

Form, Individual and Person in Plotinus

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The question whether there are Platonic Forms or Ideas of individuals, and in particular of individual human beings, has been much discussed in ancient and modern times. The contribution of Plotinus to this discussion is particularly interesting, though, as recent scholarly investigation has shown, it is not easy to determine precisely what his thought on the matter is or whether his statements about it are altogether consistent¹. However, a view of his position does now seem to be emerging which does justice to all the evidence and makes it clear that he had something important to say about human individuality which may be worth developing further. I am not the sort of traditionalist who believes that any ancient philosophers (or theologians) have done our thinking for us and solved our problems, so that all we have to do is to reproduce their thought (perhaps mistranslated into modish or fairly recently outmoded modern terms). But I am sufficiently traditionalist to believe that a careful study of the ancients will often throw new and unexpected light on contemporary problems and suggest good starting-points for the thinking which we have to do for ourselves.

The evidence for what Plotinus thought about Forms of individuals has been very carefully and comprehensively surveyed by Dr. H. J. Blumenthal in his excellent article "Did Plotinus believe in Ideas of Individuals",² which is the starting-point of the present discussion. This evidence is at first sight ambiguous and not easy to interpret in a way which gives any consistency to

1. See John M. Rist "Forms of Individuals in Plotinus" (*Classical Quarterly* N.S. XIII. 2. November 1963 pp. 223-231: Ideas of Individuals in Plotinus. A Reply to Dr. Blumenthal." (*Revue Internationale de Philosophie* 24th year, No. 92. Part 2, 1970, pp. 298-303): H. J. Blumenthal "Did Plotinus believe in Ideas of Individuals" (*Phronesis* XI, 1966, No. 2 pp. 61-80). Reprinted as ch. 9 of *Plotinus' Psychology* (The Hague 1971): P. S. Mamo "Forms of Individuals in the Enneads" (*Phronesis* XIV, 1969, pp. 77-96): J. Igal "Observaciones al Texto de Plotino" *Emerita* XLI. 1. 1973 pp. 92-98 (on V9, 12, 1-3). The view which I put forward here has emerged from constructive discussions with Drs. Rist and Blumenthal and owes a great deal to Professor J. Igal of Bilbao, whose repunctuation and reinterpretation of a key passage (V9 [5] 12, 1-3) has been accepted by Henry and Schwyzer (see *Plotini Opera* III, Paris and Brussels 1973, *Addenda ad Textum* p. 407) and who has communicated to me by letter his tentative views of the whole problem, with which I am in complete agreement.

2. See P.1. n.1.

Plotinus' thought. There is one short treatise in the *Enneads* which clearly affirms that there are Forms of individuals, particularly of individual men. This is V7 [18] *On Whether there are Ideas of Particulars*. There are also two passages in the first part of the treatise *On the Problems of the Soul*³ which seem to imply the same view, though without stating unmistakably that there are Forms of individual men. On the other hand there are two passages which seem to say clearly that Forms are always of universals, not of particulars (there is a Form of Man, not a Form of Socrates, a Form of fire, but no Forms of individual fires): one of these⁴ is earlier and the other⁵ later than the treatise on Forms of individuals. There are also a number of other passages, well distributed through the *Enneads* in treatises early and late, which are ambiguous, though some of them do seem to go against the view that there are Forms of individuals. The chronological order of the relevant passages makes it very difficult to suppose that Plotinus held one definite and clear-cut view in one part of his writing period and another in another, and Blumenthal's conclusion is that Plotinus did not hold consistent views and was never quite able to make up his mind about whether there were Forms of individuals or not.

If we are to advance from this position and find some way of showing that Plotinus did hold a definite position and that his various statements can after all be regarded as consistent, the only way, as others have seen⁶, is to examine the contexts of the various statements carefully and consider whether Plotinus is writing about the same sorts of individuals in different passages. The treatise *On Whether there are Ideas of Particulars* is, as has already been remarked, especially concerned with individual men. The reason why he finds it necessary to postulate a Form for each man, as well as the one Form of Man is clearly stated in the first chapter. "No, there cannot be the same forming principle for different individuals, and one man will not serve as a model for several men differing from each other not only by reason of their matter but with a vast number of special differences of form. Men are not related to their form as portraits of Socrates are to their original, but their different structures must result from different forming principles".⁷ We should note that, though the discussion here is

3. IV 3 [27] 5 and 12; 1-5.

4. V9 [5] 12.

5. VI 5 [23] 8.

6. Rist and Igal: P. 1. N.1.

7. ἡ τῶν διαφορῶν οὐκ ἔστιν εἶναι τὸν αὐτὸν λόγον, οὐδὲ ἀρκεῖ ἄνθρωπος πρὸς παράδειγμα τῶν τινῶν ἀνθρώπων διαφερόντων ἀλλήλων οὐ τῇ ὕλη

concerned with men, Plotinus would certainly think that what he says applies to spirits (*daemones*) and gods, whether embodied (the sun, moon and stars) or unembodied: we may remember the passage in the treatise *On the Reason why Being is everywhere all present, One and the Same* (VI 4-5 [22-23]) where he shows us a community of intelligent, divine and human souls, in the intelligible world, "But we — who are we? Are we that higher self or that which drew near to it and came to be in time? Before this birth came to be we existed there as men different from those we are now, some of us even as gods, pure souls, intellect united with the whole of reality, parts of the intelligible world, not separated or cut off, belonging to the whole: and indeed we are not cut off even now."⁸ And there are two further points which we shall need to return to when, after having, I hope, established the consistency of Plotinus's doctrine, we come to consider what he is really saying about human (or divine) personality. One is that there is nothing in V7 or anywhere else to suggest that the doctrine that there are Forms of individual men conflicts in any way with the sharp division of higher from lower self of which the last passage quoted reminded us; and that Plotinus is always very willing to admit that matter, parentage, time and place of birth etc. contribute a great deal to the mundane empirical personalities we are and encounter here below. The other is that, as he makes clear in the same first chapter of V7, he does not believe that one incarnation exhausts the possibilities of an individual human Form. The particular eternal reality which produced the person whom Plato knew here below as Socrates may also have produced the person whom others knew as Pythagoras, and many others.

