

THE ETHICS OF PLOTINUS¹

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I Plotinus and Porphyry's Life

The theme of this paper is, what I believe to be, the inconsistency in the life lived by Plotinus and the ethical teaching of the *Enneads*. This paper will do little more than set out the problem. We know quite a bit about the life Plotinus lived because of a biography written by his most famous pupil, Porphyry. We have some fragments from another biography by Eunapius and other bits and pieces. But Porphyry is the chief source.² We are lucky to have anything at all when we consider the opening lines of Porphyry's biography:

Plotinus, the philosopher of our times, seemed ashamed of being in the body. As a result of this state of mind he could never bear to talk about his race or his parents or his native country (*Vita Plotini* 1.1-2).

This is the man who refused to sit for a portrait artist or sculptor because he saw little point in producing an image of what was only an image anyway (*VP* 1.7-9). They were reduced to passing off a portrait artist as a student in order to obtain a portrait of the great man. So to be Plotinus' biographer was, one imagines, no easy task. We speculate that Plotinus was born in Lycopolis (modern Assuit), on the banks of the Nile in Upper Egypt in A.D. 205.³ We get his place of birth from Eunapius⁴ not Porphyry. Plotinus' name is certainly Roman but he was most probably a Greek or at least from a Hellenized Egyptian family. His language was certainly Greek.

¹ This is the text of a paper presented as the first lecture in the Gerard Watson Memorial Series. It was written for an undergraduate audience who knew next to nothing about Plotinus. The text has been altered slightly, but, by and large, it reads as it was delivered. A much shorter version of this paper has appeared in the *Maynooth University Record*, 2000.

² As Armstrong rightly points out it is hard to see what there was that would have been available to Eunapius that was not available to Porphyry: Loeb Vol.1 (2nd edn.) pp. 2-3, footnote 1.

³ On this see Rist, J.M., *Plotinus: The Road to Reality*, p. 248 footnote 8 and the references given there.

⁴ Eunapius, *V. Soph.* (p. 6 Boissonade).

We know that he only turned to philosophy at the age of twenty-seven. He then set out for Alexandria where Porphyry tells us the teachers of philosophy had the highest reputations. After searching and discarding various teachers he settled down under the tutorship of Ammonius Saccas (*VP* 3.11ff.). If we know little about Plotinus we know a great deal less about Ammonius.⁵ "ein großer Schatten" 'a greater shadow' he was called in a famous phrase by W. Theiler.⁶ Ammonius Saccas wrote nothing and indeed Plotinus and two other of Ammonius' pupils (Erennius and Origen) agreed not to reveal his philosophy even after his death. This vow was however eventually broken,⁷ which leaves us today trying to reconstruct his teachings from the writings of his pupils. Whatever it was that he was preaching it certainly caught the attention of Plotinus. Porphyry tells us that he:

acquired so complete a training in philosophy that he became eager to make acquaintance with the Persian philosophical discipline and that prevailing among the Indians (*VP* 3.14-17).

In 242⁸ he took part in the expedition of the Roman emperor Gordian III to the East. Gordian III had been saluted emperor by the Praetorian Guard at the age of 13. The Praetorian Prefect ran the emperor's affairs and set out on this expedition in reply to a Persian attack the previous year. There were substantial successes at first. Then Gordian was murdered in Mesopotamia in 244 through the machinations of Philip the Arab. The expedition ended in failure and Plotinus barely escaped with his life. He made his way to Antioch before finally settling in Rome at the age of 40 when Philip had become emperor.

Plotinus set up a school here and began teaching but at first he kept to the vow that he had taken regarding the teachings of Ammonius. The agreement was then broken by one of the other pupils and while Plotinus still wrote nothing down he began more and more to base his lectures on his studies with Ammonius (*VP* 3.33-34). But for ten years he wrote nothing down. Then in the tenth year of the reign of the emperor Gallienus

⁵ See Schroeder, F., 'Ammonius Saccas', *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt*, pp. 493-525.

⁶ 'Plotin und die antike Philosophie', *Museum Helveticum*, 1, p. 215.

⁷ See O'Brien, D., 'Plotinus and the Secrets of Ammonius', pp. 117-153.

⁸ All dates are A.D.

