Avocatio, Rhetoric, and the Technique of Contemplation in Plotinus

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> Our country from which we came is there, our Father is there. How shall we travel to it, where is our way of escape? We cannot get there on foot; for our feet only carry us everywhere in this world, from one country to another. You must not get ready a carriage, either, or a boat. Let all these things go, and do not look. Shut your eyes, and change to and wake another way of seeing, which everyone has but few use. (Plotinus 1.6.8.21–27)[1]

In this familiar passage Plotinus implies that, apart from philosophical argument concerning the intelligible world, there must be a technique by which we may approach to it. Clearly it involves an unfamiliar means of travel, one that is achieved by a change in our vision. It is the purpose of the present paper to explore the technique of contemplation in Plotinus which, while it presupposes philosophical reasoning, is distinguishable from it. We shall see that Plotinus furnishes this technique by expanding the Epicurean method of *avocatio* from ethical to contemplative uses. In this adaptation rhetoric enters into a dialectical relationship with reason and achieves the legitimate role that Plato assigns to it.

Epicurean philosophy offers a way to peace in the technique of *avocatio*, a calling away from passion.[2] In his *avocatio* the Epicurean philosopher Philodemus of Gadara practises a method of envisioning.[3] Philodemus uses the phrase "to place before the eyes," τιθέναι πρὸ ὀμμάτων or ἐν ὄψει, to prescribe

1. The line references to Plotinus are to P. Henry and H.-R. Schwyzer, *Plotini Opera*, 3 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1964–82) (the *editio minor*). The translations are from A.H. Armstrong, *Plotinus*, 7 vols. (London and Cambridge: Heinemann, 1966–88).

2. Cf. P. Rabbow, *Seelenführung. Methodik der Exerzitien in der Antike* (Munich: Köselverlag, 1954), 282; Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations* III.32–33: *Levitationem autem aegritudinis in duabus rebus ponit* [Epicurus], *avocatione a cogitando molestia et revocatione ad contemplandas voluptates.*

3. For the view that such envisioning stems from Philodemus rather than from Epicurus, see F.M. Schroeder, "Philodemus: *Avocatio* and the Pathos of Distance in Lucretius and Vergil," in *Vergil, Philodemus, and the Augustans*, ed. D. Armstrong, J. Fish, P.A. Johnston and M. Skinner (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2004), 141 and note 6.

Dionysius, Vol. XXX, Dec. 2012, 147–60.

this act of imagination.[4] In the *De Ira* Philodemus counsels the student (or, on the medical and psychotherapeutic analogy of Epicureanism, the patient[5]) to envision the face of the angry man, flushed and red and swollen, with flashing eyes. The student then accomplishes a distance from this disturbing image and, returned to himself, also gains a distance from his own anger.[6]

Epicurus teaches that we need not fear death: My death will be an objective fact for my family and friends, but cannot be a subjective fact for me.[7] Doubtless Epicurus thought that the doctrine alone would accomplish *ataraxia* (although students were counselled to repeat the principal doctrines over and over again to each other so that they would sink in).[8]

In Philodemus' *De Morte* the disciple has already accepted intellectually that death is not to be feared because his death cannot be a subjective experience for him. Yet he objects, in the face of this argument, that he still fears a particular kind of death. When the disciple expresses to Philodemus his fear of death by drowning, Philodemus pushes the neurosis further by imagining him devoured by fish. The fear of death on land is extended to imagine him being eaten by maggots or worms, or burning on the pyre. The good Epicurean will reflect in each case upon the fact that he should have no such *post mortem* apprehension.[9] Philodemus as psychotherapist is leading his patient to work through the species of fear that he may surmount it. He takes into account the affective apparatus of his interlocutor.[10]

Toward an understanding of the technique of envisioning, we may explore a text from the Stoic Marcus Aurelius which manifests, not the *praemeditatio* familiar from Stoicism, but an Epicurean *avocatio*. Marcus Aurelius was indeed capable of making a Stoic application of Epicureanism.[11]

Marcus Aurelius, perhaps reflecting his own experience as Emperor, recommends the following exercise for those angry and obsessed by the wickedness of those around them:

4. *De Ira*: *Edizione traduzione e commento a cura di G. Indelli* (Naples: Bibliopolis,1988), Col. I.2.20–25; Col III.113–14; Col. IV.16.