The two passages from the treatise *On the Problems of the Soul*⁹ certainly seem to point to the same doctrine as V7. The first insists strongly that Socrates cannot just perish as Socrates when he reaches the highest, intelligible level, and speaks of the dependence of souls on (apparently) individual intellects. The second speaks again of individual intellects eternally established in the intelligible world. But we need to be cautious here. Neither these two passages nor the one quoted from VI 4, if they are read carefully, make it unmistakably clear that Plotinus believed in Forms of individuals. Blumenthal in his very careful examination

μόνον, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἰδικαῖς διαφοραῖς μυρίαίς· οὐ γὰρ ὡς αἱ εἰκόνες Σωκράτους πρὸς τὸ ἀρχέτυπον, ἀλλὰ δεῖ τὴν διάφορον ποιήσιν ἐκ διαφόρων λόγων. v7 [18] 1, 18-23. All translation of passages of Plotinus are my own.

8. VI 4 [22] 14, 16-22.

9. IV 3 [27] 5 and 12, 1-5.

of the evidence from IV 3¹⁰ concludes, I think rightly, that the balance of probability is perhaps in favour of supposing that Plotinus was here thinking in terms of Forms of individuals, but that the possibility cannot be excluded that he is thinking in terms of groups of souls attached to each Form-Intellect, so that all human souls would be attached to the Intellect which is the Idea of Man, all horses' souls to the Intellect which is the Idea of horse, and so on. (In the intelligible world of Plotinus every Form or Idea is a living intellect, a *Nous*). To understand how reasonable this suggestion is in Plotinian terms we need to remember that for Plotinus, or for any Platonist, the belief that souls are eternal, and belong to the authentic world of intelligible reality because they have the capacity to know and love that intelligible reality, is independent of any belief in Forms of individuals. The hypostasis Soul with all its particular parts still belongs to the world of real beings (*ta onta*). Further, for Plotinus in particular the boundary between Intellect and Soul is not very clearly defined and he is always sure that souls as knowers and lovers of intelligible truth and beauty and aspirants to union with its source are rightfully at home in the intelligible world. So, on Plotinus's normal view, Socrates would not cease to exist when he reached the highest even if there was no individual Form of Socrates. We also need to remember that Plotinus, rather confusingly from the point of view of the present discussion, often speaks of the human soul as having an intellect (*nous*) of its own which is an image of the Intellect which is the World of Forms.

We must now turn to the first and most important of the passages which seem to deny explicitly that there are Forms of individuals. This is at the beginning of the twelfth chapter of the treatise *On Intellect, the Forms and Being* (V 9 [5]). This terse early essay (the fifth in Porphyry's chronological order) rather gives the impression that it was written hurriedly to deal with the problems of some member of his circle whose Platonic education was in a somewhat elementary stage and who had difficulties of an obvious sort about the doctrine of Forms. This however is speculative and fanciful, and I would not wish to ignore or take lightly the evidence of the passage if it was in any way decisive. But if it is read, as I think it should be, with the older punctuation¹¹ as interpreted by Igal (now accepted by Henry and Schwyzer), and if careful

10. *Art. cit.* pp. 68-70.

11. Of Perna and Creuzer: later editors (including Henry and Schwyzer in their first edition) put a full stop after οὔσαι and begin a new sentence with χρῆ but the *editio minor* (Oxford text) returns to the older punctuation.

attention is paid to the context, it seems to leave the way still open for Plotinus, without inconsistency, to adopt the view that there are Forms of individual men expounded in the later treatise V 7. My translation of the first sentence of Chapter 12, which follows Igal closely, is as follows: "But if the Form of man is there, and of rational and artistic man, and the arts which are products of Intellect, then one must say that the Forms of universals are there, not of Socrates but of man."¹² Igal points out that it is clear from the preceding chapter that the word translated "arts" (*technai*) includes both arts and sciences (or bodies of theoretical knowledge): it covers all kinds of theoretical and practical knowledge and skill which have a genuine intellectual content (this is the significance of the restriction "which are products of intellect"). In his notes on the passage which he has kindly made available to me Igal explains the philosophical significance of his change of punctuation¹³. The sentence follows immediately on and sums up the discussion of the content of the intelligible world in the preceding three chapters. After establishing in chapters 9 and 10 that all things which exist as forms in the sense-world come from the intelligible world (this, it is made clear in Chapter 10, excludes deficiencies and deformities from that world), Plotinus goes on in Chapter 11 to discuss the question of which *technai* (in the sense explained above) are to be found in the intelligible world and concludes that those which in some way deal with Forms must be said to originate there. The sentence under discussion sums up the previous discussion in its protasis and draws the conclusion that if rational and artistic man and his arts are in the intelligible world, the Forms which rational and artistic man thinks about and which are the principles of his arts must be there, and these are universal, not particular forms. Igal says, "The logical nexus between the antecedent and the consequent according to the new punctuation is made clear if we bear in mind that Plotinus is here combining Aristotle's doctrine that the sciences are of the universal with his own doctrine that *epistemai* [sciences] are identical with *episteta* [their objects] It is now quite clear what the meaning of the restriction ["not of Socrates but of man"] is with regard to the