Porphyry arrived in Rome. Plotinus was 59 years old by this time. Unfortunately everything noteworthy tends to happen after the arrival of Porphyry, or so Porphyry himself suggests, therefore we have to read him very carefully. One major event however did happen before Porphyry's arrival; that is, Plotinus had begun in 253 to write down the material that came up in discussion at the school. By the time of Porphyry's arrival in 263 Plotinus had completed 21 treatises. At Porphyry's urging Plotinus wrote another 24 treatises while Porphyry was with him. Needless to say Porphyry is inclined to think that this was his best work. So the total in 266 was 45 treatises. At that point Porphyry wasn't feeling the best and took himself off to Sicily to recuperate. While he was in Sicily Plotinus wrote the final nine treatises that have come down to us as the *Enneads*. A total of 54, 6 multiplied by 9, hence the title, *Enneads* (Nines).

By now Plotinus was in fairly poor health. Porphyry was not present but was informed about the lead up to Plotinus's death by those who stayed with Plotinus to the end, notably Eustochius. His voice lost its clearness, his sight became blurred and his hands and feet became ulcerated. He left the city and went to Campania to stay in the house of an old friend who had passed away. He died in 270.

To some extent those are the just the bare facts concerning his life and death. But Porphyry does also give us a good picture of the daily life of the philosopher and of Plotinus as an ordinary man surrounded by friends and involved in the same ordinary difficulties as everyone else. He had friends ranging from the emperor Gallienus and his wife Salonina to the ordinary people with whom he lived. Presumably some of these cared little for philosophy. He clearly did not live the sort of life one might associate with a mystic. Quite surprising is the fact that, according to Porphyry, he ran a sort of orphanage:

Many men and women of the highest rank, on the approach of death, brought him their children, both boys and girls, and entrusted them to him along with all their property, considering that he would be a holy and god-like guardian (VP 9.5-9).

So he looked after other people's property when it was entrusted to him and took care that *he was accurate in such matters*⁹ (VP 9.13-14). He was clearly not regarded as a philosopher who spent his time in some sort of mystic trance. The Aristophanic caricature of the philosopher in *Clouds* finds no place in Porphyry's *Life* of Plotinus. On the contrary, Plotinus appears to have lived a very ordinary life. He mixed with other people, greeting them intimately if we are to judge from Porphyry's note that when he developed leprosy his friends avoided him because he had the habit of greeting them by word of mouth (τὸ ἀπὸ στόματος...προσαγορεύειν) (Arm. tr.) (VP 2.16-17). He took his annual summer holiday from his job as a philosopher when he would only converse about ordinary everyday matters (ἄγοντος ἀργούς) (VP 5.4). He was by no means an intellectual snob. While it would be unfair to say perhaps that he suffered fools gladly, he clearly accepted that people had limitations (VP 7.7).

The Plotinus that emerges from Porphyry's *Life* is thus hard to reconcile with the philosopher of the *Enneads*. In *Ennead* III. 2 [47] 8. 16-21 we are asked:

If some boys, who have kept their bodies in good training, but are inferior in soul to their bodily condition because of lack of education, win a wrestle with others who are trained neither in body or soul and grab their food and their dainty clothes, would the affair be anything but a joke?

Yet his own actions tell us that he clearly regarded the everyday difficulties of life as a serious affair for the non-philosopher. Those who had not yet taken or who were highly unlikely ever to take the 'upward path' he still protected from the day to day difficulties of ordinary life to the best of his ability (VP 9.16ff.). Porphyry strengthens this view of him by telling us that "he was gentle" (VP 9.18)¹⁰ and that kindness shone out from him (ἡ πρώτης διέλαμπε) (VP 13.8-9). He was, we are told at the "disposal of *all* who had any sort of acquaintance with him" (VP 9.19-20).¹¹

⁹ My italics.

¹⁰ See also VP 23.1ff.

¹¹ Armstrong tr., my italics.

Conversely he was clearly not averse to making use of a friend if the need arose. The emperor Gallienus and his wife Salonina greatly respected Plotinus. In return, Plotinus, in his quest to have Platonopolis established, tried to make full use of their friendship (VP 12.3). Here was a man who had a surprising degree of penetration into character (VP 11.1). He was worldly enough to notice that Porphyry had become suicidal and showed great *common* sense in advising a simple holiday as a remedy (VP 11.11ff.). He was, it seems, quite active in everyday affairs and obviously sufficiently self-possessed to the extent that even though he managed to spend twenty-six years in Rome and acted as an arbitrator in very many people's disputes, he never made an enemy of any of the officials (VP 9.20-22).

