . . annul the supremely Real." They must one day come to realize that it is not the knowledge based on sense or intellect that reveals the nature of reality, and bestows the perfect satisfaction of knowing, but that knowledge which comes from the realm transcending sense and intellect. But such divine knowledge is available only to those souls evolved in readiness to perceive it.

Plotinus on Providence

To make the existence and coherent structure of this universe depend upon automatic activity and upon chance is against all good sense. Such a notion could be entertained only where there is neither intelligence nor even ordinary perception; and reason enough has been urged against it, though none is really necessary.

But there is still the question as to the process by which the individual things of this sphere have come into being, how they were made. Some of them seem so undesirable as to cast doubts upon a universal Providence.

...We are forced, in sound and sequent reasoning, to explain the Providence ruling in the universe as a universal consonance with the Divine Intelligence. The cosmos is subsequent [to the Divine Mind] not in time but in the fact of derivation, in the fact that the Divine Mind, preceding it in kind, is its cause; as being the Archetype and Model which it merely images, the primal by which, from all eternity, it has its existence and subsistence.

The relationship may be presented thus:

The authentic and primal Cosmos is the being of the Divine Mind of the [one] truly Existent. This contains within itself no spatial distinction, and has none of the febleness of division, and even its parts bring no incompleteness to it since here the

individual is not severed from the entire. In this nature inheres all life and all intellect, a life living and having intellection as one act within a unity. Every part that it gives forth is a whole. All its content is its very own, for there is here no separation of thing from thing, no part standing in isolated existence estranged from the rest, and therefore nowhere is there any wronging of any other, even among contraries. Everywhere one and complete, it is at rest throughout and invites difference at no point. It does not make over any of its content into any new form, [for] there can be no reason for changing what is everywhere perfect.

...A wide-ranging activity is dangerous to those who must go out from themselves to act. But such is the blessedness of this Being that in its very non-action it magnificently operates and in its self-dwelling it produces mightily.

By derivation from that authentic [Spiritual] cosmos, one within itself, there subsists this lower cosmos, no longer a true unity. It is multiple, divided into various elements, thing standing apart from thing in a new estrangement. No longer is there concord unbroken; hostility, too, has entered as the result of difference and distance. Imperfection has inevitably introduced discord; for a part is not self-sufficient. It must pursue something outside itself for its fulfillment, and so it becomes the enemy to what it needs. This cosmos of parts has come into being not as the result of a judgment establishing its desirability, but by the sheer necessity of a secondary kind.

The Intelligible [Spiritual] realm [within the Divine Mind] was not of a nature to be the ultimate of existents. It was the first

and it held great power, all there is of power. This means that it is productive without seeking to produce. For, if effort and search were incumbent upon it, the Act would not be its own, would not spring from its essential nature. It would be, like a craftsman, producing by a power not inherent but acquired, mastered by dint of study.

The Divine Mind, then, in its unperturbed serenity has brought the universe into being by communicating from its own store to matter; and this gift is the Logos [Reason Principle] flowing from it. For the emanation of the Divine Mind is the Logos, an emanation unfailing as long as the Divine Mind continues to have place among beings.

The Logos within a seed contains all the parts and qualities concentrated in identity; there is no distinction, no jarring, no internal hindering. Then there comes a pushing out into bulk, part rises in distinction with part, and at once the members of the organism stand in each other's way and begin to wear each other down.

So, from this, the one Divine Mind and the Logos emanating from it, our universe rises and develops parts; and inevitably are formed groups concordant and helpful in contrast with groups discordant and combative; sometimes of choice and sometimes incidentally, the parts maltreat each other. Engendering proceeds by destruction.

Yet amid all that they effect and accept, the Divine realm imposes the one harmonious Act. Each utters its own voice, but all is brought into accord, into an ordered system, for the

universal purpose, by the ruling Logos. This universe is not Intelligence and Order, like the Supernal, but participant in Intelligence and Order. It stands in need of the harmonizing because it is the meeting ground of Necessity and Divine Order—Necessity pulling towards the lower, towards the disorder which is its own characteristic, while yet the Divine Mind remains sovereign over it.

The Intelligible realm alone is Order, and there can never be another realm that is Order and nothing else; so that, given some other system, it cannot be as noble as that first; it cannot be Order. Yet since such a system cannot be merely matter, which is the utterly unordered, it must be a mixed thing. Its two extremes are matter and the divine Logos. Its governing principle is Soul, presiding over the conjunction of the two, and to be thought of not as laboring in the task but as administering serenely by little more than an act of presence.

Nor would it be sound to condemn this cosmos as less than beautiful, as less than the noblest possible in the corporeal; and neither can any charge be laid against its source.

The world, we must reflect, is a product of Necessity, not of deliberate purpose. It is due to a higher kind [the Divine Mind] engendering in its own likeness by a natural process. And nonetheless—a second consideration—if a considered plan brought it into being it would still be no disgrace to its maker. For it stands a stately whole, complete within itself, serving at once its own purpose and that of all its parts which, leading and lesser alike, are of such a nature as to further the interests of the total. It is, therefore, impossible to condemn the whole on the

merits of the parts which, besides, must be judged only as they enter harmoniously or not into the whole, [which is] the main consideration, quite overpassing the members which thus cease to have importance. To linger about the parts is to condemn not the cosmos but some isolated appendage of it..

[But] this thing that has come into being is [not simply a mass of fragments, but] the cosmos complete. Do but survey it, and surely this is the defense you will hear:

I am made by a God. From that God I came perfect above all forms of life, adequate to my function, self-sufficing, lacking nothing. For I am the container of all that is, of every plant and every animal, of all the kinds of created things, and many gods and nations of Spirit-beings and lofty souls and men happy in their goodness.

And do not think that, while earth is ornate with all its growths and with living things of every race, and while the very sea has answered to the power of Soul, do not think that the great air and the ether and the far-spread heavens remain void of it. There it is that all good souls dwell, infusing life into the stars and into that orderly eternal circuit of the heavens which in its conscious movement ever about the one center, seeking nothing beyond, is a faithful copy of the Divine Mind. And all that is within me strives towards the Good; and each, to the measure of its faculty, attains. For from that Good all the heavens depend, with all my own Soul and the gods that dwell in my every part, and all that lives and grows, and even all in me that you may judge inanimate.

...In the immaterial heaven every member is unchangeably itself forever. In the heavens of our universe, while the whole has life eternally and so too all the nobler and lordlier

components, the souls pass from body to body entering into varied forms; and when it may, a soul will rise outside of the realm of birth [and death] and dwell with the one Soul of all. For the embodied lives by virtue of an Idea or [ideal] form. Individual or partial things exist by virtue of universals; from these priors they derive their life and maintenance, for life here is a thing of change. Only in that prior realm is it unmoving. From that Unchangeable change had to emerge; from the self-cloistered Life [emerges] its derivative, this which breathes and stirs, the respiration of the still life of the Divine.

The conflict and destruction that reign among living beings are inevitable, since things here are derived, brought into existence because the Divine Logos which contains all of them in the upper heavens must outflow over the whole extent of matter. How could they come here unless they were There?

Similarly, the very wronging of man by man may be derived from an effort towards the Good. Foiled, in their weakness, of their true desire, they turn against each other. Still, when they do wrong, they pay the penalty—that of having hurt their souls by their evil conduct and of degradation to a lower place—for nothing can ever escape what stands decreed in the law of the universe.

...Why the wrong course is followed is scarcely worth inquiring. A slight deviation at the beginning develops with every advance into a continuously wider and graver error—especially since there is the attached body with its inevitable concomitant of desire; and the first step, the hasty movement

not previously considered and not immediately corrected, ends by establishing a set habit where there was at first only a fall.

Punishment naturally follows. There is no injustice in a man suffering what belongs to the condition in which he is; nor can we ask to be happy when our actions have not earned us happiness. The good, only, are happy. Divine beings are happy only because they are good.

Now once happiness is possible at all to souls in this universe, if some fail of it, the blame must fall not upon the universe but upon the feebleness insufficient to the staunch combat in the one arena where the rewards of excellence are offered. Men are not born divine; what wonder that they do not enjoy a divine life. And poverty and sickness mean nothing to the good, while to the evil they bring benefit. Where there is body there must be ill health.

Besides, these accidents are not without their service in the coordination and completion of the universal system. One thing perishes, and the cosmic Logos—whose control nothing anywhere eludes—employs that ending to the beginning of something new. And so, when the body suffers and the soul, under the affliction, loses power, all that has been bound under illness and evil is brought into a new set of relations, into another class or order. Some of these troubles are helpful to the very sufferers—poverty and sickness, for example—and as for vice, even this brings something to the general service. It acts as a lesson in right-doing, and, in many ways even, produces good. Thus, by setting men face to face with the ways and consequences of iniquity, it calls them from lethargy, stirs the

deeper mind, and sets the understanding to work. By the contrast of the evil under which wrong-doers labor it displays the worth of the right. Not that evil exists for this purpose; but, as we have indicated, once the wrong has come to be, the Logos of the cosmos employs it to good ends. And precisely, the proof of the mightiest power is to be able to use the ignoble nobly and, given formlessness, to make it the material of [previously] unknown forms.

The principle is that evil by definition is a falling short in good, and good cannot be at full strength in the sphere where it is lodged in the alien. The good here is in something else, in something distinct from the Good. And this something else constitutes the falling short, for it is not good. And this is why "evil is ineradicable." There is, first, the fact that in relation to this principle of Good, thing will always stand less than thing, and, besides, all things come into being through It, and are what they are by standing away from It.

As for the disregard of desert—the good afflicted, the unworthy thriving—it is a sound explanation no doubt that to the good nothing is evil and to the evil nothing can be good. Still the question remains, why should what essentially offends our nature fall to the good while the wicked enjoy all that nature demands? How can such an allotment be approved?

No doubt, since pleasant conditions add nothing to true happiness and the unpleasant do not lessen the evil in the wicked, the conditions matter little. As well complain that a good man happens to be ugly and a bad man handsome.

Still, under such a dispensation, there would surely be a propriety, a reasonableness, a regard to merit which, as things are, do not appear, though this would certainly be in keeping with the noblest Providence. Even though external conditions do not affect a man's hold upon good or evil, nonetheless it would seem utterly unfitting that the bad should be the masters, be sovereign in the state, while honorable men are slaves. A wicked ruler may commit the most lawless acts; in war the worst men have a free hand and perpetrate every kind of crime against their prisoners.

We are forced to ask how such things can be, under a [divine] Providence. Certainly, a Maker must consider his work as a whole, but nonetheless he should see to the due ordering of all the parts, especially when these parts have Soul, that is, are living and reasoning beings. The Providence must reach to all the details; its functioning must consist in neglecting no point.

Holding, therefore, as we do, despite all, that the universe lies under a Divine Principle whose power has touched every existent, we cannot be absolved from the attempt to show in what way the detail of this sphere is just.

...We begin with evil acts entirely dependent upon the souls which perpetrate them—the harm, for example, which perverted souls do to the good and to each other. Unless the fore-planning power alone is to be charged with the vice in such souls, we have no ground of accusation, no claim to redress: "the blame lies on the soul exercising its choice." Even a soul, we have seen, must have its individual movement. It is not abstract

Spirit. The first step towards animal life has been taken and the conduct will naturally be in keeping with that character.

It is not because the world existed that souls are here: before the world was, they had it in them to be of the world, to concern themselves with it, to presuppose it, to administer it. It was in their nature to produce it—by whatever method, whether by giving forth some emanation while they themselves remained above, or by an actual descent, or in both ways together, some presiding from above, others descending. For we are not at the moment concerned about the mode of creation but are simply urging that, however the world was produced, no blame falls on Providence for what exists within it.

There remains the other phase of the question—the distribution of evil to the opposite classes of men; the good go bare, while the wicked are rich. All that human need demands, the least deserving have in abundance. It is they that rule; peoples and states are at their disposal. Would not all this imply that the divine power does not reach to earth?

That it does is sufficiently established by the fact that Order rules in the lower things. Animals and plants have their share in order, soul, and life.

Perhaps, then, it reaches to earth but is not master over all?

We answer that the universe is one living organism. As well maintain that while human head and face are the work of nature and of the ruling principle of Order, the rest of the frame is due to other agencies—accident or sheer necessity—and owes its

inferiority to this origin, or to the incompetence of unaided Nature. And even granting that those less noble members are not in themselves admirable it would still be neither pious nor even reverent to censure the entire structure.

...Now, in every living being the upper parts—head and face—are the most beautiful, the mid and lower members inferior. In the universe the middle and lower members are human beings; above them, the heavens and the gods that dwell there. These gods with the entire circling expanse of the heavens constitute the greater part of the cosmos. The earth is but a central point, and it stands in relation to only one among the stars. Yet human wrongdoing is made a matter of wonder. We are evidently asked to take humanity as the choice member of the universe, nothing wiser existent!

But humanity, in reality, is poised midway between gods and beasts, and inclines now to the one order, now to the other. Some men grow like to the Divine; others to the brute; the greater number stand neutral.

... In sum, man has come into existence, a living being but not a member of the noblest order. He occupies by choice an intermediate rank; still, in that place in which he exists, Providence does not allow him to be reduced to nothing. On the contrary he is ever being led upwards by all those varied devices which the Divine employs in its labor to increase the dominance of moral value. The human race, therefore, is not deprived by Providence of its rational being. It retains its share, though necessarily limited, in wisdom, intelligence, executive power, and right-doing—the right-doing, at least, of individuals

to each other. And even in wronging others, people think they are doing right and only paying what is due.

Man is, therefore, a noble creation, as perfect as the scheme allows. A part, no doubt, in the fabric of the All, he yet holds a lot higher than that of all the other living things of earth.

...But if the evil in men is involuntary, if their own will has not made them what they are, how can we either blame wrongdoers or even reproach their victims with suffering through their own fault?

If there is a Necessity, bringing about human wickedness either by force of the celestial movement [of the stars] or by a rigorous sequence set up by the First Cause, is not the evil a thing rooted in Nature? And if thus the Logos of the universe is the creator of evil, surely all is injustice?

No. Men are no doubt involuntary sinners in the sense that they do not actually desire to sin; but this does not alter the fact that wrongdoers, of their own choice, are, themselves, the agents. It is because they themselves act that the sin is their own. If they were not agents, they could not sin.

Necessity [i.e., the law of cause and effect] is not an outer force, but [it] exists only in the sense of a universal relationship.

Nor is the force of the celestial movement [the configurations of the stars and planets] such as to leave us powerless. If the universe were something outside and apart from us it would stand as its makers willed so that, once the gods [stars and

planets] had done their part, no man, however impious, could introduce anything contrary to their intention. But as things are, efficient act *does* come from men. Given the starting Principle, the secondary line, no doubt, is inevitably completed. But each and every principle contributes towards the sequence. Now men are principles, or, at least, they are moved by their characteristic nature towards all that is good, and that nature is a Principle, a freely acting cause.

Are we, then, to conclude that particular things are determined by necessities rooted in Nature and by the sequence of causes, and that everything is as good as anything can be?

No. The Logos is the sovereign, making all. It wills things as they are and, in its reasonable act, it produces even what we know as evil. It cannot desire all to be good. An artist would not make an animal all eyes; and in the same way, the Logos would not make all divine. It makes gods but also celestial spirits, the intermediate order, then men, then the animals. All is graded succession, and this in no spirit of grudging but in the expression of an Order teeming with intellectual variety.

We are like people ignorant of painting who complain that the colors are not beautiful everywhere in the picture. But the artist has laid on the appropriate tint to every spot. Note also that cities, however well governed, are not composed of citizens who are all equal. Again, we are censuring a drama because the persons are not all heroes but include a servant and a rustic and some scurrilous clown. Yet take away the low characters and the power of the drama is gone; these [characters] are part and parcel of it.

Suppose this universe to be the direct creation of the Logos applying itself, quite unchanged, to matter, retaining the differentiation of parts which it derives from its prior, the Divine Mind. Then, this, its product, so produced, must be of supreme and unparalleled excellence. The Logos cannot be a thing of entire identity or even of closely compact diversity. And the mode in which it is here manifested is no matter of censure since its function is to be all things, each single thing in some distinctive way.

But has it not, besides itself entering matter, brought other beings down? Has it not for example brought souls into matter and, in adapting them to its creation, twisted them against their own nature and been the ruin of many of them? And can this be right?

The answer is that the souls are, in a fair sense, members of this Logos and that it has not adapted them to the creation by perverting them, but it has set them in the place here to which their quality entitles them.

And we must not despise the familiar observation that there is something more to be considered than the present. There are the periods of the past [births] and, again, those in the future; and these have everything to do with fixing worth of place.

Thus, a man, once a ruler, will be made a slave because he abused his power and because the fall is to his future good. Those who have misused money will be made poor—and to the good poverty is no hindrance. Those who have unjustly killed,

are killed in turn, unjustly as regards the murderer but justly as regards the victim, and those who are to suffer are thrown into the path of those who administer the merited treatment.

It is not an accident that makes a man a slave; no one is a prisoner by chance. Every bodily outrage has its due cause. The man once did what he now suffers. A man who murders his mother will become a woman and be murdered by a son. A man who wrongs a woman will become a woman, to be wronged. ¹

The space open to the soul's resort is vast and diverse; the difference will come by the double force of the individual condition and of the justice reigning in things. No one can ever escape the suffering entailed by ill deeds done. The divine law is ineluctable, carrying bound up, as one with it, the fore-ordained execution of its doom. The sufferer, all unaware, is swept onward towards his due, hurried always by the restless driving of his errors, until at last wearied out by that against which he struggled, he falls into his fit place and, by self-chosen movement, is brought to the lot he never chose. And the law decrees, also, the intensity and the duration of the suffering while it carries with it, too, the lifting of chastisement and the faculty of rising from those places of pain—all by power of the harmony that maintains the universal scheme. ²

Hence arises that awesome word, *Adrasteia* [the law of inevitable retribution, or "law of karma"]. For in very truth this ordinance [of Providence] is an *Adrasteia*, justice itself and a wonderful wisdom.

We cannot but recognize from what we observe in this universe that some such principle of order prevails throughout the entirety of existence—the minutest of things a tributary to the vast total. The marvelous art [is] shown not merely in the mightiest works and sublimest members of the All, but even amid such littleness as one would think Providence must disdain: the varied workmanship of wonder in any and every animal form; the world of vegetation; the grace of fruits and even of leaves; the lavishness, the delicacy, the diversity of exquisite bloom. And all this not issuing once, and then to die out, but made ever and ever anew as the transcendent beings move variously over this earth.