12. εἰ δὲ ἀνθρώπου ἐκεῖ καὶ λογικοῦ ἐκεῖ καὶ τεχνικοῦ καὶ αἱ τέχναι αἰὶ νοῦ γεννήματα οὐσαι, χρῆ δὲ καὶ τῶν καθόλου λέγειν τὰ εἶδη εἶναι, οὐ Σωκράτους, ἀλλ' ἀνθρώπου (lines 1-3). For older punctuations and interpretations of the passage see *Plotini Opera II* (Paris and Brussels 1959) p. 424 and *Plotinus Schriften Ia*, ed. and tr. R. Harder, (Hamburg 1956) pp. 122-123.

13. His discussion of the passage is published in Spanish in *Emerita* (Madrid) see p.1. n.1.

problem of the existence of Ideas of Individuals. The restriction does not fall upon the existence of Ideas of Individuals but on the logical necessity of asserting their existence once the antecedent is admitted. Given the antecedent, we must assert the existence of Ideas of universals, but we are not yet allowed to assert the existence of Ideas of Individuals on this account. The question is left open." It is interesting to note here that, even when Plotinus most clearly asserts the existence of Forms of Individuals, he makes no attempt to adapt the normal Platonic-Aristotelian view that knowledge in the true sense is of universals to explain how we know individual Forms, as we must be able to if they are truly Forms. But to pursue the possible reasons for this would take us too far from our subject.¹⁴

Plotinus continues Chapter 12 in a way which seems to support Igal with the words, "But we must enquire about man, whether the form of the individual is there." But at this point the discussion, as it so often does in Plotinus, takes an unexpected turn. We find that we are not talking about differences of intelligence and character but differences in the shape of noses. What Plotinus wishes to consider here is not what made Socrates the loved and revered teacher of Plato, but what gave him his snub nose. He has no difficulty in explaining this in an Aristotelian way by saying that snubness and aquilineity are specific differences (*diaphorai*) in the form of man, and that the fact that one man has one kind of aquiline (or snub) nose is due to the matter. There is clearly no question of asserting an individual Form for Socrates's body: the universal Form of Man (itself a species within the Form of animal), with the necessary specific differences, and variations due to matter, will account for all the phenomena.¹⁵ To

14. Cp. the very interesting discussion in Klaus Wurm *Substanz und Qualität* (Berlin-New York 1973) pp. 237-8. Wurm accepts Blumenthal's view and thinks that the reasons for Plotinus' indecision are that for him the important distinction is not between general and particular but between intellectually and sensibly apprehensible being and that the nature of the noetic certainty which is a direct apprehension of the intelligible as a unity-in-diversity makes the discursive distinction between universal and particular, and their relation to each other in a thought that defines, unimportant.

15. This is probably the way to understand VI 5 [23] 6, where the one Form of Man is said to make many men: it is corporeal man, man as a member of the zoological species man, who can be regarded as produced by the universal Form without any need to postulate an individual Form. This Passage has been extensively discussed by R. Arnou (*Le Désir de Dieu dans la Philosophie de Plotin*. (Paris (1921) pp. 204-8 and Blumenthal (*art. cit.* pp. 70-73), but without adverting to this possible explanation.

regard man as a natural kind or species like any other kind of animal is of course a perfectly Platonic way of looking at him. "Man" was a stock example of a universal Form in the Academy (hence the name of the "Third Man" argument): and in the *Timaeus*¹⁶ not just men, but gods are regarded as a zoological species (the natural kinds in the Absolute Living Creature which are to be reproduced to populate the visible universe are gods in the sky, birds in the air, fish in the water and land-animals — of which men are of course a sub-species — on land). But neither for Plato nor for Plotinus does the statement that men (or gods) considered as animals are particulars participating in a universal species-form tell by any means the whole truth about the relationship of men (still less of gods) to the Forms.

There is no indication that Plato believed in Forms of individual men. But the individual man for him is not just a mundane image of a species-form or a fleeting quasi-reality here below participating in such a form, but, by right and nature as a knower and lover of the intelligible, is an everlasting inhabitant of the intelligible world. And in the next chapter of the treatise which we are discussing¹⁷ Plotinus strongly emphasises this other Platonic way of looking at man. He has returned here from his digression about the arts to his main theme of the content of the intelligible world, and insists that not all things here below are just images of archetypes. Souls and their virtues, and Absolute Soul itself, are present in their own right both above in the intelligible and below in the world of sense. The mention of Absolute Soul here (and in the next chapter) reminds us of something we need to remember if we are to keep this discussion in context; that the assumption of individual Forms could never for Plotinus exclude higher universal Forms, of man and of soul, in which the lower Forms participate. And he says here very forcibly, something else which we also need continually to remember. "The sense-world is in one place, but the intelligible world is everywhere."¹⁸ There is no question in Plotinus of a tidy separation of the two worlds, with the intelligible archetypes stacked up there above and their transitory images flickering about here below. The relationship of the two worlds is much closer and more subtle: and Soul and souls always for him belong to both. This chapter does not, any more than the passages from IV 3 and VI 4 discussed earlier,¹⁹ show that Plotinus believed

16. 39E 10-40A2.

