

XXIV.—Katharsis in the *Enneades* of Plotinus¹

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According to the teaching of Plotinus the Soul attains the Ekstasis by a process of purification involving two distinct steps. The Soul is united to the Intellectual-Principle by first pursuing, later abandoning Virtue and Self-knowledge, and by studying dialectic. The study of philosophy brings it to the One but involves ultimately the rejection of the intellectual act. The Soul itself is affected, and the process has a positive as well as a negative aspect.

Katharsis in Greek religion and philosophy is from the beginning a means of separating Man's soul from the body. At first, as in particular with the Orphics, the separation is viewed almost literally. The soul is believed by means of ritualistic purification to be released from the "wheel of being," that is, from the necessity of ever again inhabiting the mortal body, conceived always as the soul's prison. Plato in borrowing the conception inevitably substitutes a spiritual purification for the ritualistic. Personal immortality after death, when the soul is finally freed from bodily ties, is the ultimate goal. But there exists also the desire for a present psychological and spiritual separation of soul and body, which is at once a preparation and immediate end. This is basically the theory of Plotinus. There are two changes which the particular developments of his own system make necessary. First, his acceptance and formulation of the belief hinted at in Plato and developed by the Middle Platonists, that Matter itself is Evil, gives him metaphysical as well as psychological justification for demanding that the body be abandoned entirely. In the second place, the transcendent nature of the One or the Good, to which he gives more emphasis than Plato, necessitates an abandoning of intellection itself in the approach to the Highest, thus extending the scope of katharsis.

With these two important exceptions, the ideas of the two men are not dissimilar. It is not my purpose to present a comparison of the two or to discuss the historical reasons behind those

¹ Translations and terminology (and capitalization) are based on, though not always identical with, the work of Mackenna and Page, *Enneads* (London, 1917-1930). In particular I have used Mackenna's designation for the three Plotinian realms: τὸ ἓν, the One; νοῦς, Intellectual-Principle; ψυχή, Soul.

changes which Plotinus made. The significant point is the fact that already with Plato (shown particularly in Socrates' discussion in the *Phaedo*) katharsis is more than a separation. The Soul is not merely freed from pollution but is itself internally affected by the purification, is made to concentrate its powers. The process is more than even a psychological separation; it is a spiritual renewal. Failure to realize that such is the case in the thought of Plotinus has been, I believe, a major error on the part of many Plotinian scholars.

It is well known that Plotinus himself was disturbed by the problem of the Soul's relation to evil. Metaphysically speaking, he could not admit that an act of creation which imitated that of the Primal Cause could be in any sense at all an evil or a failure. Thus he was forced to say that the voluntary embodiment of the Soul was good. Yet from the philosophical point of view, there must of necessity be a certain element of evil or defilement involved in the union of Soul and Body in order for him to advance his plea that the human being should reach ever upward to the Intellectual-Principle and so free his Soul from material ties. If the bonds linking Soul to Body are desirable, there can be no reason for desiring to free the Soul from them. The reconciliation of the two ideas is accomplished by the use of an argument based on time. The initial entry of the Soul is allowed to be a metaphysical necessity. The Soul is "a god, a later phase of the divine; but under stress of its power and of its tendency to bring order to its next lower, it penetrates to this sphere in a voluntary plunge; if it turns back quickly, all is well; it will have taken no hurt by acquiring the knowledge of Evil and coming to understand what sin is" (4.8.5). Nevertheless, if the Soul remains in the lower world too long, fleeing the All which is its home and exercising its own individuality, then it is overcome by the gradual encroachment of Matter and hence is no longer without evil.

Whether the Soul's union with the bodily is evil only in process of time or at the moment of the first descent, in either case it is entanglement with Matter that produces the evil. For with Plotinus Matter, being viewed as absolute privation, is Evil absolute. Furthermore, it is at least sometimes conceived as being an actively evil force as well as a passive one. The result is that there are two ways in which its association with the Soul is harmful. First, Matter is accretion. The Soul takes on that which is alien to itself

and is laden with a heavy burden, as it were, which impedes its flight upward. In more psychological terms, the Soul by its concern for earthly things is prevented from uninterrupted contemplation of the divine. Second, Matter brings about dispersion in the Soul. The Soul's power is enfeebled by its entanglement with Matter so that its divine faculties no longer have free play. It lacks the strength and power to raise itself up to contemplation of the divine.

Soul's entanglement with Matter is but the last in a series of downward steps. The Soul's ultimate goal is the One, and this cannot be reached simply by the taking away of Matter. Accretion and dispersion both were present as soon as the One had overflowed to produce the Intellectual-Principle, and again when this gave birth to the Soul. Matter is the only positive, absolute Evil. It is only through Matter that the Soul can lose even partially any of its own natural powers. But in so far as the departure from the divine One is concerned, each step down is apostasy. Each new quality, however good in itself, is accretion, introduces dispersion, and so is relatively evil. The Soul's union with the One is prevented by those very qualities which distinguish it as Soul and likewise by those qualities in the Intellectual-Principle, which it must first attain if it is to reach the One. By the possession of anything which is not in the One, it is rendered impure and must be purified before the goal is achieved.

If the descent and subsequent defilement of the Soul was accomplished by the accrument of alien qualities which brought the enfeebling of its powers, the reascent is to be achieved by the directly opposite process. Addition is to be replaced by subtraction, dispersion by concentration. Since it is the presence of the alien which renders the Soul unable to concentrate, to collect its full powers within itself, it is the process of getting rid of the foreign elements which receives most of Plotinus' attention. But the fact that there is always a positive side as well must not be overlooked. The Soul, then, must be purified of that which it has taken on. In the Plotinian hierarchy the qualities of each lower realm are not to be imputed to the higher one. The higher realm causes and includes but does not partake of the lower ones (6.7.42). Thus the advance to each new stage is achieved by the abandoning of the lower one, with the discarding of all the qualities inherent in it. To a large extent it is entirely negative; but once the negative process is

complete, the step into the higher state has been accomplished. Each higher realm is reached automatically after the attainment of the peak of the lower one. To attain the higher, one must develop the full capacities of the lower. This perfection is achieved by discarding all alien matter—that is, the qualities of a still lower realm—and so enabling the state or power in question to be most truly and purely itself. “Repose from the alien leaves the characteristic activity intact” (5.3.7).