The question is this: how do we reconcile the philosopher of the *Enneads* with the man that emerges from Porphyry's *Life*? To understand why this is a problem we need to look briefly at the content of the *Enneads*. In particular we need to understand the metaphysical structure that underpins the ethics and the psychology of the *Enneads*.

II The Metaphysical Structure of the *Enneads*

The first thing that should be made clear is that Plotinus differed greatly from Plato in one major respect. Plotinus was a *mystic*. Not only did he believe in a metaphysical construct designed to reveal another level of reality, as for example with Plato's Forms, he also believed that the philosopher was actually capable of making an ascent to the highest point in this other world. In fact Porphyry claims that Plotinus actually made such an ascent on four occasions:

...for his end and goal was to be united to, to approach the God who is over all things. Four times while I was with him he attained that goal (VP 23.15ff.).

At the top of Plotinus' hierarchical structure of reality is the *One*. The One is the undiminished giver from which all else comes. It produces, as all perfect things do, and what is produced is the world of Intellect. Intellect is the One in multiplicity, in multiplicity because being less perfect than the One it cannot retain its unity. This is the world of Plato's *Forms* and Aristotle's *Nous*. This is real Being; the One is beyond Being. Intellect too produces; the result of its production is Soul. This is a further remove from the unity and perfection of the One. Soul's attempt to express the

multiplicity of Intellect results in the sense world that we have around us. This sensible world is merely an imperfect copy of the Intelligible world. As it is a lesser level it must operate in time not eternity. This sensible world is the home of the body/soul compound, that is, the human being. The important point is however, that soul is ultimately an inhabitant of the Intelligible world. It stretches from there to this sensible world which it has created. It is a bridge between the Intelligible and Sensible world. Important for us to understand, in view of the theme of this paper, is the fact that we, as body/soul compounds have a part of our soul that belongs to the Intelligible world. There is a part of our soul that never descends. This higher soul is always available to us if we choose to become conscious on its level. That is what the *Enneads* are instructing us to do.

There we have in a very brief and crude way Plotinus's metaphysical world.¹² I am well aware that I have given a fairly simple and uncontroversial account. What is clear though and free from dispute is the fact that we as human beings have our origins at a higher level and can return to that level if we choose. The world just described exists not only outside of the human being but also within us. The different metaphysical levels are not cut off from one another, rather the different levels of Being are traversed by the soul and the upward path is always at hand. We heard Porphyry say that Plotinus took this path four times while he was with him. He joined in mystical union with the One. Porphyry himself claims one such ascent. We can hear from Plotinus himself exactly what such an ascent was like:

Often I have woken up out of the body to my self and have entered into myself, going out from all other things; I have seen a beauty wonderfully great and felt assurance that then most of all I belonged to the better part; I have actually lived the best life and come to identity with the divine; and set firm in it I have come to that supreme actuality, setting myself above all else in the realm of Intellect. Then after that rest in the divine, when I have come down from Intellect to discursive reasoning, I am

¹² One of the best general introductions to the metaphysics of the *Enneads* is still, in my opinion, the chapters in A.H. Armstrong, *An Introduction to Ancient Philosophy*, pp. 175-196.

puzzled how I ever came down, and how my soul has come to be in the body (*Ennead* IV. 8 [6] 1.1ff.).

You can see the basic Platonic idea of our souls belonging to a higher world but for some reason becoming ensnared in the material sphere. Why we come down is another matter that could be debated. But this metaphysical structure contains all the essentials. We have the freedom to leave the sensible world if we choose. Thus the duty of the philosopher is, as it was for Plato, to break out of that tomb which is the body and regain our proper metaphysical level. This is the stated objective of the Plotinian sage.

III The Ascent

Since the One is within us, our efforts should tend towards an internal spiritual journey. The body, if not evil, is simply something that has attached itself to our lower soul, and so should be ignored as much as possible. It cannot be ignored completely:

He must give to this bodily life as much as it needs and he can, but he is himself other than it and free to abandon it... (*Ennead* I. 4 [46] 16.17-18).

It is clear that the focus must be on the ascent to the Divine. This is in keeping with the Greek philosophical tradition to which Plotinus belonged. For Plato the objective was to become like God (*Theaetetus* 176b). Aristotle in the *Nicomachean Ethics* begins Book I by asking what is it that everyone strives after. The answer he arrives at is *eudaimonia*. This is not simply happiness but rather the highest and best possible life for a human being. This consists in the contemplation of God:

...but we ought so far as in us lies, to put on immortality, and to do all that we can to live in conformity with the highest that is in us... (1177b31ff.).