17. V 9 [5] 12.

18. lines 14-15.

19. see p. 51

in Forms of individuals. But it does indicate a line of thought which could lead to the doctrine that there are such Forms which he expounds in V 7, and could do so without any inconsistency with the belief which he seems to have shared with other Platonists²⁰ that there are not individual Forms of particular human bodies, still less of anything on a lower level of formal distinctiveness and complexity. The individual Forms whose existence is explicitly denied in VI 5 [23] 8 are forms of particular portions of elementary bodies; there is only one Form of fire, not Forms of individual fires. In Chapters 2 and 3 of V 7 Plotinus does seem inclined to push his doctrine of individual Forms rather further than is suggested here and to suggest that different kinds of physical beauty may require individual forms to explain them²¹ and even finally in Chapter 3 that perhaps no two things are ever quite formally identical:²² and if there is any inconsistency between his views in this treatise and those which he expresses elsewhere in the *Enneads* it is to be found here. But there seems from our discussion to be no inconsistency with what is said anywhere else in the explicit statement that the higher self of a man has an individual Form for its principle, that there is a Form of Socrates as well as a Form of man, and I think we can take it that this is the considered opinion of Plotinus. Individual Forms are to be assumed wherever a real formal difference can be detected, as it can be clearly in the case of the true, higher selves of individual men (and of course of higher spiritual beings, gods and *daemones*): they should not be assumed where such differences cannot be observed, and it seems to have been Plotinus's normal thought that they should not be supposed to exist in the case of human bodies or anything lower than animal bodies in the scale of formal distinctiveness and complexity. His principles would, however, leave him free to suppose their existence at lower levels whenever and wherever he thought it necessary to do so.

Having established (at least to my own satisfaction) the consistency of Plotinus's thought about Forms of individual men,²³

20. Though not perhaps without some vacillation about what he is not likely to have regarded as very important: see the fuller discussion below pp. 59-60

21. V 7, 2, 14-15.

22. V 7, 3, 7ff. Plotinus's tendency to postulate forms of all individual things in this treatise is due to at least a tentative acceptance of the Stoic *ἰδίως ποιόν*. Harder's "dialogue" presentation of V 7 in his edition brings this out particularly well.

23. For discussions of other ambiguous passages in the *Enneads* which have not been considered here see Blumenthal's article and Rist's "Reply

I should like to examine his doctrine as expounded in V 7 in more detail. It contains some points of considerable interest. The assertion of a Form of each individual human being suggests that Plotinus set a high value on personality. There is nothing surprising, as Professor Cornelia de Vogel has shown,²⁴ in a Greek philosopher having a clear idea of individual personality and considering it important, and there is no need to suppose any Christian influence on his thought at this point. But there are some aspects of his thought about the human person which might be rather disconcerting to some of those who nowadays proclaim themselves "personalists" and talk a great deal about what is often a rather loose and vague conception of personality, human and divine.

First of all we must consider more carefully than we have done so far, the relationship of the true or higher self to the individual Form. It does not seem to be one of simple identity, at least in those latest treatises²⁵ where Plotinus is particularly inclined to emphasise the transcendence of Intellect over Soul, and to suppose that our higher self, the part which "does not come down" of which we read repeatedly in the *Enneads*, is soul and nothing more than soul. The situation here seems to be rather as Blumenthal describes it. We may still suppose there to be Forms of individuals but an individual Form will be, as he says "some further transcendent principle of the individual's being, a Form that would not be a part of his structure, but on whose existence that structure would nevertheless depend. Like the One, though of course in a different way, it might transcend the highest part of the individual, and yet be essential to his existence".²⁶ We should not here make too clear-cut a distinction between an earlier and a later phase in the teaching of Plotinus. Our highest part is always in earlier treatises said to be a soul even when it is most strongly asserted to be "in the intelligible" or an intellect²⁷ or even "an intelligible universe". And in these latest treatises, even when the distinction between Intellect and Soul is apparently being most sharply

to Dr. Blumenthal" (cp. p.1. n.1). I am generally in agreement with Rist about their interpretation.

24. See her article *The Concept of Personality in Greek and Christian Thought in Studies in Philosophy and the History of Philosophy* Vol. 2. (Catholic University of America Press 1963) pp. 20-60; and the important texts well presented in her *Greek Philosophy III* (Leiden 1959) see the Index II s.v. "person, personality".

25. I 1 [53] and V 3 [49].

26. *Art. cit.* p. 61.