5. On Epicureanism and medicine see R.S. Kilpatrick, "*Amicus Medicus*: Medicine and Epicurean Therapy in the *De Rerum Natura*," *Memoirs of the American Academy at Rome* 41 (1986): 69–100.

6. Frs. 6 and 13 Indelli.

7. *Kyr. Dox.* II ap. D.L. X.139; *Letter to Menoeceus* ap. D.L. X.124–25.

8. *Letter to Menoeceus* ap. D.L. X.135.

9. *De Morte*: *Philodemus over den Dood*, ed. T. Kuiper (Amsterdam, 1925), XXXII. Col. 3. 0.2–XXXIII. Col. 4. 0.5.

10. On envisioning in Philodemus see further Schroeder, "Philodemus: *Avocatio* and the Pathos of Distance," 139–43.

11. Cf. P. Hadot (trans. M. Chase), *The Inner Citadel*: *The Meditations of Marcus Aurelius* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1998), 58.

> Think, let us say, of the times of Vespasian; and what do you see? Men and women busy marrying, bringing up children, sickening, dying, fighting, feasting, chaffering, farming, flattering, bragging, envying, scheming, calling down curses, grumbling at fate, loving, hoarding, coveting thrones and dignities. Of all that life, not a trace survives today. (*Meditations* 4.32)[12]

Marcus is first engaged in his own anger and its particular targets. Then he is summoned to an act of reflection that detaches him from that state: He is asked to envision the reign of Vespasian and all of its intrigues. He is further invited to another act of imagination: All those who were then caught up in such passions are now dead. He is bidden to destroy the image that was previously created of the reign of Vespasian by reflecting that all the actors in that drama have passed away. Returning to his own world, Marcus is detached from and no longer engaged in his own anger and its objects. The double act of imagining and then obliterating the image that has been advanced occasions an affective displacement. Marcus' emotion and attention are given a new focus in the image of Vespasian's reign that detaches him from his own concerns and feelings. When that image is in turn destroyed with the reflection upon mortality, he is delivered from passion.[13]

It is important that not one, but two images, are projected by this meditation. First, of course, the image of Vespasian's reign. Secondly, the image of the disciple's own mind and spirit. His mind is occupied by the particular targets of his rage. The anger that he feels toward his enemies is perhaps his normal state of consciousness, so much so that no alternative may be entertained. The image of Vespasian's reign shows him rage, not toward his own targets, but toward others, now dead, and a hatred, not his own, but that of others who have passed on. The effect of this image is to disengage his anger from its particular targets so that he can see the anger itself and distance himself from his normal state of mind. The image of the functioning of his own mind frees him from his unhappy state of consciousness and allows him the alternative of serenity. I select the passage about the reign of Vespasian because it exemplifies so well the movements of engagement and detachment I wish to discuss.

A similar type of imagery that occurs in Marcus Aurelius portrays life as a stage and all of us as players: Engagement in the contemplation of the spectacle is followed by detachment as we realize that the events beheld do not really affect us:

12. Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*, translated with an introduction by M. Staniforth (Hammondsworth: Penguin,1964). This translation shall be used throughout.

13. Cf. Schroeder, "Philodemus: *Avocatio* and the Pathos of Distance," 139–40.

> In a mind that is disciplined and purified there is no taint of corruption, no unclean spot nor festering sore. Such a man's life fate can never snatch away unfulfilled, as it were an actor walking off in mid-performance before the play is finished. (*Meditations* 3.8)

Here there is an incipient image of all the world as a stage that reduces the actions of our life to the events in a play, something that could be observed, now with engagement, then with detachment. The detachment is achieved as Marcus underlines the difference between life and the stage for the wise man: As his inner life is alone important, he can exit from the story line without tears. We may compare the following:

> You are not ejected from the city by any unjust judge or tyrant, but by the selfsame Nature which brought you into it; just as when an actor is dismissed by the manager who engaged him. "But, I have played no more than three of the five acts." Just so; in your drama of life, three acts are all the play. Its point of completeness is determined by him who formerly sanctioned your creation, and today sanctions your dissolution. Neither of these decisions lay within yourself. Pass on your way, then, with smiling face, under the smile of him who lets you go. (*Meditations* 12.36)

The play image appears in this wonderful passage of asyndeton:

> An empty pageant; a stage play; flocks of sheep, herds of cattle; a tussle of spearmen; a bone flung among a pack of curs; a crumb tossed into a pond of fish; ants, loaded and labouring; mice, scared and scampering; puppets, jerking on their strings—that is life. In the midst of it all you must take your stand, good-temperedly and without disdain, yet always aware that a man's worth is no greater than the worth of his ambitions. (*Meditations* 7.3)

We may notice here how the rapid succession of images, all portraying the nugatory character of life's ordinary concerns, is designed to detach us from our passions and immediate preoccupations.

