

# Porphry's *Life of Plotinus* and Academic Power

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## THE PRESENCE OF PLOTINUS

Our teacher may well impress us, not only by learning, but by force of personality. In fact, the memory of the person might in time become the most enduring legacy. If the teacher is a sage, or even a saint, the impact might be yet greater, so much so that we feel another and numinous presence revealed through the person of the teacher. Such an influence is more often felt in moments of silence. Porphyry clearly believed that his master Plotinus was more than a teacher or a model of rational philosophizing. In his *Life of Plotinus*, he tries to give us a sense of the presence of Plotinus to his disciples. He wishes to convey how another world is revealed to us through the person of his master. He also wishes to show something of the community that he created by his presence in their midst.

Porphyry (*VP* 8) describes how Plotinus, even while engaged in casual conversation with someone, could retain his concentration and his train of thought:

In this way he was present at once to himself and to others (Συνήν οὖν καὶ ἑαυτῷ ἅμα καὶ τοῖς ἄλλοις), and he never relaxed his self-turned attention (πρὸς ἑαυτὸν προσοχήν) except in sleep: even sleep he reduced by taking very little food, often not even a piece of bread, and by his continuous turning in contemplation to Intellect (ἢ πρὸς τὸν νοῦν αὐτοῦ διαρκῆς ἐπιστροφή) (19-23).<sup>1</sup>

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1. All translations, both of Porphyry *VP* and Plotinus are from Armstrong, *Plotinus*. The line references are to the *editio minor* of Henry and Schwyzer, *Plotini Opera*. I have modified the Armstrong translation of this passage. There is a question here of whether we should translate νοῦν as "intellect" (referring to Plotinus' own intellect as Armstrong here) or as "Intellect" referring to the Plotinian hypostasis of Intellect. Translation of *VP* in Brisson et al. *Vie de Plotin* I, 151: "par sa conversion soutenue de l'Intellect." Cf. Morlet, "Vie de Plotin" 31: "sa conversion continuelle vers l'Intellect." The Brisson et al. translation and Morlet here depart from the translation of Bréhier, vol. 1: 11: "la réflexion continue sur ses pensées." In the "Notes sur la *Vita Plotini*" in Brisson et al., *Vie de Plotin* II, Brisson, 241 we are informed that for Porphyry the end of philosophy

Here we can distinguish three moments of presence: (1) the presence of Plotinus to himself; (2) the presence of Plotinus to his disciples; and (3) the presence of Plotinus to an unseen realm of contemplation (and its presence to him).

Porphry, while commenting on the escape from the flesh proclaimed concerning Plotinus in the Delphic oracle delivered to Amelius, describes Plotinus' union with the One (*VP* 23.7-12):

So to this god-like man above all, who often raised himself in thought, according to the ways Plato teaches in the *Banquet*, to the First and Transcendent God, that God appeared who has neither shape nor any intelligible form, but is throned above intellect and all the intelligible.

He proceeds to recount how he, Porphyry, had himself attained such union:

I, Porphyry, who am now in my sixty-eighth year, declare that once I drew near and was united to him [the first and transcendent god] (12-14).

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is the return to oneself (*De abstinentia* I.29.4: εἰς τὸν ὄντως ἑαυτὸν ἢ ἐπιδρομή cf. *ibid.* III.27.6 and *Letter to Marcella* 8); this true self is identical with the intellect (*Sententiae* 40. p. 50, 16-21 Lamberz): τούτοις (those who have accomplished the return) παροῦσιν αὐτοῖς πάρεστι καὶ τὸ ὄν. The present passage compares with *De Abstinentia* I.32.2: τὴν δὲ ἀμελετησίαν παρέχει ἡ μετὰ τῆς πρὸς τὰ νοητὰ διαρκoῦς φροντίδος ἀποχή τῶν τὰ πάθη ἐγειρόντων αἰσθημάτων, ἐν οἷς καὶ τὰ ἐκ τῶν τροφῶν ἐγγίγνεται. Notice the use of διαρκῆς. The presence of God is inseparable from the presence to oneself, because intellect (νοῦς) is the temple (νεώς) of God (*Letter to Marcella* 19). Earlier in this chapter (8.4-11) Porphyry tells us that Plotinus first composed his work in his mind and then wrote it down. Pernot, "Concentration intellectuelle" argues that Plotinus is using the rhetorical method of *cogitatio*, a discipline of mental composition. In this process (8.6) Plotinus was μόνον τοῦ νοῦ ἐχόμενος: "il s'attachait seulement à sa pensée" (136); "he was wholly concerned with his thought" (Armstrong *ibid.*); "il ne s'attachait qu'au sens" (Morlet). Thus νοῦν at 8.24 might mean simply "train of thought" or "meaning". Nevertheless Pernot comments of such *cogitatio*: "C'était une prouesse de mémoire, et avantage: une prouesse de concentration intellectuelle, de fonctionnement de l'esprit, voir un trait d'inspiration surnaturelle" (154). Pernot also speaks of a philosophical transcendence of rhetoric (155). The use of ἐπιστροφή suggests to me a conversion (of a metaphysical kind). Of course, Plotinus' continual address to the hypostasis of Intellect may explain why he was concerned with sense rather than with style (as opposed to Longinus who as *philologos* [*VP* 14.18-20] was preoccupied with words [cf. Pépin, "*Philologos/Philosophos*" 499]). Significantly Plotinus in 4.8.1, in his only first person account of experience of the intelligible world, represents that experience as his normal state (to be interrupted by a fall into the body). See O'Meara, "A propos d'un témoignage" and Schroeder, *Form and Transformation* 5.

He then recounts Plotinus' own experience of the One:

To Plotinus "the goal ever near was shown": for his end and goal was to be united to, to approach the God who is over all things. Four times while I was with him (ὅτε αὐτῷ συνήμην) he attained that goal, in an unspeakable actuality and not in potency only (14-16).

Here Porphyry presents both Plotinus' presence to the One and also how that presence affected and empowered Porphyry himself.

In Chapter 13.5-7 of the *VP*, Porphyry offers a physical description of Plotinus that also suggests the manner of his presence:

When he was speaking his intellect visibly lit up his face (ἡ ἐνδείξις τοῦ νοῦ ἄχρι τοῦ προσώπου αὐτοῦ τὸ φῶς ἐπιλάμποντος): there was always a charm about his appearance, but at these times he was still more attractive to look at.

Here we may especially notice the aura of illumination that proceeds from the countenance of the sage.