27. As we have already seen (p. 52) this term is ambiguous.

drawn, we sometimes encounter a most important feature of the thought of Plotinus about man which is disconcerting to tidy-minded expositors but helpful to those who are trying to make some progress with his help in the difficult business of understanding themselves. This is the extraordinary capacity which Plotinian man possesses for getting out of himself, travelling beyond his own horizons, discovering that he can become that which is a static, schematic catalogue of the inhabitants of the universe he can never be defined as being. So, to take one particularly striking example, in one of the great late treatises just referred to, entitled *On the Knowing Hypostases and That which is Beyond*,²⁸ we seem by the end of Chapter 3 to be tidily settled as reasoning souls, intermediate between our lower embodied self in the sense-world and Intellect. The chapter ends with the words "Sense-perception is our messenger, but Intellect is our king." Chapter 4, however, begins, "But we too are kings, when we are in accord with it," and continues immediately to show that "being in accord with Intellect" may simply mean taking the laws and principles of our thinking from Intellect (as Soul always does in Plotinus), but it may mean something very much more. He says "The man who knows himself is double, one knowing the nature of the reasoning which belongs to soul, and one up above this man, who knows himself according to Intellect because he has become that Intellect: and by that Intellect he thinks himself again, not any longer as man, but having become altogether other and snatching himself up into the higher world, drawing up only the better part of soul, which alone is able to be winged for intellection, with which someone there keeps by him what he sees" (lines 7-14). Here it seems that we have an ultimate self higher than the determinable "we", the reasoning soul, the highest in us which can be called "man". This self who can "snatch himself up into the higher world" has presumably become identical with his individual Form or Intellect (all Forms are living intelligences in Plotinus, and all are one, though in a differentiated unity in which they do not lose their individual diversity). But this is not the end of the story. A further self-transcendence is possible. Either our ultimate self can transcend Intellect and reach union with its principle or (as seems to me a more likely account of what Plotinus is trying to say) Intellect, with all the selves in it, eternally transcends itself, so reaching beyond its intellection, in which it is eternally inadequately translating the originative Unity and Goodness into its own multiplicity-in-unity of Forms, to its eternal

28. V 3 [49].

union with its principle, the One or Good. Our self does not lose its identity even in this ultimate union, and all its lower powers and activities remain in being, ready for use when required. But the only upper limit to the self's power of passing beyond itself is its union with the absolute, unlimited, unknowable selfhood which we inadequately call the Good, or the One, or God, to which it is urged on by that love, given by the Good, which is the ultimate constituent of its selfhood.²⁹

We must now turn to consider the relation of the higher self to the lower self, or "other man", the composite being which is lower soul forming and animating body, and to our empirical personalities as they appear here below. First of all we must remember that, as we have already noticed,³⁰ the intelligible world in which the higher self resides is not separate or cut off from the world of sense and body. In fact for Plotinus everything which appears in the sense-world, including embodied, historical man, only appears there because it has its authentic existence, far more vividly real and intensely alive than its shadowy being here below, in the intelligible world. This theme is boldly and magnificently developed in the first chapters of the great treatise *How the Multitude of Forms came into being and On the Good*.³¹ Here certainly embodied man, with his eyes and eyebrows and sight and all other sense-perceptions, appears as part of the intelligible All which includes all the great parts of the physical universe and all that is in them, all that is obviously animate and all that is apparently inanimate existing in a single living thought which has all the magnificent diversity which is necessary to its perfection. The creative form, the *logos* of a man, is not the *logos* of a man simply as reasoning soul but includes his animal nature, his embodied lower self.³² But it is not clear that it is the *logos*, the creative expression

29. The above paragraph owes a great deal to Dr. Gerard J. P. O'Daly, and for a much more precise and fully documented account of the Plotinian self reference should be made to his book *Plotinus' Philosophy of the Self* (Irish University Press, Shannon, Ireland 1973). My one difference with O'Daly is in my estimate of the extraordinary passage VI 7 [38] 35 in which Plotinus describes universal Intellect, "drunk" and "in love", eternally passing beyond its normal intellectual activity in its eternal union with the Good. It is a failure, of course, as all attempts to describe the indescribable must be failures, but it still seems to me the best of Plotinus's attempts to indicate what happens at this point.

30. p. 55

31. VI 7 [38] 1-12; cp. VI 6 [34] 15, 10ff. There is an excellent detailed study of the argument of these first chapters of VI 7 and its implications in O'Daly op. cit. Chapter 2, pp. 32-39.

32. Chapters 4 and 5.

on a lower level, of an *individual* Form-Intellect, the eternal selfhood of a particular man. Socrates's snub nose and all his other physical particularities would according to the teaching of these chapters be expressions of something eternally existing in the intelligible world: but it is not clear that they would be included in the individual Form of Socrates. There is nothing in these chapters which excludes the belief in individual Forms in the sense in which we have established that Plotinus probably consistently held it, but equally nothing which absolutely requires it, except perhaps one sentence in which he appears to be saying that the differences between the intelligences of individual men are, like all other differences apparent here below, permanently present in the intelligible.³³ But all that is said about the foundation of the bodily differences here below in the intelligible world can be read in terms of ordinary Platonic species-Forms. And there is one passage where it is strongly suggested that it is the World-Soul which makes our individual bodies for us.³⁴ There seems to be nothing in the rest of the *Enneads* which will enable us to settle the question decisively either way, and determine precisely what Plotinus thought about the degree to which our lower souls and the forms of our bodies are *logoi* or expressions on a lower level of our higher souls and through them of our individual Form-Intelligences. There are passages which speak of them as being the work of universal soul, and suggest that we are not properly individual at this level,³⁵ and others which incline more to seeing them as products of the higher self. The chapters from V 7 already referred to³⁶ seem to go furthest in this direction (especially if they are read with the chapters of VI 7 just discussed). We should of course remember that, just as all Form-Intellects are one in a way which does not exclude diversity, so all souls form a somewhat less fully integrated unity-in-diversity (in which the World-Soul just mentioned is not the totality of soul, but a very exalted particular soul, a superior relation of ours on the same level, a sort of elder sister.³⁷) And, as Blumenthal, who has studied this question particularly carefully, suggests³⁸, the difference for Plotinus may therefore have been only between soul acting in more or less individualized ways, and it may not have seemed to him of great importance which view one took.