On the whole, Plotinus is not interested in such paraenetic material as we find in Philodemus and Marcus, although it does make its appearance in the *Enneads*. In the treatise *On Providence* he offers the image of the world as a stage and us as merely players, with ourselves as dispassionate spectators of murders and the sackings of cities as if they and the accompanying passions do not affect us:

> We should be spectators of murders, and all deaths, and takings and sackings of cities, as if they were on the stages of theatres, all changes of scenery and costume and acted wailings and weepings. (3.2.15.43–47)

Socrates too must act in but not be engaged by the drama of life:

> But toys, too, are taken seriously by those who do not know how to be serious and are toys themselves. But if anyone joins in their play and suffers their sort of sufferings, he must know that he has tumbled into a children's game and put off the play-costume in which he was dressed. And even if Socrates, too, may play sometimes, it is by the outer Socrates that he plays. But we must consider this further point, too, that one must not take weeping and lamenting as evidence of the presence of evils, for children, too, weep and wail over things that are not evils. (3.2.15.56–62)

Here, as in Philodemus and Marcus, an affective displacement is achieved through a process of engagement and detachment as we realize apathy toward the misfortunes of this life as if they were events on a stage that do not really concern us.

In paraenetic rhetorical texts from Philodemus and Marcus Aurelius we have encountered techniques of imagery that involve the motions of engagement and detachment. These techniques achieve an affective displacement that delivers the soul of the disciple from passion. We have further seen that such material occurs in Plotinus. What I wish to show now is that such techniques are employed in the thought experiments of Plotinus, not to ethical, but to metaphysical and spiritual ends free of the ethical imperialism that informs the texts of Philodemus and Marcus Aurelius.

Plotinus bids us (6.4.7) to consider the image of a hand that exerts force upon a plank. The force of the hand is present throughout the whole plank without its being divided. In the same manner, the Soul is present to the many particulars of the sensible world without division and loss of unity. Then Plotinus rectifies the image by subtracting from the plank its corporeal character. He then advances to a supplementary image by asking us to imagine a luminous mass at the heart of a transparent sphere. He then further invites us to subtract from the source of illumination its bodily nature. It was not *qua* corporeal but *qua* luminous that the luminous source was present to the illumined sphere. Indeed light, even the light that we see with our eyes, is incorporeal. In subtracting the corporeal character of the images offered, Plotinus is practising abstraction (*aphairesis*) that consists in non-privative negation.

I wish now to suggest that this passage has another dimension, beyond the ostensible thought experiment: One of spiritual direction. Notice that the moments of engagement and detachment that we have discovered in Philodemus and Marcus Aurelius are present here. We are invited first, in the case of the hand or plank, or of the luminous mass and the transparent sphere, to engage in a task of the imagination. Then we are asked to think something away. As we follow the motions of this argument in terms, not of reason, but of affect, we are rendered capable of envisioning and entering into the world of incorporeal reality that they are meant to describe. After

exploring the image of the light and sphere, Plotinus remarks, making an epideictic use of the second person:

> Suppose that someone took away (ὑφέλοι) the bulk of the body, but kept the power of the light, would you still say that the light was somewhere, or would it be equally present over the whole outer sphere? You will no longer rest in your thought on the place where it was before, and you will not any more say where it comes from or where it is going, but you will be puzzled and put in amazement when, fixing your gaze now here and now there in the spherical body, you yourself perceive the light. (6.4.7.32–39)

The act of thinking away corporeal reality disorients us, breaks through the operations of discursive reason, and opens us up to spiritual illumination. We think away the sensible world. Normally we would consider omnipresence from the perspective of the sensible world to which God is present. Now we understand divine omnipresence from within. In this metaphysical and spiritual exercise in engagement and detachment, Plotinus transcends the ethical preoccupations of the texts in Philodemus and Marcus Aurelius that we have examined. Notice that the same argument runs once through the imperium of reason and again through the domain of affect. To the rational argument of abstraction there corresponds in rhetoric a removal of imagery designed to achieve affective displacement.[14]