### THE TEXT OF PLOTINUS AS PORPHYRY'S SOURCE FOR HIS DESCRIPTION OF HIS PRESENCE.

In Porphyry's account of the personal impact of his master, Plotinus' own text becomes Porphyry's source. This is to say that he presents material derived from the *Enneads* as if it were biographical detail within Porphyry's own sphere of knowledge.

Hadot remarks of the presence of Plotinus to others in *VP* 8 that we have already discussed: "On the subject of the philosopher's rapport with others, about his 'presence to others' of which Porphyry speaks, we find no theoretical information in the treatises of Plotinus."<sup>2</sup> Plotinus' description of the sensible world poses great problems for the interpreter of his writings. We seem to seek in vain for his account of it. Plotinus approaches the sensible world, not as an object of interest in itself, but as a fund of metaphor for describing the intelligible world. He obliquely describes the relationship between the sage and his disciple in portraying the relationship between the upper and the lower soul: the sage illustrates the upper soul while the pupil exemplifies the lower soul. We shall see that Porphyry exploits this oblique description of the relationship between the sage and his disciple in the *Enneads*

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2. Hadot, "Neoplatonist Spirituality," 231; cf. Schroeder, *Form and Transformation* 91-113.

in order to depict the relationship between Plotinus and his pupils. He turns this material in such a way that he occupies a privileged position in that school.

We have seen that in *VP* 8 Porphyry describes Plotinus' presence with the verb *suneinai*. In Plotinian Greek, the verb *suneinai* ("to be with") and its derivative noun *sunousia* ("being with") describe moments of presence and dependence.<sup>3</sup> As an ontological term, it describes the presence of a principle such as the One to itself. It further describes the presence of a superior principle to entities lower than itself as the One is present to Intellect, Soul, and the sensible world that emanate from it. It also describes the presence of the human soul to a higher principle such as the One. Plotinus prefers *sunousia* to the asymmetrical *parousia* as a word to describe this relationship because it provides an elastic inventory of presence and dependence.

In the oblique Plotinian description of the relationship between the sage and his disciples, Plotinus distinguishes two moments: presence to self and presence to others. True presence to self involves engagement with the highest level of oneself and therefore presence to the intelligible world. From that presence there flows the dependence of the sage's lower self upon its higher level. Also there flows, by emanation, a presence to the disciple who is dependent upon the sage.

Speaking of the purification of the soul from passions and desires, Plotinus argues (1.2.5.21-27):

The soul will be pure in all these ways and will want to make the irrational part, too, pure, so that this part may not be disturbed; or, if it is, not very much; its shocks will only be slight ones, easily allayed by the neighbourhood (*γειτονήσει*) of the soul: just as a man living next door to a sage would profit by the sage's neighbourhood (*ἀπολαύει τῆς τοῦ σοφοῦ γειτινάσεως*), either by becoming like him or by regarding him with such respect as not to dare to do anything of which the good man would not approve.

In the following chapter (1.2.6) Plotinus takes tacit issue with the doctrine of the *Theaetetus* 176b that the aim of philosophy is the imitation of god as far as possible by arguing: "Our concern, though, is not to be out of sin, but to be a god" (2-3). He proceeds:

If, then, there is still any element of involuntary impulse of this sort, a man in this state will be a god or spirit who is double, or rather who has with him (*σὺν αὐτῷ*) someone else who possesses a different

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3. Cf. Schroeder, "Presence and Dependence."

kind of virtue: if there is nothing, he will be simply god, and one of those gods who follow the First. For he himself is the god who came Thence, and his own real nature, if he becomes what he was when he came, is There. When he came here he took up his dwelling with someone else (συνωκίσθη), whom he will make like himself to the best of the powers of his real nature, so that if possible this someone else will be free from disturbance or will do nothing of which his master does not approve (3-11).

Plotinus then goes on to ask what kind of virtue the higher self, the god, would possess:

So the higher justice in the soul is its activity towards Intellect, its self-control is its inward turning to Intellect, its courage is its freedom from affections, according to the likeness of that to which it looks which is free from affections by nature: this freedom from affections in the soul comes from virtue, to prevent its sharing in the affections of its inferior companion (19-27).<sup>4</sup>

Schniewind states: "On an ethical level the *σπουδαῖος* is fully engaged in an educational role vis-à-vis the ordinary man."<sup>5</sup> This statement implies that the sage has an advertent moral engagement with others despite the fact that the relevant texts describe the internal relationship between the higher soul and the lower soul in the same individual. The texts cited by Schniewind do not bear out this thesis.<sup>6</sup> Schniewind's best case is provided by 1.4.15. If the sage is overcome by an irrational fear he will resist it with a dispassionate reproach as one would to a child (1.4.15.23-5):

"A man of this sort will not be unfriendly or unsympathetic; he will be like this in himself and in dealing with his own affairs; but he will render to his friends all that he renders to himself, and so will be the best of friends as well as remaining intelligent." Schniewind remarks "It seems to me that the *σπουδαῖος* is addressing himself

4. I prefer "Intellect" here to Armstrong's "intellect"; cf. note 1 above.

5. Schniewind, "Social Concern," 59.

6. 3.8.6.37-8. *Ibid.*, 54-5: "The *σπουδαῖος*, therefore, has already finished reasoning (αελόγισται) when he declares (ἀποφαίνει) what he has himself to others." Schniewind 56: "It seems to indicate that the *σπουδαῖος* reproduces something of his experience to someone else who still needs discursive reason." Sleenman and Pollet give "show or display" for ἀποφαίνειν. Thus ἀποφαίνειν could mean to display by being an example. Note that discursive reason has come to an end by the moment of this revelation. At 1.4.14.1-4 the separation of the body from the soul witnesses (μαρτυρεῖ) that man is not a conjoint (συναμφοτέρον). *Ibid.* 56: "Various pedagogical means are used by the *σπουδαῖος* to testify to the ordinary man what it is like to be located in the intellect." It is not clear to me that the "ordinary man" is the addressee.

from his intelligible part to the intelligible part of his interlocutor.”<sup>7</sup>

Yet the generosity of the sage to others need not be *advertent*, i.e., it may be an emanation or consequence of his relation to himself and to the intelligible world. It need not, e.g., involve location at all. Schniewind offers better argument: “According to Plotinus, each level of reality is an expression of the perfection of the One, and also a result of its fundamental generosity. The more the sage imitates the Good, therefore, the more naturally he imitates this principle of generosity.”<sup>8</sup>

To return to Porphyry’s *Life of Plotinus*, Porphyry in Chapter 8.19 says that Plotinus was present at once to himself and to others. We have seen that in *Enneads* 2.5. and 6 Plotinus describes the relationship between the higher and the lower soul of the sage with the illustration of the disciple who lives next to the sage. The sage of the analogy is present to his disciple by being present to himself and also to the intelligible world. Porphyry’s description of Plotinus and his disciples differs from the figurative account of the relationship between the higher and lower souls in that the metaphor is realized as concrete historical reality. Plotinus is indeed a sage and his presence is realized among actual disciples. Again, in chapter 8 of the *Life*, Plotinus’ engagement with the world around him does not interrupt his continuous turning in contemplation to Intellect.