In the reascent the katharsis is thus continuous. In the lower stages the objects of purification are to a certain extent evil in themselves in that they involve dependence on Matter. In the later the purification is only of that which is merely no longer needed because of being superseded by something higher. The activities of which the Soul is purified in the later stages are in themselves good and have brought the Soul up to its present height. They may, however, because of their very goodness, act as a snare, deceiving the Soul into thinking that it has already reached the divine and so prevent its striving to go higher.

Plotinus refers to the ascent as a sort of mystic journey to be taken by initiates (1.3.1). The path is upward from the lowest of three realms to the highest. The first stage is thus from the Soul to the Intellectual-Principle, the second from the Intellectual-Principle to the One. The first ascent, however, actually consists of two steps: the first within the sphere of the Soul itself, its awakening to a realization of its own nature and origin; and the second, the actual advance into the higher realm. In other words, Soul must attain its highest capacity as Soul before it can become Intellectual-Principle. Each man must come to a realization of the essential life—that is, the divine Soul—within him and its position as an integral part, an identity with the All-Soul. So far the problem is an individual one, varying in its solution with the character and circumstances of each human being. Once the union with the All-Soul is realized, then the path to be trod is always the same, the step from pure Soul to pure Intellectual-Principle and eventually from pure Intellectual-Principle to the One.

While it is true that katharsis with Plotinus is for the purpose of enabling the Soul to be united with the One during life, it is important to remember that the goal is by no means an harmonious, complementary synthesis of Soul and Body. Repeatedly he urges the fact that the separation of the two must be absolute—in a

spiritual sense, of course,—that in any compromise between the two, Body will inevitably be dominant, that any good in this life exists never through such a partnership but only through Soul's repudiation of it, that the liberation of the Soul is not a withdrawing from certain evil aspects of Body but a flight entirely away from it.² The condition of the embodied Soul is like gold in the natural state. The gold is hidden in inferior, extraneous matter almost beyond detection, but all the qualities which make the metal precious remain intact. The task of bringing it to its finest state is achieved by removing that which has collected around it. Similarly, the Soul must be liberated from all that pertains to Matter, so that it may be free to exercise all the powers inherent in it. So long as it attaches any importance to Body, there is a thinning out or diminishing of its own powers, both as Soul and as a potential part of each of the more divine realms. While its divinity is not essentially changed, its active power is not unaffected.

The purification of the Soul, then, is a steady withdrawal from all that is inferior until it contains nothing extraneous to the divine One. How is this to be accomplished? The answer is the same as that given by Plato—by the pursuit of philosophy. We are specifically told so in several places. In the treatise *On the Animate and Man* when Plotinus is speaking of the various possible modes of coalescence of Soul and Body, he says that in case Soul is partly attached and partly free, it will be the two-fold task of philosophy to direct the lower phase of the Soul toward the higher and in so far as is possible to separate it from its instrument, the Body (1.1.3). Again in the last *Ennead* he speaks of the two phases of the Soul and says that the higher will be held down by the lower so long as the lower remains. If, however, philosophy has freed the higher Soul (Εἰ δὲ παντελῶς λύσειε φιλοσοφία), then the lower departs alone to an inferior realm and the higher, the true Soul, may enter into the intellectual world purified of any contamination from lower existence (αὐτὴ δὲ καθαρῶς ἐν τῷ νοητῷ οὐδενὸς ἐξηρημένου αὐτῆς 6.4.16). Again we are told that the man who is capable of entering into the Intellectual Realm is the one with the nature of the lover and a disposition inherently philosophical (5.9.2). Finally, in taking up the problem of whether or not the Soul is to be considered impervious to earthly influence, Plotinus asks, "Why then if the Soul has been unaffected from the beginning, is it necessary to make the Soul

² See 3.6.6; 2.3.9; 5.1.10; 1.7.3; 1.8.8; 5.4.15.

immune by means of philosophy" (ἀπαθῇ τὴν ψυχὴν ἐκ φιλοσοφίας ποιεῖν 3.6.5)?

In such statements we are told specifically but without elaboration that katharsis is accomplished through philosophy. A close examination of the *Enneades* will show, I believe, that the philosophical approach is maintained throughout in connection with the Soul's purification and that the conception of katharsis as accomplished by philosophy forms the foundation of the whole Plotinian system.³ Yet the term "philosophy" varies according to the particular stages in the ascent. Thus at one time is meant that part of philosophy which is equivalent to mere ratiocination, at another dialectic; at still other times philosophy is thought of as pure religion. For purposes of discussion we may divide the study of the approach to the One and its achievement through philosophy in the same way as does Plotinus. Thus we have first the approach to the Intellectual-Principle, second the approach to the One, or the Ekstasis.

I. THE APPROACH TO THE INTELLECTUAL-PRINCIPLE

(1) *The Virtues*. Without true Virtue, says Plotinus, God is but a name. By it the Soul is cleansed; through it, along with wisdom, God is made manifest (2.9.15). With Plotinus as with most of the Greek philosophers, Virtue includes but is never limited to moral goodness. With him more than with any of the others Virtue is intellectualized. To a certain extent, particularly in the passages dealing with metempsychosis, Virtue is loosely equated with morality and justice, and Vice with their opposites. But in general his belief that the earthly life of the Soul is never an end in itself leads Plotinus to make of the virtues simply a means of separating the Soul from all bodily concerns and training it to look upward to the Intellectual-Principle. With Plato he declares that all the virtues are purifications. Virtue in its true sense is not the regulation of earthly life but an internal liberation from it. In a more positive sense it is the Soul's retirement into itself as the result

³ Marcel De Corte has discussed this subject in an article, "Technique et fondement de la purification Plotinienne," *Revue d'Histoire de la Philosophie* 5 (1931) 42-74. His discussion, which is excellent so far as it goes, falls short, it seems to me, in two important points: first, he fails to realize that the Soul itself is affected by the purification; second, he does not distinguish between dialectic and philosophy, as does Plotinus, and so does not give proper emphasis to the fact that there are two distinct stages in the process of katharsis.

of purification of all that belongs to the external world. This view must never be misconstrued as meaning that earthly morality and goodness are unimportant in Plotinus' eyes. But their importance is taken for granted as of necessity included in a higher conception.