The philosophy of the *Enneads* is in general agreement with these views. But how exactly do we accomplish this? How do we break out of the body? Here Plotinus certainly goes beyond Plato. Plato advised the philosopher to pay as little attention to the body as possible while imprisoned in it and be unconcerned at having to abandon it. If he were to do that then he could sit with the smugness of Socrates in the *Phaedo*.

I can't persuade Crito that I am this Socrates here who is talking to you now and marshalling all the arguments; he thinks that I am the one whom he will see presently lying dead; and he asks how he is to bury me!...No you must keep up your spirits and say that it is only my body that you are burying; and you can bury it as you please... (*Phaedo*, 110d ff.).

In Plotinus the instructions are clear. We must, Plotinus tells us, take the upward path. We must strive to *bring back the god in us to the Divine in the All*.¹³ We are souls who have chosen to desert the level of Intellect and live in the world of images that is this sense world. We *are* whatever conscious-level we choose to operate on. We can choose to be beguiled by the images that come from the sense world thinking them to be real and so spend our time being concerned with the body. We have also the option of ignoring the images that come to us from sense objects and the freedom to choose to focus on the realities of Intellect itself. We are, in a wonderful phrase by E.R. Dodds, "a fluctuating spotlight of consciousness."¹⁴

The *Enneads* are a handbook designed to help one make this mystical ascent, to help one become conscious on the level of Intellect, and there, to make contact with the One. This we can do. So becoming God-like is bound up with consciousness. How does one become conscious at the level of the higher soul? Plotinus tells us:

There are two stages of the journey for all, one when they are going up and one when they have arrived above. The first leads from the regions below, the second is for those who are already in the intelligible realm and have gained their footing There... (*Ennead* I. 3 [20] 1. 13ff).

Plotinus then in this treatise termed *On Dialectic* by Porphyry, goes on to describe what sorts of things the ordinary aspirant should pay attention to and what steps s/he should follow. In fact the road he describes is very similar to the one so beautifully described by Plato in that wonderful piece in the *Symposium* where Plato outlines the ascent to the Form of Beauty.¹⁵

¹³ VP 2.26

¹⁴ Dodds, E.R., *Les Sources de Plotin*, pp. 385-386.

¹⁵ *Symposium* 209e 5ff.

Part of the background training for this is the four cardinal virtues laid out in the Plato's *Republic*: Courage, Wisdom, Temperance, and Justice? So what sort of a person does the sage become?

IV Ethics: Theory and Practice

One would assume that s/he would be quite indifferent to the matters of daily life. The only genuine help that the sage could give would be to turn those who are capable of it into philosophers and prepare them to become conscious on the level of real Being. One would assume from the *Enneads* that the sage would hardly bother with non-philosophers. What could s/he do for them? It is hard to see the sage then as a friend to all. This has indeed been the view of a number of scholars.¹⁶ The most recent has been Dillon. He suggests with regard to the Plotinian sage:

All earthly concerns such as love for family or kin, not to mention care for the poor and oppressed, and all passions, such as pity or grief, must be shaken off (like clothes at an initiation ceremony) in the process of purification.¹⁷

He also adds:

One feels of Plotinus that he would gladly have helped an old lady across the road - but he might very well fail to notice her at all, and if she were squashed by a passing wagon he would remain quite unmoved.¹⁸

This is a reasonable comment to make based on the philosophy expounded in the *Enneads*. For instance in *Ennead* I. 2 [19] 7. 19-27 Plotinus has this to say:

Perhaps the possessor of the [civic] virtues will know them, and how much he can get from them, and will act according to some of them as circumstances require. But when he reaches higher principles and different measures he will act according to these.

¹⁶ See Plass, P., 'Plotinus' Ethical Theory', p. 253 and Westra, L., *Plotinus and Freedom*, p. 127.

¹⁷ Dillon, J., 'An ethic for the late antique sage', p. 320.

¹⁸ *Ibid.* p. 324.

For instance, he will not make self control consist in that former observance of measure and limit, but will altogether separate himself, as far as possible, from his lower nature *and will not live the life of the good man which civic virtue requires.*¹⁹ He will leave that behind, and choose another, the life of the gods: for it is to them, not to good men that we are to be made like.