33. Chapter 9, lines 14-15.

34. Chapter 7.

35. IV 9 [8] 3; IV 3 [27] 7.

36. See p. 56. For production of the lower self by the higher see VI 4 [22] 14.

37. IV 3 [27] 6, 13; II 9 [33] 18, 16.

38. In his book (see n. 1) Chapter 3, p. 29.

In any case, however our lower self of passion, perception and body is formed, Plotinus is as willing as any Greek philosopher to admit that many things in it, perhaps most of what we should nowadays regard as distinctive features of "personality" or "character", are due to heredity and environment. We derive much at this level from the particular place and time at which we are born in any one incarnation, from the climate of our country, from the sort of society we live in and from our bodily constitution, which is largely a matter of heredity.³⁹ When the Form-Intellect whom Plato knew as Socrates entered upon his incarnation as a fifth-century Athenian, everything in his "personality" which came from his being a fifth-century Athenian was, in Plotinus's view, externally determined and no true part of his higher self: and so were characteristics inherited from his parents and due to the structure and temperament of the body, being snub-nosed, ugly and homosexually erotic. Even if an individual *logos* of the transcendent Form-Intellect, the Absolute Socrates, was operating at this level its operations here could only be part of the universal plan according to which soul as a whole carries out its work of translating the intelligible in the sensible as well as it can, and would be governed and determined by that universal plan and subject to partial thwarting by the recalcitrance of matter. The true self of Socrates would only begin to appear and be fully operative when he began to make something of what his country and city and period and parents and bodily nature had given him, to use his circumstances as material for free and responsible moral decisions and to find in them the way back to self-realization and self-transcendence. The historic Socrates would have to choose to be the true Socrates, and it would only be after, perhaps, a hard struggle that he would bring his historically determined temperament and environment into such order and subjection that it would no longer bewitch or imprison him, and he would be free to be himself and pass beyond himself to union with the Good from whom the love which impelled him to choice and struggle came.

The lower, historically and environmentally determined self, with its many characteristics which might seem highly "personal" to modern ways of thinking, is not our true self, but it provides many levels on which we can live if we do not try hard to do otherwise, from the mere animal (or even vegetable) to the successful business man or politician. As Plotinian man can get out of himself upwards, so he can drop out of himself downwards,⁴⁰ to

39. IV 3 [27] 7: II 3 [52] 14-15: for the influence of environment on intelligence and character cp. Plato *Timaeus* 24 C-D.

40. This expression should not be taken too literally. As the chapters from

ordinary worldliness or worse. And one life here below by no means exhausts his possibilities. As we have already noticed⁴¹ the Form-Intellect whom Plato knew as Socrates might have been Pythagoras before, and might be a great many other people in the course of the world's history. And, though in this particular case Plotinus would probably have thought incarnation in other than human form most unlikely, his consideration of the way in which most men live led him to suppose that they could expect to spend a good many of their lives here below as animals or birds or plants. It seems clear that he took Plato's references to animal reincarnation perfectly seriously and literally and held with Empedocles that the human soul could descend even to plant level.⁴² This belief in reincarnation means that for him our true self is even less closely tied to the historical, empirical personality than has so far appeared. It does not belong to, and is not intrinsically developed or determined by, or with a view to its belonging to a particular place or period or race or sex or even species.⁴³ On the other hand it does not seem to be the sort of colourless, indeterminate, uninteresting lowest common denominator of animate nature which this negative characterisation might suggest. It is rather that its capacities for activating empirical personalities are too extensive and various to be exhausted in the course of one life. Reincarnation, Plotinus says, is possible because each of us is "all things",⁴⁴ or "each soul possesses all the *logoi* in the universe"⁴⁵ or "the soul is many things, and all things, both the things above and the things below down to the limits of all life, and we are each one of

VI 7 discussed above (pp. 59-60) show, one cannot really "drop out" of the intelligible world and the whole of one's lower self is eternally there in the intelligible. What "coming down" or separating oneself from the intelligible or diminishing oneself to the measure of one's empirical personality really means for Plotinus is forgetting one's true nature in egocentric concentration on one's empirical ego and obsession with its particular, limited needs and desires: it is not a change of nature or state but a change of outlook or attitude. Plotinus is not always as careful in his language as he should be, but it does seem that this is what he really intends to say. See VI 4-5 [22-23], especially VI 4, 16 and VI 5, 12.

41. p. 51

42. III 4 [15] 2: VI 7 [38] 6-7. Porphyry, Iamblichus and others disagreed with Plotinus on this point. On the differing views held by Platonists on animal reincarnation see H. Dörrie "Kontroverse um die Seelenwanderung im Kaiserzeitlichen Platonismus," *Hermes* 85.4. (1957) pp. 414-435: J. H. Waszink, *Tertulliani de Anima* (Amsterdam 1947) p. 391.