Plotinus' views on Virtue and man's philosophical purpose are summed up in his famous sentence coming at the end of his treatise *On Virtue*: "Our concern is not to be sinless but to be divine" (1.2.6). This is, of course, closely linked with the Platonic doctrine of attaining likeness to God, which Plotinus quotes directly, saying like Plato that in attaining this likeness lies our escape from evil and this world. To Plato's explanation that this likeness means "becoming just and holy, living by wisdom" (μετὰ φρονήσεως γενέσθαι), Plotinus adds the words *ὅλως ἐν ἀρετῇ* (1.2.1). Thus it is Plotinus who emphasizes the necessity of Virtue; but he does so only for the sake of giving it a specific and strict interpretation, which later leads to a partial discarding of it. Plato goes on in the passage mentioned to what he believes to be the true reason for practising Virtue and shunning Vice. "God is in no wise and in no manner unrighteous, but utterly and perfectly righteous, and there is nothing so like him as that one of us who in turn becomes most nearly perfect in righteousness. It is herein that the true cleverness of a man is found and also his worthlessness and cowardice; for the knowledge of this is true Virtue, and ignorance of it is folly or manifest wickedness" (*Theaetetus* 176 B-C).

With Plato, then, man must pursue Virtue merely because God is perfect righteousness. This is not untrue for Plotinus, but he does not see things quite so simply. To begin with, he divides the virtues into two—or perhaps three—different classes. The first is that of the civic virtues, and these Plotinus decides are not capable of bringing about "likeness." For how, he asks, can there be a quality such as courage where there is no danger, or self-restraint where there are no false allurements from which one should restrain oneself? The conclusion is that the civic virtues in so far as they are associated with mortal reasoning faculties do not exist in the divine realm. These are all closely bound up with those concomitants of bodily existence which are not found in the divine. *Phronesis* is pure ratiocination; *andreia* is concerned with the passionate nature; *sophrosyne* produces the harmony between passion and reason; *dikaiosyne* is the employment of each of the virtues as it should command or obey. It is obvious that we cannot gain

likeness to God by virtues so firmly bound to the bodily. The civic virtues are not those by which men win the ultimate mystic vision.

Yet there have been men possessed of the civic virtues whom tradition has recognized as divine. We must recognize that there are both two planes of excellence and two classes of virtues to which we may attain. The virtues of this lower plane are by no means to be despised so long as they are viewed in the proper perspective. Moral excellence is form for the Soul (6.7.27). The lower virtues regulate and ennoble our lives here. They set limits and measure to our desires and emotions. They save us from false opinion. For a man becomes better by being subject to measure and removing himself from the sphere of the unbounded and unmeasured. The Soul is as Matter to the acts of the virtues, and they are like an image of the best which is above. By replacing the utter measurelessness of Matter with some slight participation in ideal form, the virtues bring the Soul a little nearer to the divine that is beyond form. Then the Soul being closer to the divine than the body and thus more akin participates more fully, and deceiving us, it almost seems like the divine itself. It is in this way that those who possess the civic virtues acquire likeness (1.2.2).

It will be noted that even in this praise of earthly virtues they are given no true ultimate value. Divinity is not reached by such virtues, only an illusion because of an approximation to it. If man is deceived by this appearance, Virtue becomes itself a snare and a hindrance to the Soul. All practical virtues in themselves are simply sensible qualities, and qualities are associated with the Soul in its apostasy. The practical virtues are important as contributing to the external social well-being of humanity. They make for beauty and order in the world and so are desirable, but they are not necessary (6.3.16).

An extension of this idea is the belief that good is not derived from the act itself but from the inner disposition prompting it. Heracles is the type of a hero of virtuous actions. Through his noble service he was deemed worthy of being a god. But he did not have the contemplative nature and so was not wholly worthy of being in the higher realms. Something of him remained below, and that is why the poet put Heracles himself among the gods and his shade in the lower world (1.1.12).

Since it is clear that likeness to God cannot be attained merely by the practice of civic or practical virtues, Plotinus assumes the existence of a higher class of virtues of the same name as the lower but more intellectual in nature. Even these ideal virtues do not of necessity exist in the divine state, but through acquiring them we attain likeness to a Being in which they have no place. It is the Plotinian principle of advancing by means of that which must be discarded just before the ultimate goal is achieved. In the final analysis the higher virtues are little more than katharsis itself, in this instance the freeing of the intellect from all that is bodily.

Plotinus discusses Plato's saying that all the virtues are purifications.⁴ In what sense, he asks, are we to think Plato meant this? The Soul's evil comes about through its fusion with the body, by sharing its states and, so to speak, thinking with it. Thus each of the four cardinal virtues is interpreted as one aspect of the purifying process. *Phronesis* refers to the Soul's separating its intellect from the body and acting alone. *Sophrosyne* is refusing to be affected by the passions of the body. *Andreia* is ceasing to fear separation from the body by death. Finally *dikaiosyne* is the dominance of reason and intellect without opposition (1.2.3).⁵

After the acts of the higher virtues the Soul is left immune to passion, and one would not be wrong in saying that such a Soul had attained likeness to God. For the divine is pure, and its activity is such that likeness to it is wisdom (1.2.3). Now the Soul will hold itself aloof from all passions and affections, and all that it gives to the body will be bestowed as upon something separate. For the Soul's true good lies in devotion to the Intellectual-Principle, which is its kin (1.2.4). Freedom to exercise this contemplation is won by the purification which the higher virtues have achieved. At times Plotinus makes the connection between the virtues and intellect a little closer. In one passage virtues are said to be species and not primary genera because they are all subordinate acts of intellect (6.2.18). In another we read that the virtues of the Soul are those by which the vision is directed to the Intellectual-Principle, wisdom and thought (1.2.7). But it must be remembered that while the higher virtues are closely bound up with the intellectual, they do not constitute the intellectual act itself. Virtue is of the

⁴ For the development of this idea in Plato and Plotinus see E. Brehier, "ΑΠΕΤΑΙ ΚΑΘΑΡΣΕΙΣ," *REA* 42 (1940) 53-58.

⁵ See also 1.6.5-6.

Soul, not of the Intellectual-Principle or the One. The higher virtues are not even the actual contemplation of the Intellectual-Principle. They are the purification of all that would prevent that contemplation. They form the intellectual attitude that allows the vision.