In Chapter 23 of the *Life*, Porphyry recounts both his own union with the One and Plotinus’ union with the highest hypostasis. In Chapter 8 the simultaneous presence of Plotinus to himself and to his disciples is expressed with the verb *suneinai*. The same verb is used again in Chapter 23.16 when Porphyry says that he “was with” (συνήμην) Plotinus when he was united with the One. What is expressed with the verb *suneinai* in Chapters 8 and 23 of the *Life* is exhibited in other language in *Enneads* 1.2.5 and 6 (yet making use of the preposition σύν and the prefix σύν in συνοικίεσθαι). There Plotinus speaks of the neighbourhood of the disciple to the sage in the context of illustrating the relationship between the higher and lower soul. Thus Porphyry cannibalizes the oblique description of the relationship between the sage and his disciple in Plotinus to render it actual in the relationship between Plotinus and his disciples. In Chapter 23, the *sunousia* of

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7. Ibid. 58

8. Ibid. 58

Porphyry with Plotinus (supposedly in the absence of other less privileged disciples) at the moment of union with the One confers a special status on Porphyry who is vying for his legitimacy in the Plotinian succession. Porphyry is obviously also applying to his description of Plotinus' relationship to his disciples the language of relationship that Plotinus uses to describe both the presence of the One to itself and to other things. The phrase *συνεῖναι ἑαυτῷ* is used of the One's presence to itself (6.8.15.1-4):

And he, that same self, is loveable and love and love of himself (*αὐτοῦ ἐρώς*), in that he is beautiful only from himself and in himself. For surely his keeping company with himself (*συνεῖναι ἑαυτῷ*) could not be in any other way than if what keeps company and what it keeps company with were one and the same.

*Sunousia* is used to describe our love of the One (6.9.9.44-45): "There is one true object of eros, with whom we may be together (*suneinai*)." So even as *sunousia* describes the One's relationship with itself, so does it describe our relationship to it. This use of *sunousia* obviously parallels the use of "neighbourhood" (*geitonêsis*) that we have examined.

The theme of the presence (*sunousia*) of the sage to his disciple is to be found in the Platonic corpus. In what follows the question of whether the *Theages* is a genuinely Platonic dialogue need not concern us as it was regarded as genuine in antiquity.<sup>9</sup> In the *Theages* 129e1-130a5 Socrates says that his daimonion governs his associations (*sunousiai*). Those whose association with Socrates is unopposed by the daimonion improve their characters. Aristides tells Socrates (130d2-e4) that he has never learned anything from Socrates, but whenever he was in the same house (*οἰκίᾳ*), he improved his character and even more so when he was in the same room (*οἰκήματι*). He made the greatest progress "when I

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9. The authenticity of the *Theages* has been cast into doubt "because of the occult nature of the *daimonion*." Bussanich defends its authenticity (universally accepted in antiquity) on the grounds that such a use of the *daimonion* is properly attested in Plato: cf. Bussanich, "Socrates the Mystic," 40. It is included in the Platonic tetralogies of Thrasyllus and in a list of Plato's writings in D.L.III.51.16 (cf. Lamb, *Plato* 345); the *Theages* is listed among the works of doubtful authorship: see Kraut, "Introduction to the study of Plato" 35n18; stylometric analysis suggests that the *Theages* is genuine: cf. Brandwood, "Stylometry and chronology," 112. Ledger, *Re-counting Plato*, 121,169, 219 finds that stylometric analysis is not inconsistent with the authenticity of the *Theages*. Although the *Theages* is not listed in Henry and Schwyzer's *index fontium*, there is no reason to suppose that Plotinus did not accept the dialogue as authentic.

sat right beside you and physically held on to you and touched you." Perhaps the use of οἰκία and οἰκήμα here influence Plotinus' employment of συνουκίζεσθαι at 1.2.6.9. Bussanich remarks:<sup>10</sup> "It is common in mystical orders for disciples to desire and derive benefit from physical contact with spiritual masters and gurus whose love exerts a spiritually erotic attraction on their disciples." In Letter VII 341c5-d2 Plato says that the highest wisdom cannot be communicated by books and writing, but is conveyed by long association (*sunousia*) between teacher and pupil and "suddenly, like a fire flashing forth when a fire is kindled, it is born in the soul and straightway nourishes itself."<sup>11</sup> The association of Alcibiades as described by Alcibiades in the *Symposium* (215a4-218b8) is of this type.<sup>12</sup> The influence of the *Theages* passage may be seen in Porphyry's *Letter to Marcella* 19-20: In an exercise of paranomasia Porphyry says: νεῶς μὲν ἔστω τοῦ θεοῦ ὁ ἐν σοὶ νοῦς, "Let the mind (*nous*) within you be a temple (*neôds*). It must be prepared and adorned for a worthy reception of God ... you will have God as our partner (σύνοικον)."<sup>13</sup>

### DOCETIC BIOGRAPHY

We have seen that, in Chapter 13.5-8 of the *Life*, Porphyry offers a description of Plotinus:

When he was speaking his intellect visibly lit up his face (ἡ ἐνδείξις τοῦ νοῦ ἄχρι τοῦ προσώπου αὐτοῦ τὸ φῶς ἐπιλάμποντος): there was always a charm about his appearance, but at these times he was still more attractive to look at.

We may compare 1.6.5.12-17. Plotinus is explaining that the true lover is moved, not by physical, but by spiritual, beauty:

You feel like this when you see, in yourself or in someone else, greatness of soul, a righteous life, a pure morality, courage with its noble face (πρόσωπον), and dignity and modesty advancing in the

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10. Bussanich, "Socrates the Mystic" 41. The word "Upanishad" in Sanskrit is derived from the Sanskrit *upa* ("near"), *ni* ("down"), and *sad* ("sit") and thus refers to the association of the disciple with the guru: cf. Li, *Guide to Asian Philosophy* 3.