43. Though animal, and perhaps female, reincarnation is always a falling below its best capacity.

44. VI 7, 6, 23.

45. V 7 [18] 1, 9-10.

us an intelligible universe”⁴⁶

This does not mean that we can just as well be anybody as anything else in any of our lives here below. What we are in each successive incarnation is determined by our behaviour in previous incarnations.⁴⁷ And Plotinus is compelled to restrict and qualify the rather too sweeping statements made in the passages just quoted about each of us being everything. If each of us, (and every other Intellect-Form) was simply identical with the whole intelligible world, and there was nothing more to be said, the whole rich variety of that world on which Plotinus so strongly insists, would obviously disappear. But he does not find it altogether easy to find an appropriate way of describing the sort of restriction and qualification which he thinks is necessary. In one place he says that a particular Form-Intellect is actually what it is, but potentially everything else in the intelligible world, and continues “. . . what it is actually is the last and lowest point in its development; so the last phase of this particular Intellect is horse; horse is where it stopped in its continuous going forth towards a lesser life.”⁴⁸ This is not a very satisfactory way of putting it on Plotinus’s own principles. It brings out well the dynamic character of his Form-Intellects. But the Aristotelian potentiality which appears here has really no business in his intelligible world at all, for everything there is supposed to be, in the Aristotelian language which he often uses, purely actual. Plotinus, however, has great difficulty in keeping potentiality out of the intelligible world, and it several times creeps back in:⁴⁹ this may be one of the most fruitful of his paradoxes in stimulating new, non-Aristotelian, ways of thinking about spiritual reality. In another place he uses a way of speaking which goes back to Anaxagoras,⁵⁰ that of “naming by predominance” and says “One particular kind of being stands out in each, but in each all are manifest”.⁵¹ Perhaps the best way of expressing what seems to be his real intention might be to say that each Form-Intellect immediately grasps in the living thought which it is the whole intelligible world, and so is that world, but it does so in its own particular way, from its own particular point of view. Intellect as a whole would then be the thinking in all these particular thinkings but not a “universal” thinking distinct from

46. III 4, 3, 21-22.

47. III 4, 2: III 2 [47] 13.

48. VI 7, 9, 34-37.

49. See my paper “Eternity, Life and Movement in Plotinus” *Accounts of Νοῦς in Le Neoplatonisme* (Paris 1971) pp. 67-76.

50. Fr. 12 Diels-Kranz (last sentence).

51. V 8 [31] 4, 10-11.

the particular ones. It is not an instance of Intellect. It would therefore be richly personal, a community of selves united in living thought, but not a person. And its source and goal, the One or Good, cannot be called "personal" or "impersonal" because he cannot properly be called anything: he exceeds all definition or description. It may sometimes be proper to use "personal" and sometimes "impersonal" language in pointing the mind towards him.

This way of describing the universality and particularity of the individual Form-Intellects fits in quite well with Plotinus's statements that, not only is each of them capable of operating as a creative power on many higher and lower levels, but there is an actual hierarchy in the intelligible world, not only in the sense that there are more and less universal Forms (which of course he maintains) but that there are higher and lower kinds of Forms differing in dignity and value. This hierarchy extends from gods (who, in some cases at least, are the originative principles of the embodied, visible gods, the sun, moon and stars) down through all the orders of intelligent living beings to irrational animals and plants and on into the apparently inanimate, to the forms of the elements, fire, air, earth and water. And every member of it, down to the meanest form of apparently inanimate matter (which in the intelligible world is living thought) must be there if Intellect is to be, as Plotinus continually insists, the totality of being in which all possibilities of existence in their rich (but not for Plotinus infinite)⁵² diversity are eternally actual.⁵³ If we try to think of this hierarchy in terms of distinctions between living thoughts, as Plotinus would wish us to, we shall have to think of it in some way as being based on distinctions in the quality of these thoughts. Each would think, and so be, all the others, but with a different degree, perhaps, of clarity and intensity and, possibly, with a different focus of attention. The Form of Socrates would think and be the All to the highest degree of clarity and intensity possible to Form-Intellects comprehended in the Form of Man, and with a distinctively Socratic focus or angle of vision. The Horse-Form's way of thinking and being the All would be somehow distinctively horsey. And the individual soul, or member of the the group of souls,

52. For the very special sense in which the number of the intelligibles can be called *ἄπειρος* (as being the ultimate limit and measure not limited or measured by anything beyond itself) see VI 6 [34] 17-18. In V 7. 1. The doctrine of world-periods or recurring cycles is used to explain why one can postulate Forms of individual men without having to assume an infinite number of them.

53. For the full picture of the intelligible hierarchy see VI 7, 9-12.

dependent on each Form-Intellect, would embody itself on its first entrance into the lower world in a body appropriate to the distinctive quality of that Form-Intellect's thought. A human soul, at least, in subsequent incarnations might fall below or rise above the kind of body and lower self appropriate to that particular man according to its behaviour in previous lives.⁵⁴ (Plotinus is not interested in exploring the possibilities open to beings which start at a lower than human level: it would be fascinating but unprofitable to speculate whether, in his view, a fox which misbehaved itself might pass into a rabbit's body next time, and, if it did not conduct itself as a good rabbit should, might decline further into a carrot.) Visible gods (and probably such spirits as have any sort of bodies) have everlasting, perfect and incorruptible bodies and do not change them.