That the higher virtues completely supersede the lower is brought out in a passage in which Plotinus divides men into three groups: those who live by sense and pretended reasoning, those who live by a virtue which enables them to select well among lower things, and those who live by divine contemplation. Of these only the third class ever attains ultimate truth (5.9.1). It may be said that those who pursue the practical virtues but not divine contemplation hold a middle position analogous to that of Christians who would live by works alone. The Christian who lives a moral life and keeps God's laws is more to be commended than he who lives a life of wickedness; yet without divine love he is nothing. The Plotinian philosopher, too, is to be praised for freeing himself from the lowest phases of bodily affections, but without the divine vision he still lives in unreality. The object of our imitation is not good men but the divine (1.2.7).

It is clear that all the virtues are means of purification. The civic virtues purify man of objective evil; that is, they restrain him from vice. The intellectual virtues completely free the Soul of all dependence upon the bodily. Both of these are negative. Is there a positive Virtue? Virtue in the positive sense is that which remains after the Soul's achieved purification. It is the essential act, the Soul's true good—in other words, the Soul's vision, the contemplation of the Intellectual-Principle. Purification brings about the Soul's turning from the bodily to the Intellectual-Principle. The Soul's virtue is the actual vision which results in its identification with the Intellectual-Principle (1.2.4).

To sum up, there are three steps in the approach to the Intellectual-Principle by Virtue: (1) the turning of the Soul from moral evil and lack of order; (2) the turning of the Soul from Body into itself and its own reason; (3) the turning of the Soul from itself to the Intellectual-Principle, in this last case alone not accomplished by any true discarding of lower elements. It is seen that Virtue—or the virtues—becomes more and more intellectualized as the process of purification and the consequent reascent of the Soul continue. By the time that the third step has been reached, Virtue is

only a means of identification with pure intellect, and no ethical coloring whatsoever remains. Virtue as commonly conceived has been sought, practiced, and of necessity transcended.

(2) *Self-Knowledge*. Γνωθι σαυτόν as Plotinus uses it has somewhat less of an ethical and psychological and more of a metaphysical character than with Socrates. The Platonist by self-knowledge comes to know the Soul in its relation to the divine. The Neo-Platonist by looking inward arrives at the realization that he himself is one with the divine. Plotinus in his teaching concerning the higher and lower parts of the Soul includes the idea that self-knowledge is the proper method of learning properly to understand them (6.4.17). Γνωθι σαυτόν is said to those who, because they are manifold, have the task of appraising themselves since they do not know all or some of their constituents just as they do not know their own origin or principle of Being (6.7.41).

But the attainment of self-knowledge with Plotinus includes more than the realization of one's psychological nature and capacities. It takes on a metaphysical character by which the contemplation of oneself leads one to the understanding of the divine Soul within. Following this the Soul's contemplation of itself results in the perception of the Intellectual-Principle within itself and consequently the achievement of self-identity with the higher realm. Man contains within him potentially both the Soul and the Intellectual-Principle. By looking inward he may contemplate them and eventually be identified with them.

Self-knowledge as a means of inner growth is presented perhaps most clearly in the treatise *On Beauty*. If man would know the beauty which the Soul possesses, says Plotinus, he must withdraw within himself. If he does not yet find himself beautiful, he must labor like the creator of a statue, cutting away what is excessive, straightening what is crooked, and so forth. When the statue of the inner man is made perfect, then one is gathered into the purity of his own being where nothing of externals can cling to him. Then he becomes that veritable light, very vision, and so mounting, his Soul can approach the divine Intellectual-Principle.

The view that our perception of beauty, form, intellect, and the good must begin with the study of those qualities within ourselves is not wholly dissimilar to the Platonic doctrine which would have our appreciation of beauty dependent on our knowledge of the idea of beauty, which we learned in a former and higher state.

Nevertheless, differences increase as one looks for them. For one thing, Plotinus states that the god in each of us is the same (6.5.1). By looking inward we pierce more and more beyond all the accidental properties of ourselves as individual human beings until at last we see the true self within us, which is divine and above all that which accentuates our distinction from other real beings.

The precept *γνώθι σαυτόν*, then, is applied to the process of the Soul's contemplation of its own nature while purifying itself of external—that is, bodily—interests. In other words, self-contemplation is again a form of katharsis. The turning inward is for the purpose of enabling the Soul to be alone. Even the circular movement of the heavens Plotinus explains as coming about because the Soul always discovers more than Soul, while Soul alone is what it would find (2.2.2). For the Soul to regain its union with the higher power, two things must be done. First, the Soul must learn to know the worthlessness of those objects which it now honors. Second, it must recall its own origin and worth. For its separation from the Intellectual-Principle has come about as the result of forgetting whence it came and consequently holding itself in dishonor and glorifying in inferior externals. The second method supersedes the first and if clearly brought out explains the first. The Soul must now look inward and by seeing only itself learn to know its own origin and ultimate goal. "To know ourselves is to know our source" (6.9.7).

Self-knowledge is an intellectual, on the whole, positive form of katharsis, for it raises the soul to the Intellectual-Principle by teaching it to know more of its own nature. Yet as was the case with the virtues, self-knowledge is eventually discarded. In the treatise *On Intellectual Beauty* Plotinus describes the man who through self-knowledge and the appreciation of inner beauty has arrived at the desired goal. At that moment he may see an image of himself lifted to greater beauty; but this he ignores, lovely though it is, and sinks into perfect unity with the divine. The turning to the divine is in two phases. First comes separation when man is aware of himself. Then as he advances inward he fears the separated life and forgets himself in the very act of turning inward. If he does not lose this self-awareness, the vision is not complete; and he keeps himself apart from the divine. Active self-knowledge has led to the desired goal by being first sought, then achieved, and then abandoned.

(3) *Dialectic*. In the treatise *On Dialectic* Plotinus tells us that there are three types of men who are capable of reaching the ultimate goal. They are the musician, the lover, and the philosopher. The musician and the lover must be guided by outside influence; the philosopher may advance by the impulse of his own nature. The musician proceeds from the perception of tones, rhythms, and forms in natural sounds to the realization of the correspondences and relationships behind them. Then he must be taught that what so thrilled him was the intellectual harmony and that the beauty within it was not a particular beauty but universal beauty. From there he must go on to study the truths of philosophy until he understands those things which hitherto he possessed in ignorance. The lover, who belongs to the class above that of the musician, through which the musician must pass on the journey upward, advances from the perception of physical and particular to intellectual and universal beauty after the manner prescribed by Plato. The philosopher, unlike the other two, does not need to begin with the separation from bodily interests, for by his very nature he is already prepared for the upward step. He begins at once the study of mathematics, by which he may win a comprehension of abstract thought and a faith in the incorporeal, training in the higher virtues, and finally the pursuit of dialectic.