In all the changing, there is no change by chance. There is no taking of new forms that does not lead to desirable ends and in ways worthy of divine powers. All that is divine executes the Act of its quality. Its quality is the expression of its essential Being. And this essential Being in the Divine is the Being whose activities produce as one thing the desirable and the just. For if the good and the just are not produced there, where, then, have they their being?

Animals devour each other; men attack each other. All is war without rest, without truce. This gives new force to the question how Order can be author of the plan and how all can be declared well done.

The Divine Logos is the beginning and the end; all that comes into being must be rational and fall at its coming into an ordered scheme reasonable at every point. Where, then, is the necessity of this bandit war of man and beast?

This devouring of kind by kind is necessary as the means to the transmutation of living things which could not keep form forever even though no other killed them. What grievance is it that when they must go their dispatch is so planned as to be serviceable to others?

Still more, what does it matter when they are devoured only to return in some new form? It comes to no more than the murder of one of the personages in a play. The actor alters his make-up and enters in a new role. The actor, of course, was not really killed; but if dying is but changing a body as the actor changes a costume, or even an exit from the body like the exit of the actor from the boards when he has no more to say or do—though he will still return to act on another occasion—what is there so very dreadful in this transformation of living beings one into another?

Surely it is much better so than if they had never existed. That way would mean the bleak quenching of life, precluded from passing outside itself. As the plan holds, life is poured copiously throughout a universe, engendering the universal things and weaving variety into their being, never at rest from producing an endless sequence of comeliness and shapeliness, a living pastime.

Men directing their weapons against each other—under doom of death yet neatly lined up to fight as in the pyrrhic sword-dances of their sport—this is enough to tell us that all human intentions are but play, that death is nothing terrible, that to die in a war or in a fight is but to taste a little beforehand what old

age has in store, to go away earlier and come back the sooner. So for misfortunes that may accompany life—the loss of property, for instance: the loser will see that there was a time when it was not his, that its possession is but a mock boon to the robbers, who will in their turn lose it to others, and even, that to retain property is a greater loss than to forfeit it.

Murders, death in all its guises, the reduction and sacking of cities, all must be to us just such a spectacle as the changing scenes of a play. All is but the varied incident of a plot, costume on and off, acted grief and lament. For on earth, in all the succession of life, it is not the soul within but the shadow outside of the authentic man, that grieves and complains and acts out the plot on this world stage which men have dotted with stages of their own constructing. All this is the doing of man knowing no more than to live the lower and outer life, and never perceiving that, in his weeping and in his graver doings alike, he is but at play.

...But does not this make it absurd to introduce souls as responsible causes, some acting for good and some for evil? ³

The souls are in harmony with each other and so, too, are their acts and effects; but it is harmony in the sense of a resultant unity built out of contraries. All things, as they rise from a unity, come back to unity by a sheer need of nature. Differences unfold themselves, contraries are produced, but all is drawn into one organized system by the unity at the source.

...Having attached all to this source, we turn to move down again in continuous division. We see the unity fissuring, as it

reaches out into universality, and yet embracing all in one system so that with all its differentiation it is one multiple living thing—an organism in which each member executes the function of its own nature while it still has its being in that One Whole ...⁴

...We may not think of some things being fitted into a system with others abandoned to the capricious. If things must happen by cause, by natural sequences, under one Logos [i.e., one Causal Law] and a single set scheme, we must admit that the minor equally with the major is fitted into that order and pattern.

Wrongdoing from man to man is wrong in the doer and must be imputed, but, as belonging to the established order of the universe, it is not a wrong even if it involves the innocent sufferer. It is a thing that had to be, and, if the sufferer is good, the issue is to his gain. For we cannot think that this ordered combination proceeds without God and justice. We must take it to be precise in the distribution of due, while, yet, the reasons of things elude us, and to our ignorance the scheme presents matter of censure.⁵

[Individual] circumstances are not sovereign over the good of life, for they are themselves molded by their priors and come in as members of a sequence. The First Principle holds all the threads while the minor agents, the individuals, serve according to their own capacities, as in a war the general lays down the plan and his subordinates do their best to its furtherance. The universe has been ordered by a Providence that may be compared to a general. He has considered operations,

conditions, and such practical needs as food and drink, arms and engines of war. All the problem of reconciling these complex elements has been worked out beforehand so as to make it probable that the final event may be success. The entire scheme emerges from the general's mind with a certain plausible promise, though it cannot cover the enemy's operations, and there is no power over the disposition of the enemy's forces. But where the mighty general in question is one whose power extends over all that is, what can pass unordered? What can fail to fit into the plan?

[Even your choosing fits into the plan.] For, even though the [apparently independent] *I* is sovereign in choosing, yet by the fact of the choice the thing done takes its place in the ordered total. Your personality does not come from outside into the universal scheme; you are a part of it, you and your personal disposition!

But what is the cause of this initial personality?

This question [which is a major question] resolves itself into two: Are we to make the Creator the cause of the moral quality of the individual or does the responsibility lie with the creature?

...If man were all of one piece—I mean, if he were nothing more than a *made* thing, acting and acted upon according to a fixed nature—he could be no more subject to reproach and punishment than the mere animals. But as the scheme holds, man is singled out for condemnation when he does evil; and this with justice. For he is no mere thing made to rigid plan; his nature contains a [higher] Principle apart and free.

...And since the higher exists, there must be the lower as well. The universe is a thing of variety, and how could there be an inferior without a superior or a superior without an inferior? We cannot complain about the lower in the higher; rather, we must be grateful to the higher for giving something of itself to the lower.⁶

...Now, in humanity the lower is not supreme; it is an accompaniment. But neither does the higher rule unfailingly. The lower element also has a footing, and man, therefore, lives in part under sensation, for he has the organs of sensation, and in large part even by the merely vegetative principle, for the body grows and propagates. All the graded phases are in a collaboration, but the entire form, man, takes rank by the dominant, and when the life-principle leaves the body, it is what it is, what it most intensely lived.

This is why we must break away towards the High. We dare not keep ourselves set towards the sensuous principle, following the images of sense, or towards the merely vegetative, intent upon the gratifications of eating and procreation. Our life must be pointed towards the intellectual, towards the Divine Mind, towards God.⁷

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IV. FREE WILL

Introduction to Free Will

Many have grappled with the idea of the Free Will of the Soul, and it is a question that has caused many to stumble. Plotinus' position on free will also may appear somewhat ambivalent and uncertain. After presenting many different theories on the matter, and then rejecting each of them, he seems to hold to the position that the Soul is, by virtue of its identity with the highest Principle, an independent "first-hand Cause" in and of itself, and therefore possesses free will. In other places, however, Plotinus insists on the derivation of all souls from the Divine Mind, and that from the One, which would seem to imply a universal determinism that left no place for an independent will. I would like to offer my own perspective on the subject of free will which might serve to resolve the apparent contradictions inherent in Plotinus' vision:

We may picture the entire array from The One to manifested universe as a "raying out" or a "projection" from an interior center—a sort of telescoping outward of a projected image, becoming at its "screening" in the phenomenal world a something elaborately conditioned, though it is unconditioned at its single source. At the source, it is one, eternal, unconditional; at the other end of the projection it is a multitude of souls, all intricately conditioned. Soul has, therefore, two aspects, two identities: in its origin it is eternal Divinity; in its temporal display, coupled with matter, it is still Divine, but it is also a thing limited and burdened by conditions. Yet, even in its limited projection, it maintains its "higher" identity—just as light, however it may be refracted into a multicolored spectrum, remains pure light, or as the ocean, however lashed into multiple waves, remains the ocean.

The soul, however hemmed in by conditions and delusion, is always unconditioned at its core, always ultimately restorable to its eternal unity, above all conditionality. And so we must say it is this, but it is also that; it is caused, but it is also the cause; it is bound, but it is free; it is the projected image, but it is also the Exemplar; it is an individual soul, limited by its environmental and karmic conditions, but it is the one Soul of all, identical with its own source, and therefore free—for it is Divine, and the Divine is free.

Strictly speaking, we cannot legitimately apply the term “free” to the One. Though we may speak of the individual soul as possessing “freedom,” the idea of “free” or “unfree” is inapplicable to the One, or even the Divine Mind. Free from what? What could constrain Him, since there is nothing outside of the One for Him to be free of? So, you see, the opposites “free” and “not-free” do not even exist in the One; all such dualities come into existence with the separative consciousness which creates the duality of an “I” and a “Thou.” Nonetheless, as a concession to the need for applying a name to His infinite independence, we say that the One is “free.”

When we speak of the free will of the soul, we forget that the One is all-inclusive—He *includes* all wills. He could not make a separate will *free* from Himself, because He is the only One from whom a will could be made, and therefore even that will must partake of Him. From the standpoint of God, the entire unfoldment of the universe, including all choices made, is one coordinated *fait accompli*: “All things move together of one accord; assent is given throughout the universe to every falling grain.” Nothing—not even free will—is outside of that one accord.

Reason, then, would seem to dictate that, since the Divine Mind is the initiator and container of all that is, all is therefore under that one causative Principle; that all that is manifest is determined by the Divine Will; and that if there is such a thing as free will it must be the unique province of that Divine source, but certainly not the possession of mankind. And, from one perspective, all this is true. Its truth was expressed very aptly by that celebrated nineteenth century mystic-seer, Sri Ramakrishna, when he said:

The Englishman [i.e., the Western materialist] talks about free will, but those who have realized God are aware that free will is a mere appearance. In reality, man is the machine and God is the Operator. Man is the carriage and God its Driver.¹

But there is that other perspective which sees that God (the Divine Mind), who is the Driver, is in fact the very Consciousness that knows Itself as 'I' within the individual soul; It is indeed the very Self and essence of man, comprising his *real* identity. Intuitively we sense our own infinite freedom of will, or something close to it, and reason as well seems to demand a freedom and independence upon which to base individual responsibility for our acts. "If every event in our lives is determined by God," we ask, "where then is our freedom of choice? Where is the possibility for virtue, for choosing the path of righteousness over the path of evil? And how is it even possible to progress morally and spiritually by one's own efforts if all is in God's hands? How could we be held responsible for our acts if every sentiment, emotion, thought, or act is determined by God?"

These are questions which must occur to anyone who thinks deeply about such matters. But these questions are framed on a presumption of duality where none in fact exists. For *we* and *God* are ultimately not two. And it is only a linguistic quandary that we fall into when we regard ourselves and God as separate entities, we and consider one to be determining the other.

There is only One in this universe; it is *He* who, *as us*, is freely making all the choices.

Each individual being (soul) chooses according to his or her evolutionary development, but it is He alone who is manifesting as each individual at every step on the evolutionary scale. Therefore, we must admit that everything is in fact determined by God's Will. And we must also see that, since *we* are ultimately Him, *we* are free. When these two, man and God, are recognized to be one, this question of whether we are free or determined in our willing is easily resolved. Determinism and free will are *both* true; they are "complementary" truths, each representing one aspect of a dual-sided reality. As Soul, the one eternal Consciousness, beyond time, we are forever free—beyond free. But, as individualized egos, as entities projected into time and space, we are determined by His will.

Thus, the question, "Are we responsible for our acts?" must be answered, "No," if we identify "we" with the ego—that false identification of oneself with our projected image; and "Yes," if we identify with the universal Soul, the Divine and unconditioned Self. For, as the one Consciousness, we are the witness of all the thoughts and impulses of our nature, and [we] are free to grant or withhold consent to her promptings. Therefore, ultimately, we *are* responsible for our acts. It is on the basis of our divine Soul, of our ultimate Divinity, that all civil and criminal law intuitively recognizes the culpability of the individual. For, if we were not the eternal Self (The One) in essence, if we were not absolutely free from causal necessity, but merely unwitting, mechanical pawns, we could not be held responsible for what we do. But our Soul partakes of Divinity; our Self *is* God, we *are* free; and therefore, we *are* responsible for our choices.

The villain is hanged for his offenses, since it was he who made the deadly choices of his own free will which constitute his villainy, and it is he who

bears responsibility for them. But, consider, even the villain is God masquerading as villain. He, the Lord of the universe, is playing all the roles in this drama. How, then, to speak of free-will? Does a dream-character in my dream move and act according to his own will? No. He is merely a projection of my thought, albeit a subconscious one. In the same way, I am a projection of God's Thought. I may feel that I am moving, acting and choosing according to my own will, but I am but a dream-figure in the universal Mind.

Whatever free-will I possess is His. From one perspective, I am but an image in His universal dream; from another, larger, perspective, 'I' am the Dreamer. Both are true. Which do I identify with? If we acknowledge that He is in truth the only 'I', then yes, 'I' have free-will. I—by virtue of the fact that the Soul emanates from the Divine Mind, which in turn emanates from the One—am none else but the One who alone is. I (He) am (is) doing everything and making all the choices.

The question of "free will" is one which has fascinated the minds of men since first man looked to the heavens and deduced a Creator. And, though the answer to the problem is very simple, it is difficult for most minds to assimilate which have not gotten in the habit of allowing for two answers to be true which appear to logically contradict each other. Such an attitude is required of physicists for whom light, and energy itself, must be seen as both a particle (quanta) and a wave, whose respective qualities are mutually exclusive. What is required is the ability to freely shift one's viewpoint from one frame of reference to another.

The answer to the question, "Do I have free will?" is determined by who *I* is; in other words, to which "I" you are referring. If you are identifying with the apparent (projected) self, the ego, the soul as manifest individual, the answer is, "No, you do not have free will." Nothing happens in this drama

that was not in the original script. Omar Khayyam has rightly said: "The first morning of creation wrote what the last dawn of reckoning shall read." The Will that flung forth the universe is its only Cause, and all that follows is effect. Effects are implied and contained in their cause, as the tree is contained in its seed. Even your apparent choosing is *His* choosing; even the choosing is Him. In short, there is no escaping Him, for He is "even that which thinks of escape." On the other hand, if by *I* you refer to the one Self, the universal Consciousness; if by *I* you mean the eternal Lord and Witness of all this drama, then you already know the answer: "Yes, you have free will. Your will is the only will; You are Freedom itself!"

The great Vedantic sage, Shankaracharya, taught, "*jivo brahmaiva napara*" ("the soul is none other than Brahman"). And this is true; the soul is always free in the sense that it remains, in its transcendent aspect, immutable and unaffected by bodily conditions or worldly circumstances. It is identical with the transcendent Source of all, and is supremely, absolutely, free. It is certain that the Eternal, the One, is free; and insofar as the soul is identical with the One, the soul is free. While it identifies with the conditional, it is bound; it is subject to determination. Only when it knows itself as the One does it become *actually* free. This is the view of Vedanta, and the basis for its concept of "liberation"; and this is the view of Plotinus as well.

Another great seer and teacher put it well when he said: "You shall know the Truth, and the Truth will make you free." According to this understanding, a man is free insofar as he is cognizant of his essential identity with the Highest and bound when he departs from his divinely appointed reason and identifies with the body, succumbing to the rule of earthly necessity, and is moved willy-nilly by the causative forces inherent in Nature. He has the power, as divine Soul, to will freely, unencumbered, uncompelled by circumstance; and, for that reason is responsible for his individual actions. All souls are linked by inclusion to the one Soul, and by extension to the

Divine Mind; but only he who is cognizant, aware, of his divine Identity, is truly free.

Plotinus on Free Will

On the assumption that all happens by Cause, it is easy to discover the nearest determinants of any particular act or state and to trace it plainly to them. [For example,] the cause of a visit to the center of affairs will be that one thinks it necessary to see some person or to receive a debt, or, in a word, that one has some definite motive or impulse confirmed by a judgment of expediency. Sometimes a condition may be referred to the arts, the recovery of health for instance to medical science and the doctor. Wealth has for its cause the discovery of a treasure or the receipt of a gift, or the earning of money by manual or intellectual labor. The child is traced to the father as its Cause and perhaps to a chain of favorable outside circumstances such as a particular diet or, more immediately, a special organic aptitude or a wife apt to childbirth. And the general cause of all [this] is Nature.

But to halt at these nearest determinants, not to be willing to penetrate deeper, indicates a sluggish mind, a dullness to all that calls us towards the primal and transcendent Causes. ...[Wise] men therefore have never been able to rest at the surface causes.

[There are various schools of thought regarding the primal Cause:] One school postulates material principles such as atoms. From the movement, from the collisions and combinations of these, it derives the existence and the mode of being of all particular phenomena, supposing that all depends upon how these atoms are agglomerated, how they act, how

they are affected. Our own impulses and states, even, are supposed to be determined by these principles.

Such teaching, then, obtrudes the compulsion of an atomic Necessity even upon Real Being [i.e., the Divine Reality]. Substitute, for the atoms, any other material entities as principles and the cause of all things, and at once Real Being becomes servile to the determination set up by them.

Others rise to the First Principle of all that exists and from It derive all they tell of a Cause penetrating all things, not merely moving all but making each and everything. But they pose this as a fate and a supremely dominating Cause; not merely all else that comes into being, but even our own thinking and thoughts would spring from Its movement, just as the several members of an animal move not at their own choice but at the dictation of the leading principle which animal life presupposes.

Yet another school fastens on the Cosmic Circuit [of the heavenly bodies] as embracing all things and producing all by its motion and by the positions and mutual aspect of the planets and fixed stars in whose power of foretelling they find warrant for the belief that this Circuit is the universal determinant [Cause].

Finally, there are those who dwell on the interconnection of the causative forces and on their linked descent—every later phenomenon following upon an earlier, one always leading back to others by which it arose and without which it could not be, and the latest always subservient to what went before them—but this is obviously to bring in fate by another path.

This school may be fairly distinguished into two branches: a section which makes all depend upon some one principle and a section which ignores such a unity.

Of this last opinion we will have something to say, but for the moment we will deal with the former, taking the others in their turn.

[Whether we presuppose] "atoms" or "elements," it is in either case an absurdity, an impossibility, to hand over the universe and its contents to material entities, and out of the disorderly swirl thus occasioned to call order, reasoning, and the governing soul into being; but the atomic origin is, if we may use the phrase, the most [absurdly] impossible.

A good deal of truth has resulted from the discussion of this subject; but, even to admit such principles does not compel us to admit universal compulsion or any kind of "fate." Suppose the atoms to exist: These atoms are to move, one downwards—admitting a down and an up—another slantwise, all at haphazard, in a confused conflict. Nothing here is orderly; order has not come into being, though the outcome, this Universe, when it achieves existence, is all order. And thus, prediction and divination are utterly impossible, whether by the laws of the science—what science can operate where there is no order? — or by divine possession and inspiration, which no less require that the future be something regulated.