The most notable feature of the thought of Plotinus about the self which I have been inadequately trying to describe is the extraordinary breadth and flexibility of his conception. What we should call the person, that in us which is capable of free decision, true thought, and the passionate love of God, is for him so open that its only bounds are the universe and God. We are most ourselves when we are most universal, and can even transcend that universe of living thought which is the totality of real being in its true form and come to union with that Good beyond thought and being which is always within the innermost depth of self which we can find and over the horizon of our world at its widest (this, like all statements about the Good, is an inadequate and unsatisfactory way of putting it, using the spatial metaphors the inappropriateness of which Plotinus fully recognises even when he is compelled, as he often is, to use them). To achieve this vision of openness Plotinus has to separate our true self to an extent which most of us will find disconcerting from the empirical personality here below which is limited and conditioned, stunted or developed, frustrated or fulfilled by the circumstances of bodily life, the self which is the animate body. There are obvious and manifold difficulties about his position, which would not have greatly worried Plotinus himself. His belief in the true higher self was founded on a direct awareness of the intelligible and what lies beyond it which could not in his opinion be adequately translated into the language of discursive reason, and arguments based on mundane observations and employing the concepts, definitions and logical procedures which we use in prosaic discursive speech would have seemed to him to lead to conclusions far less certain

54. III 4, 6.

than his own immediate self-awareness. How far we can follow him in this must be a matter for individual reflection and decision. But if we find that we can adopt something like a Plotinian position it would provide a good foundation for belief in man's freedom and dignity without denying what must be admitted about the degree to which our empirical personalities are determined by biological and social circumstances. It would also provide grounds for confidence in our capacity to survive the death of the body, though this would be less important from Plotinus's own point of view. He is much less excited and concerned than most Christians, and indeed most Platonists, about life after death because he is so confident that he can live in his heaven, the world of Intellect, and attain to union with God while still in the body and this world, fulfilling his duties here below and looking after his real bodily needs with whatever degree of consciousness and attention may be necessary. Reflection on the idea of the higher self capable of activating a variety of empirical personalities may also help us, as Plotinus so often does, to build a bridge between our Western tradition, in which he is one of the great originative thinkers, and the thought of India. A quotation from a contemporary Christian theologian, John Hick, may help to explain what I have in mind here. He is speaking of one of the forms which the "Indian doctrine of reincarnation" can take, and describes it almost exactly as I have described the doctrine of Plotinus ". . . reincarnation as a metaphysical theory about a spiritual entity, the higher soul, which lies behind the empirical self but of which this self is not normally conscious. The soul produces a series of selves as its expressions and instruments, these successive selves being described as reincarnations of the same eternal soul⁵⁵." I think it important in these days when the great religious traditions of mankind are drawing together in a new way to realise that we have in our own tradition a notable witness to a doctrine so important in the religious tradition of India, even if his teaching has generally been rejected or neglected in the selective remodellings of Western tradition by orthodox Christians or modern rationalists. Later in the same volume my colleague Wilfred Cantwell Smith remarks, on the same subject, "Finally, it seems to me extremely probable that there is a quality or dimension to every human life transcending man's immediate mundane existence, transcending the spatio-temporal, to which both the traditional Christian and the traditional Indian doctrine give intellectually inadequate and yet

55. *Truth and Dialogue* (papers read at a Conference on the Philosophy of Religion held at Birmingham in 1970: published London 1974) p. 153.

not illegitimate expression⁵⁶." This, or something every like it, may well be the conclusion to which our study of our own tradition in its full breadth and depth together with the other great traditions should lead us, though our common reflection may eventually make us able to express it with more intellectual adequacy.

Finally, we should consider the implications of the kind of limit which we have seen that Plotinus had to impose on that universality of the person which he elsewhere so strongly asserts. I do not propose to examine here the limitation which he places on intelligible universality itself, his conviction that the world of real being and divine thought must be finite. To explore the advantages and disadvantages of this position, and the very far-reaching consequences which follow if, as most of us might be inclined to do, we follow Plotinus's disciple Amelius rather than Plotinus himself and suppose that the number of Forms is infinite,⁵⁷ would take a great deal of time and lead us far away from our main subject. But we have seen that however universal the self or person may be or become in one sense, it must in some way remain particular and limited. It must still be possible to regard it as part of the whole, and not simply identical with the whole. Otherwise the whole will not be a universe with all its rich variety. There will be no world for persons to be in, and no other persons with whom they can have any sort of fellowship or communion. A person must always be a particular person, an instance of a living, thinking, loving being. This has important consequences, which I do not think Christian personalists always see, for thought about the personality of God. Leaving on one side the complications, and at times incoherences, introduced by traditional Trinitarian doctrine — and also the possibility that some forms of that doctrine, if boldly developed, might be genuinely helpful at this point — to say firmly that it is literally and exactly true that God is a person in some understandable sense, and that our encounter with him is to be represented as an encounter of two persons, would seem to me to place him inside the totality of being as one particular among others, to make him a member, though no doubt the largest and most important member, of the cosmos, rather like Plotinus's World-Soul. If on the other hand we hold fast to the doctrine which has been accepted by very many Christians as well as by Neoplatonists that God is infinite and unknowable because absolutely undetermined and uncircumscribed, the Good who

56. p. 161.

57. For what little is known about the position of Amelius see Syrianus *In Metaph.* 147, 1 ff.

always lies over the edge of our thought so that it can only construct a multiplicity of inadequate images which may be means of his presence to us if we do not turn them into idols, but can never give a description of him; then we cannot say that God is a person⁵⁸. We may still find it absolutely necessary, as Plotinus often does, to use personal language about our meeting with him. But in his own nature he is beyond our particular thinkings and particularities, even the ultimate particularity, at once most intimate and most capable of approximating to universality, which we call being a person or self.

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58. The reasons why the most eminent of living Platonists, Professor J. N. Findlay, cannot accept that God is personal have considerably influenced me at this point: see his *Plato. The Written and Unwritten Doctrines* (London 1974) especially pp. 387-88 and 409.