It is the pursuit of dialectic which completes the necessary training of all three classes. This is the science of reality, and Plotinus explains very carefully what he means by it. It is that which teaches the true nature of things, showing the position of each object with regard to reality. It deals with Being and its distinction from Non-Being and with the Good and the Not-Good and the eternal and the perishable. These things it studies with true science, not opinion. "It comprehends the Ideas, traverses the entire Intellectual realm, then knowing the Being in Intellect, arrived at Unity, it contemplates and is at peace" (1.3.4). In other words it brings the Soul to perfect identity with the Intellectual-Principle; and in this union the Soul joins in the essential activity of the Intellectual-Principle, which is the contemplation of the One. It must be noted that this passage does not indicate a union with the One. The Intellectual-Principle, while contemplating the One, is at no time identified with it.

In this description dialectic seems to be pure metaphysics. Is it to be understood as identical with philosophy? Fortunately

Plotinus anticipates this question and tells us that it is not. Dialectic is the precious part of philosophy, which is itself the "most precious." Philosophy uses dialectic in a relationship even closer than that in which other skills use arithmetic, in forming a conception of the laws of the universe and in its contemplation of ethics; for dialectic sets forth the practices from which ethics result. The difference is even more marked between dialectic and ratiocination. Dialectic deals not with rules and theories but with reality. It knows untruths and sophisms only as falsities outside its own canon of truth. Verbal propositions are beneath it, though it knows the truth behind them. Petty precisions of process it leaves to any other science which may care for the work. Above all it comprehends the movements of the Soul. It is a sort of super-reasoning. With wisdom it strips all things of Matter and presents them in their universal aspect.

By dialectic we can overcome the weakness of our usual mental acts, which are not pure intellect but human reason swayed by all that is external (3.4.17). The hierarchy of reason in the Plotinian system is roughly parallel to that of the virtues. The knowing of sensible things comes first. All knowledge involving any sort of sense perception is the specific act of the embodied Soul and has no true significance. Next comes such reasoning as is carried on by the mind alone; that is mere ratiocination. It is this mental act which is provided for in the training given by the study of mathematics, which leads to the understanding of the abstract. After this there comes that use and act of reason (*λογισμός*) which is characteristic of the Soul. This, it is probable, is not dissociated from dialectic, for the object of reasoning with both is true Being. With each level of reason as with each plane of virtue, the lower is always superseded by the higher, and even the essential act of the Soul will eventually give place to that of the Intellectual-Principle.

Closely connected with dialectic is Plotinus' doctrine of form. In the pursuit of beauty we learn to know the beautiful first in sensible objects. Then this very appreciation of them teaches us to find beauty in the non-sensible until we love that which is totally unrelated to earthly beauty and look on earthly beauty as a snare to keep us from the divine. In the same way we advance by leaving the formless and learning to perceive form, but our goal is that which is without form. The best of Matter is that which has some form. Soul is form to all of Matter. The Intellectual-Principle is

form to Soul. But the primal source from which all form has come is formless (6.7.28 and 33). To a certain extent form is reason, particularly in the realm of the Platonic Ideas, which Plotinus adopts as having their dwelling in the Intellectual-Principle. Certainly our perception of form comes through reason; and the Ideas, which are divine, purely intellectual form, must be seen through dialectic.

As the result of the training by dialectic the Soul achieves the Intellectual-Principle. The first principles of the science are given by the Intellectual-Principle itself. The rest dialectic devises for itself, uniting and dividing until it comes to perfect intellect. For, he says, we read that dialectic is the purest (*καθαρώτατον*) achievement of intellect and wisdom. Dialectic, then, is the final step after the Soul has been purified from Body. Yet it is itself a sort of katharsis. It is dialectic which determines the nature of the virtues which act as purifications. It is dialectic which purifies thought of earthly elements and presents it in universal terms. Dialectic is the means by which the Soul exerts its own absolute act of Virtue and obtains the vision of the Intellectual-Principle.

(4) *The First Katharsis Achieved.* In describing the actual vision of the Intellectual-Principle, Plotinus' language is at first purely metaphysical, finally almost mystical. The Soul's approach is by no means an accretion of knowledge, a perceiving of divine object by active subject. The Soul does not learn to comprehend the Intellectual-Principle as one studies to master the contents of a new book. This cannot be true for two reasons. First, the distinction between subject and object does not exist in the Intellectual-Principle. Knowing is an absolute, achieved state, not a process of becoming. Second, the Soul does not strive to comprehend the Intellectual-Principle but to become one with it. One must be careful to observe Plotinus' oft-repeated warning and not view his realms too concretely, either spatially or temporally. There is no difficulty in the concept of the Soul's identification with the Intellectual-Principle. The student who becomes an artist is not changed from one person into another. He is merely the same man developing powers which were always within him but hitherto entirely or partially unrecognized and dormant. The same divine essence is present always; according to the concentration of its powers, it is called Soul, Intellectual-Principle, or the One.

Man's ability to reason out these matters comes about partly through the fact that Soul, though the lowest of the three realms, is nevertheless intellective, partly because the Intellectual-Principle is in us as well as Soul, a part of us to which we are always rising (1.1.13). The Philonic conception of "By Light, Light" (*φῶς φωτῖ*) is directly paralleled by the Plotinian "Intellectual-Principle by Intellectual-Principle" (*νοῦς νῶ*).⁶ It is for this reason that the Soul aided by dialectic is able to bridge the gap even though its own intellectual powers are inferior.