The point that I want to make is that I do not see how Plotinus the philosopher who espouses this philosophy in the *Enneads* can be easily reconciled with Plotinus the man as he appears in Porphyry's *Life*.²⁰ The problem is this: the imperative of the *Enneads* is that we must try to bring back the god in us to the divine in the All (VP 2.26). This would, one imagines, demand a somewhat reclusive lifestyle for the sage. This does not seem to be the lifestyle that emerges from Porphyry's biography. Indeed, I am not the only one who has found the philosophy of the *Enneads* slightly at odds with the philosopher evoked by the pen of Porphyry.

In 1984 Ferwerda²¹ had this to say:

But deep in our heart we cannot help remembering how Porphyry tells us that Plotinus was a very nice person, a man who showed a great deal of concern for what happened to other people. Does this not indicate a certain dichotomy between doctrine and behaviour?

More recently Bussanich²² has noted:

¹⁹ My italics

²⁰ It is by no means easy to see why A.H. Armstrong should conclude that " ..Plotinus was a complete and consistent character in whom life and thought were so closely related that it is not easy to understand the one without knowing something about the other." *The Cambridge History of Later Greek and Early Medieval Philosophy*, p. 3. Note too the same uneasy compromise in the philosophy of Epicurus. Epicureans were famous for their friendship but it is not easy to see why this should be so given their ethical philosophy that aimed at invulnerability.

²¹ Ferwerda, R., 'Pity in the Life and Thought of Plotinus', p. 58.

²² Bussanich, J., 'The Invulnerability of Goodness: The Ethical and Psychological Theory of Plotinus', p. 182.

We may conclude therefore that just as Plotinus admitted the beauty of the visible world, while still holding it to be an 'unreal' beauty, so he admitted that practical help should be given to one's fellow humans while at the same time supposing that the problems that he was helping to solve were unreal problems. Thus if he ever supposed that it was not the philosopher's concern to act in such matters, he was as good as saying that the lesser goods of the visible world were no goods at all. We should recall at this point that he is undoubtedly the victim of Plato's divided thoughts on these problems. Is the true philosopher the dualistically-minded ascetic of the *Phaedo* or the interested dissector of the marvels of the visible world of the *Timaeus*?³⁰

Having moved back to Plato, Rist suggests that the edict of the Cave in *Republic* may be the solution. Does Plotinus recognise a duty to his fellow humans? Was Plotinus following the command of Plato to go back into the Cave? Rist dismisses this because in his view the virtues for Plotinus, at their highest level, are purely contemplative. We do not go back into the Cave out of a sense of duty.³¹ Aware that the problem has still not been solved Rist offers a final solution. He tells us that:

...in practice he [Plotinus] has recognised that concern for others does not entail the withdrawal of the mind from higher things and its submergence in the lower. The Plotinian soul is a subtle instrument; it can contemplate the higher and care for the lower at the same time.³²

Metaphysically Rist is correct here. The sage *can* do this but the question still remains: why would the sage bother with the non-philosopher? Bussanich too offers a solution:

In the special case of the philosopher, virtuous actions are accomplished spontaneously and easily; without feelings, deliberation, or choice; without awareness of the particulars; and

³⁰ *Ibid.* p. 166.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² *Ibid.* p. 168.

with complete detachment as to the outcome (I.4.10.22-34, IV.4.8.4ff.).³³

This explanation can, it seems to me, be drawn very reasonably from Plotinus's metaphysics but does not fully account for the picture of the sage delivered by Porphyry. Plotinus does not come across as an automaton, as someone without feelings. Although both Rist and Bussanich present Plotinus as someone operating on two levels, as he undoubtedly did, this does not, in my opinion, solve the problem. They tell us *what* the sage can do but they do not tell us *why* s/he would do it. We are still left with the question: why does the sage bother with the non-philosopher? I noted above that Rist had suggested that there is no answer in the *Enneads* to why the sage would bother with the non-philosopher. He may well be right. The philosophy of the *Enneads* is for specialists. The content is aimed at helping the philosopher achieve union with the One. It is not concerned with the non-philosopher.³⁴ But the *Enneads* also tell us that the sage has concerns for ordinary folk. At I. 4 [46] 11.13 we are told: "He would like *all men* to prosper and *no one* to be subject to any sort of evil",³⁵ imaginary or not one presumes. This is certainly reflected in Plotinus' life.