Material entities exposed to all this onslaught may very well be under compulsion to yield to whatsoever the atoms may bring; but would anyone pretend that the acts and states of a soul or

mind could be explained by any atomic movements? How can we imagine that the onslaught of an atom, striking downwards or dashing in from any direction, could force the soul to definite and necessary reasonings or impulses or into any reasonings, impulses or thoughts at all, necessary or otherwise? And what of the soul's resistance to bodily states? What movement of atoms could compel one man to be a geometrician, set another studying arithmetic or astronomy, lead a third to the philosophic life? In a word, if we must go, like soulless bodies, wherever bodies push and drive us, there is an end to our personal act and to our very existence as living beings.

The School that erects other material forces into universal causes is met by the same reasoning: we say that while these can warm us and chill us, and destroy weaker forms of existence, they can be causes of nothing that is done in the sphere of mind or soul: all this must be traceable to quite another kind of Principle.

Another theory: The Universe is permeated by one Soul, Cause of all things and events; every separate phenomenon as a member of a whole moves in its place with the general movement. All the various causes spring into action from one source: therefore, it is argued, the entire descending chain of causes and all their interaction must follow inevitably and so constitute a universal determination. A plant rises from a root, and we are asked on that account to reason that not only the interconnection linking the root to all the members and every member to every other but the entire activity and experience of the plant, as well, must be one organized overriding governance, a "destiny" of the plant.

But such an extremity of determination, a destiny so all-pervasive, does away with the very destiny that is affirmed: it shatters the sequence and cooperation of causes. It would be unreasonable to attribute to destiny the movement of our limbs dictated by the mind and will: this is no case of something outside bestowing motion while another thing accepts it and is thus set into action; the mind itself is the prime mover. Similarly, in the case of the universal system; if all that performs act and is subject to experience constitutes one substance, if one thing does not really produce another thing under causes leading back continuously one to another, then it is not a truth that all happens by causes, there is nothing but a rigid unity. We are no "we"; nothing is our act; our thought is not ours; our decisions are the reasoning of something outside ourselves; we are no more agents than our feet are kickers when we use them to kick with.

No. Each of several things must be a separate thing. There must be acts and thoughts that are our own; the good and evil done by each human being must be his own; and it is quite certain that we must not lay any vileness to the charge of the All. But perhaps the explanation of every particular act or event is rather that they are determined by the movement of the Cosmic Circuit, the changing position of the heavenly bodies as these stand at setting or rising or in mid-course and in various aspects with each other.

Augury, it is urged, is able from these indications to foretell what is to happen not merely to the universe as a whole, but even to individuals, and this not merely as regards external

conditions of fortune but even as to the events of the mind. We observe, too, how growth or check in other orders of beings—animals and plants—is determined by their sympathetic relations with the heavenly bodies and how widely they are influenced by them, how, for example, the various countries show a different produce according to their situation on the earth and especially their lie towards the Sun. And the effect of place is not limited to plants and animals; it rules human beings too, determining their appearance, their height and color, their mentality and their desires, their pursuits and their moral habit. Thus, the Cosmic Circuit would seem to be the monarch of the All.

Now a first answer to this theory is that its advocates have merely devised another shift to immolate to the heavenly bodies all that is ours, our acts of will and our states, all the evil in us, our entire personality; nothing is allowed to us; we are left to be stones set rolling, not men, not beings whose nature implies a task.

But we must be allowed our own—with the understanding that to what is primarily ours, our personal holding, there is added some influx from the All—the distinction must be made between our individual act and what is thrust upon us: we are not to be immolated to the stars. ...[For] if the stars are held to be causing principles on the ground of the possibility of foretelling individual fate or fortune from observation of their positions, then the birds and all the other things which the soothsayer observes for divination must equally be taken as causing what they indicate. ¹

It remains to notice the theory of the one Causing-Principle alleged to interweave everything with everything else, to make things into a chain, to determine the nature and condition of each phenomenon—a Principle which, acting through seminal Reason-Forms [the *Logoi Spermatikoi* of the Stoics]—elaborates all that exists and happens. This doctrine is close to that which makes the Soul of the Universe the source and cause of all condition and of all movement whether without or—supposing that we are allowed as individuals some little power towards personal act—within ourselves.

But it is the theory of the most rigid and universal Necessity. All the causative forces enter into the system, and so every [one of] several phenomena rises necessarily; where nothing escapes Destiny, nothing has power to check or to change. Such forces beating upon us, as it were, from one general cause leave us no resource but to go where they drive. All our ideas will be determined by a chain of previous causes; our doings will be determined by those ideas; personal action becomes a mere word. That we are the agents does not save our freedom when our action is prescribed by those causes...

No one who sees the implications of this theory can hesitate: unable to halt at such a determinant principle, we seek for other explanations of our action.

[Now to the theory of the] Soul: we must place at the crest of the world of beings, this Principle [of Soul], not merely the Soul

of the Universe but, included in it, the soul of the individual. This, no mean Principle, is needed to be the bond of union in the total of things, not, itself, a thing sprung like things from life-seeds, but a first-hand Cause, bodiless and therefore supreme over itself, free, beyond the reach of Cosmic Cause. For, brought into body [by some other cause], it would not be unrestrictedly sovereign; it would hold rank in a series.

Now the environment into which this independent principle enters, when it comes to this point [of inhabiting a body], will be largely led by secondary causes. There will therefore be a compromise; the action of the soul will be in part guided by this environment while in other matters it will be sovereign, leading the way where it will. The nobler soul will have the greater power; the poorer soul, the lesser. A soul which defers to the bodily temperament cannot escape desire and rage and is abject in poverty, overbearing in wealth, arbitrary in power. The soul of nobler nature holds good against its surroundings; it is more apt to change them than to be changed, so that often it improves the environment and, where it must make concession, at least keeps its innocence.

...Therefore, when the soul has been modified by outer forces and acts under that pressure so that what it does is no more than an unreflecting acceptance of stimulus, neither the act nor the state can be described as voluntary; so, too, when even from within itself, it falls at times below its best and ignores the true, the highest, laws of action. But when our soul holds to its Reason-Principle, to the guide, pure and detached and native to itself, only then can we speak of personal operation, of voluntary act. Things so done may truly be described as our

doing, for they have no other source. They are the issue of the unmingled Soul, a Principle that is a First, a leader, a sovereign not subject to the errors of ignorance, not to be overthrown by the tyranny of the desires which, where they can break it, drive and drag, so as to allow of no act of our own, but mere answer to stimulus.

To sum up the results of our argument: All things and events are foreshown and brought into being by causes; but the causation is of two kinds: there are results originating from the soul and results due to other causes, those of the environment. In the action of our souls all that is done of their own motion in the light of sound reason is the soul's work, while what is done where they are hindered from their own action is not so much done as suffered. Unwisdom, then, is not due to the soul, and in general—if we mean by Fate a compulsion outside ourselves—an act is fated when it is contrary to wisdom.

But all our best is of our own doing; such is our nature as long as we remain detached. The wise and good do perform acts; their right action is the expression of their own power. In the others it comes in the breathing spaces when the passions are in abeyance; but it is not that they draw this occasional wisdom from outside themselves; simply, they are for the time being unhindered.²

If man were ...nothing more than a *made* thing, acting and acted upon according to a fixed Nature, he could be no more subject to reproach and punishment than the mere animals. But as the scheme holds, man is singled out for condemnation when he does evil; and this with justice. For he is no mere thing

made to rigid plan; his nature contains a Principle apart and free.³

Suppose we found such a nature in ourselves; we are untouched by all that has gathered round us subjecting us to happening and chance; all that accruement was of the servile and lay exposed to chance. By this new state alone we acquire self-disposal and free act, the freedom of that light which belongs to the order of The Good and is good in actuality, greater than anything Divine Mind has to give ... When we attain to this state and become this alone, what can we say but that we are more than free, more than self-disposing? And who then could link us to chance, hazard, happening, when thus we are become veritable Life, entered into That which contains no alloy but is purely Itself?⁴

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VI. BEAUTY

Introduction to Beauty

Following Plato's lead, Plotinus uses the term, "The Good" as synonymous with The One. "Beauty" is another term used by Plato to signify the Divine; and Plotinus, in keeping with his dedication to Plato's metaphysics, writes eloquently in defense of this term as significant of the Spiritual or "Intelligible" world within the Divine Mind. Beauty in the external world is but a reflection of the Divine, says Plotinus. That which we are drawn to and love in another is the divine Light. A form is beautiful insofar as it accurately reflects the Ideal which exists eternally in the Divine; and likewise, with the beauty in human conduct or in a work of art, of poetics or thought. They are beautiful by virtue of their likeness with the Ideal existent in the Divine Mind. It is the godly virtues and godly soul-qualities that have power to draw our love, for all love originates and has its objective in that Beauty which is consonant with the Divine.

The beauty that we know and pursue in ourselves is the beauty of likeness with the Divine, most especially when we are cognizant of our identity with the One, and cognizant too of our oneness with all that comes forth from It. This beauty lies in the soul's conformity to its divine archetype in the Mind of God; thus, it is in the godly soul that true beauty resides. And it is the beautiful soul that is worthy to be loved by a soul able to recognize that beauty by virtue of its own likeness to God. In all things and creatures that are found beautiful by such a soul, it is the divine Light that is loved. And That being the true Object of her love, where Beauty itself resides, the loving soul takes That as her aim and goal, ascending in beauty in her own likeness with God, until at last she is drawn in to God's unifying embrace, becoming very Beauty.

Plotinus on Beauty

Whence shone forth the beauty of Helen, over whom men battled; or of all those women like in loveliness to Aphrodite; or of Aphrodite herself; or of any human being that has been perfect in beauty; or of any of the gods, visible or invisible, possessing what would be beauty if [only] we saw [them]?

...The Nature which creates things so lovely must be itself of a far earlier beauty. We, undisciplined in discernment of the inward, knowing nothing of it, run after the outer, never understanding that it is the inner which stirs us. We are like one who sees his own reflection but, not realizing where it comes from, goes off in pursuit of it.

But that the thing we are pursuing is something different and that the beauty is not in the concrete object is shown by the beauty there is in matters of study, in conduct and custom; in other words, in our souls or minds. And it is precisely here that the greater beauty lies, perceived whenever you look to the wisdom in a man and delight in it, not wasting attention on the face, which may be hideous, but passing all appearance by and catching only at the inner beauty, the true person. If you are still unmoved and cannot acknowledge beauty under such conditions, then looking to your own inner being you will find no beauty to delight you and it will be futile in that state to seek the greater vision, for you will be questing it through the ugly and impure.

This is why such matters are not spoken of to everyone. You, if you are conscious of beauty within, remember. ¹

Where, then, exists the author of this beauty and life, the begetter of the true?

You observe the splendor over all the manifold Forms or Ideas; well might we linger here. But amid all these things of beauty we cannot but ask whence they come and whence the beauty. The beautiful objects themselves cannot be the source of beauty; if they were, beauty also would be merely a part. It can be no shape, no power, nor the total of powers and shapes that have had the becoming that has set them here; it must stand above all the powers, all the patterns. The origin of all this must be the formless—formless not as lacking shape but as the very source of even intellectual [spiritual] shapes.

...Its beauty, too, will be unique, a Beauty above beauty: it cannot be [merely] beauty, since it is not a thing among things. It is lovable and the Author of beauty. As the power to [lend beauty to] all beautiful shape, it will be the ultimate of beauty, that which brings all loveliness to be. It begets beauty and makes it yet more beautiful by the excess of beauty streaming from itself, the source and height of beauty. As the Source of beauty, it makes beautiful whatsoever springs from it. ²

Beauty addresses itself chiefly to sight; but there is a beauty for the hearing too, as in certain combinations of words and in all kinds of music, for melodies and cadences are beautiful; and minds that lift themselves above the realm of sense to a higher order are aware of beauty in the conduct of life, in actions, in

character, in the pursuits of the intellect; and there is the beauty of the virtues. What loftier beauty there may yet be, our argument will bring to light.

What, then, is it that gives comeliness to material forms and draws the ear to the sweetness perceived in sounds, and what is the secret of the beauty there is in all that derives from Soul?

Is there some One Principle from which all take their grace, or is there a beauty peculiar to the embodied and another for the bodiless? Finally, one or many, what would such a Principle be?

Let us, then, go back to the source, and indicate at once the Principle that bestows beauty on material things.

Undoubtedly this Principle exists; it is something that is perceived at the first glance, something which the Soul names as from an ancient knowledge and, recognizing, welcomes it, and enters into unison with it.

As it is not for those to speak of the graceful forms of the material world who have never seen them or known their grace—men born blind, let us suppose—in the same way those must be silent upon the beauty of noble conduct and of learning and all that order who have never cared for such things, nor may those tell of the splendor of virtue who have never known the face of justice and of moral wisdom beautiful beyond the beauty of evening and of dawn.

Such vision is for those only who see with the Soul's sight—and at the vision, they will rejoice, and awe will fall upon them and a trouble deeper than all the rest could ever stir, for now they are moving in the realm of Truth.

This is the spirit that Beauty must ever induce, wonderment and a delicious trouble, longing and love and a trembling that is all delight. All this may be felt for the unseen as for the seen; and this the souls feel for it, every soul in some degree. But those the more deeply that are the more truly apt to this higher love—just as all take delight in the beauty of the body but all are not stung as sharply, and those only that feel the keener wound are known as lovers.

...What do you feel in presence of the grace you discern in actions, in manners, in sound morality, in all the works and fruits of virtue, in the beauty of souls? When you see that you yourselves are beautiful within, what do you feel? What is this Dionysiac exultation that thrills through your being, this straining upwards of all your soul, this longing to break away from the body and live sunken within the true Self?

These are no other than the emotions of souls under the spell of love.

But what is it that awakens all this passion? No shape, no color, no grandeur of mass; all is for a soul, something whose beauty rests upon no color, for the moral wisdom the soul enshrines and all the other hueless splendor of the virtues. It is that you find in yourself, or admire in another, loftiness of spirit; righteousness of life; disciplined purity; courage of the majestic

face; gravity, modesty that goes fearless and tranquil and passionless; and, shining down upon all, the light of godlike intellection.

All these noble qualities are to be revered and loved, no doubt, but what entitles them to be called beautiful?

...Let us take the contrary, the ugliness of the soul, and set that against its beauty: To understand, at once, what this ugliness is and how it comes to appear in the soul will certainly open our way before us.

Let us then suppose an ugly soul, dissolute, unrighteous, teeming with all the lusts; torn by internal discord; beset by the fears of its cowardice and the envies of its pettiness; thinking, in the little thought it has, only of the perishable and the base; perverse in all its impulses; the friend of unclean pleasures; living the life of abandonment to bodily sensation and delighting in its deformity.

What must we think but that all this shame is something that has gathered about the soul, some foreign bane outraging it, soiling it, so that, encumbered with all manner of turpitude, it has no longer a pure activity or a pure sensation, but commands only a life smoldering dully under the crust of evil; that sunk in manifold death, it no longer sees what a soul should see, may no longer rest in its own being, dragged ever as it is towards the outer, the lower, the dark?

...If a man has been immersed in filth or daubed with mud, his native comeliness disappears and all that is seen is the foul stuff

besmearing him. His ugly condition is due to alien matter that has encrusted him, and if he is to win back his grace it must be his business to scour and purify himself and make himself what he was.

...And so [it is with] the soul; let it be but cleared of the desires that come by its too intimate converse with the body, emancipated from all the passions, purged of all that embodiment has thrust upon it, withdrawn, a solitary, to itself again—in that moment the ugliness that came only from the alien is stripped away. For, as the ancient teaching was, moral-discipline and courage and every virtue, not even excepting wisdom itself, all is purification. ...The soul thus cleansed is all idea and reason, wholly free of body, intellective, entirely of that divine order from which the wellspring of Beauty rises and all the race of beauty.

Hence the soul heightened to the Divine Mind is beautiful to all its power. For intellection and all that proceeds from intellection are the soul's beauty, a graciousness native to it and not foreign, for only with these is it truly soul. And it is just to say that in the soul's becoming a good and beautiful thing is its becoming like to God, for from the Divine comes all the beauty and all the good in beings.

Therefore, we must ascend again towards the Good, the desired of every soul. Anyone who has seen This, knows what I intend when I say that It is beautiful. Even the desire of It is to be desired as a good. To attain It is for those who will take the upward path, who will set all their forces towards It, who will divest themselves of all that we have put on in our descent. So,

to those who approach the holy celebrations of the mysteries, there are appointed purifications and the laying aside of the garments worn before, and the entry in nakedness—until, passing, on the upward way, all that is other than God, each in the solitude of himself shall behold that solitary-dwelling Existence, the Apart, the Unmingled, the Pure, That from which all things depend, for which all look and live and act and know, the Source of life and of intellection and of being.

And one who shall know this vision—with what passion of love shall he not be seized, with what pang of desire, what longing to be molten into one with This, what wondering delight! If he who has never seen this Being must hunger for It as for all his welfare, he that has known [It] must love and reverence It as the very Beauty; he will be flooded with awe and gladness, stricken by a salutary terror. He loves with a true love, with sharp desire. All other loves than this he must despise, and disdain all that once seemed fair.

This, indeed is the mood even of those who, having witnessed the manifestation of gods or supernatural beings, can never again feel the old delight in the comeliness of material forms. What then are we to think of one who contemplates absolute Beauty in Its essential integrity, no accumulation of flesh and matter, no dweller on earth or in the heavens—so perfect Its purity—far above all such things in that they are non-essential, composite, not primal but descending from This?

Beholding this Being—the Self-Intent that ever gives forth and never takes—resting, rapt, in the vision and [in] possession of so lofty a loveliness, growing to Its likeness, what Beauty can

the soul yet lack? For This, the Beauty supreme, the Absolute, and the Primal, fashions Its lovers to Beauty and makes them also worthy of love.

And for This, the sternest and the uttermost combat is set before the souls. All our labor is for This, lest we be left without part in this noblest vision, which to attain is to be blessed in the blissful sight, which to fail of is to fail utterly.

For not he that has failed of the joy that is in color or in visible forms, not he that has failed of power or of honors or of kingdom has failed, but only he that has failed of only This, for whose winning he should renounce kingdoms and command over earth and ocean and sky, if only, spurning the world of sense from beneath his feet, and straining to This, he may see.

But what must we do? How lies the path? How come to vision of the inaccessible Beauty, dwelling as if in consecrated precincts, apart from the common ways where all may see, even the profane?