11. Cf. Bussanich, "Socrates the Mystic," 49. The Seventh Letter is listed in the *index fontium* of Henry and Schwyzer; there is no reason to believe that Plotinus did not regard it as authentic.

12. Cf. Bussanich, "Socrates the Mystic," 43-6.

13. Trans. Wicker, "To Marcella," 63.

godlike light of Intellect shining upon all this (ἐπι πᾶσι δὲ τούτοις τὸν θεοειδῆ νοῦν ἐπιλάμποντα).<sup>14</sup>

Plotinus' face was, at certain times, more attractive than at others. This sentiment reflects 6.7.22.22-9 where Plotinus argues against symmetry as an explanation for beauty that what creates the beauty of a face is not its symmetry and proportion, but rather a grace and light that illumine it: διὸ καὶ ἐνταῦθα φατέον μᾶλλον τὸ κάλλος τὸ ἐπὶ τῇ συμμετρῖᾳ ἐπιλαμπόμενον. Plotinus may be offering us here the first theoretical statement of facial expression (as it is featured in Roman sculpture).<sup>15</sup> It is significant that Porphyry uses this expression to describe the individuality of Plotinus himself. Notice in these three passages the common use of ἐπιλάμπειν.<sup>16</sup>

Jerphagnon argues persuasively that the *Life* belongs to a genre of philosophical biography that differs from our own in presenting, not so much the salient facts of the philosopher's life and background, but an irruption of spiritual light into the dark world of sense.<sup>17</sup> We might refer to this kind of writing as docetic biography. Narrative economy in the account of Plotinus' shame at being born into a body, his refusal to have his portrait painted on the Platonic ground that such a portrait would be at a further remove from reality, and the withholding of information about his genealogy point in this direction. So do the complementary accounts of epiphany as in the luminous quality of Plotinus' countenance and the incident, as we shall see, in the temple of Isis.

We may ask why Porphyry adapts Plotinus' language to his own biographical uses. First we may see what use it is that Porphyry is making of such language. We have seen that Plotinus offers an

14. I prefer "Intellect" here to Armstrong's "intellect."

15. Cf. Schroeder, *Form and Transformation*, 20-1; Mortley, *Plotinus* 126-37; on individuality in Roman portrait sculpture see L'Orange, *Art Forms and Civic Life* 105.

16. Cf. Plotinus 1.6.1.37-40: "And when, though the same good proportion (συμμετρία) is there all the time, the same face sometimes appears beautiful and sometimes does not, surely we must say that being beautiful is something else over and above good proportion and good proportion is beautiful because of something else;" cf. Plotinus 1.1.8.15-18: "the soul is pictured as present to bodies since it illuminates them (ἐλλάμπουσα εἰς αὐτὰ), abiding in itself and giving images of itself as a face seen in many mirrors"; cf. 1.6.9.13: "you are to work on your statue of yourself until the glory of virtue shines upon you (ἐκλάμψειέ σοι)." Cf. Männlein-Robert, "*Biographie*" 589n41; cf. Cox-Miller, *Biography in Late Antiquity* 103n8.

17. Jerphagnon, "Plotin, épiphanie".

analogy in which the presence of the sage to his disciple illustrates the nature of the relationship between the upper and the lower soul. In 4.5.7 Plotinus illustrates the procession of sensible light from its source by comparing it with the procession of the lower from the upper soul. This seems surprising: we might accept that the sensible image as signifier would be employed to illustrate its intelligible correlate as signified, but not *vice versa*. This makes sense within the Plotinian metaphysics of light in which light is not merely metaphorical but an ontologically adequate descriptor of intelligible reality.<sup>18</sup> We may refer to this kind of predication as iconic inversion.

This iconic inversion, however, involves as well a reciprocal predication. Both the procession of sensible light from its source (a flame, the sun etc.) and the procession of the lower from the higher soul are instances of emanation and illumination. Yet iconic inversion may be implied in the relation between the sage and his disciple that we have already examined. The true expression of spiritual leadership is to be found in the relationship between the upper soul in contemplation of the intelligible world and the lower soul that profits from the presence of the higher soul. Plotinus speaks both of the desire on the part of the disciple to imitate his master and also his fear of doing anything that would displease the master (1.2.5.26-7). The relationship between the sage and his disciple might also indeed involve teaching, curriculum etc., but these particulars are embraced in the wider scheme of Plotinian presence. We may see here the subtlety of “emanation” as the relationship embraces but is not exhausted by its details.<sup>19</sup>

The presence of Plotinus as described by Porphyry is, as we have seen, threefold: To himself, to others, and to the intelligible world. These three moments are also present in the analogy of the presence of the sage to his disciple and in the presence of the upper to the lower soul. Porphyry invests Plotinus with the threefold presence of the sage of the Plotinian analogy. This description of Plotinus presupposes an interpretation of the analogy along the lines of iconic inversion. The presence of Plotinus to his disciples is precisely anchored in the presence of his upper soul to the intelligible world. So the best way to understand the relationship between Plotinus and his disciples is by a concentration on the

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18. Beierwaltes, “Plotins Metaphysik des Lichtes”.

19. Cf. Dörrie, “Emanation,” 135-7; 83-85 in reprint for Plotinus’ qualification of emanation imagery; cf. Schroeder, *Form and Transformation* 35 and note 34.

presence of the upper soul to the lower soul.

If the best way to describe the relationship between the sage and his disciple is in this oblique description then the best manner for Porphyry the biographer to describe his master is in language that Plotinus uses to describe the relationship between the upper and lower soul and procession of intelligible light from its noetic source. The relationship presents greater depth and dimension in its vertical, than in its horizontal, axis.

Porphyry's master stroke is to invest the Plotinian image of the sage in the biography of his teacher and to render the disciple of the analogy a biographical recipient of the benign presence of Plotinus. Plotinus' account of beauty and facial expression exercises an epiphany in Porphyry's description of the nimbate Plotinus.<sup>20</sup> Iconic inversion renders the sensible world an epiphany of the intelligible world and affirms the goodness and beauty of the sensible world. Thus narrative economy and the suppression of biographical details in the docetic biography of Plotinus prepares the ground for a salubrious epiphany.