The answer to this problem may well lie in Plotinus' metaphysics. The creator of the sensible world, the World Soul, as Plotinus calls it, instinctively looks after its creation. And we are encouraged in the *Enneads*, as Smith³⁶ points out, to act like the World Soul. If we do, Smith suggests that "the norms of ethical conduct flow automatically and without difficulty from the higher life of Intellect."³⁷ The solution to this problem may well be along these lines, but the matter is, at least to me, still far from clear.

Bibliography

Armstrong, A.H., (ed.), *Plotinus* 7 vols., Loeb Classical Library, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1966-1989).

³³ Bussanich, J., *opt.cit.* p. 183.

³⁴ Smith, A., *Porphyry's Place in the Neoplatonic Tradition*, pp. 71,139.

³⁵ Armstrong translation.

³⁶ Smith, A., 'The Significance of Practical Ethics for Plotinus' in *Traditions of Platonism*, edited by J. Cleary, Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 1999, pp. 234-235.

³⁷ *Ibid.* p.236.

Plotinus seems committed to the contradictory position that the philosopher will, on the one hand, be self-sufficient, free of constraining emotional attachments, and fully immersed in contemplation and, on the other hand, that she will also act virtuously and be friendly.

Bussanich logically goes on to ask how the biographical details of Plotinus' life can be reconciled with his metaphysical psychology.²³

This was a man who looked after orphans. A man who patiently attended to the accounts of those who entrusted him with their property and *took care that they should be accurate* (VP 9.13ff). Porphyry says that he was gentle and at the disposal of all who had any sort of acquaintance with him (VP 9.19). Clearly he was not uncaring in any normal sense of the word. How do we reconcile this apparent ambiguity?

This is not a recent problem. As early as 1967 Rist had found difficulty with Plotinus' theory and practice. Given the metaphysics and psychology of the *Enneads* it is hard to see why the sage would bother with anyone else. Rist suggests that the only real help the philosopher could offer his friends is to demonstrate in his own life that the philosophic ascent is "possible and worthwhile".²⁴

The theory of the self-sufficiency of the sage *should* preclude him from all communal interests....In theory the sage's only concern should be with teaching; in practice Plotinus both teaches those who can be taught and helps those who are not able to enter upon the path of philosophy so that they may avoid troubles which (in theory) are illusory in any case.²⁵

Given the metaphysics and psychology of the *Enneads* it is hard to see why the sage would bother with anyone at all. As the quote above indicates, one could possibly argue that the only real help a philosopher could give is to teach.²⁶ But as Rist then observes: why bother even to teach? For Plotinus

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ Rist, J.M., *Road to Reality*, p. 163.

²⁵ See also Rist, J.M., 'Plotinus and Moral Obligation', pp. 217-233.

²⁶ Rist, J.M., *Road to Reality*, p. 163.

all that should matter is his own successful career of contemplation.²⁷ Rist says that there is no answer to this question in the *Enneads* and he suggests that we should not expect one.²⁸ But surely we are entitled to consistency between a life lived and a philosophy preached?

Rist does however offer a solution to the problem of why the sage might teach:

There is a harmony in the whole of the universe. All things derive from the One and are, in Plotinus' language, in the One. All souls are striving to greater or lesser degrees to return to him. When any individual soul returns and is joined in communion with its source, it must be presumed to share in its source's creativity and causal energy. In other words, each soul will become responsible in its way for the creation and maintenance of all things. It will even love all things in so far as all things contain the principle of unity, for the One loves itself both in itself and in the rest of the cosmos.

We know that the return of the soul is to be explained by the principle of 'like to like'. The soul is like the One, and the more it is purified the more it resembles the One's simplicity. Hence even before it achieves the union with its source which it seeks, it will be trying to act in a manner appropriate to the One. It will be sharing the One's omnipresence in so far as it can, and it will always be turned towards others, knowing that once they turn towards the One, they will be led back on the path to union. What higher motive could prompt a man to teach?²⁹

This seems to me a reasonable argument as to why the sage would teach. It takes account of the metaphysics and psychology of the *Enneads*. But what about those who would or could not be taught? What responsibility does the sage have to these? None, one would imagine. Yet in practice Plotinus cared for these too. Rist traces this back to a fundamental problem in Plato:

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ *Ibid.* pp. 163-164.

- , *An Introduction to Ancient Philosophy* (London: Methuen, 1957). See pp. 175-196.
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