He that has the strength, let him arise and withdraw into himself, foregoing all this that is known by the eyes, turning away forever from the material beauty that once made his joy. When he perceives those shapes of grace that show in body, let him not pursue: he must know them for copies, vestiges, shadows, and hasten away towards That they tell of. For if anyone follow what is like a beautiful shape playing over water—is there not a myth telling in symbol of such a dupe, how he sank into the depths of the current and was swept away to nothingness?

... "Let us flee then to the beloved Fatherland" [a reference to the words of Odysseus in his homeward flight]: this is the soundest counsel. But what is this flight? How are we to gain the open sea? For Odysseus is surely a parable to us when he commands the flight from the sorceries of Circe or Calypso—not content to linger for all the pleasure offered to his eyes and to all the delight of sense filling his days.

The Fatherland to us is There whence we have come, and There is The Father.

What then is our course, what the manner of our flight? This is not a journey for the feet; the feet bring us only from land to land. Nor need you think of a coach or a ship to carry you away. All this order of things you must set aside and refuse to see: you must close the eyes and call instead upon another vision which is to be waked within you, a vision, the birthright of all, which few turn to use.

And this inner vision, what is its operation?

Newly awakened, it is all too feeble to bear the ultimate splendor. Therefore, the soul must be trained—to the habit of remarking, first, all noble pursuits, then the works of beauty produced not by the labor of the arts but by the virtue of men known for their goodness. Lastly, you must search the souls of those that have shaped these beautiful forms.

But how are you to see into a virtuous soul and know its loveliness?

Withdraw into yourself and look. And if you do not find yourself beautiful yet, act as does the creator of a statue that is to be made beautiful: he cuts away here, he smooths there, he makes this line lighter, this other purer, until a lovely face has grown upon his work. So do you also. Cut away all that is excessive, straighten all that is crooked, bring light to all that is overcast; labor to make all one glow of beauty and never cease chiseling your statue, until there shall shine out on you from it the godlike splendor of virtue, until you shall see the perfect goodness firmly established in the stainless shrine.

When you know that you have become this perfect work, when you are self-gathered in the purity of your being, nothing now remaining that can shatter that inner unity, nothing from without clinging to the authentic man, when you find yourself wholly true to your essential nature, wholly that only veritable Light which is not measured by space, not narrowed to any circumscribed form but diffused as something without end, ever unmeasurable as something greater than all measure and more than all quantity—when you perceive that you have grown to this, you are now vision itself. Now call up all your confidence, strike forward yet a step—you need a guide no longer—strain, and see.

This is the only eye that sees the mighty Beauty. If the eye that adventures the vision be dimmed by vice, impure, or weak, and unable in its cowardly blenching to see the uttermost brightness, then it sees nothing, even though another points to what lies plain to sight before it. To any vision must be brought an eye adapted to what is to be seen, an eye having some

likeness to it. Never did eye see the sun unless it had first become sunlike, and never can the soul have vision of the primal Beauty unless itself be beautiful.

Therefore, first let each become godlike and each beautiful who cares to see God and Beauty. So, mounting, the soul will come first to the Divine Mind and survey all the beautiful Ideas in the Supreme and will avow that this is Beauty, that the Ideas are Beauty. For by their efficacy comes all other Beauty, by the offspring and essence of the spiritual Being. What is beyond the Divine Mind we affirm to be the nature of Good, radiating Beauty before it. So that, treating the spiritual Cosmos as one, the First is the Beautiful. If we make distinction there, the realm of Ideas constitutes the Beauty of the spiritual realm; and The Good, which lies beyond, is at once the fountain and principle of Beauty. The primal Good and the primal Beauty have the one dwelling-place and, thus, always, Beauty's seat is There. ³

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VII. LOVE

Introduction to Love

Plotinus' conception of Beauty as That which constitutes the soul's highest nature is integrally related to his conception of Love. Love is the sympathy felt by the soul toward Beauty, for Beauty is the Divine and is love's Generator and Source. The soul, becoming beautiful by its purification from all that is beneath it, and aspiring toward increasing beauty, is drawn to the Divine which is the source of all beauty. This drawing-power is Love. And this Love is the taste of God, for Love emanates from God and surrounds Him, as the corona surrounds the Sun; and the soul, being contained in that emanation, partakes of its nature. This Love, therefore, is inherent in the soul.

We may say that love is God's magnetic attraction, drawing us to His presence within each other and to the source of that love within ourselves. And, as a magnetic attraction, its pull is felt the stronger as we inwardly approach the source of that attraction. Drawn by that Love within ourselves, we focus on That, rising above the body, the mind, and the intellect, to know its strongest presence and attraction in the soul, which resides more nearly to the divine Source. So long as our soul's focus remains on the Source of love within, that Love permeates our being, and is reflected in our outward appearance and actions. When we lose that focus, and turn outwards, it dissipates and becomes a lesser thing.

We recognize love as a feeling, a quickening of desire, an exhilaration and a sense of want in the soul. While it is attendant upon God, whether in oneself or in another, it knows love; but that love becomes corrupted when the soul's attention is diverted from its Source. The complement of the soul with body pulls the attention down to matter and bodily things, and by this corruption love is focused no longer upward (inward), but downward toward satisfaction of bodily needs and desires. But the love felt in the soul for God

is a pure, simple love; it desires only to be released from being, and to be merged in God. It has left the world behind; it has passed ratiocination and understanding; it knows only its longing for God, and calls out to Him, seeking His enlightening embrace, seeking only to be merged in Him. And, by drowning in that Love, the soul itself becomes a radiant beacon of Love.

Plotinus on Love

It is sound, I think, to find the primal source of Love in a tendency of the soul towards pure Beauty, in a recognition, in a kinship, in an unreasoned consciousness of friendly relation. ...Nature itself, clearly, springs from the Divine realm, from God and Beauty; and when anything brings delight and the sense of kinship, its very image attracts.

...Those who desire earthly procreation are satisfied with the beauty found on earth, the beauty of image and of body. It is because they are strangers to the Archetype, the Source of even the attraction they feel towards what is lovely here. There are souls to whom earthly beauty is a leading to the memory of that [Beauty] in the higher realm and these love the earthly as an image. Those who have not attained to this memory do not understand what is happening within them, and [they] take the image for the reality. Once there is perfect self-control, it is no fault to enjoy the beauty of earth. [But] where appreciation degenerates into carnality, there is waywardness.

Pure love seeks the Beauty alone, whether there is remembrance [of that higher Beauty] or not. But there are those who feel, also, a desire of such immortality as lies within mortal reach. And these are seeking Beauty in their demand for perpetuity, the desire of the Eternal. Nature teaches them to sow the seed and to beget in beauty, to sow towards eternity, but in beauty through their own kinship with the beautiful. And indeed, the Eternal is of the one stock with the beautiful; the

external Nature is the first shaping of beauty and makes beautiful all that rises from it.

The less the desire for procreation, the greater is the contentment with Beauty alone. Yet procreation aims at the engendering of beauty; it is the expression of a lack. The subject is conscious of insufficiency and, wishing to produce beauty, feels that the way is to beget in a beautiful form. Where the procreative desire is lawless or against the purposes of nature, the first inspiration has been natural, but they have diverged from the way, they have slipped and fallen, and they grovel. They neither understand whither Love sought to lead them nor have they any instinct to production. They have not mastered the right use of the images of beauty; they do not know what the authentic Beauty is.

Those who love beauty of person without carnal desire love for Beauty's sake. Those who have—for women, of course—the copulative love, have the further purpose of self-perpetuation. As long as they are led by these motives, both are on the right path, though the first have taken the nobler way. But, even in the right, there is the difference that the one set, worshipping the beauty of earth, look no further; while the others, those of recollection, venerate also the Beauty of the other world while they still have no contempt for this in which they recognize, as it were, a last outgrowth, an attenuation of the higher. These, in sum, are innocent frequenters of Beauty, not to be confused with the class to whom it becomes an occasion of fall into the ugly—for the aspiration towards a good often degenerates into an evil. ¹

Of course, love, as an emotion, will take its name from Love, the Divinity, since real Being must be prior to what lacks this reality. The mental state will be designated as "love," like the Divinity, though it is no more than a particular act directed towards a particular object; but it must not be confused with the absolute Love, the Divine Being.²

It is not surprising if we fail to recognize what is passing within us. Lovers, and those in general who admire beauty here, do not stop to reflect that it is to be traced, as of course it must be, to the Beauty There. ...And indeed, if the Divine, the transcendently beautiful, did not exist in a Beauty beyond all thought, what could be lovelier than the things we see? Certainly, no reproach can rightly be brought against this world save only that it is not That.³

All human beings from birth onward live to the realm of sense more than to the spiritual. Forced of necessity to attend first to the material, some of them elect to abide by that order and, throughout their lives, make its concerns their first and their last; the sweet and the bitter of sense are their good and evil. They feel they have done all if they live along pursuing the one and barring the doors to the other. And those of them that pretend to reasoning have adopted this as their philosophy. They are like the heavier birds which have incorporated much from the earth and are so weighted down that they cannot fly high despite the wings Nature has given them.

Others do indeed lift themselves a little above the earth. The better in their soul urges them from the pleasant to the nobler, but they are not of power to see the Highest and so, in despair

of any surer ground, they fall back, in virtue's name, upon those actions and options of the lower from which they sought to escape.

But there is a third order: those godlike men who, in their mightier power, in the keenness of their sight, have clear vision of the splendor above and rise to it from among the cloud and fog of earth and hold firmly to that other world, looking beyond all here, delighted in the place of Reality, their native land, like a man returning after long wanderings to the pleasant ways of his own country.

What is this other place and how is it accessible?

It is to be reached by those who, born with the nature of the lover, are also authentically philosophic by inherent temper. In pain of love towards Beauty but not held by material loveliness, taking refuge from that in things whose beauty is of the soul—such things as virtue, knowledge, and [moral] law—and thence, rising still a step, reach to the source of this loveliness of the soul, thence to whatever be above that again, until the uttermost is reached: The First, the Principle whose beauty is self-springing. This attained, there is an end to the pain unassuageable before.⁴

The born lover, to whose degree the musician also may attain ... has a certain memory of Beauty but, severed from it now, he no longer comprehends it. Spellbound by visible loveliness, he clings amazed about that. His lesson must be to fall down no longer in bewildered delight before some embodied form; but he must be led, under a system of mental discipline, to Beauty

everywhere and made to discern the one Principle underlying all, a Principle apart from the material forms, springing from another source, and elsewhere more truly present.⁵

You must turn appearances about or you will be left void of God. You will be like those at the festivals who in their gluttony cram themselves with things which none going to the gods may touch. They hold these goods to be more real than the vision of the god who is to be honored and they go away having had no share in the sanctities of the shrine.

In these rites of philosophy, the unseen God leaves those in doubt of his existence who think nothing patent but what may be known to the flesh. It happens as if a man slept a life through and took the dream world in perfect trust; wake him, and he would refuse belief to the report of his open eyes and settle down to sleep again. . . . Certain people, we must keep in mind, have forgotten That to which from the beginning onwards their longing and effort are pointed: for all that exists desires and aspires towards the Supreme by a compulsion of nature ...⁶

The soul, ...stirred by the Divine, becomes Love. ...When there enters into it a glow from the Divine, the soul gathers strength, spreads true wings, and, however distracted by its proximate environment, speeds its buoyant way to something greater; ...its very nature bears it upwards, lifted by the Giver of that love. ...Surely, we need not wonder that It possesses the power to draw the soul to Itself, calling it back from every

wandering to rest before It. From It came everything; nothing is mightier.⁷

Lovers here [on earth] mould themselves to their beloved; they seek to increase their attraction of person and their likeness of mind; they are unwilling to fall short in moral quality or in other graces lest they be distasteful to those possessing such merit—and only among such [as these] can true love exist. In the same way the soul loves the Supreme Good, from its very beginnings stirred by It to love.

The soul which has never strayed from this love waits for no reminding from the beauty of our world. Holding that love—perhaps unawares—it is ever in quest, and, in its longing to be born to There, passes over what is lovely here and with one glance at the beauty of the universe dismisses all; for it sees that all is put together of flesh and matter, befouled by its housing, made fragmentary by corporeal extension, not the authentic Beauty which could never venture into the mud of body to be soiled, and annulled.

By only noting the flux of things it knows at once that from elsewhere comes the beauty that floats upon them and so it is urged to There, passionate in pursuit of what it loves, never—unless someone robs it of that love—never giving up till it attain.

There indeed all it saw was beautiful and true; it grew in strength by being thus filled with the life of the True. Itself becoming true Being and attaining true knowledge, it enters by

that neighboring into conscious possession of what it has long been seeking. ⁸

We ourselves possess Beauty when we are true to our own being; our ugliness is in going over to another order; that is to say, our Self-knowledge is our beauty; in Self-ignorance we are ugly. Thus, Beauty is of the Divine and comes from There only. ⁹

...Love is ever intent upon that other [Divine] loveliness, and It exists to be the medium between desire and that object of desire. It is the eye of the desirer. By its power that which loves is enabled to see the thing loved. ¹⁰

Love ...has of necessity been eternally in existence, for it springs from the intention of the soul towards its best, towards the Good. For as long as soul has been, Love has been. ¹¹

This indwelling Love is no other than the Spirit which, as we are told, walks with every being, [and is] the affection dominant in each separate nature. ¹²

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VIII. PURIFICATION

Introduction to Purification

Purification, says Plotinus, is the withdrawal of the soul from all that is alien to it. It is synonymous with what some have called "renunciation." This renunciation or purification is a necessary step on the road to spiritual vision, as the soul has put on, in its sojourn on earth, an excrescence, as it were, of worldly illusions, and must extricate itself from those false illusions. The mind, involved with its worldly concerns and considerations cannot at the same time gaze freely on the Divine. And the more elaborately the mind is involved in focusing on matters of this "lower" realm, the more difficult it is to refocus its attention on the "higher" realm of spiritual reality.

It is little wonder, then, that this purification, this renunciation, is a frightening prospect to those greatly attached to the pleasures and apparent practical advantages of worldly involvement. The truth is that no one could accomplish the relinquishment of the mind's fascination with the pleasures of the material world if the fascination with the joys of the spirit had not the stronger pull. And where that greater joy has not yet been discovered, the pull of worldly pleasure continues to exert the dominant attraction. The mind is attracted to what the heart best loves and desires, hence the saying, "Your heart is where your treasure is." And the heart's love of what is other than God is uprooted only by a keen discrimination between the Real and the appearance, the refinement of vision that guides the heart's affection to the Real, to God. Those only who have clearly recognized the emptiness of the one and the desirability of the other are able to undergo the purification that sets them free.

Of what, then, does such purification consist?

"Purification" is in some sense an inappropriate term for the activity Plotinus has in mind, for such activity is truly a non-activity. That is to say, it is not a

process of active cleansing or taking away, but it is rather a willful directing of the soul and will to God and the things of God, and a refusal to acquiesce to anything less. That in itself is all that is required. That accomplishes what is to be accomplished in all that is purification. To direct the mind and will toward what is to be banished is simply to assert and lay emphasis on those negative qualities. They are simply to be abandoned in the positive directing of the mind, hence the soul, to the Highest. At once the soul is pure.

But, of course, there are deeply ingrained habits, inclinations, in the couplement of soul with body which will come back to tempt the mind to lower things. Here is where the strength of one's determination is challenged, where one's love of God is tested, where virtue has the opportunity to triumph. No amount of pretense will be of any avail; to enter that door, the purity required is absolute. Only the perfect can know the Perfect; only the pure can know the Pure.

Plotinus on Purification

Since evil is here, haunting this world by necessary law, and it is the soul's design to escape from evil, we must escape hence.

But what is this escape?

"In attaining likeness to God," we read. And this is explained [by Plato] as "becoming just and holy, living by wisdom," the entire nature grounded in virtue.

But does not likeness by way of virtue imply likeness to some being that has virtue? To what divine being, then, would our likeness be? To the Being—must we not think? — in which, above all, such excellence seems to inhere, that is to the Soul of the cosmos and to the Principle ruling within it, the Principle endowed with a wisdom most wonderful. What could be more fitting than that we, living in this world, should become like to its Ruler? ¹

"Likeness to God," says Plato, "is a flight from this world's ways and things."...

But in what sense can we call the virtues purifications, and how does purification result in likeness [to God]?

As the soul is evil by being interfused with the body and by coming to share the body's states and to think the body's thoughts, so it would be good, it would be possessed of virtue,

if it threw off the body's moods and devoted itself to its own act: the state of intellection and wisdom; [if it] never allowed the passions of the body to affect it, knew no fear of parting from the body, and if reason and the Divine Mind ruled without opposition. This would be the state of righteousness. Such a disposition in the soul, become thus intellective and immune to passion, it would not be wrong to call "likeness to God"; for the Divine, too, is pure and the Divine activity is such that likeness to it is wisdom. ²

The soul's true good is in devotion to the Divine Mind, its kin; evil to the soul lies in frequenting what is alien to it. There is no other way for it than to purify itself and so enter into relation with its own; the new phase begins by a new orientation.

After the purification, then, is this [new] orientation still to be made? No. By the purification the true alignment stands accomplished.

The soul's virtue, then, is this alignment [of the soul with God]? No. It is what the alignment brings about within.

And this?

That it sees; that, like sight affected by the thing seen, the soul admits the imprint, graven upon it and working within it, of the vision it has come to.

But was not the soul possessed of all this always, or had it forgotten?

What it now sees, it certainly always possessed, but as lying away in the dark, not as acting within it. To dispel the darkness, and thus come to the knowledge of its inner content, it must thrust towards the light.

Besides, it possessed not the originals but images, pictures. And these it must bring into closer accord with the exemplars they represent. And, further, if the Divine Mind is said to be a possession of the soul, this is only in the sense that It is not alien and that the link becomes very close when the soul's sight is turned towards It. Otherwise, ever-present though It be, It remains foreign, just as our knowledge, if it does not determine action, is dead to us.

So, we come to the scope of the purification: that understood, the nature of likeness becomes clear. Likeness to what principle? Identity with what God?

The question is substantially this: how far does purification dispel the two orders of passion—anger, desire, and the like, with grief and its kin—and in what degree the disengagement from the body is possible.

Disengagement means simply that the soul withdraws to its own place.

It will hold itself above all passions and affections. Necessary pleasures and all the activity of the senses it will employ only for medicament and assuagement lest its work be impeded. Pain it may combat, but, failing the cure, it will meekly bear it and ease it by refusing to assent to it. All passionate action it

will check. The suppression will be complete if that be possible, but at worst the soul will never itself take fire but will keep the involuntary and uncontrolled outside its own precincts and rare and weak at that. The soul has nothing to dread, though no doubt the involuntary has some power here too. Fear therefore must cease, except so far as it is purely monitory. What desire there may be can never be for the vile; even the food and drink necessary for restoration will lie outside the soul's attention, and not less the sexual appetite. Or, if such desire there must be, it will turn upon the actual needs of the nature and be entirely under control; or if any uncontrolled motion takes place, it will reach no further than the imagination, be no more than a fleeting fancy.