In his study of Plotinian rhetoric, Phillips argues:

> [Plotinus] seems to have conceived two levels of language, one directed toward the soul which has escaped the body and ascended to the intelligible realm (argument from "necessity"), and the other, which Plotinus terms "persuasion," for the benefit of the embodied soul. His notion of the value and efficacy of rhetoric fits the second of these levels: it is a form of metaphor providing an image of reality (the intelligible world). The embodied soul is unable to understand the nature of the intelligible world in itself, and so must resort to perceptual imagery.[15]

It should rather be said that Plotinus directs both discursive reason and persuasion to the embodied soul. Because the conclusions of discursive reason, though cogent, cannot be grasped by the affective apparatus of the embodied soul, persuasion and imagery are used to help it approximate the conclusions of discursive reason.

14. On the affective character of Plotinian thought experiments, cf. S. Rappe, "Self-Knowledge and subjectivity in the *Enneads*," in *The Cambridge Companion to Plotinus*, ed. L.P. Gerson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 259–66; F.M. Schroeder, "Plotinus and Language," *The Cambridge Companion to Plotinus*, 336–55, especially 336–37 (on the present passage).

15. J.F. Phillips, *The Prose Style of Plotinus: Rhetoric and Philosophy in the Enneads* (Diss. Wisconsin-Madison, 1980), 336.

In the treatise *On Free Will and the Will of the One*, Plotinus is refuting the view that "came to be" (συνέβη) could be predicated of the One. He argues that the One could not come to be by chance because it never comes to be and there is nothing out of which it could come to be. The things that come to be are after it. He then seeks to account for the false train of thought that raises this question in the first place (6.8.11.13–33). Our problem arises because we think of the One as being in some place, a kind of vast emptiness that exists in our imagination (φαντασίᾳ, line 17) and then introducing the One into it, as if from outside. We must remove (ἀνέλοντα, line 23) the difficulty by not thinking in spatial terms at all. We must not put anything around it in a kind of circle. As it is before all things, "happened to be" cannot be its predicate. Here Plotinus reconstructs the imaginative process by which we fall into a false pattern of enquiry and then shows how it might be removed by a kind of surgical procedure. In the next chapter he reflects:

> Well then, is he not what he is? And is he himself really master of his being what he is or transcending being? For again the soul is not in the least persuaded by what has been said (πεισθεῖσα τοῖς εἰρημένοις) and sees no way out of its difficulty. (6.8.12.1–3)

In 6.8.11, reason has been unable to persuade the soul which demands imagery. He then proceeds to show how the phrase "master of his being" is inapplicable to the One which cannot be master *of* anything, since it would then be two and not one and how it cannot be master of its being since it is superior to being. He comments (6.8.13.1–5) that all of our normal vocabulary for describing necessity and freedom is inadequate but must be introduced for the sake of persuasion (πειθοῦς χάριν). The word οἷον "as it were," (equivalent to our quotation marks) should constantly qualify our vocabulary about the One (6.8.13.49–50). So we must constantly practise bracketing when using language borrowed from our experience about the One. Persuasion here has the pedestrian sense of using language that we know to be inadequate through its implicit duality because it might help the mind to understand something of the One's volition. Plotinus returns (6.8.18.1–5) to the circle imagery eschewed in 6.8.11, but with language that suggests the inadequacy of the image—the One is at once outside and encompassing, inside and the source or centre from which all depend.

Yet persuasion is not confined to the function of a *pis aller*. Plotinus is in these thought experiments also exercising a kind of therapy. He is showing us the false and idolatrous habits of our thinking about the intelligible world. He introduces and brings into our consciousness the images of the hand and the plank, of the luminous centre and the sphere, of the centre and the circle only in order to exorcise them. The therapy of Plotinus is addressed to the passion of fear:

> What then could the One be, and what nature could it have? There is nothing surprising in its being difficult to say, when it is not even easy to say what Being or Form is; but we do have a knowledge based upon the Forms. But in proportion as the soul goes toward the formless, since it is utterly unable to comprehend it because it is not delimited and, so to speak, stamped by a richly varied stamp, it slides away and is afraid that it may have nothing at all. (6.9.3.1–6)

The soul fears that in approaching that which is no thing it may have nothing. The therapy is to work through the image generating habit of our minds to the point at which we are empty to receive the One.