The act of identification of Soul and Intellectual-Principle is simultaneously a self-realization and a loss of self. "We are most completely aware of ourselves when we are most completely identified with the object of our knowledge" (5.8.11). The man in such a state is like one possessed by a god. Giving himself completely to the inner divine intellections, he becomes no longer the seer but the seen, the perfect unity of subject and object. The vision itself, we are told, is seeing a god giving birth to beautiful offspring. It is beholding the reality of a functioning universe in its relation to divine cause. Plotinus resorts to the figures of Greek myth. Zeus, the Soul, is the sovereign of the visible universe. By beholding his beauty we may gain an impression of the greater beauty of his father Kronos, the Intellectual-Principle, who is fettered to an unchanging identity (5.8.13). Man's identification with the Intellectual-Principle is the experience of a sense of union between his intelligence or essential Being and the intellectual essence underlying all reality. It is the absorption of the restricted individual mind or soul into the ultimate, universal mind, through which alone it has power and Being.

The nature of the Intellectual-Principle has been the subject of lengthy discussion by many writers, and it need not be dealt with in detail here. Plotinus gives a good sentence description of it: "It is veritable Intellect which as such thinks of authentically existing beings and makes them exist. It is, then, authentic Being." The Intellectual-Principle is ultimate reality, which is identical with true intellection, absolute knowledge.

The consideration of the nature of the achieved vision of the Intellectual-Principle shows how each one of the steps previously discussed is necessary to attain it. First of all, the divine intellect

⁶ For a discussion of this conception in the works of Philo see E. R. Goodenough, *By Light, Light, The Mystic Gospel of Hellenistic Judaism* (Yale, 1935).

is separated from all sensual or perishable things. For this reason the virtues must be pursued as a means of separating the Soul from bodily interests. Second, the Intellectual-Principle is self-knowing. Thus the initiate must begin with self-introspection, learning to know his own nature as man and as a part of the divine. Third, it is pure intelligence. Hence the higher forms of Virtue are intellectualized, and the contemplative life is the only one of true value. Finally, the Intellectual-Principle is not only intelligence but reality; it is the intellection of Being. For this the only true approach must be dialectic. This science is, of course, intellectual, both in itself and in its being the culmination, the ideal form of the lower mental sciences, which must be mastered by all philosophers.⁷ In addition, it is the science of Being; and its achieved goal is the knowledge of Being, which is the Intellectual-Principle. Dialectic is not itself the Intellectual-Principle, but it is the final and only step which leads to the very heart of the Intellectual-Principle.

By dialectic, the precious part of philosophy, man frees himself even from the sciences and mental acts which have brought him so far upward. The change implied in Soul itself is discarded. He is still Soul, but he is the unchanging Intellectual-Principle as well. Finally even dialectic is left behind. It is the last rung of the ladder by which man has climbed out of the cave and stepped into the outer world.

THE APPROACH TO THE ONE

The Intellectual-Principle is the natural dwellingplace of the Soul. The One is to be apprehended only in those rare moments of mystic union, the Ekstasis, which Porphyry tells us that Plotinus experienced only four times in the course of their years together (*Vita* 23).⁸ Yet the memory of the vision remains even after the actual Ekstasis is a thing of the past, and it is only when the Soul possesses this memory and the knowledge that the vision may come

⁷ It is noteworthy that Plotinus gives less emphasis to the training of the human mind than does Plato. Human knowledge is everywhere neglected by Plotinus for the sake of dwelling on spiritual values. Though Plotinus' system is more definite than Plato's in emphasizing the presence of an Intellectual-Principle, it is the spiritualized Soul and not the glorified human intellect that attains the divine vision.

⁸ A. H. Armstrong presents a careful comparison of the nature of the One and of the Intellectual-Principle and their relation to the human soul in *The Architecture of the Intelligible Universe in the Philosophy of Plotinus* (Cambridge, 1940).

again, that life in the Intellectual-Principle can be lived to the fullest degree. Thus the Ekstasis, however rare, is necessary for the normal, perfect life of the Soul, which is led in the Intellectual-Principle.

As has been said, the vision of the One cannot be attained until the union of the Soul with the Intellectual-Principle has been achieved. "We must behold the One not by bringing in anything of sense or by taking into the Intellectual-Principle anything from Soul; but beholding the most pure by pure Intellectual-Principle and from the peak of the Intellectual-Principle" (6.9.3). Yet while the Soul is thus led to see that which the divine intellect contemplates, nevertheless before the actual identification with the One can come about, the Soul must be purified of those qualities which characterize the Intellectual-Principle as distinct from the One. These are multiplicity and intellection. Multiplicity in the second realm comes about through the fact that it is the home of the Ideas and that its contemplation of the One is in itself a denial of unity; for where there are one to contemplate and one to be contemplated, there is multiplicity. For the human Soul intellection in this realm is contemplation and meditation upon reality and divine cause. It is a sinking of oneself in a universal Mind. But this Mind is ever in quest of something higher, and by this questing intellection, the Soul arrives at the utter repose where there is no more desiring. Like the higher virtues, intellection aids at first in producing katharsis and in preparing the Soul for the final step. Yet ultimately it too is abandoned.

It may be well here to remark that the discarding of all specific quality as not belonging to the One does not necessarily imply a completely negative view of the nature of the One. The One is not absolute negation but absolute perfection. The constant negations which Plotinus applies to it are simply to emphasize by means of refusing to admit inadequate restrictive terms, the transcending positive aspect of the One. The Soul must empty itself of earthly qualities in order to take on the divine; it does not become empty in order to make itself a part of nothing. But the nature of the divine of which it becomes a part cannot be predicated in human terms. This view of the One as both the negation of all known qualities and yet perfect fullness is reflected in the purification which the human Soul must undergo. That is to say, the Soul must both purify itself of its weaknesses, of accretion, and concentrate its

powers, building up its strength so that it may be capable of containing the divine. The process of ridding the Soul of its limiting qualities must be accomplished before an approach can be made beyond them.