To sum up, why does Porphyry borrow language from Plotinus' own text to describe Plotinus? The elements of world negation and epiphany as aspects of the relationship between Plotinus and his disciples are intellectually distinguishable but imply each other in a dialectical tension. The account of the relationship between the upper and lower soul as illustrated by the relationship between the sage and his disciple is indeed offered as an account of the relationship between the upper and the lower soul. Yet it also obliquely offers, not only an explanation, but the best account of the relationship between the sage and his disciple. A direct account of the relationship between the sage and his disciple would involve us in a dreary pedagogical discussion that would miss the subtlety of Plotinian *sunousia*. The very elasticity of *sunousia* allows for iconic inversion.

There is, however, another reason why Porphyry describes Plotinus in language borrowed from his own writings. Porphyry is discharging a debt of piety, of memory, and of love toward his

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20. Goulet, "Étude sur la vie des philosophes," 9: "Ces traits légendaires ou romanesques qui envahissent progressivement les Vies des philosophes doivent être compris dans le context religieux de la production de ces ouvrages. On doit y voir non pas des supercherries d'auteurs peu scrupuleux, mais des productions de la foi religieuse, des actes de foi en une figure divine qui finit par incarner de plus en plus les traits divers de l'archetype religieux."

teacher. It is from the presence of Plotinus in his own life that he learned what teaching and wisdom are. As we shall see, Plotinus' own meeting with Ammonius is described in terms of breathless discovery. So must it have been for Porphyry when he first encountered his master. Porphyry conveys a sense of succession that transcends continuity of doctrine. In a way, Ammonius in his very obscurity symbolizes the mysterious character of Porphyry's attachment to Plotinus. We may see in this the hand of providence.

### THE POLITICAL CHARACTER OF THE VITA PLOTINI

As I have argued in a study of Ammonius Saccas, the teacher of Plotinus, Porphyry's *Life of Plotinus* is not an innocent document.<sup>21</sup> It is rather designed to secure Porphyry's pride of place in the circle of Plotinus. Everything that we know about the shadowy figure of Ammonius, the teacher of Plotinus, is derived from Porphyry, so that nothing in the later sources adds anything to the knowledge we gain from the *Life of Plotinus*.<sup>22</sup> In classical antiquity, knowledge of the master's youth on the part of the pupil yielded credibility to the pupil's claims to succession. We can see this in the claims of Plato and Xenophon to know about the youthful Socrates and in the material concerning the youth of Origen in Eusebius. Of course, Porphyry is further motivated to provide intimate knowledge of his master's youth by the fact that he was a latecomer to Plotinus' school. Plotinus nowhere provides us with the name of his teacher, a fact revealed only by Porphyry. It is anomalous for an ancient philosopher not to mention his teachers. For example, Alexander of Aphrodisias tells us of his teachers Herminius and Sosigenes.<sup>23</sup> For Porphyry, to show knowledge of Plotinus' education and teacher in Alexandria is a means of increasing his own prestige and claim to succession within the Plotinian school.

In late antique philosophical biography and hagiography the character (*êthos*) of the holy man is already formed from his youth upwards. There is no development, but the deeds and sayings of the holy man illustrate his semi-divine nature.<sup>24</sup> It is significant

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21. Schroeder, "Ammonius Saccas," 517-20.

22. Schwyzer, *Ammonios Sakkas*.

23. For Herminius see Simplicius *In De Caelo* (CAG 7) 430.32 ff.; for Sosigenes see Alexander *In Meteorologica* (CAG 3.2) 143.13 and Schroeder and Todd, *Two Greek Commentators* 4 and note 14.

24. Cf. Cox-Miller, *Biography in Late Antiquity*, 9, 22, 56-7

that in the account of Plotinus' encounter with Ammonius there is no conversion from an unphilosophical to a philosophical life. Plotinus already possesses the knowledge and character he seeks and finds in Ammonius a catalyst for his practice of philosophy and the philosophical life.<sup>25</sup>

Porphiry tells us concerning Ammonius that Plotinus sought high and low for a teacher of philosophy. When he finally found Ammonius, he exclaimed, "This is the man whom I sought" (*VP* 3.13). This sort of proclamation is well within the ancient tradition of philosophical biography and hagiography.<sup>26</sup>

He then goes on to relate the story of a strange pact entered into by Plotinus, Erennius, and Origen not to publish opinions that had been elucidated by them in Ammonius' lectures (ἂ αὐτοῖς ἐν ταῖς ἀκροάσεσιν ἀνεκεκαθάρτο). Plotinus held conferences with others in which he kept concealed which doctrines were in a tradition stemming from Ammonius (τὰ παρὰ Ἀμμωνίου δόγματα).<sup>27</sup> First Erennius, then Origen, broke the agreement (*VP* 3.24-30). The agreement was broken by Origen who first wrote nothing and then wrote two treatises, *On the Daimones* and, in the reign of Gallienus, *That the King is the Only Maker* (these works seem to refer to themes common to Middle Platonism so that no information about any distinctive position of Ammonius could be gleaned from these titles).<sup>28</sup> Plotinus continued to lecture, basing what he said on his association with Ammonius (ἐκ τῆς Ἀμμωνίου συνουσίας). There is no indication that Plotinus broke the agreement in using material in a tradition derived from

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25. Cf. Männlein-Robert, "Biographie," 591; 596. In *VP* 3.13-17 Plotinus, upon studying with Ammonius, acquired such a philosophical character (τοσαύτην ἔξιν ἐν φιλοσοφίᾳ κτήσασθαι) that he wished to explore the philosophy of the Persians and Indians. The word ἔξις is defined by LSJ as: "being in a certain state, a permanent condition." This description accords well with Männlein-Robert's view. It is also clear that the mention of Persian and Indian philosophy extends the meaning of "philosophy" beyond Hellenic doctrine. Surely we are here in the world of Philostratus' *Apollonius of Tyana* and such figures as the Egyptian gymnosophists and the Indian Brahmins.

26. Cf. Bieler, *ΘΕΙΟΣ ΑΝΗΡ*, 38; Nock, *Conversion*: 107 ff.; 254-71; cf. Männlein-Robert, "Biographie," 590-91

27. For the use of παρὰ and the genitive to convey the sense of "tradition" cf. Alexander (?) *De Intellectu* 150.19: τῶν παρὰ Ἀριστοτέλους περὶ τοῦ πρώτου οἰκείου and 172.16: τῶν παρὰ Ἀριστοτέλους περὶ τὰ ἐφ' ἡμῖν in which Stoic concepts are embraced within a tradition stemming from Aristotle (in which they are re-interpreted). Cf. Schroeder and Todd, *Two Greek Commentators* 28.