The soul itself will be inviolately free and will be working to set the irrational part of the nature above all attack, or if that may not be, then at least to preserve it from violent assault, so that any wound it takes may be slight and be healed at once by virtue of the Soul's presence. Just as a man living next door to an Adept would profit by the neighborhood, either in becoming wise and good himself or, for sheer shame, never venturing any act [of] which the nobler mind would disapprove.

There will be no battling in the soul; the mere intervention of reason is enough. The lower nature will stand in such awe of reason that for any slightest movement it has made it will grieve, and censure its own weakness, in not having kept low and still in the presence of its lord.

In all this there is no sin—there is only matter of discipline—but our concern is not merely to be sinless but to be God.

As long as there is any such involuntary action, the nature is twofold: God and half-god; or rather God in association with a nature of a lower power. When all the involuntary is suppressed, there is God unmingled, a Divine Being of the order of those [gods] who follow upon The First.

For, at this height, the man is the very being that came from the Supreme. The primal excellence restored, the essential man is There. Entering this [earthly] sphere, he has associated himself with a lower phase of his nature, but even this he will lead up into likeness with his highest Self, as far as it is capable, so that if possible it shall never be inclined to, and at the least never adopt, any course displeasing to its overlord.³

Let us consider a soul, not one that has appropriated the unreasoned desires and impulses of the bodily life, or any other such emotion and experience, but one that has cast all this aside, and as far as possible has no commerce with the bodily. Such a soul demonstrates that all evil is accretion, alien, and that in the purged soul the noble things are immanent, wisdom and all else that is good, as its native store.

If this is the soul once it has returned to its self, how deny that it is [of] the [same] nature we have identified with all the Divine and Eternal? Wisdom and authentic virtue are divine, and they could not be found [to exist] in that which is mean and mortal. What possesses these [wisdom and true virtue] must be divine by its very capacity for what is divine, the token of kinship and of identical substance.

Hence, too, any one of us who exhibits these soul-qualities will differ but little from the Supernals [the disembodied God-like souls]; he will be less than they only to the extent in which the soul in him is associated with [the] body. This is so true that, if every human being were at that stage, or if a great number lived by a soul of that degree, no one would be so incredulous as to doubt that the soul in man is immortal. It is because we see everywhere the spoiled souls of the great masses of men that it becomes difficult to recognize their divinity and immortality.

To know the nature of a thing we must observe it in its unalloyed state, since any addition obscures the reality. Clear [away what is extraneous], then look. Or, rather, let a man first purify himself and then observe [himself]: he will not doubt his immortality when he sees himself thus entered into the pure, the Spiritual. For, what he sees is a Divine Mind looking on nothing of sense, nothing of this mortality, but by its own eternity having intellection of the eternal. He will see all things in this Spiritual realm, himself having become a spiritual Cosmos and all lightsome, illuminated by the truth streaming from The Good, which radiates truth upon all that stands within that realm of the Divine.

Thus, he will often feel the beauty of that saying, "Farewell; I am an immortal God," for he has ascended to the Supreme, and is all one strain to enter into likeness with It.

If the purification puts the human into knowledge of the highest, then, too, the knowledge latent within becomes manifest, the only authentic knowing. For it is not by running hither and thither outside of itself that the soul understands

morality and right conduct; it learns them of its own nature, in its contact with its Self, in its intellectual grasp of its Self, seeing deeply impressed upon it the images of its primal state. What was one mass of rust from long neglect it has [now] restored to purity. ⁴

What form, then, does each virtue take in one so lofty?

Wisdom and understanding consist in the contemplation of all that exists in the Divine Mind, and the Divine Mind itself apprehends this all as an immediate presence.

...[Therefore] in the soul, the direction of vision towards the Divine Mind is wisdom and prudence. ⁵

But what can be meant by the purification of a soul that has [by definition] never been stained and by the separation of the soul from a body to which it is essentially a stranger?

The purification of the soul is simply to allow it to be alone. It is pure when it keeps no company; when it looks to nothing outside of itself; when it entertains no alien thoughts; ...when it no longer sees in the world of image, much less elaborates images into veritable affections. Is it not a true purification to turn away towards the exact contrary of earthly things?

Separation, in the same way, is the condition of a soul no longer entering into the body to lie at its mercy; it is to stand as a light, set in the midst of trouble but unperturbed through all.

In the particular case of the affective phase of the soul, purification is its awakening from the baseless visions which beset it, the refusal to see them. Its separation consists in limiting its descent towards the lower and accepting no picture thence ...⁶

As a man reaches to loftier principles and other standards, these in turn will define his conduct. For example, restraint in its earlier form will no longer satisfy him; he will work for the final disengagement. He will live, no longer, the human life of the good man—such as civic virtue commends—but, leaving this beneath him, he will take up instead another life, that of a god.

For it is to God, not to the good [man], that our likeness must look: to model ourselves upon good men is to produce an image of an image. We have to fix our gaze above the image and attain likeness to the supreme Exemplar.⁷

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IX. THE RETURN

Introduction to The Return

When Plotinus speaks of the Return of the soul to the transcendent Source of all, he is speaking from his own experience of this returning—what we know as the "unitive" or "mystical" experience." Such an experience occurs when a soul, having turned toward God in longing, and away from all that is below, is lifted in spirit—never knowing how—resulting in a sudden radical change in awareness of its identity. From its limited perspective as a yearning soul, it is suddenly transformed into the All, and knows itself as a participant in the All, no longer having a separate individuality, but aware only of itself being that All—like a wave yearning for the ocean who suddenly becomes aware that it is truly the ocean and nothing but ocean.

As this new All-awareness examines its own vastness, peering keenly into itself for perfect clarity, it sees that, in truth, it is above even this infinite ocean of Being. It is the one pure Consciousness in which this ocean exists. It is quite above the ocean of Being and all the multiplicity of wave-forms within it; It is a never-changing Consciousness from which this ocean of Being has come forth, and this ocean is Itself, but It is not this ocean. It stands to this ocean of time and movement and uproar as the consciousness of man stands to his ever-productive mind. It is aware of it, and aware that it is Its own production, but takes no part in it, standing eternally alone and unaltered. This is the supreme Self of all that is; It is the only One. And It knows Itself in this enlightened soul.

But the experience cannot be held. The frailty of the soul and the weight of mental habit sinks it away from the height it has attained, and again it finds itself back in its familiar surroundings on earth. But it retains within it the knowledge of its limitless Self. And with what amazement it reflects on its new knowledge! "I am not this thing I appear to be and have so long identified with," it exclaims; "I am the eternal One!" Such has been the

experience of all who have been lifted There, and this is the experience of which Plotinus tells as well.

Plotinus on The Return

That which the soul must seek, That which sheds Its light upon the Divine Mind, leaving Its mark wherever It falls, surely we need not wonder if It has the power to draw [all back] to Itself, calling [the soul] back from every wandering to rest before It. From It came all and so there is nothing mightier; all is feeble before It. ¹

To real Being we go back, all that we have and are. To That we return as from That we came. Of what is There [in the Spirit-realm] we have direct knowledge, not images or even impressions. And to know without image is to be; by our part in true knowledge we *are* those [supernal] beings. We do not need to bring them down into ourselves, for we are There among them. Since not only ourselves but all other things also are those beings, we all are they. We are they while we are also one with all: therefore, we and all things are one.

When we look outside of That on which we depend we ignore our unity. Looking outward we see many faces; look inward and all is the one Supreme. If a man could but be turned about ...he would see at once God and himself and the All. At first no doubt all will not be seen as one whole, but when we find no stop at which to declare a limit to our being we cease to close ourselves out from the total of reality; we reach to the All as a unity—and this not by any stepping forward, but by the fact of being and abiding There where the All has its being. ²

In that you have entered into the All, no longer content with the part, you cease to think of yourself as under limit but, laying all such determination aside, you become an All. No doubt you were always That, but there has been an addition and by that addition you are diminished. For the addition was not from the realm of being—you can add nothing to being—but from non-being. It is not by some admixture of non-being that one becomes an entire, but by putting non-being away. By the lessening of the alien in you, you increase. Cast it aside and there is the All within you. Engaged in the alien, you will not find the All. Not that it has to come and so become present to you; it is you that have turned from it. And turn though you may, you have not severed yourself; it is there; you are not in some far region. Still there before it, you have faced to its contrary.

...But there is that Other whom all peoples seek, and all the earth and heaven—Him who is everywhere Self-abiding and from whom derives Being and the real beings down to Soul and Life, all bound to Him and so moving to that unity which by its very lack of extension is infinite. ³

This Highest cannot be divided and allotted; [It] must remain intangible but not bound to space; It may be present at many points, wheresoever there is anything capable of accepting one of its manifestations. Thus, a center is an independent unity; everything within the circle has its termination at the center; and to the center the radii bring each their own. Within our nature is such a center by which we grasp and are linked and held; and those of us are firmly in the Supreme whose being is concentrated There.

...If there is to be perception of what is thus present, we must turn the perceptive faculty inward and hold it to attention There. Hoping to hear a desired voice we let all others pass and are alert for the coming at last of that most welcome of sounds. So here, we must let the hearings of sense go by, save for sheer necessity, and keep the soul's perception bright and quick to the sounds from above. ⁴

...Every soul has something of the lower on the body side and something of the higher on the side of the Divine Mind. ⁵

Even in fire there is the heat which exists by virtue of its essential nature and there is the warmth going instantaneously outward from that characterizing heat by the fact that the fire, remaining unchangeable fire, utters the act native to its essential reality.

So, it is in the Divine also. Or rather we have there the earlier form of the double act: the Divine remains in its own unchanging being, but from its perfection and from the Act included in its nature there emanates the secondary or issuing Act which—as the output of a mighty power, the mightiest there is—attains to real Being as second to That which stands above all Being. That transcendent [One] was the potentiality of the All; this secondary is the All made actual. ⁶

What can it be that has brought the souls to forget the Father, God, and, though [they are] members of the Divine and entirely of that world, to ignore at once themselves and It?

The evil that has overtaken them has its source in self-will, in the entry into the sphere of process, and in the primal differentiation with the desire for self-ownership. They conceived a pleasure in this freedom and largely indulged their own motion. Thus, they were hurried down the wrong path, and in the end, drifting further and further, they came to lose even the thought of their origin in the Divine.⁷

Let every soul recall, then, at the outset the truth that Soul is the author of all living things, that it has breathed the life into them all, whatever is nourished by earth and sea, all the creatures of the air, and the divine stars in the sky. It is the maker of the Sun, and itself formed and ordered this vast heaven and conducts all that rhythmic motion. It is a principle distinct from all these to which it gives law and movement and life, and it must of necessity be more honorable than they, for they gather or dissolve as Soul brings them life or abandons them, but Soul, since it never can abandon itself, is of eternal being.⁸

If, then, it is the presence of Soul that brings worth, how can a man slight himself and run after other things? You honor the Soul elsewhere; honor then yourself.

The soul once seen to be thus precious, thus Divine, you may hold the faith that by its possession you are already nearing God. In the strength of this power make upwards towards Him; you must attain to no great distance: there is not much between.⁹

...This Light [from the Highest] shining within the soul enlightens it; that is, it makes the soul intellectual, working it into likeness with itself, the Light above.

Think of the traces of this Light upon the soul, then say to yourself that such, and more beautiful and broader and more radiant, is the Light itself. Thus, you will approach to the nature of the Divine Mind and the Spirit-realm, for it is this Light, Itself lit from above, which gives the soul its brighter life.¹⁰

We may know we have had the vision when the soul has suddenly taken Light. This Light is from the Supreme and is the Supreme. ...The soul remains unlit without that vision; lit, it possesses what it sought. And this is the true end set before the soul, to take that Light, to see the Supreme by the Supreme and not by the light of any other principle: to see the Supreme which is also the means to the vision; for that which illumines the soul is That which it is to see, just as it is by the Sun's own light that we see the Sun.

But how is this to be accomplished?

Let all else go.¹¹

Many times, it has happened [so to me]: [I have been] lifted out of the body into my Self, becoming external to all other things and centered upon my Self. Beholding a marvelous beauty, [I have been] then, more than ever, assured of community with the loftiest order. Enacting the noblest life, acquiring identity with the Divine, stationing within It by having attained that

activity, [I became] poised above whatsoever within the Spirit-world is less than the Supreme. Yet, there comes the moment of descent from intellection to reasoning. And after that sojourn in the Divine, I ask myself how it happens that I can now be descending, and how did the soul ever enter into my body, the soul which, even within the body, is the high thing it has shown itself to be. ¹²

We are left wondering whence [this vision] came, from within or without; and when it has gone, we say, "It was here. Yet no; it was beyond!" But we ought not to question whence; there is no whence, no coming or going in place. Now it is seen and now not seen. We must not run after it, but [we must] fit ourselves for the vision and then wait tranquilly for its appearance, as the eye waits on the rising of the Sun, which in its own time appears above the horizon—out of the ocean, as the poets say—and gives itself to our sight. ¹³

Suppose the soul to have attained: The Highest has come to her, or rather has revealed Its presence; she has turned away from all about her and made herself apt, beautiful to the utmost, brought into likeness with the Divine by those preparings and adornings which come unbidden to those growing ready for the vision. She has seen that presence suddenly manifesting within her, for there is nothing between. Here is no longer a duality but a two-in-one; for, so long as the presence holds, all distinction fades. It is as lover and beloved here [on earth], in a copy of that union, long to blend. The soul has now no further awareness of being in body and will give herself no foreign name, not man, not living being, not Being, not All. Any observation of such things falls away; the soul has neither time

nor taste for them. This she sought and This she has found and on This she looks and not upon herself; and who she is that looks she has not leisure to know.

Once There she will barter for This nothing the universe holds; not though one would make over the heavens entire to her. There is nothing higher than this, nothing of more good. Above This there is no passing; all the rest, however lofty, lies on the downward path. She is of perfect judgment and knows that This was her quest, that nothing is higher. Here can be no deceit; where could she come upon [something that is] truer than the Truth? And the Truth that she affirms, she is herself; but all the affirmation is later and is silent. In this happiness she knows beyond delusion that she is happy; for this is no affirmation of an excited body but of a soul become again what she was in the time of her early joy. All that she had welcomed of old—office, power, wealth, beauty, knowledge—of all she tells her scorn as she never could, had she not found their better. Linked to This she can fear no disaster, not even if she has had the vision but once. Let everything about her fall to pieces, she wouldn't mind if only she might be wholly with This, so huge [is] the happiness she has won to.

Such is the soul's temper in this union that even the act of intellect once so intimately loved she now dismisses; intellection is movement and she has no wish to move. The object of her vision has itself no intellection, even though it is by means of the Divine Mind that she has attained the vision, herself made over into Divine Mind and becoming that principle so as to be able to take her stand in the realm of Spirit. Entered there and making herself over to that, she at

first contemplates that realm, but once she sees That which is higher still, she leaves all else aside. Thus, when a man enters a house rich in beauty he might gaze about and admire the varied splendor before the master appears; but, face to face with that great person— no thing of ornament, but [one] calling for the truest attention— he would ignore everything else and look only to the master.

In this state of absorbed contemplation there is no longer [the] question of holding an object [in view]. The vision is continuous so that seeing and seen are one thing; object and act of vision have become identical. Of everything that until then filled the eye no memory remains. And our comparison would be closer if, instead of a man appearing to the visitor who had been admiring the house, it had been a god, and not a god manifesting to the eyes but one filling the soul.¹⁴

It is important to have [intellectual] knowledge of The Good or contact with It: this ...is the grand learning—the learning, not of looking toward It but attaining, first, some knowledge of It. We come to this learning by analogies, by abstractions, by our understanding of its subsequents, of all that is derived from the Good, by the upward steps towards It. Purification has The Good for its goal. Also, the virtues, all right ordering, ascent within the Spiritual, settlement therein, banqueting upon the Divine—by these methods one becomes, to self and to all else, at once seen and seer. Identical with Being and Divine Mind and the entire living All, we no longer see the Supreme as an external; we are near now, the next is That, and It is close at hand, radiant above the intelligible realm [of Spirit].

Here, we put aside all the learning. Disciplined to this intensity, established in Beauty, the quester still holds knowledge of the ground he rests on; but, suddenly, swept beyond it all by the very crest of the wave of Spirit surging beneath, he is lifted and sees, never knowing how. The vision floods the eyes with Light, but it is not a light showing some other object; the Light is itself the vision. No longer is there thing seen and light to show it, no longer intellect and object of intellection. This is the very radiance that brought both intellect and intellectual object into being for the later use and allowed them to occupy the quester's mind. With This he himself becomes identical with that radiance whose Act is to engender the Divine Mind, not losing [anything] in that engendering, but forever unchanged, the engendered coming to be simply because that Supreme exists. If there were no such Principle above change, no derivative could rise.¹⁵

...God is [the] cause of Himself; for Himself and of Himself He is what He is, the first Self, the transcendent Self [of all].

Lovable, very love, the Supreme is also Self-love in that He is lovely to no one other than Himself and in Himself. The presence of Self to Self exists only when the associating [subject] is identical with the associated [object]. And since, in the Supreme, associated and associating are one, seeker and sought one—the sought serving as the true essence (*hypostasis*) and substrate of the seeker—once more God's being and his seeking are identical. Once more, then, the Supreme is the Self-producing, sovereign of Himself, not coming to be as some external [being] willed but existing as He wills it.

...When we attain to this state and become This alone, what can we say but that we are more than free, more than self-disposing? And who then could link us to chance, hazard, happening, when thus we are become Life itself, [having] entered into That which contains no admixture but is purely Itself? ¹⁶

Our way then takes us beyond knowing. There may be no wandering from Unity; knowing and knowable must all be left aside; every object of thought, even the highest, we must pass by, for all that is on the upward path is subsequent to This and derives from This, as from the Sun [is derived] all the light of the day.

[It is said that this vision is] "Not to be told; not to be written." In our writing and telling we are but urging towards It; by our discussion we are merely calling to vision. To those desiring to see, we point the path. Our teaching is of the road and the traveling; the seeing must be the very act of one who has made this choice.