The One is also called by Plotinus "The Good," though the term has, of course, no ethical connotation but designates rather the universal *τέλειον* which is beyond all specific *τέλεια*. It will be recalled that Plotinus' final designation of a positive virtue found in the first stage of the ascent was the essential act of the Soul, the actual process of the Soul's contemplation of the Intellectual-Principle. With this conception of Virtue as a movement toward a higher realm of reality, we begin to approach Plotinus' theory of specific and absolute Good. Since already in the first step Virtue had thus become non-ethical, it is not surprising that now goodness becomes a matter of native activity exerted by one existent in reaching toward another. This is the central thought of the treatise *On the Primal Good and Its Secondary Forms* (1.7). In this essay, in which there is frequent confusion between the Good as absolute, motionless achievement and the Good as a method of leading the Soul upward, three significant points stand out. First, it is said that the Good for each entity—that is, its highest virtue—is its natural activity, which in the case of the rightly functioning Soul is ever upward to the Primal Good. On the higher plane the Soul's goodness is its perception of the Primal Good as being the true cause of the Soul's attraction to the Intellectual-Principle. This active desire for the Good, the reaching out for it is the method by which the Soul attains it. Second, the Soul is said to be able to achieve the Good, not only by reaching out for it but becoming like it. Here certainly is implied a positive conception of both the One and the method of attaining union with it. Finally, the Good is said to be possessed in Unity, Being, and Form. Of these only the first belongs in the Good itself. Again we have an example of the higher plane reached by means of those things which are to be abandoned once the goal is achieved. The Good, then, is the ultimate and may be attained by the Soul's exercising its natural inclination toward it.

It is clear that there can be in this second step no direct parallel to the part played by the first two classes of virtues in the first katharsis. Likewise self-intellection is no longer considered an adequate method (5.6.5). This might seem rather surprising since

the very essence of the Intellectual-Principle is self-intellection. For what other name could be given to a knowledge that is absolute with no distinction between subject and object? It may be that to have the Intellectual-Principle come to recognize the presence of the One within it as the result of conscious self-examination would imply a distinction between the knower and the known, which is just what Plotinus is vigorously denying. At any rate the contemplation of the One by the Intellectual-Principle is never the same as the Soul's vision of it; for the former demands a certain separation which in the case of the Ekstasis is denied. The Soul while it lives in the Intellectual-Principle shares in the divine contemplation, but it knows a still higher desire. In the Ekstasis the Soul is not the Intellectual-Principle contemplating. It is the One itself.

How are we to explain this transcending achievement? Is it by any known process other than intellection? And what name are we to give intellection on this highest plane? Taking the last question first, we may recall that in the earlier step, the last and ultimately effective method of bringing the Soul to the union with the Intellectual-Principle was the pursuit of dialectic. At that phase of his discussion Plotinus explicitly stated that dialectic was but a part, although a precious part, of philosophy. Since dialectic, the lower of the two, brought the Soul to the Intellectual-Principle, is it not possible, or rather necessary, to assume that philosophy plays at least a part in bringing the Soul to the vision of the One? There is one passage in which, as it seems to me, Plotinus clearly and beyond question applies the term philosophy to the Soul's attempt to know the One. He is speaking in the last *Ennead* of the pain that comes to the Soul when it tries to grasp the conception of absolute unity. He continues, "Soul must see in its own way; this is by coalescence, unification; but in seeking thus to know the Unity, it is prevented by that very unification from recognizing what it has found; it cannot distinguish itself from the object of this intuition. Nonetheless, it is necessary for one to do thus if he is going to strive to comprehend the Unity by philosophy" (6.9.3). Certainly there is no term other than philosophy to be applied to intellectual activity exerted in the effort to comprehend divinity, no other, that is, once the lower forms of reason have been ruled out. If it is the task of dialectic to bring the Soul into the Intellectual-Principle, where else can be the field of philosophy save at the height

of the Intellectual-Principle, standing with the Soul as it prepares to experience the Ekstasis?

Granted that it is intellection as philosophy which plays an important part in this final step, what specifically is its function, and is it in itself all sufficient? That intellection alone is not enough is made very clear. This may be partly because intellection is not present in the One itself. For true intellection is a reaching toward the highest Good, and the One cannot have a reaching out when there is nothing beyond it to which it can aspire. Partly responsible in all probability is simply the fact that in the ultimate vision Plotinus like most mystics demands that there come forth power from the Primal Source and that without it man is powerless.

To analyze in cut and dried fashion the almost poetic description which Plotinus gives of the Ekstasis is as unfair as for the present purpose it is necessary. The poetic language, however, is the inevitable result of his attempt to describe something surpassing human knowledge and never a screen for inadequate formulation of ideas; and there are several definite conceptions which stand out clearly. In most of these passages there is an accompanying statement to the effect that intellection is finally abandoned. In the treatise *On the Multiplicity of the Ideal Forms* we are told that when by the love of Beauty, conceived here as the love of form, we approach the first principle of Beauty, which is formless, we are to think of it not as attained by the Soul but as coming to the Soul, which is present to receive it after turning from its old environment and preparing itself as beautifully as possible and coming into likeness with the divine. The Soul now perceives the presence manifested within her. The *ἐν αὐτῇ* is possible because there are no longer two but one. While the vision remains, distinction is lost—and Plotinus brings in here the parallel of the earthly union of lovers. With true judgment the Soul perceives that it has reached the ultimate goal of its desire and that there is nothing higher. The truth which it perceives now it can affirm beyond doubt, but it will make the affirmation later and silently. By this Plotinus probably means that the state is not one of conscious knowing but that while it cannot later be put into words for others, its truth and power will not be lost to him who has experienced it. Now the Soul realizes the inferiority of all which it formerly accepted. Even intellection it will discard; for intellection is movement, and this it does not desire. It is through becoming itself Intellectual-Principle

that the Soul now experiences the vision; by becoming intellectualized it has been able to take its stand in that intellectual realm which it first contemplated. But once catching a glimpse of a higher realm, the Soul leaves the lower just as a person will contemplate a beautiful house only until its greater master has appeared. "The Soul now knows no movement since the Supreme knows none; it is now not even Soul since the Supreme is not in life but above life; it is no longer Intellectual-Principle, for the Supreme has not intellection, and the likeness must be perfect; this grasping is not even by intellection, for the Supreme is not known intellectually" (6.7.34–35).

Following this passage Plotinus reviews again the intellectual steps by which the Soul has reached its present position. He concludes with a significant sentence. At the moment preceding the Ekstasis the seeker is still striving upward with his intellectual capacities, "but *suddenly swept beyond it all by the very crest of the wave of Intellect 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 itself is the vision."⁹ Clearly the vision comes about as the result of both intellection and the power of the One. The latter is predominant, but it acts almost simultaneously with the wave of intellection. Neither alone would be sufficient.