28. Armstrong, "Part III: Plotinus," 198-9; Schroeder, "Ammonius," 501-2.

Ammonius in his oral teaching. Nor has Porphyry at this point said anything about Plotinus breaking the agreement by writing (as in the case of Origen and presumably Erennius).<sup>29</sup> Perhaps the oath is betrayed, not by writing, but by publishing. In that case, since it is Porphyry who is publishing Plotinus, Plotinus is guiltless. What is crucial to understanding Porphyry's purpose in this confusing story is that he wishes us to locate Plotinus in a *tradition* stemming from Ammonius and that he Porphyry is our unique source for that tradition. He does not tell us what that tradition is.

It is easy to see from the mysterious character of this story how one would think that there was an oath binding a group of

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29. O'Brien, "Plotin et le Voeu de Silence" emends (in the absence of MS. support) VP 3.24-5 to exclude the words *καὶ Πλωτίνῳ* on the grounds that the pact was revealed by the death of Ammonius and that Plotinus was not, at that point, in Alexandria to enter into the pact. O'Brien leans on the fact that *ἀνεκείκασθαι* (3.26-7) is in the pluperfect and that this tense would only be appropriate if Ammonius had died at the point that they entered into the pact. The past tense could, however, simply refer, from the point of time at which anyone felt tempted to undo the agreement, to discussions that had taken place in the past. O'Brien, having advanced his emendation, argues that Porphyry was trying to let Plotinus off the hook: Plotinus was never a signatory to the pact, although he observed its spirit for a long time. O'Brien sees a contradiction: at 3.27-8 Plotinus continues to meet with students, although he maintains silence concerning the doctrines of Ammonius. However, at 3.32-5 Plotinus wrote nothing for ten years, but he drew his lectures from his association with Ammonius. A solution would be that the act of publishing was the means of breaking the agreement. However, Porphyry tells us that Origen, who broke the pact first, published *That the King is the only Maker* in the reign of Gallienus (3.31-2). Plotinus came to Rome in the reign of Philip the Arab (acceded 244). Plotinus has to start writing in 254 to complete the ten years of not writing. Gallienus' reign was from 254-68. O'Brien has an argument on the basis of the preamble of Longinus' *On the End* contained in VP 21. While Longinus mentions Origen's *On Spirits* in the preamble (20.41), he does not mention *That the King is the only Maker*. The *terminus post quem* of Longinus' *On the End* is 263 because he mentions Porphyry as present in the school of Plotinus and Porphyry arrives in the tenth year of Gallienus' reign (4.1). The *terminus ante quem* is provided by the death of Plotinus in 269. Thus *That the King is the only Maker* cannot have been written until 263, i.e., after Plotinus had started to write. Therefore the act of writing is not the trigger for breaking the pact. An objection to O'Brien's argument is that Porphyry tells us, in the same place in which he is discussing his portrayal of the pact, not only that Origen wrote *That the King is the only Maker* in the reign of Gallienus, but prefaces this statement by saying he wrote the work *On Spirits* (undated). The work *On Spirits* is mentioned in *On the End* and therefore could have been written before Plotinus published. The detail about the publication of *That the King is the only Maker* could be gratuitous information, a kind of footnote.

Pythagorean initiates into a pact of holy silence.<sup>30</sup> Willy Theiler describes Ammonius as *ein grosser Schatten*.<sup>31</sup> We know nothing really about the content of his teaching. However, the power of this shadow transcends the concerns of source research. Even as Plotinus is, apart from his teaching, a presence to his disciples, so does he manifest the mysterious presence of Ammonius in his own life. That mysterious presence extends to Porphyry in a secret succession.

Porphyry in fact gives us a written source for his knowledge of Ammonius: he quotes from a treatise of Longinus entitled *On the End* in which Longinus divides the philosophers encountered in his youth into two categories familiar enough in the university of the present day: publishers and non-publishers! Ammonius is classed among the non-publishers (*VP* 20.36). We may see in the non-publishing of Ammonius the kernel of truth behind the pact not to reveal his teaching. The non-publishing (and unknown) Ammonius is a splendid candidate for that teacher of Plotinus' youth, knowledge of whom confers title upon Porphyry. Another story of Plotinus' youth, that he was at his nurse's teat until the age of eight, fits the same biographical category.

Finamore, building upon my argument, contends that Porphyry, by his own account a latecomer to the school of Plotinus in Rome, uses techniques familiar from the rhetorical handbooks to marginalize (damning with faint praise and praising with faint damns) the role and witness of Amelius, whose association with Plotinus was more ancient than his own, and who had also kept

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30. Cf. Dörrie, "Ammonios, der Lehrer Plotins." The word *συνθήκη* means simply "agreement." Surely if there were a sacred oath, it could not be broken by agreement among the initiates. Presumably the seminar of Ammonius was (if it existed) a group in which the members all joined in a common quest. The Platonic verb *ἀνακαθαίρειν* means to clear up by discussion. If we take the story seriously, we would have here a publication agreement among the participants so that no-one would scoop the others (concern is expressed about charges of plagiarism against Plotinus [*VP* 17-18]). For this interpretation see Harder et al., *Plotins Schriften Vc: Anhang*: 86-7. The pronoun *αὐτοῖς* at 3.26, whether we construe it as a dative of agency or an ethical dative, refers to all three participants. Cf. Casel, *De Philosophorum Graecorum Silentio Mystico* 116 who sees here, not the observation of a mystical silence, but a wish to protect philosophy from the vulgar (he refers to the statement in chapter 4 in which Porphyry remarks on how the writings of Plotinus were hard to come by when he first entered the school). I do not wish to enter all the problems of this passage here: my main point involves Porphyry's claim to Ammonian tradition.

31. Theiler, "Plotin und die antike Philosophie," 215.

notes of Plotinus' lectures which he collected in a hundred volumes (but significantly did not publish Plotinus, as did Porphyry).<sup>32</sup>

Saffrey, taking a position apparently different from that of Finamore and myself, argues that Porphyry follows a common practice in introducing his edition of Plotinus with a life of the author whom he is editing. There is no question that he was seeking succession to Plotinus in the school at Rome: "Il est à remarquer que, dans la Vie de Plotin, à aucun moment la question de la succession de Plotin n'est posée."<sup>33</sup> There is, in fact, no evidence that Porphyry founded a school of any kind.<sup>34</sup> (Dillon, however, argues that there is evidence that a school of Porphyry existed, although we do not know anything about it).<sup>35</sup> The fact that Porphyry composed the *Life of Plotinus* in 301, i.e., thirty-one years after the death of Plotinus, also militates against the likelihood that his intention was to establish such a succession.

