

Platonist Philosophy as a Way of Life

Handout

Locke Lectures IV, Oxford 2011

I Historical and Literary Background

- Plotinus b. 205 C.E; studies philosophy at Alexandria 232- (aged 27)
 Begins to write treatises 253/4 (aged 49), while living and teaching at Rome.
 Porphyry comes to work with him in 263, receives old and new treatises from him.
 d. 270 (aged 66)
 Porphyry edits and publishes Plotinus' work in the format of 54 treatises, with Porphyry's titles, arranged in 6 sets of 9 treatises (= 6 "enneads," or groups of 9), c. 301-305.

II Introduction

- (1) Late Platonists on Pythagoras, Plato and the "ancient wisdom"
- (2) The three eternal and purely "intelligible" Substances (the three "hypostases"):
 - The First=The Highest=The One=The Good
 - Intellect
 - Soul
- (3) The Spiritual Crisis: Platonism and Christianity

III Principal Topics of Today's Lecture: Plotinus' theories of

- (a) the human person
- (b) the human good
- (c) the character and role of the human virtues in enabling us to attain our good.

IV Five levels at which Soul works in creating, sustaining in existence, and directing the life-activities of living things:

- (1) As World-soul, makes material stuffs of which they are made
- (2) As World-soul, (a) makes and distributes their organs across their bodies, (b) causes automatic life functions (breathing, metabolism, growth, heat-maintenance, equilibriums of health, etc.)
- (3) As the individual animal's soul (consciousness), causes perception, feelings of pain and pleasure, emotions and non-rational desires
- (4) In human beings (only), as individual soul (consciousness), makes possible empirical reasoning about physical objects and events, and choices, decisions, and voluntary actions
- (5) In human beings (only), as individual soul, makes pure intellectual thinking about Forms possible

V The Living Being (zôon) vs, the Human Person (see *Enneads* I.1)

(a) The living human being = the compound thing formed by a given human body and the image of the individual soul of that human being

(b) The human person (anthrôpos) = the intellect that that individual soul is.

VI Three sets of human virtues (see *Enneads* I.2)

(1) Intellectual virtues (belonging to the individual intellect of the person in question; exercised in acts of thinking-and-understanding Forms)

(2) Purifying virtues (belonging to the individual intellect, exercised in acts of concentration and attention in which one looks “upward” to Forms, and away from the physical world below)

(3) Civic virtues (belonging to the image of the individual soul/intellect; exercised in attending in a decent way to the life of the body and the person’s personal and social life)