In the final section of the last *Ennead* Plotinus presents a sort of summary of his ideas on the nature of the Ekstasis and its attainment. He repeats that in the Ekstasis there are not two but one. It is not a vision perceived but a unity apprehended, and the image of it, if the seeker will but remember, will remain with him. While it lasts, there is no passion, no outgoing desire, no reason, no intellection, no individual self. In perfect stillness, he has attained utter rest. He is like one who has progressed to the innermost sanctuary beyond the temple images which he formerly worshipped. The union is not a vision but a going forth from self (ἐκστασις), a simplification (ἁπλωσησις), a renunciation (ἐπίδοσις αὐτοῦ), a reach toward contact (ἐφεισις πρὸς ἀφήν), a repose (στάσις), and a meditation toward adjustment (περινώησις πρὸς ἐφαρμογήν). Any other means of seeing fails. Even those who have not seen the Supreme are aware of its existence since they will be aware of their own source,

⁹ 6.7.36: ἐξελεχθείς δὲ τῷ αὐτῷ τοῦ νοῦ οἷον κύματι καὶ ὑψοῦ ὑπ' αὐτοῦ οἷον οἰδήσαντος. See also 6.9.4.

will know Principle by Principle, and possess a craving that is never satisfied until the Ekstasis is achieved. The Soul when it has reached this height is not in something alien but in itself. It is not Being but beyond Being, self-gathered in the Supreme. The self uplifted is an image of the Supreme. If we pass beyond image to archetype, we have won the ultimate goal. If we fall back, we must reascend once more, knowing ourselves all order again, lightened of our burden, advancing through Virtue to the Intellectual-Principle and through the wisdom of this to the One. This is the life of the gods and godlike and blessed men, freedom from all that is here, taking no pleasure in what is here, a flight of the solitary to the solitary.

In general outline the course of the Soul's experience on the highest plane is not radically different from what it underwent in the lower stages. Formerly it purified itself of all which prevented it from being wholly Soul, then all which kept it from becoming Intellectual-Principle; and it emerged pure intellect. In this last stage the all-transcending nature of the One demands that katharsis be complete. Nothing which can be given any name of quality may remain; and so multiplicity and intellection, which are the only two properties remaining, must be discarded. The former involves a loss of self-awareness. This has already been met in the approach to the Intellectual-Principle, but there Plotinus was concerned with the self as a particular human being with individual interests. Here it is a higher psychological awareness of the Soul as *experiencing* something else rather than as *being* it which is being sacrificed. It must be remembered, however, that the change is not a negation. As the Soul becomes something greater, it is itself infinitely expanded. It has not lost itself in nothingness.

As has been said, man's intellectual activity on this highest plane is called by Plotinus philosophy. Unlike dialectic on the lower level it does not take the Soul quite all the way on its journey. This does not mean that philosophy is mere ratiocination or that it is in any way at all identical with ordinary human mental processes. The fact that it is infinitely above dialectic, which is itself divine, is sufficient refutation for any such argument. Philosophy is a sort of ideal dialectic. As the latter bridges the gap between human and divine intellection, so philosophy perfects divine intellection and leads the way to that which is beyond all intellectual comprehension.

I have tried to emphasize throughout this discussion that while the Soul is required to strip itself of all that is alien to the One, there is always a simultaneous positive process of building up and concentrating its powers. This is the preparation on the part of the Soul of which Plotinus speaks when he refers to the preparation and adornment which the Soul has taken on before it awaits the coming of the Ekstasis as the result of power from above. Philosophy is the means by which the Soul thus prepares itself. It is learning to see that there is more than intellect, realizing that one can by the act of recognizing that fact prepare to experience it. After the Ekstasis has been achieved, philosophy translates the experience into terms valuable for the more normal course of the Soul's life in the Intellectual-Principle. Saying that the final Ekstasis comes as the result of a power outside the Soul, that the Soul receives it rather than takes it, is likely to involve us in more of an idea of separation both temporal and spatial than Plotinus would have us hold. The completion of the philosophical preparation, the instant of perfect readiness, and the actual absorbing of the Soul into the One by Itself are simultaneous. The "crest of the wave of intellect" raises the Soul into the mystic power. Without the intellect the Soul could not achieve the Ekstasis any more than it could be absorbed into the divine union without divine power.

Philosophy, we may conclude, has been the method by which the entire process of katharsis has been accomplished. Philosophy is the means of learning to know the moral virtues and the intellectual ones. Philosophy possesses as a precious part of itself dialectic, which enables the Soul to complete the first step in its ascent. Philosophy teaches the Soul by each one of these means to cast off all in itself that is inferior, and to concentrate, to perfect all that is divine. Finally it is the intellectual perception that there is something beyond all intellect, and it is the activity of the intellect which prepares the Soul to receive that power. As the subordinate parts of philosophy have accomplished the early phases of purification, so true philosophy achieves the final katharsis. As the last step, philosophy is itself rejected, but it is rejected only because the nature of the One is so great that anything which we can comprehend must be for that very reason discarded. Philosophy is rejected because it is not the One, and the One is all that can remain.

The theory of katharsis which Plotinus presents seems to me a remarkable attempt at resolving the problem of rationalism versus mysticism. He is, of course, not the only intellectual mystic, but he is important for having given us one of the most detailed and logical expositions of such a way of life that can be found. He does not make the mistake of attempting to describe in specific terms an experience which transcends the specific. Yet in proving the necessity of recognizing the existence, desirability, and importance of such an experience, he reasons in terms of almost mathematical precision. If we grant his conclusion that there is something beyond intellect to be obtained, we must admit that the steps leading to it are entirely consistent. Since the primal cause cannot be defined in terms material or mental, it is fitting to hold that it cannot be reached by efforts purely physical or intellectual. On the other hand, since it is only through the intellect that one can grasp the possibility of the goal to be reached, it is logical to maintain that intellectual activity is the highest duty and privilege of man and that it is right to sacrifice to it all other pursuits. In the philosophical approach there is an ever greater intellectualization, but Plotinus never falls into the error of worshipping the means instead of the end.

Katharsis is not in its practical application negative but positive. No lesser thing is given up until a greater has been seen. Furthermore, it is not really a denial of the individual. By katharsis one develops within himself those powers which would otherwise never be recognized. Earthly life, moreover, is not only a preparation for a life after death; for the Ekstasis comes to the living man, to him who lives most fully that intellectual life which distinguishes him from other creatures.