However, for Saffrey, as for Finamore and myself, the *Life of Plotinus* is not an innocent and objective act of biographical scholarship. Saffrey sees the very manner of organizing the Enneads by topic a reflection of Porphyry's interpretation of the hypotheses concerning the One in Plato's *Parmenides* and constitutes polemic against Iamblichus' understanding of the those hypotheses.<sup>36</sup>

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32. Finamore, "Biography as Self-Promotion"; cf. Masullo, "Biographia Philosophica" 235-6 for Porphyry's subtle use of rhetorical technique to undermine the position of Amelius; cf. Brisson "Amélius" 795 for Porphyry's rivalry, if not hostility, toward Amelius.

33. Saffrey, "Pourquoi Porphyre" 34.

34. Saffrey, "Pourquoi Porphyre" 35-42.

35. Dillon, "Philosophy as a Profession" 4; Eunapius, *Vitae Sophistarum* V.458 Giangrande (Dillon gives the reference as Eunapius, *VPhil.* VI: 467) informs us that Iamblichus studied with Porphyry: εἶτα μετ' Ἀνατόλιον Πορφύριον προθεῖς ἑαυτόν. However cf. Smith, *Porphyry's Place* XVIIIn18: "This might simply mean that he had read Porphyry's works but προστιθῆμι seems to imply more than this." Smith remains unconvinced. Dillon points out that we also know the name of Gedalius and other pupils to whom Porphyry dedicated his commentary on Aristotle's *Categories*.

36. Addey, *Divination and Theurgy*, who argues against the view that the relation between Porphyry and Iamblichus is characterized by polemic, ignores the important paper of H. D. Saffrey, "Pourquoi Porphyre" with respect to Porphyry's arrangement of the treatises of Plotinus into six Enneads. We know from Proclus that the Neoplatonists established their basic principles from their interpretation of the hypotheses of Plato's *Parmenides* and the order of the hypostases in each author is deduced from that source (Saffrey and Westerink, *Proclus* LXXV-LXXIX). Porphyry arranges Plotinus' writings, not in their chrono-

Saffrey supposes that, for succession to be claimed, there must be a school to be claimed by the successor. The word "school" may, of course, denote an established institution, from a private school located in a household to a school with a formal and endowed chair. On the other hand, the word may refer to an intellectual direction or tradition, a school of thought. It is in this latter sense that we should understand the school of Plotinus.<sup>37</sup> If we understand the term in that way, then we may see that Porphyry, while not wishing, by writing the *Life of Plotinus*, to establish himself as a the successor to Plotinus in his school, nevertheless is motivated so to write the *Life* that he will preserve his own eminent position within the tradition inaugurated by his master.

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logical, but in their thematic, order. That order reflects the Porphyrian order of the world as reflecting Porphyry's understanding of the hypotheses of Plato's *Parmenides*. The superior beings of Iamblichus that occupy the position of Soul in Porphyry represent the gods and *daimones* of theurgy (both authors interpreting the third hypothesis). The rational souls occupy the last place in Iamblichus where that place is occupied by body put in order in Porphyry (where both authors are interpreting the fourth hypothesis). Thus the difference in classification by Porphyry and Iamblichus reflects their differences on the question of theurgy. These differences of Iamblichus from Porphyry skew Porphyry's order of the intelligible world. The classification of the intelligible world in Porphyry's thematic arrangement of the Plotinian treatises further reflects this difference between the two authors and constitutes a weapon that Porphyry is using in his battle with Iamblichus (Saffrey, "Pourquoi Porphyre" 47-53; cf. 56). In effect, by placing the rational souls after the *daimones* of theurgy, Iamblichus is rendering philosophy (as practiced by rational souls) subservient to theurgy. Of course, Saffrey accepts the received view (put into question by Addey) that Porphyry's *Letter to Anebo* is a polemic against Iamblichus who, in the *De Mysteriis*, is undertaking an apologetic response to that polemic. The success of Saffrey's subtle argument will depend on the view that one takes of the relationship between these two works. If Saffrey is right, the very manner of presenting the text of Plotinus offers an interpretation which brings the status of theurgy into question. Addey would doubtless reply that the move from rational thought to theurgy is cumulative, i.e., that reason is not destroyed, but absorbed and fulfilled in theurgy (Addey, *Divination and Theurgy* 192-9).

37. Goulet-Cazé, "L'arrière-plan scolaire" 249-50; Augustine refers to a *schola Plotini* (*Letter* XCVIII 33; *PL* XXXIII.448); cf. Goulet-Cazé 231n2; cf. Brisson, "Plotin: Une Bibliographie." In Brisson et al. *Vie de Plotin* II 10; on the question of the "school" of Plotinus see also J.-M. Narbonne and M. Achard in their introduction to the 2012 Budé of Plotinus: XIX-XXI: also to be considered is the absence of structured courses and the lack of succeeding cohorts of young students.

### PORPHYRY AND THE POLITICS OF PLOTINIAN SUCCESSION

We have been treating the *Life of Plotinus* as an exercise in asserting Porphyry's position within the Plotinian succession. Succession can mean a proper tradition of doctrine handed down from one generation to another. Porphyry pays some homage to this concept of succession in his story of how the opinions of Ammonius were conveyed to and maintained by his students, including Plotinus. However, he never tells us what these opinions are. Another form of succession (familiar from the church) is that of sacral power. It is the argument of this paper that it is the latter form of succession that really interests Porphyry in the *Life of Plotinus*.

In *VP* 10 Porphyry presents three stories concerning the sacral power of Plotinus. The first concerns magic, the second theurgy, and the third popular religion. These stories taken together offer a catalogue of late antique religious and philosophical praxis. In each case Plotinus' soul proves to be more powerful than the representatives of these positions. These figures offer a contrast with the access of Porphyry to the spiritual power of Plotinus.