As we have seen, Plotinus does not discount intellectual enquiry in favour of moral persuasion. At the same time, he borrows the technique of affective displacement, not toward moral purification, but toward a deliberate disorientation of our cognitive patterns. Marcus observes:

> Thus to a man of sensitiveness and sufficiently deep insight into the workings of the universe, almost everything, even if it be no more than a by-product of something else, seems to add its meed of extra pleasure. Such a man will view the grinning jaws of real lions and tigers as admiringly as he would an artist's or sculptor's imitation of them. (*Meditations* 3.2)

Notice the use that Marcus makes here of plastic art. A work of art may engross our attention or be admired with affective distance. The habit of distancing ourselves from what the art displays may then be applied to gaining the sort of philosophical autism that Marcus and the Stoics are seeking.

Now the images advanced by Plotinus are not plastic art as in the passage from Marcus that we discussed, but icons generated by the mind. Like the images of art, however, they may be contemplated either with engagement or detachment. As in 5.3.6 the soul must acknowledge its iconic character in order to transcend it, so must the soul recognize its icon-building nature as it suspends the images it will always produce in its attempt to understand the intelligible object.

In Buddhistic meditation, one does not dismiss, but first recognizes and then suspends the images of the mind. Plotinus is too wise to ask us to cease from image making, for that is the whole habit of our minds, certainly of his mind, since his imagery is so intricate, abundant, and compelling. What he is asking us to do, I suggest, is to recognize the images for what they are and to gain both intellectual and affective distance from them.

As we have seen, then, Phillips advances the model that reason and persuasion address respectively the disembodied and the embodied soul. I prefer the notion that both discursive reason and persuasion are addressed to the embodied soul of the philosopher, with persuasion supplementing reason. On another model, both reason and rhetoric are addressed to the embodied

soul. Reason prevails and carries necessity in its argument concerning the nature of the intelligible world and our dependence upon it. Reason persuades us that such and such must be the case. Yet the argument does not carry persuasion, since the embodied soul cannot internalize it on the level of affect. On this other model, rhetoric succeeds, not just in persuading us that something is the case by providing us with approximate imagery, but in bringing the soul into union with the object of its quest. When that union is achieved, the soul has a noetic certainty that discursive reason cannot deliver. Persuasion is dissolved in the moment of its realization in an act of imaginative transcendence. The soul that was embodied becomes disembodied, so that the wall that Phillips would erect between persuasion and necessity, rhetoric and reason, and the embodied and disembodied states of the soul is torn down. There is a greater fluidity among these distinctions than Phillips' model would have us understand.

Plotinus regards apodeictic argument as being cogent, of having necessity (ἀνάγκη), but as lacking persuasion (πειθώ). The distinction that Plotinus draws in 5.3.6 between persuasion and necessity is itself found in Plato's *Phaedrus* 260d4–9 where personified Rhetoric claims that she never compels, but persuades.[16] In the opening chapters of 5.3, *On the Knowing Hypostases*, Plotinus seeks to solve the sceptical conundrum that attaches to self-knowledge: If I know myself, then the knowing part will be one thing and the part known another. Then will that knowing part know itself and, if so, will it not then further be divided into knower and known to infinite regress?

Plotinus proceeds to argue that while indeed discursive thought continues to present this problem, discursive thought may be regressed to the noetic thought of Intellect in which there is no division between knowing subject and known object. Reflecting upon his own argument, Plotinus proceeds in this chapter to argue that the soul, to be persuaded, must reflect upon its own iconic character, i.e., that its thought is an image dependent upon the archetype of Intellect (5.3.6.1–11). It knows what it sees and what it speaks and, in this diminished sense, knows itself.