There are those who have not attained to see. The soul has not [yet] come to know the splendor There; it has not felt and clutched to itself that love-passion of vision known to the lover [who has] come to rest where he loves. Or, struck perhaps by that authentic Light, all the soul lit by the nearness gained, we have remained weighted from beneath; the vision is frustrated. We should go without burden, and [yet] we go carrying that which can but keep us back; we are not yet made over into Unity.

From none is the Principle absent and yet [It is absent] from all. Present, It remains absent save to those fit to receive, disciplined into some accordance, able to touch It closely by their likeness and by that kindred power within themselves through which, remaining as it was when it came to them from the Supreme, they are enabled to see insofar as God may at all be seen.

Failure to attain may be due to some impediment or to lack of the guiding thought that establishes trust. Impediment we must charge against ourselves and strive by entire renunciation to become emancipate ...¹⁷

If the mind reels before something thus alien to all we know, we must take our stand on the things of this realm and strive thence to see. But in the looking, beware of throwing outward; this Principle does not lie away somewhere leaving the rest void. To those of power to reach, It is present; to the inapt, [It is] absent. In our daily affairs we cannot hold an object in mind if we have given ourselves elsewhere, occupied upon some other matter. That very thing, and nothing else, must be before us to be truly the object of observation. So here also; preoccupied by the impress of something else, we are withheld under that pressure from becoming aware of the Unity. A mind gripped and fastened by some definite thing cannot take the print of the very contrary. As matter must be void of quality in order to accept the universal forms, so and much more must the soul be kept formless if there is to be no infixed impediment to prevent it being brimmed and lit by the primal Principle.¹⁸

God ...is outside of none; [He is] present, [but] unperceived by all. We break away from Him, or rather from our Self; [and] what we turn from we cannot reach. Astray ourselves, we cannot go in search of another; [just as] a child distraught will not recognize its father. To find our Self is to know our Source.¹⁹

Thus, the Supreme, as containing no otherness, is ever-present with us; we [are] with It when we put otherness away. It is not that the Supreme reaches out to us seeking our communion; we reach towards the Supreme. It is we who become present. We are always before It, but we do not always look. Thus, a choir, set in due order about the conductor, singing, may turn away from that center to which all should attend; let it but face aright and it sings with beauty, effectively present. We are ever before the Supreme — [to be] cut off is utter dissolution; we could no longer exist—but we do not always attend. When we look, our Goal is attained. This is rest; this is the end of singing ill. Effectively before Him, we lift a choral song full of God.

In this choring, the soul looks upon the wellspring of life, wellspring also of intellect, beginning of being, fount of good, root of soul. It is not that these are poured out from the Supreme, lessening It as if It were a thing of mass. If that were true, these emanents [such as soul, intellect, being] would be perishable; but they are eternal. They spring from an eternal Principle, which produces them not by Its fragmentation, but in virtue of its intact identity. Therefore, they too hold firm; [just as] so long as the sun shines, so long there will be light.

We have not been cut away; we are not separate. So what if the body-nature has closed about us to press us to itself. We breathe and hold our ground because the Supreme does not give and [then] pass, but gives on forever, so long as It remains what It is.

Our being is the fuller for our turning There. This is our prosperity; to hold aloof is loneliness and lessening. Here is the soul's peace, outside of evil, refuge taken in the place that is free of wrong. Here it has its Act, its true knowing. Here it is immune. Here is the true living; that of today, when all are living apart from Him, is but a shadow, a mimicry. Life in the Supreme is the native activity of intellect; in virtue of that silent converse it brings forth gods, brings forth beauty, brings forth righteousness, brings forth all moral good. For the soul is pregnant with all these when it has been filled with God. This state is its first and its last, because from God it comes. Its good lies There, and, once turned to God again, it is what it was. Life here, with the things of earth, is a sinking, a defeat, a failing of the wing.

That our good is There is shown by the very love inborn with the soul ...The soul in its nature loves God and longs to be at one with Him in the noble love of a daughter for a noble father; but coming to human birth and lured by the courtships of this sphere, she takes up with another love, a mortal; she leaves her Father and falls. But one day, coming to hate her shame, she puts away the evil of earth, once more seeks the Father, and finds her peace.

Those to whom all this experience is strange may understand by way of our earthly longings and the joy we have in winning to what we most desire—remembering always that here what we love is perishable, hurtful, that our loving is of mimicries and turns awry because all was a mistake. Our good was not here; this was not what we sought. There only is our true love and There we may unite with it, not holding it in some fleshly embrace but truly possessing it. Those who have seen know what I have in mind. The soul takes another life as it draws nearer and nearer to God and gains participation in Him. Thus restored, it feels that the dispenser of true life is There to see; that now we have nothing [else] to look for. But, rather, that we must put aside all else and rest in This alone, become This, This alone, all the earthly environment done away, in haste to be free, impatient of any bond holding us to the baser; so that with our entire being we may cling about This, no part in us remaining through which we are not in touch with God.

Thus, we have all the vision that may be of Him and of our Self. But it is of a Self-wrought to splendor, brimmed with the intellectual light, become that very light, pure, buoyant, unburdened, raised to Godhood or, better, knowing its Godhood, all aflame then—but crushed out once more if it should take up the discarded burden.

But how comes the soul not to keep that ground?

Because it has not yet escaped wholly. But there will be the time of vision unbroken, the Self hindered no longer by any hindrance of body. Not that those hindrances beset that in us which has truly seen; it is the other phase of the soul that

suffers, and that only when we withdraw from vision and take to knowing by proof, by evidence, by the reasoning processes of the mental habit. Such logic is not to be confounded with that act of ours in the vision. It is not our reason that has seen; it is something greater than reason, reason's Prior, as far above reason as the very object of that thought must be.

In our Self-seeing There, the Self is seen as belonging to that order, or rather we are merged into that Self in us which has the quality of that order. It is a knowing of the Self restored to its purity. No doubt we should not speak of seeing; but we cannot help talking in dualities [such as] seen and seer, instead of [speaking] boldly [of] the achievement of Unity. In this seeing, we neither hold an object [in vision] nor trace distinction; there is no two. The man [himself] is changed, no longer himself nor self-belonging; he is merged with the Supreme, sunken into It, one with It. Center coincides with center, for centers of circles, even here below, are one when they unite, and two when they separate; and it is in this sense that we now [after the vision] speak of the Supreme as separate. This is why the vision baffles telling; we cannot detach the Supreme to state it. If we have seen something thus detached, we have failed of the Supreme which is to be known only as one with ourselves.

This is the meaning of that rule of our [Pythagorean and Orphic] mysteries: "Nothing divulged to the uninitiate." The Supreme is not to be made a common story; the holy things may not be uncovered to the stranger, to anyone who has not himself attained [or is, at least, attempting] to see. There were not two; beholder was one with beheld. It was not a vision embraced but a Unity apprehended. The man formed by this

mingling with the Supreme must—if he only remember — carry its image impressed upon him. He is become the Unity, nothing within him or without inducing any diversity; no movement now, no passion, no outward looking desire, once this ascent is achieved. Reasoning is in abeyance and all intellection and even, to dare the word, the very "self." Caught away, filled with God, he has in perfect stillness attained isolation. All the being calmed, he turns neither to this side nor to that, not even inwards to himself. Utterly resting, he has become very rest. He belongs no longer to the order of the beautiful; he has risen beyond beauty; he has over passed even the choir of the virtues. He is like one who, having penetrated the inner sanctuary, leaves the temple images behind him—though these become once more the first objects of regard when he leaves the holies—for There his converse was not with image, not with trace, but with the very Truth in the view of which all the rest is but of secondary concern.

There, indeed, it was scarcely vision, unless of a mode unknown. It was a going forth from the self, a simplifying, a renunciation, a reach towards contact and at the same time a repose, a meditation towards assimilation. This is the only seeing of what lies with the holies: to look anywhere else is to fail.

Things here [in this world] are signs; they show therefore to the wiser teachers how the supreme God is known. The instructed priest reading the sign may enter the holy place and make real the vision of The Inaccessible.

Even those who have never found entry must admit the existence of that Invisible. They will know their Source and Principle, since by principle they see principle and are linked with it; by like they have contact with like and so they grasp all of the Divine that lies within the scope of mind. Until the seeing comes they are still craving something, that which only the vision can give. This Goal, attained only by those that have over passed all, is the All-Transcending.

It is not in the soul's nature to touch utter nothingness; the lowest descent is into evil and, so far, into non-being. But to utter nothing, never. When the soul begins again to mount, it comes not to something alien but to its very Self. Thus detached, it is in nothing but Itself. Self-gathered, it is no longer in the order of Being; it is in the Supreme.

There is thus a commingling by virtue of which the essential man outgrows Being, and he becomes identical with That which transcends Being. The self thus lifted, we are in the likeness of the Supreme. If from that heightened self we pass still higher — [as an] image to its original—we have won the Goal of all our journeying. Once fallen back again, we waken the virtue within until we know ourselves all order once more. Once more we are lightened of the burden and move by virtue towards the Divine Mind and through the wisdom therein to the Supreme.

This is the life of gods and of the godlike and blessed among men, liberation from the alien that besets us here, a life taking no pleasure in the things of earth, the passing of the alone to the Alone.

X. HAPPINESS

Introduction to Happiness

The happiness of which Plotinus speaks is the happiness obtained through the direct knowledge of the Divine Self. That Divine is of the nature of perfect satisfaction, and the recognition of Its eternal presence in the soul awakens that happiness in the soul. That inherent soul-happiness exists potentially in all, but is realized, not by those who look to find it in worldly achievements or pleasures, but only by those who look to find it where it truly is—in the divine nature of the soul. Plotinus holds that knowledge of the Divine is knowledge of Self; and those who identify with the Divine part are aware of their eternal Identity. Inherent in such identification is all virtue, all contentment, freedom from fear, and imperturbable peace. This is the state of the Adept, or Master, who, having experienced his Divine nature, is wholly identified with It.

The knowledge of the Divine Self brings with it a wisdom that frees the mind from error; it is a wisdom that acknowledges the absolute rule of Providence in the world, acknowledges the transitory nature of the body, and the immortality of the soul; acknowledges the presence and rule of God in all things, and gives over the sense of individual selfhood to that all-governing Power. It is thus a freedom from the limitations of embodied life, and an affirmation of the unlimited and eternal life of the Divine soul. This, says Plotinus, is the life of the Adept, constituting true happiness.

Plotinus on Happiness

If, then, the perfect life is within human reach, the man attaining it attains happiness... But are we to picture this kind of life as something foreign imported into his nature? No: there exists no single human being that does not either potentially or effectively possess this thing which we hold to constitute happiness.

But are we to think of man as including this form of life, the perfect, as a partial constituent of his entire nature?

[No.] We say, rather, that while in some men it is present as a mere portion of their total being—in those, namely, that have it potentially—there is, too, the man, already in possession of true felicity, who is this perfection realized, who has passed over into actual identification with it. All else is now mere clothing about the man, not to be called part of him since it lies about him unsought, not his because not appropriated to himself by any act of the will.

To the man in this state, what is the Good?

He himself, by what he has and is.

And the author and principle of what he *is* and holds is the Supreme, which within Itself is the Good but manifests Itself within the human being after this other mode.

The sign that this state has been achieved is that the man seeks nothing else. What [else] indeed could he be seeking? Certainly, none of the less worthy things; and the best he carries always within him.

He that has such a life as this has all he needs in life. Once the man is an Adept, the means of happiness, the way to good, are within, for nothing is good that lies outside him. Anything he desires further than this he seeks as a necessity, and not for himself but for a subordinate, for the body bound to him, to which since it has life he must minister the needs of life, not needs, however, to the [authentic Self of the] true man of this degree. He knows himself to stand above all such things, and what he gives to the lower he so gives as to leave his true life undiminished.

Adverse fortune does not shake his felicity: the life so founded is stable ever. Suppose death strikes at his household or at his friends; he knows what death is, as the victims, if they are among the wise, know too. And if death taking from him his familiars and intimates does bring grief, it is not to him, not to his true Self, but to that in him which stands apart from the Supreme, to that lower self in whose distress he takes no part.¹

Now if happiness did indeed require freedom from pain, sickness, misfortune, disaster, it would be utterly denied to anyone confronted by such trials. But if it lies in the fruition of the genuine Good, why turn away from this Goal and look to means, imagining that to be happy a man must need a variety of things none of which enter into happiness? If, in fact, felicity *were* made up by heaping together things that are at once

desirable and necessary—or perhaps even things that are called desirable without being necessary—we must bid for them all. But if the Goal must be One and not many; if in other words our quest is of a Goal, and not of goals; that only can be chosen which is ultimate and noblest, that which calls to the tenderest longings of the soul.

...It is certain that we shrink from the unpleasant, and such shrinking is assuredly not what we should have willed. To have no occasion for any such shrinking would be much nearer to our taste; but the things we seek tell the story as soon as they are ours. For instance, health and freedom from pain—which of these has any great charm? As long as we possess them we set no store upon them. And anything which, present, has no charm and adds nothing to happiness, which when lacking is desired because of the presence of an annoying opposite, may reasonably be called a necessity but not a good.

Such things can never make part of our final object. Our Goal must be such that though these pleasanter conditions be absent and their contraries present, it shall remain, still, intact.

Then why are these [pleasanter] conditions sought, and their contraries repelled by the man established in happiness?

Here is our answer:

These more pleasant conditions cannot, it is true, add one particle to the Adept's felicity; but they do serve towards the integrity of his being, while the presence of the contraries tends against his being or complicates [adherence to] the Goal. It is

not that the Adept can be so easily deprived of the Goal achieved but simply that he who holds the highest Good desires to have That alone, not something else at the same time, something which, though it cannot banish the Good by its incoming, does not even compare with It.

In any case, if the man who has attained felicity meets some turn of fortune that he would not have chosen, there is not the slightest lessening of his happiness for that. If there were, his felicity would be veering or falling from day to day. The death of a child would bring him down, or the loss of some trivial possession. No. A thousand mischances and disappointments may befall him and leave him still in the tranquil possession of the Goal.²

As for violent personal sufferings, he will carry them off as well as he can; if they overpass his endurance they will carry him off.

And so, in all his pain he asks no pity. There is always the radiance in the inner soul of the man, untroubled like the light in a lantern when fierce gusts beat about it in a wild turmoil of wind and tempest.³

...We cannot be indolent: this is an area for the powerful combatant holding his ground against the blows of fortune, and knowing that, sore though they be to some natures, they are little to his, nothing dreadful, nursery terrors.

So, the Adept would have desired misfortune?

It is precisely to meet the undesired when it appears that he has the virtue which gives him, to confront it, his passionless and unshakeable soul. ⁴

We shall perhaps be told [by some people] that in such a state the man is no longer alive; we answer that these people show themselves equally unable to understand his inner life and his happiness. If this does not satisfy them, we must ask them to keep in mind a living Adept and, under these terms, to inquire whether the man is in happiness. They must not whittle away the man and then look for the happiness of a man. Once they allow that the Adept lives within, they must not seek him among the outer activities, still less look to the outer world for the object of his desires. To consider the outer world to be a field to his desire, to fancy the Adept desiring any good external, would be to deny substantial existence to happiness; for the Adept would like to see all men prosperous and no evil befalling anyone; but though it turn out otherwise, he is still content.

If it be admitted that such a desire would be against reason, since evil cannot cease to be, there is no escape from agreeing with us that the Adept's will is set always and only inward. ⁵

The pleasure demanded for the Adept's life cannot be in the enjoyments of the licentious or in any gratifications of the body—there is no place for these, and they stifle happiness—nor in any violent emotions, for what could so move the Adept? It can be only such pleasure as there must be where Good is, pleasure that does not rise from movement and is not a thing of process, for all that is good is immediately present to the Adept

and the Adept is present to himself. His pleasure, his contentment, stands, immovable.

Thus, he is ever cheerful, the order of his life ever untroubled. His state is fixedly happy and nothing whatever of all that is known as evil can set it awry—given only that he is and remains an Adept.

If anyone seeks for some other kind of pleasure in the life of the Adept, it is not the life of the Adept he is looking for.⁶

Let the earth-bound man be handsome and powerful and rich, and so apt to this world that he may rule the entire human race: still there can be no envying him, the fool of such lures. Perhaps such splendors could not, from the beginning even, have gathered to the Adept; but if it should happen so, he of his own action will lower his state, if he has any care for his true life. The tyranny of the body he will work down or wear away by inattention to its claims; the rulership he will lay aside. While he will safeguard his bodily health, he will not wish to be wholly untried in sickness, still less never to feel pain. If such troubles should not come to him of themselves, he will wish to know them, during youth at least. In old age, it is true, he will desire neither pains nor pleasures to hamper him. He will desire nothing of this world, pleasant or painful; his one desire will be to know nothing of the body. If he should meet with pain, he will pit against it the powers he holds to meet it; but pleasure and health and ease of life will not mean any increase of happiness to him nor will their contraries destroy or lessen it.

When in the one subject a positive can add nothing, how can the negative take away? ⁷

...We discuss the happy man after our own feebleness; we count alarming and grave what his felicity takes lightly. He would be neither wise nor in the state of happiness if he had not quitted all trifling with such things and become as it were another being, having confidence in his own nature, [having] faith that evil can never touch him. In such a spirit he can be fearless through and through. Where there is dread, there is not perfect virtue; the man is some sort of a half-thing.

As for any involuntary fear rising in him and taking the judgment by surprise, while his thoughts perhaps are elsewhere, the Adept will attack it and drive it out; he will, so to speak, calm the refractory child within him, whether by reason or by menace, but without passion, as an infant might feel itself rebuked by a glance of severity.

This does not make the Adept unfriendly or harsh: it is because of his great concern to be true to his own Self that he is the Adept. Giving freely to his intimates of all he has to give, he will be the best of friends by his very union with the Divine Mind. ⁸

Those who refuse to place the Adept aloft in the Spirit-realm but drag him down to the accidental, dreading accident for him, have substituted for the Adept we have in mind another person altogether. They offer us a tolerable sort of man and they assign to him a life of mingled good and ill, a case, after all, not easy to conceive. But admitting the possibility of such a mixed

state, it could not deserve to be called a life of happiness; it misses the great, both in the dignity of Wisdom and in the integrity of Good. The life of true happiness is not a thing of mixture. And Plato rightly taught that he who is to be wise and to possess happiness draws his good from the Supreme, fixing his gaze on That, becoming like to That, living by That.

He can care for no other Goal than That: all else he will attend to only as he might change his residence, not in expectation of any increase to his settled felicity, but simply in a reasonable attention to the differing conditions surrounding him as he lives here or there.