Plotinus enjoins: "But since the things which it speaks are above, or come to it from above, whence it also comes itself, it could happen to it, since it is a rational principle and receives things akin to it, and fits them to the traces in itself, in this way to know itself (οὕτω τοι γινώσκειν ἑαυτό). Let it then transpose the image to the true Intellect (μεταθέτω τοίνυν καὶ ἐπὶ τὸν ἀληθῆ νοῦν τὴν εἰκόνα) (5.3.6.25–29)." Does Plotinus mean simply that examination of our own imperfect self-knowledge and reflection on its derivation from Intellect may persuade the soul that Intellect is self-knowledge without exteriority and without regress? But such knowledge *that* the thought of

16. Cf. Laws 718b2–3; 719e7–8; 722b4–723b6 and Phillips, *Prose Style of Plotinus*, 6–8.

Intellect was of that nature had already been formulated by discursive reason as a necessary conclusion. The knowledge here is not knowledge that Intellect is so, but self-knowledge, i.e., the soul must realize the *telos* of self-knowledge in identifying with the perfect self-knowledge of Intellect.

Apodeictic proof is not sufficient, for while it has necessity, it has not persuasion. Notice that when the soul *is* persuaded, it *ceases to be persuaded*, because persuasion has its locus in soul *qua* soul. When it enters upon the certainty of thought in Intellect, it leaves persuasion behind. Now since the rational discourse that lacked persuasion is not the thought of Intellect, it can prove *that* discursive thought is dependent upon noetic thought, but it can never, while remaining what it is, enter upon noetic thought. Thus persuasion is more effective than apodeictic proof in bringing the soul to the proper end of its itinerary, *viz.* union with Intellect. Of course, it must be remembered that such persuasion is prepared by rational enquiry.

The soul has followed an itinerary from necessity, to persuasion, to necessity. It has proceeded from the necessity of logical argument concerning the self-knowledge of Intellect, to persuasion, to the higher necessity that can exist only in that perfection of knowledge that is perfect self-knowledge. In the moment that persuasion succeeds, it is overcome. So is its instrument, the image. In this case the image is the mind of the embodied soul, now joined in union with the self-knowledge of Intellect.[17]

This chain of enquiry might surprise the student of Plato. The reader of such dialogues as the *Protagoras* or the *Gorgias* is used to the Socratic opposition between philosophy and rhetoric. If persuasion belongs to rhetoric, as it does in Plotinus and elsewhere, then the opposition between philosophy and rhetoric familiar from Plato is overcome in the thought of the founder of Neoplatonism. If I speak of a certain superiority or greater success on the part of rhetoric over reason, I should qualify this statement by saying that in Plotinus philosophy and rhetoric, persuasion and necessity are not in separate compartments: They exist rather in a relation of complementary dialectical tension. Of course, while Plato is critical of contemporary rhetoric, he does open a door for a true rhetoric, purged of sophistry.[18] Plotinus could say that his rhetoric is that true rhetoric.

Both in the Plotinian thought experiments and in their rhetorical application to the education of the soul, something is represented to the mind, e.g.,

17. On the soul's self-reflection upon its iconic nature and self-knowledge, cf. W. Beierwaltes, *Selbsterkenntnis und Erfahrung der Einheit. Plotins Enneade V.3. Text, Übersetzung, Interpretation, Erläuterungen* (Frankfurt-am-Main: Klostermann, 1991), 113–17 and my review of this book, *Ancient Philosophy* 14 (1994): 469–75. On the respective roles of πειθώ and ἀνάγκη in Plotinian rhetoric, cf. Phillips, *Prose Style of Plotinus,* 3–29.

18. Cf. *Phaedrus* 277a6–278b4.

the images of the light and the sphere. Such a representation is an act of the imagination. Studies of imagination (*phantasia*) in Plotinus have focused upon the philosophical meanings of the word.[19] Yet there is another and rhetorical sense that informs its use in Plotinus. Marcus Aurelius, in an exercise of *avocatio*, counsels us to dismiss resentment by imagining a pig squealing under the sacrificial knife (10.28). Marcus employs the verb *phantazesthai*. The extra-philosophical or rhetorical use of *phantasia* and its cognates is attested elsewhere in literary criticism and art-criticism. Longinus (3.1) remarks that inferior poetry is "confused in its imagery" (τεθορύβηται ταῖς φαντασίαις). Philostratus, in the *Life of Apollonius of Tyana* 6.19, presents the argument that *phantasia* is greater than *mimêsis* (imitation) in that whereas imitation has reference to sensible models, imagination fashions art from that which

19. Imagination (φαντασία) occupies a low place among our faculties in classical Greek philosophy and is parasitic on sensation (Plato, *Sophist* 264a4–6; Aristotle, *De Anima* 3.3). In Plotinus it is mostly concerned with the sensible world and sensation has its end in imagination and memory (1.8.15.18–19; 4.3.29.22–26; 6.8.3.10–12). Yet Plotinus also distinguishes between a faculty of the imagination belonging to the lower soul and a faculty of the imagination belonging to the upper soul. He distinguishes as well between a faculty of memory belonging to the lower soul and a faculty of memory belonging to the upper soul. The faculty of imagination in each case works in tandem with the faculty of memory occupying the same level, so that what is imagined in each case is also remembered. The two faculties are distinct as are the images they generate. Yet they co-exist. The distinction between the two faculties is problematic when viewed on a static model. If the faculties and their images and memories are distinct, is not the unity of the human being compromised? On the dynamic model provided by the procession of the lower from the higher soul, if the two levels of soul dwell together in harmony, the two faculties achieve a unity of function: The two different images generated are perceived as one. The higher imagination is concerned with intelligible objects, the lower with sensible objects and imagination serves as a bridge between the sensible and intelligible worlds. Upon death, the two faculties of imagination are parted (4.3.31). The higher soul has no need for the affections of the latter in its imagination and memory (4.3.32). Because the two kinds of memory are dependent upon imagination, they remember in representational form. The imagination reflects as in a mirror the activity of Intellect, but in a representational form: Thus imagination serves as the foundation of self-awareness (4.3.30; cf. 1.4.10). For a recent discussion of the philosophical uses of imagination in Plotinus with further reflections on imagination and opinion and imagination and immortality, see M.J. Nyvlt, *Aristotle and Plotinus on Intellect. Monism and Dualism Revisited* (Lanham, Boulder, New York, Toronto, Plymouth, UK: Lexington Books, 2012), 165–86. Closer to the argument of the present study is J. Dillon, "Plotinus and the Transcendental Imagination" in *Religious Imagination*, ed. J.P. Mackey (Edinburgh University Press: Edinburgh, 1986), 55–64 who describes the images of the light and sphere (6.4.7) and the present passage (5.8.9) as instances of what he calls "dynamic images." He defines (n13): "By 'dynamic image' is meant an image which is designed to develop as one contemplates it, thus leading the mind to a deeper comprehension of reality." He also refers (58) to "dynamic images" as "those spiritual exercises which he [Plotinus] prescribes for us at various points in the tractates in order to make use of the imagination for the clearer grasping of a truth which transcends all sense-perception, though one must start from physical images in one's ascent to understanding."

it has not seen: An example is the sublime Zeus of Pheidias.[20] It is of interest to observe that Plotinus takes the same statue as an example of a *mimêsis* that is addressed, not to a sensible, but to an intelligible model. The Zeus of Pheidias is Zeus as he would appear if he but chose to reveal himself among us (5.8.1 38–40).[21]

In 5.8.9.1–24, Plotinus is helping us to understand the thought of his hypostasis of Intellect, which thinks all the Forms at once with no distance between the mind and its objects. He asks us to summon the "shining imagination (φωτεινὴ τις φαντασία, line 8) of a sphere containing all things in the visible universe within it." He then asks us to abstract (ἀφελὼν, ἄφελε, line 11) the corporeal mass of the scene. We may then enter upon noetic thought. We may notice here that Plotinus makes a contemplative and literary, rather than a philosophical, use of imagination (φαντασία) and makes a contemplative and rhetorical, rather than a philosophical, use of *aphairesis*.[22]

Corresponding to the negative theology of Plotinus is a negative anthropology. If the human person is an image of the divine and the divine is approached by negating the image, then negation is used of the image as well as of the original. Plotinus undertakes a contemplative application of his negative anthropology. We have seen how, in 5.3.6, the soul, by becoming aware of its iconic character, abolishes that icon and enters into unity with Intellect. In 5.8.11, the soul erects an icon of its ideal self, i.e., of itself as at unity with Intellect and then destroys it to enter into the unity sought. The

20. Cf. Dillon, "Plotinus and the Transcendental Imagination," 53 and note 3.

21. Cf. F.M. Schroeder, *Form and Transformation. A Study in the Philosophy of Plotinus* (Montreal and Kingston, London, Buffalo: McGill-Queen`s University Press, 1992), 56.