He will give to the body all that he sees to be useful and possible, but he himself remains a member of another order, not prevented from abandoning the body, nor under necessity to leave it at nature's hour, he himself always the master to decide in its regard.

Thus, some part of his life considers exclusively the soul's satisfaction. The rest is not immediately for the Goal's sake and not for his own sake, but for the [body] thing bound up with him, the thing which he tends and bears with as the musician cares for his lyre, as long as it can serve him. When the lyre fails him, he will change it, or will give up lyre and lyring, as having another craft now, one that needs no lyre; and then he will let it rest unregarded at his side while he sings on without an instrument. But it was not idly that the instrument was given him in the beginning: he has found it useful many a time, until now.⁹

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XI. THE STARS

Introduction to The Stars

Plotinus, we are told by Porphyry, was adept in the science of horoscopy; that is to say, he understood the astrological lore of his time, and fully grasped the significance of the stars and planets as symbols relating to the conditions and events of life on earth. It would not be quite accurate to say that, since his time, this science has been relegated to the realm of superstition and charlatanism; it is much more accurate to say that astrology has *always* been pilloried and slandered by the uncomprehending majority, and has always been regarded as superstition by the established order. The astrologer, Ptolemy, who wrote his *Tetrabiblos* in the 2nd century C.E., rightly noted that "it is a common practice with the vulgar to slander everything which is difficult of attainment."¹ Astrology, despite its false representation in a popularized and degraded form in newspapers and magazines, is the esoteric knowledge of the correspondences between the zodiacal positions and configurations of the planets and the circumstances and events in the lives of souls on earth.

Such a correspondence must appear to those ignorant of the spiritual nature of the universe and the integral relationship between the parts and the whole of this universe to be not only improbable but impossible. There are many of us, however, who, along with Plotinus, have carefully studied the matter over a long period of time, and have concluded that, indeed, there is such a correspondence. It seems, however, that the intuitive knack of observing and comprehending the subtleties of such correspondences is limited to those whose soul-evolution and intuitive intelligence makes them peculiarly adept at discerning these correspondences. Those who make careful observation of the daily movements of the planets and a similarly careful observation of their own inner and outer circumstances cannot fail to acknowledge the fact of correspondence. Plotinus was such an observer, and had become convinced of the remarkable symbology inherent in "the cosmic

circuit. [Remember that in Plotinus' time, the heavenly bodies were thought by nearly everyone to orbit the earth in a sequence of 'shells']

But still he was careful not to imply that the stars and planets are "efficacious" in their activities; that is the pitfall wherein many have tumbled. Plotinus held that the stars are not causes, and that they were not capable of producing effects. [See his remarks on the Cosmic Circuit in the sections on "Soul" and "Free Will".] Their movements are merely synchronous with the events on earth which they symbolize; they are coexistents in an integrated Whole in which each of the parts is interrelated as the cells in a blossoming flower or the molecules of water in a cresting wave.

Late in his life, Plotinus wrote an entire treatise dedicated to explaining this, titled *Are The Stars Causes?* Much of this chapter is taken from that treatise. He was keenly aware of the popular mentality which regarded the correspondences observed between the cosmic circuit and life on earth to be a *causal* relationship, wherein the planets, considered to be gods (Mars, Aphrodite, etc.) were seen to be independent causes of observable effects on earth. Plotinus felt the necessity of dispelling this mistaken notion, and of replacing it with the understanding of an intelligently inter-knit universe of elements which stem from an integral Consciousness, and in which each element is in sympathy with the all. He points out that those who see the stars and planets as independent causes of events on earth suffer under the *mistaken notion* that:

... there is no One Being controlling the entire scheme; all is made over to the stars singly, as if there were no sovereign Unity, standing as source of all the forms of Being in subordinate association with it, and delegating to the separate members, in their appropriate kinds, the task of accomplishing its purposes and bringing its latent potentiality into act.

This is a separatist theory, tenable only by minds ignorant of the nature of a Universe which has a ruling principle and a first cause operative downwards through every member.

A person's earthly birth is the embodiment of a soul at the moment of the unique arrangement of the stellar and planetary bodies existing at that particular "frame" in the unfoldment of the universe. The positions of the heavenly bodies are therefore related to the person born at that particular moment, not in any *causal* way, but are integrally related simply by virtue of the fact that both are embodiments of the same moment in the coordinated unfolding of the universe. And everything that happens to that person in life will be accompanied by a planetary arrangement which, in its relationship to the positions of the planets at the moment of his birth, will symbolize that event. In other words, the planets do not focus beneficent or malevolent rays or forces in our direction; they do not put forth any fields of influence that impinge on us in some manner.; in short, they are not causes at all, but merely *signs* of the activity of the one Cause, which is God, revealed to those who can read them. The fallibility of our accuracy in reading these signs does not, of course, reflect on the accuracy of the correspondence between symbol and event.

What, then, of the factors in the soul's makeup which are carried over from past incarnations? If the newly embodied soul is merely in perfect synchronization with the arrangement of the cosmic circuit, where is there a place for the voluntary acquisition of these soul qualities? This, too, Plotinus addresses: the evolution of the soul is in pace with the evolution of the universe. The evolving universe contains and reflects the evolution of each soul, including its "independent will"; the stellar and planetary positions which signal that soul's development, re-embodiment, and even the moment of his experience of "union" with the One will coincide perfectly

with those moments. And the question of whether it is the soul's evolutionary struggle or the planetary alignments which brings about the soul's development, and even enlightenment, must be answered, "Neither." They are coordinated events in the unfolding of God's cosmic drama; both planetary positions and life-events are simultaneous effects of the one Cause, occurring in Himself in the ordered unfoldment of His will. All is one coordinated and integrated Whole, and all that occurs within it is His doing.

Few are able to comprehend the possibility of a universe of such immense complexity and coordination. That is because few have discovered the amazing symbology of the heavens, occurring there, no doubt, for our benefit and edification; and few have directly perceived the Unity in which all is seen to move together of one accord. Plotinus is one of those few, and what he has to say on this subject is worthy of our earnest contemplation.

Plotinus on The Stars

This All that has emerged into life is no amorphous structure—like those lesser forms within it which are born night and day out of the lavishness of its vitality. The Universe is an organized, effective, complex, all-comprehensive Life, displaying an unfathomable wisdom. How, then, can anyone deny that it is a clear image, beautifully formed, of the Divine Mind? No doubt it is a copy, not original; but that is its very nature. It cannot be at once symbol and reality. But to say that it is an inadequate copy is false; nothing has been left out which a beautiful representation within the physical order could include.

Such a reproduction there must necessarily be—though not by deliberation and contrivance—for the Spirit-realm could not be the last of things, but must have a double Act, one within Itself and one outgoing. There must, then, be something later than the Divine; for only the thing with which all power ends fails to pass downwards something of Itself. In the Supreme there flourishes a marvelous vigor and therefore It produces.

Since there is no universe nobler than this, is it not clear what this must be? A representation carrying down the features of the Spirit-realm is necessary. There is no other Cosmos than this; therefore, this is such a representation.²

...It is not by crushing the Divine into a unity but by displaying Its exuberance—as the Supreme Himself has displayed it—that we show knowledge of the might of God, who, abidingly what

He is, yet creates that multitude, all dependent on Him, existing by Him and from Him. This Universe, too, exists by Him and looks to Him—the universe as a whole and every god within it—and tells of Him to men, all alike revealing the plan and will of the Supreme. ³

[Even] our adversaries do not deny that here [on earth] there is a system of law and penalty. And surely, we cannot in justice blame a dominion which awards to everyone his due, where virtue has its honor, and vice comes to its fitting shame. [It is a dominion] in which there are not merely representations of the gods, but the gods themselves [as stars and planets], watchers from above; and—as we read—they easily rebut human reproaches, since they lead all things in order from a beginning to an end, allotting to each human being, as life follows life, a fortune shaped to all that has preceded—a destiny which, to those who do not penetrate it, becomes a matter of boorish insolence upon things divine. ⁴

Perhaps, [it is suggested,] the explanation of every particular act or event is that each is determined by the movements of the spheres, the changing position of the heavenly bodies as these stand at setting or rising or in mid-course and in various aspects with each other. Prognostication, or divination, it is urged, is able from these indications to foretell what is to happen not merely to the universe as a whole, but even to individuals, and this not merely as regards external conditions of fortune but even as to the events of the mind. ...Now a first answer to this theory is that its advocates have merely devised another means to attribute to the heavenly bodies all that is ours, our acts of will and our states, all the evil in us, our entire personality;

nothing is allowed to us; we are left to be stones set rolling, not men, not beings whose nature implies a task.

But we must be allowed our own—with the understanding that to what is primarily ours, our personal holding, there is added some influx from the All—the distinction must be made between our individual act and what is thrust upon us: we are not to be immolated to the stars... If the stars are held to be *causing* principles on the ground of the possibility of foretelling individual fate or fortune from observations of their positions, then the birds and all the other things which the soothsayer observes for divination must equally be taken as causing what they indicate.⁵

That the circuit of the stars indicates definite events to come but without being the direct *cause* of all that happens, has been affirmed, and proved by some modicum of argument: but the subject demands more precise and detailed investigation, for to take the one view rather than the other is of no small moment. ...Like the birds of augury, the living beings of the heavens [i.e., the stars and planets], having no lot or part with us, may serve incidentally to *foreshow* the future, but they have absolutely no main [causal] function in our regard.

...Why should there be any difference as a given star sees certain others from the corner of a triangle or in opposition or at the angle of a square? ... [The truth is that] all the stars are serviceable to the Universe, and therefore can stand to each other only as the service of the Universe demands, in a harmony like that observed in the members of any one animal form. They exist essentially for the purpose of the Universe, just as

the gall exists for the purposes of the body as a whole not less than for its own immediate function ...Some such balance of function was indispensable in the All—bitter with sweet. There must be differentiation—eyes and so forth—but all the members will be in sympathy with the entire animal frame to which they belong. Only so can there be a unity and a total harmony. And in such a total, analogy will make every part a Sign.

...[According to those who regard the stars as independent causes of events on earth] there is no One Being controlling the entire scheme; all is made over to the stars singly, as if there were no sovereign Unity, standing as source of all the forms of Being in subordinate association with it, and delegating to the separate members, in their appropriate kinds, the task of accomplishing its purposes and bringing its latent potentiality into act. This is a separatist theory, tenable only by minds ignorant of the nature of a Universe which has a ruling principle and a first cause operative downwards through every member.

But, if the stars [do] announce the future—as we hold of many other things also—what explanation of the cause have we to offer? What explains the purposeful arrangement thus implied? Obviously unless the particular is included under some general principle of order, there can be no signification. We may think of the stars as letters perpetually being inscribed on the heavens or inscribed once for all and yet moving as they pursue the other tasks allotted to them. Upon these main tasks will follow the quality of signifying, just as the one principle underlying any living unit enables us to reason from member to member, so that for example we may judge of character and even of

perils and safeguards by indications in the eyes or in some other part of the body. If these parts of us are members of a whole, so are we: in different ways the one law applies.

All teems with symbol; the wise man is the man who in any one thing can read another, a process familiar to all of us in not a few examples of everyday experience. But what is the comprehensive principle of coordination? Establish this and we have a reasonable basis for the divination, not only by stars but also by birds and other animals, from which we derive guidance in our varied concerns.

All things must be enchained; and the sympathy and correspondence obtaining in any one closely knit organism must exist, first, and most intensely, in the All. There must be one Principle constituting this unit of many forms of life and enclosing the several members within the unity, while at the same time, precisely as in each thing of detail the parts too have each a definite function, so in the All, each several member must have its own task—but more markedly so since in this case the parts are not merely members but themselves Alls, members of the loftier kind.

Thus, each entity takes its origin from one Principle and, therefore, while executing its own function, works in with every other member of that All from which its distinct task has by no means cut it off. Each performs its act, each receives something from the others, every one at its own moment bringing its touch of sweet or bitter. And there is nothing undesigned, nothing of chance, in all the process: all is one scheme of differentiation,

starting from the Firsts and working itself out in a continuous progression of effects.

Soul, then, in the same way, is intent upon a task of its own; in everything it does it counts as an independent source of motion. It may take a direct course, or it may take a wandering course, but a law of Justice goes with every action in the Universe... And the stars, as being no minor members of the heavenly system, are cooperators contributing at once to its stately beauty and to its symbolic quality. Their symbolic power extends to the entire realm of sense, their efficacy only to what they patently do.

For our part nature keeps us upon the work of the Soul as long as we are not wrecked in the multiplicity of the Universe. Once thus sunk and held we pay the penalty, which consists both in the fall itself and in the lower rank thus entailed upon us. Riches and poverty are caused [not by the stars but] by the combinations of external fact.

...In [Plato's] *Timaeus*, the creating God bestows the essential of the soul, but it is the divinities moving in the Cosmos [i.e., the planets and stars] that infuse the powerful affections holding from Necessity—our impulse and our desire, our sense of pleasure and of pain—and that lower phase of the soul in which such experiences originate. By this statement our personality is bound up with the stars, whence our soul takes shape. And we are set under necessity at our very entrance into the world: our temperament will be of the stars' ordering; and so, therefore, the actions which derive from temperament, and all the experiences of a nature shaped to impressions.

What, after all this, remains to stand for the "we" [that is, in what way are "we" existent as individually independent beings]? "We" are the result of a Being whose nature includes, with certain sensibilities, the power of governance. Cut off as we are by the nature of the body, God has yet given us, in the midst of all this evil, "virtue the unconquerable," meaningless in a state of tranquil safety but everything where its absence would be peril of fall.

Our task, then, is to work for our liberation from this sphere, severing ourselves from all that has gathered about us. The total man is to be something better than a body ensouled—the bodily element dominant with a trace of soul running through it and a resultant life-course mainly of the body—for in such a combination all is, in fact, bodily. [But] there is another life, emancipated, whose quality is progression towards the higher realm, towards the Good and Divine, towards that Principle which no one possesses except by deliberate usage. One may appropriate [this Higher Principle], becoming, each personally, the higher, the beautiful, the godlike; and living, remote, in and by It—unless one choose to go bereaved of that higher Soul and therefore, to live fate-bound, no longer profiting, merely, by the significance of the sidereal system but becoming as it were a part sunken in it and dragged along with the whole thus adopted.

For every human Being is of twofold character; there is that compromise-total [consisting of soul conjoined to body] and there is the authentic Man [the divine Self]. And it is so with the Cosmos as a whole: It is in the one phase a conjunction of body

with a certain form of the soul bound up in body; in the other phase it is the universal Soul, that which is not itself embodied but flashes down its rays into the embodied soul. And the same two-fold quality belongs to the Sun and the other members of the heavenly system.

To that remoter, pure Soul, the Sun and stars communicate no baseness. In their efficacy upon the All, they act as parts of it, as ensouled bodies within it; and they act only upon what is partial. Body is the agent while, at the same time, it becomes the vehicle through which is transmitted something of the star's will and of that authentic Soul in it which is steadfastly in contemplation of the Highest. But all follows either upon that Highest or rather upon the Beings about It—we may think of the Divine [Mind] as a fire whose outgoing warmth pervades the Universe—or upon whatsoever is transmitted by the one Soul to the other [the individual soul], its kin. All that is graceless is a mixture. For the universe is in truth a thing of blend, and if we separate from it that separable Soul, what is left is little. The All is a God when the divine Soul is counted in with it; the rest, we read, is [but] a mighty spirit, and its ways are less than Divine.

If all this be true, we must at once admit signification, but efficacy we must not admit without reservation or ascribe it to the stars in their wholeness, except in what concerns the All and in what is of their own residuary function. We must admit that the soul before entering into birth presents itself bearing with it something of its own, for it could never touch body without a large capacity for submission. We must admit some element of chance around it from its very entry, since the moment and

conditions are determined by the cosmic circuit [of the stars and planets]. And we must admit some effective power in that circuit itself; it is cooperative, and completes of its own act the task that belongs to the All of which everything in the circuit takes the rank and function of a part... Some of the phenomena of this sphere derive from the cosmic circuit and some not: we must take them singly and mark them off, assigning to each its origin.

The gist of the whole matter lies in the consideration that Soul governs this All by the plan contained in the *Logos* [Reason-Principle] and plays in the All exactly the part of the particular principle which in every living thing forms the members of the organism and adjusts them to the unity of which they are portions. The entire force of the Soul is represented in the All, but, in the parts, Soul is present only in proportion to the degree of essential reality held by each of such partial objects. Surrounding every separate entity there are other entities, whose approach will sometimes be hostile and sometimes helpful to the purpose of its nature. But to the All taken in its length and breadth each and every separate existent is an adjusted part, holding its own characteristic and yet contributing by its own native tendency to the entire life-history of the Universe.

...Thus, the All stands as one all-complete Life, whose members, to the measure in which each contains within itself the Highest, effect all that is high and noble. And the entire scheme must be subordinate to its antecedent as an army to its general... All living things, then—all in the heavens and all elsewhere—fall under the general *Logos* of the All; they have been made parts with a view to the whole. Not one of these

parts, however exalted, has power to affect any alteration of these Reason-Principles or of things shaped by them and to them. By some modification one part may work upon another, whether for better or for worse; but there is no power that can wrest anything outside of its distinct nature.

...In the case of inherited fortune, the stars merely *announce* a rich man, exactly as they announce the high social standing of the child born to a distinguished house. ... [In such a case], something from the All has entered into action; and if this be so, it will be foreshown—since all things make a chain, so that we can speak of things universally. ⁶

That which contains all things must be a self-sufficing entity and remain so: it moves by phases purposefully according to its Reason-Principles which are enduringly valid. It reverts unflinching, in the measured stages of defined life-duration, to its established character, leading the things of this realm to be of one voice and plan with the Supreme. And thus, the cosmic content is carried forward to its purpose, everything in its coordinate place, under only one Reason-Principle operating alike in the descent and return of souls and to every purpose of the system.

We may know this also by the concordance of the souls with the ordered scheme of the Cosmos; they are not dependent, but, by their descent, they have put themselves in contact, and they stand henceforth in harmonious association with the cosmic circuit—to the extent that their fortunes, their life-experience, their choosing and refusing, are announced by the patterns of the stars—and out of this concordance rises as it were one

musical utterance: the music, the harmony [in which all live and] by which all may be described, is the best witness to this truth.

...The Cosmic Law is thus rooted in a natural principle under which each separate entity is ordained to go, duly and in order, towards that place and kind to which it characteristically tends; that is, towards the image of its primal choice and constitution.