22. The use of the sphere in this passage as a vehicle of the noetic ascent of the soul is perhaps a precursor of the noetic *sunthêmata*, especially mathematical *sunthêmata*, that Shaw detects in Iamblichus, cf. G. Shaw, *Theurgy and the Soul. The Neoplatonism of Iamblichus* (University Park, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania University Press, 1995), 189–215. See further S. Rappe, *Reading Neoplatonism. Non-discursive Thinking in the Texts of Plotinus, Proculs, and Damascius* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 15 and 139 (on the image as theurgic *sumbolon*) and F.M. Schroeder's review of this book in *Mouseion* XLV—Series III, Vol. 1, 2001 No. 1: 89–91 and F.M. Schroeder, "The Platonic Text as Oracle in Plotinus," *Metaphysik und Religion. Zur Signatur des spätantiken Denkens. Akten des Internationalen Kongresses vom 13–17 März 2001 in Würzburg*, ed. T. Kobusch and M. Erler (Munich and Leipzig: K.G. Saur, 2002), 34–36. In this paper, I discuss Plotinus' use of the text of Plato as a contemplative object of the type described by *sunthêma* or *sumbolon* in later Neoplatonism. For further treatment of philosophy and the technique of contemplation, see P. Rabbow, *Seelenführung*; P. Hadot (trans. M. Chase, ed. and intro. A.I. Davidson), *Philosophy as a Way of Life*: *Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault* (Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell, 1995); P. Hadot (trans. M. Chase), *What is Ancient Philosophy?* (Cambridge MA and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2004); W. Beierwaltes, "Das Eine als Norm des Lebens. Zum metaphysischen Grund neuplatonischer Lebensform," *Metaphysik und Religion,* 121–51, rev. in W. Beierwaltes, *Procliana: Spätantikes Denken und seine Spuren* (Franfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 2007), 25–60.

difference between the two passages is that in 5.3.6 the soul comes to an awareness of its iconic character where in 5.8.11 the soul actually erects an icon of itself as a contemplative object which, when the exercises of engagement and detachment have been fulfilled, will by its destruction realize the displacement of affect and orientation necessary to union with Intellect. Plotinus is developing a contemplative technique. It is also to be noticed that the soul in its self-discovery enters into a community in Intellect. On the theory of perspective observable in Plotinus, the vanishing point is behind the spectator so that the spectator, instead of being an objective observer, is embraced by the perspective of what he sees. Thus the distinction "inside-outside" and all self-consciousness are overcome as the soul is included in the community of the Forms.[23]

In summation, Plotinus in his thought experiments generates imagery for the purposes of rendering philosophical ideas more easily comprehensible. The word of philosophy produces an image that passes from philosophical to rhetorical and contemplative uses. The movements of imagination and abstraction familiar from negative theology pass from the necessity of philosophy to the persuasion of rhetoric to the certainty of noetic intuition. In that final transition, the verbal illustration of philosophy and rhetoric debouches into contemplative ecphrasis. The image takes on its own life as it appears and then dissolves in the face of noetic illumination.

23. Cf. Gary Gurtler, "Plotinus and Byzantine Aesthetics," *The Modern Schoolman* 66 (1989): 275–82, especially (on the present passage) 282–83; cf. the foundational study on perspective in Plotinus by A.Grabar, *L'Art del la fin de l'antiquité et du moyen age,* 3 vols. (Paris: Collège de France, 1968), I:15–29; 17–20; 23; Gurtler argues convincingly that Plotinus 4.5.3.32–38 provides better proof for inverse perspective in Plotinus than the texts that Grabar advances; cf. F.M. Schroeder, "The Vigil of the One and Plotinian Iconoclasm," *Neoplatonism and Western Aesthetics*, ed. A. Alexandrakis (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002), 65–68; Schroeder, "Plotinus and Language," 347–49. I presented an earlier version of the present paper, "The Contemplative Image and Imagination in Plotinus," at the session *Ancient Mediterranean Philosophy* of the *Mediterranean Perspectives XIX* conference, at the École des Hautes Études in Paris on 8 July 1997 with support from the Dowling Foundation and the Office of Research Services, Queen's University. I wish to express my gratitude to both institutions. That paper was included in the proceedings of the conference, *Mediterranean Perspectives* (1998), 7–19. I have permission from the editor to make the present use of this material.

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