In that archetypal world every form of soul is near to the image to which its individual constitution inclines it; there is therefore no need of a sender or leader acting at the right moment to bring it at the right moment whether into body or into a definitely appropriate body. Of its own motion it descends at the precisely true time and enters where it must. To every soul its own hour; when that [hour] strikes it descends and enters the body suitable to it as at the cry of a herald. Thus, all is set stirring and advancing as by a magician's power or by some mighty traction. It is much as, in any living thing, the soul itself effects the fulfillment of the natural career, stirring and bringing forth, in due season, every element—beard, horn, and all the successive stages of tendency and of output—or, as it leads a tree through its normal course within set periods.

The souls go forth neither under compulsion nor of free will; or, at least, freedom, here, is not to be regarded as action upon preference. It is more like such a leap of the nature as moves men to the instinctive desire of sexual union, or, in the case of some, to fine conduct. The motive lies elsewhere than in the reason: like is destined unfailingly to like, and each one moves hither or thither at its fixed moment.⁷

The Circuit [of the stars] does not go by chance but under the Reason-Principle of the living whole; therefore, there must be a harmony between cause and caused. There must be some order ranging things to each other's purpose, or in due relation to each other. Every configuration [involving two or more planetary bodies] within the Circuit must be accompanied by a change in the position and condition of things subordinate to it, which thus by their varied rhythmic movement make up one total dance-play.

In our dance-plays there are outside elements contributing to the total effect—fluting, singing, and other linked accessories—and each of these changes in each new movement. There is no need to dwell on these; their significance is obvious. But besides this there is the fact that the limbs of the dancer cannot possibly keep the same positions in every figure; they adapt themselves to the plan, bending as it dictates, one lowered, another raised, one active, another resting as the set pattern changes. The dancer's mind is on his own purpose. His limbs are submissive to the dance-movement which they accomplish to the end, so that the connoisseur can explain that this or that figure is the motive for the lifting, bending, concealment, effacing, of the various members of the body; and in all this the executant does not choose the particular motions for their own sake; the whole play dictates the necessary position to each limb and member of the entire person as it serves to the plan.

Now this is the mode in which the heavenly beings must be held to be causes wherever they have any action, and, when they do not act, to indicate.

Or, a better statement: the entire Cosmos puts its entire life into act, moving its major members with its own action and unceasingly setting them in new positions. By the relations thus established, of these members to each other and to the whole, and by the different figures they make together, the minor members in turn are brought under the system, as in the movements of some living being, so that they vary according to the relations, positions, configurations. The beings thus coordinated are not the causes; the cause is the coordinating All. At the same time, it is not to be thought of as acting upon a material distinct from itself, for there is nothing external to it since it is the cause by actually being all. On the one side the configurations, on the other the inevitable effects of those configurations upon a living being moving as a unit and, again, upon a living Being [an All] thus by its nature conjoined and concomitant and, of necessity, at once subject and object to its own activities...

...The Being we are considering is a living unity, and therefore necessarily self-sympathetic. It is under a law of Order and therefore the unfolding process of its life must be self-accordant. That life has no haphazard, but [it] knows only harmony and ordinance. All the groupings follow a rational order: all single beings within it, all the members of this living whole in their choral dance are under a [common] rule of law.⁸

Thus this universe of ours is a wonder of power and wisdom, everything by a noiseless road coming to pass according to a law which none may elude—which the base man never conceives though it is leading him, all unknowingly, to that

place in the All where his lot must be cast—which the just man knows, and, knowing, sets out to the place he must, understanding, even as he begins the journey, where he is to be housed at the end, and having the good hope that he will be with gods.⁹

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XII. LETTER TO FLACCUS

Introduction to Plotinus' Letter to Flaccus

The following letter of Plotinus to Flaccus, one of his followers, presents in synoptic form the magnificence of Plotinus' vision and contains nearly every element of his philosophy. I would like to call the reader's attention, however, to one particular element in it: the statement near the end of the letter that, "There is a raying out of all orders of existence, an external emanation from the eternal One. There is again a returning impulse, drawing all upwards and inwards toward the center from whence all came."

Plotinus would seem to be alluding here to that "eternal return" spoken of by numerous mystic seers whereby there is an outgoing and return of the manifested universe from its Source in a recurrent cycle. Now, while this is in keeping with the declarations of nearly every mystic who has written about the unitive mystical experience, it seems on the surface to contradict what Plotinus says elsewhere regarding the eternity of the universe.

In one treatise, he states, "We hold [as factual] the eternal existence of the Universe, the utter absence of a beginning in it." ¹ But Plotinus is speaking here not of the manifest physical universe, but of the "Intelligible" universe which is eternally existent as Idea or Thought within the Divine Mind. He does not hold that it has always been manifest, but rather that, prior to manifestation, it lay motionlessly merged in the eternal One, its phenomenal manifestation as matter and form merely latent, potential, not yet manifest. For Plotinus, the universe that was brought into "being," already existed, unmoving, unchanging, within the One eternally. The following passage from one of his treatises makes this clear:

Time lay, though not yet as Time, in the Authentic Existent together with the Cosmos itself; the Cosmos also was merged in the Authentic and motionless within It. But there was an active principle there, ...For the Soul contained an unquiet faculty, ...and it could not bear to retain

within itself all the dense fullness of its possession. ...To bring this Cosmos into being, the Soul first laid aside its eternity and clothed itself with Time ...²

"Time," he says, "only comes into being with [the creation of] the All." And so, it may truly be said that there never was a "time" when the manifest universe did not exist. For Time does not exist until it comes into being along with this imaged spatial universe. Time, along with Space, does indeed arise out of the Eternal, and again subsides into the Eternal, just as a mental image in the mind of man arises from his unchanging consciousness and again subsides back into it. The Eternal remains throughout, unaffected, uncompromised, never-changing—just as the consciousness of man remains the same despite the elaborate parade of images unceasingly displayed across its face. Time begins with the creative impulse, and ends with its subsidence, the Eternal all the while unchanged.

To the question, "how can one speak of a time when the universe does not exist, since Time itself comes into existence only at the birth of the universe?" Plotinus answers, 'There was never a time when the universe did not exist, but there *was* [is] Eternity.' "...The Soul-Movement," says Plotinus, "has for its prior [not Time but] Eternity which knows neither its progression nor its extension. The descent towards Time begins with this Soul-Movement; it made Time and harbors Time as a concomitant to its Act."³

The Eternal continues to exist as the Eternal, whether there is a universe or not. From the standpoint of the Eternal, the beginning of Time and the manifest universe is merely a copy, an ephemeral insubstantial appearance, produced by the Divine Mind. The Eternal remains unaffected by its appearance or disappearance. And while it is true that there was no Time before the creation of the universe, there was [is] the Eternity of the one

Consciousness, which continues to be so throughout the duration of the universe of time, and it continues after Time and the manifest universe have come to an end. And when the creative Power inherent in the eternal Consciousness begins another universe, and sets Time in motion once again, the Eternal, along with the Intelligible universe, remains as it was, integral, unmoved, forever the same.

Another sense in which the universe is eternal is in that Energy of which the universe consists; for, as science informs us, "the sum of the energy within a closed system remains constant." As the universe is the only *truly* closed system, the totality of Energy constituting the universe remains the same (i.e., eternal) whether there is a manifestation of universal form or not. Even when it is in its unmanifest stage, and Time has come to a stop, that Energy, that creative Power, continues to exist in its fullness. The *potentiality* of universal manifestation within the One is indeed eternal and without beginning; it is that Creative Power or Energy which Plotinus called *Nous*, "the Divine Mind." This Power is co-eternal with the Absolute, as it is inherent in the Godhead; but the actual universal manifestation from this inherent Power is periodic, bursting forth, expanding, and relapsing back into potentiality in a cyclic rhythm extending over billions of earth-years.

This bursting forth of the universe and its subsequent demise is described similarly in many of the Indian scriptural writings, as well as in the writings of many Western seers of antiquity. Here is how it is described in the *Svetasvatara Upanishad*: "He [the Lord] spreads his net [of appearance] and then withdraws it again into His *Prakrti* [creative] aspect."⁴ Then the Creative Power rests, so to speak, in itself [this is called the period of *pralaya* in the Vedantic tradition]—as a man rests in deep sleep when there is no longer any production of dream-images—and it remains thus until it brings forth another dream-universe.

And here, from the *Maitri Upanishad*:

The supreme Spirit is immeasurable, inapprehensible, beyond conception, never-born, beyond reasoning, beyond thought. He is vaster than the infinity of space.

At the end of the worlds, all things sleep: He alone is awake in eternity. Then from his infinite space new worlds arise and awake, a universe which is a vastness of thought. In the consciousness of Brahman, the universe exists, and into Him it returns.⁵

Such a process of manifestation and de-manifestation is spoken of in the *Bhagavad Gita* as well:

They who know that the vast day of Brahma, the god of creation [i.e., the personified creative Power], ever lasts a thousand ages; and that his night lasts also a thousand ages—they know in truth day and night.

When that day comes, all the visible creation arises from the Invisible; and all creation disappears into the Invisible when the night of darkness comes.

Thus, the infinity of beings which live again and again all powerlessly disappear when the night of darkness comes; and they all return again at the rising of the day. But beyond this creation, visible and invisible, there is an Invisible, higher, Eternal; and when all things pass away, this remains for ever and ever.⁶

Then Krishna, who is identified with the Eternal, says:

At the end of the night of time all things return to my [creative Power, called] *Prakrti*; and when the new day of time begins I bring them again into light.

Thus, through my *Prakrti* I bring forth all creation, and these worlds revolve in the circle of time.

But I am not bound by this vast work of creation. I exist alone, watching the drama of this play. I watch and in its work of creation *Prakrti* brings forth all that moves and moves not: and thus, the worlds go on revolving.⁷

What do the mystics of other traditions have to say? Here is the great Taoist mystic, Chuang Tze (3rd century B.C.E.):

Teh [the creative Energy] is born from *Tao* [The Eternal, The One], and all life forms are born of this creative Energy; thus, all creation evolves into various forms.

...Life springs into existence without a visible source and is reabsorbed into that Infinite. The world exists in and on the infinite Void; how it comes into being, is sustained and once again is dissolved, cannot be seen.

It is fathomless, like the sea. Wondrously, the cycle of world-manifestation begins again after every completion. The *Tao* sustains all creation, but It is never exhausted. ...That which gives life to all creation, yet which is, Itself, never drawn upon—that is the *Tao* [the Eternal].⁸

Heraclitus (540-480 B.C.E.) adds his voice to the consensus:

What is within us remains the same eternally; It is the same in life and death, waking and sleeping, youth and old age; for, It has become this world, and the world must return to It.⁹
 This ordered universe ...always was, is, and shall be—[like] an ever-living Flame that is first kindled and then quenched in turn.¹⁰

And, by all accounts, this creative effusion and its "eternal return" was also recognized by Pythagoras (570-490 B.C.E.), Empedocles (495-435 B.C.E.), and the early Stoics, and was an established major tenet of Stoic metaphysics by the time of Plotinus.

The periodic or cyclic nature of the manifestation of the universe is in accord with what scientific observation is now revealing to modern astronomers. What is known as "the Big Bang theory" has now become widely accepted as an accurate model of universal manifestation and expansion. And as the limits of our vision have been expanded by new technology, these same astronomers are led by their observations to conclude that at some point the universal expansion must reverse itself and become contraction, a return to a central core, its source.

For the person who has "seen" this universal manifestation and de-manifestation in its cyclic recurrence from the vantage point of Eternity, it is an unquestionable reality requiring no further affirmation; however, it is encouraging to know that science, by its own methods, is able to confirm and support what the mystic already knows with certainty is true. He (the mystic) has seen its occurrence from the Timeless state and observed its cyclic recurrence in the way one might watch his own breath being recurrently exhaled and inhaled.

It may be justifiably objected that this knowledge has little or no practical application to our spiritual understanding or practice. Since we live only a short while, and while living, are concerned mainly for the felicity of our own existence during our brief tenure on earth, it seems of little use to know that, after billions of years, this universe will implode upon itself, and then eventually—after billions of more years—will begin the whole cycle of birth and death over again. Indeed, it is a knowledge that serves little purpose in the abstract. But it is the truth; and its certainty in the mind of one who has "seen" it gives a timeless and dispassionate perspective to all that he witnesses on earth. For those reading about it, it is merely metaphysics, a conceptual framework. But to those who have reached those infinite shores, it is a certainty bearing reminiscence of the homecoming in which all soul-satisfaction resides. It is the happy return of man to God, of the soul to its ever-abiding Self, in the eternal awareness of the world as Its own divine, yet transient, radiance.

Plotinus' Letter to Flaccus

I applaud your devotion to philosophy. I rejoice to hear that your soul has set sail, like the returning Ulysses, for its native land—that glorious, that only real country—the world of unseen Truth. To follow philosophy, the senator Rogatianus, one of the noblest of my disciples, gave up the other day all but the whole of his patrimony, set free his slaves and surrendered all the honors of his station.

Tidings have reached us that Valerian has been defeated, and he is now in the hands of Sapor. The threats of Franks and Allemanni, of Goths and Persians, are alike terrible by turns to our degenerate Rome. In days like these, crowded with incessant calamities, the inducements to a life of contemplation are more than ever strong. Even my quiet existence seems now to grow somewhat sensible of the advance of years. Age alone I am unable to debar from my retirement. I am weary already of this prison-house, the body, and calmly await the day when the divine nature within me shall be set free from matter.

The Egyptian priests used to tell us that a single touch with the wing of their holy bird could charm the crocodile into torpor; it is not thus speedily, my dear friend, that the pinions of your soul will have power to still the untamed body. The creature will yield only to watchful, strenuous constancy of habit. Purify your soul from all undue hope and fear about earthly things, mortify the body, deny self—affections as well as appetites—and the inner eye will begin to exercise its clear and solemn vision.

You ask me to tell you how we know, and what is our criterion of certainty. To write is always irksome to me. But for the continual solicitations of Porphyry I should not have left a line to survive me. For your own sake and for your father's my reluctance shall be overcome.

External objects present us only with appearances. Concerning them, therefore, we may be said to possess opinion rather than knowledge. The distinctions in the actual world of appearance are of import only to ordinary and practical men. Our question lies with the Ideal reality that exists behind appearance. How does the mind perceive these Ideas? Are they without us, and is the reason, like sensation, occupied with objects external to itself? What certainty would we then have—what assurance that our perception was infallible? The object perceived would be a something different from the mind perceiving it. We should have then an image instead of Reality. It would be monstrous to believe for a moment that the mind was unable to perceive Ideal Truth exactly as it is, and that we had not certainty and real knowledge concerning the world of Intelligence. It follows, therefore, that this region of Truth is not to be investigated as a thing external to us, and so only imperfectly known. It is within us. Here the objects we contemplate and that which contemplates are identical—both are thought. The subject cannot surely know an object different from itself. The world of Ideas lies within our intelligence. Truth, therefore, is not the agreement of our apprehension of an external object with the object itself. It is the agreement of the mind with itself. Consciousness, therefore, is the sole basis of certainty. The mind is its own witness. Reason sees in itself

that which is above itself as its source; and again, that which is below itself as still itself once more.

Knowledge has three degrees—opinion, science, illumination. The means or instrument of the first is sense; of the second dialectic; of the third intuition. To the last I subordinate reason. It is absolute knowledge founded on the identity of the mind knowing with the object known.

There is a raying out of all orders of existence, an external emanation from the ineffable One. There is again a returning impulse, drawing all upwards and inwards towards the center whence all came. Love, as Plato in the *Banquet* beautifully says, is child of poverty and plenty. In the amorous quest of the soul after the Good lies the painful sense of fall and deprivation. But that love is blessing, is salvation, is our guardian genius; without it the centrifugal law would overpower us, and [would] sweep our souls out far from their source toward the cold extremities of the material and the manifold. The wise man recognizes the idea of the Good within him. This he develops by withdrawal into the holy place of his own soul. He who does not understand how the soul contains the beautiful within itself, seeks to realize beauty without by laborious production. His aim should rather be to concentrate and simplify, and so to expand his being; instead of going out into the manifold, to forsake it for the One, and so to float upwards towards the Divine Fount of being whose stream flows within him.

You ask, "How can we know the Infinite?" I answer, "Not by reason." It is the office of reason to distinguish and define. The

Infinite, therefore, cannot be ranked among its objects. You can only apprehend the Infinite by a faculty superior to reason, by entering into a state in which you are your finite self no longer—in which the divine Essence is communicated to you. This is ecstasy. It is the liberation of your mind from its finite consciousness. Like only can apprehend like; when you thus cease to be finite, you become one with the Infinite. In the reduction of your soul to its simplest self, its divine essence, you realize this union—this Identity.

But this sublime condition is not of permanent duration. It is only now and then that we can enjoy this elevation (mercifully made possible for us) above the limits of the body and the world. I myself have realized it but three times as yet, and Porphyry hitherto not once. All that tends to purify and elevate the mind will assist you in this attainment, and [will] facilitate the approach and the recurrence of these happy intervals. There are, then, different roads by which this end may be reached. The love of beauty which exalts the poet; that devotion to the One and that ascent of science which makes the ambition of the philosopher, and that love and those prayers by which some devout and ardent soul tends in its moral purity towards perfection. These are the great highways conducting to that height above the actual and the particular, where we stand in the immediate presence of the Infinite, who shines out as from the deeps of the soul. ¹¹

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About The Author

Swami Abhayananda was born Stan Trout in Indianapolis, Indiana on August 14, 1938. After service in the Navy, he settled in northern California, where he pursued his studies in philosophy and literature. In June of 1966, he became acquainted with the philosophy of mysticism, and experienced a strong desire to realize God. Abandoning all other pursuits, he retired to a solitary life in a secluded cabin in the mountain forests near Santa Cruz, California; and, on November 18, of that same year, became enlightened by the grace of God.

He spent four more years in his isolated cabin, and subsequently met Swami Muktananda who visited Santa Cruz in 1970. Shortly thereafter, he joined Muktananda in India, as his disciple, and later lived and worked in Muktananda's Oakland, California ashram. In May of 1978, he returned to India and was initiated by his master into the ancient Order of *sannyas*, and given the monastic name, Swami Abhayananda, "the bliss of fearlessness." As a Swami, he taught in various cities in the U.S., but in 1981, unwilling to condone what he saw as abuses of power, Abhayananda left Muktananda's organization, and went into retreat once again, this time for seven years, in upstate New York. It was during this time that many of his books were written, and Atma Books was founded to publish them.

At present, Swami Abhayananda is residing on the Treasure Coast of Florida, where he continues to write, publish and offer his works on the knowledge of the Self as free downloadable PDF documents at his website: www.themysticsvision.com.

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