The first story is of Olympius of Alexandria who practised magic (μαγεία) to curse Plotinus by directing the malign influence of the stars against him: the curse was, by the strength of Plotinus' soul, turned back on Olympius himself. For Plotinus magic can affect the lower soul and is exercised through the horizontal sympathy of the cosmos.<sup>38</sup> Yet Plotinus stipulates (4.4.44.1) "Contemplation alone remains incapable of enchantment." The higher soul is not subject to it.<sup>39</sup> We have so far remarked (with reference to the nimbate Plotinus and the threefold presence of Plotinus) that Porphyry lifts material from the *Enneads* to describe Plotinus himself. We have here another instance of this practice. Mazur remarks of our present story: "He [Plotinus] is obliged to admit the efficacy of malicious astral magic, since he himself, apparently, was at one point a victim." We might wish to take this with a bit of salt. As Porphyry remarks, stating the purpose of this anecdote: "Plotinus certainly possessed by birth something more than other men." (We may take it as settled that Plotinus was not himself a vulgar magician).<sup>40</sup>

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38. 4.4.40-41 and Mazur, "Unio Magica: Part II," 32.

39. Cf. Mazur, "Unio Magica: Part II," 32.

40. Armstrong, "Was Plotinus a Magician?" Although Mazur in "Unio Magica Part II" accuses Armstrong of confusing vulgar magic with theurgy. We may surely assert that Plotinus was not a magician in the vulgar sense of *mageia* and

The second story concerns an anonymous Egyptian priest. In Chapter 10.15-33 Porphyry describes a *séance* in the temple of Isis in Rome in which an Egyptian priest wished to show Plotinus his personal *daimôn*. When the spirit came, it was not a *daimôn*, but a god. The priest, either out of fear or jealousy, strangled the birds he was holding as a protection. Porphyry remarks,

“So the companion of Plotinus was a spirit of the more god-like kind, and he continually kept the divine eye of his soul fixed on this companion. It was a reason of this kind that led him to write the treatise ‘On Our Allotted Guardian Spirit,’ in which he sets out to explain the differences between the spirit-companions.”

Porphyry then remarks that it was after this *séance* that Plotinus composed his treatise on the personal *daimôn* (3.4). We have so far observed (in the case of the threefold presence of Plotinus to his disciples and in the case of the nimbate Plotinus) a pattern of using language borrowed from the *Enneads* to describe Plotinus himself. Surely that principle may be invoked here. The sequence is rather that Porphyry reads 3.4 and then invents the story about the *séance* on its basis. If this is so, then Porphyry is not merely commenting on an incident in the life of Plotinus: he is inventing this story to suit his own purposes. The Egyptian identity of the unnamed priest (and the attachment to Isis) makes us think of Iamblichus (who was descended from a long line of priest-kings in Emesa and assumes the role of an Egyptian priest, Abammon, in writing the *De mysteriis*). The anonymity of the Egyptian priest here doubtless reflects the adoption of an Egyptian pseudonym by Iamblichus. The Plotinian treatise 3.4 is the inspiration for Porphyry’s story. Plotinus teaches that a man’s *daimôn* or guardian spirit is the principle on the level above that on which he lives. Thus the man who lives at the level of Soul has Intellect as his *daimôn* and the man who lives at the level of Intellect has the god beyond Intellect, the One, as his *daimôn*.<sup>41</sup> The use of the particle γάρ in the sentence that immediately follows the tale of Olympius (10.15) is important, yet is not brought out in Armstrong’s translation which should be emended as follows: “[For] an Egyptian priest who came to Rome and made his acquaintance etc.” The story of the Egyptian priest is intended as a further example of the sacral

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*goêteia*.

41. 3.4.6.1-4; cf. Männlein-Robert, “Biographie,” 589 who speaks here of a “Transfer einer ‘Botschaft’ von den Schriften eines Philosophen auf sein Leben, seine Biographie.”

power of Plotinus.

We have seen how in chapter 23 Porphyry was with (συνήμην) Plotinus when he experienced union with the One and also how Porphyry himself attained that union. Clearly Porphyry had successful access to the *daimôn* of Plotinus. If Plotinus normally was functioning on the level of Intellect, than the next god up would be his *daimôn*. So the highest god, the One, was Plotinus' guardian spirit. Iamblichus was overwhelmed and hence unsuccessful in his access to the *daimôn* of Plotinus. The story redounds to the superiority of Porphyry and his favour with Plotinus. We have seen in Enneads 1.2.5 and 6 how the relationship between the higher soul and the lower soul is compared with the presence of the sage to his disciple. We have further seen how this passage is adapted in *VP* 8 to the presence of Plotinus to his disciples. Porphyry's statement at *VP* 10 that Plotinus "continually kept the divine eye of his soul fixed on this companion [the personal *daimôn*]" compares nicely with his statement at *VP* 8 that describes his "continuous turning in contemplation to Intellect." We have seen that the story of the séance in *VP* 10 owes a literary debt to Enneads 3.4. If we construe the upper soul of 1.2.5-6 as a *daimôn* we may see how the passages at *VP* 8 and 10 complement each other. At *VP* 22.23 Amelius consults the oracle of Apollo concerning Plotinus and the oracle replies addressing Plotinus thus: δαῖμον, ἀνεῖρ τὸ πάροιθεν, "Spirit (*daimôn*), man once." Plotinus on his death has become his *daimôn*, so that if, for example, he was living at the level of Intellect, he would now occupy the next level up, that of the god identified with the One. Thus the passages at *VP* 8 and 10 are also oracular in character. In a way we may see the whole of the Life as a response to oracular enquiry. The figure of the holy man Plotinus is an icon endowed with sacral power.

Doubt has been cast on the theurgic character of this passage. Addey takes the position that the story does not reflect theurgy, because the appropriate vocabulary is lacking. Addey remarks: "Yet Porphyry does not use the terms θεουργία, μαγεία, or γοητεία to describe this ritual, but calls it a κλήσις (a 'calling' or 'invocation'), an ambiguous term used to denote both theurgy and magical practices." Addey adds that *klêsis* may be used either of magic or of theurgy. I would suggest that it may here be used of theurgy.

Porphyry enquires of Iamblichus if astrology is of use in discovering the personal *daimôn*. Iamblichus is of the view that

the technical approach of astrology is inferior to the means of theurgic divination (*De Mysteriis* 9.1-3; 9.5-8; cf. Porphyry, *Letter to Anebo* 2.14-17.)<sup>42</sup> In IX.9 Iamblichus says: "The invocation (κλήσις) of *daimones* is undertaken in the name of the one supreme God who from the beginning determined for each his own *daimôn* and indeed reveals in rites according to his will the *daimones* that belong to each." For Addey this means "summoning the *daimôn* from higher causal principles, operating on a universal basis and transcending the realms of nature."<sup>43</sup> This is the only evidence that Addey adduces for Porphyry on the personal *daimon*. Obviously the account of invocation at VP 10 is at odds with the astrological explanation. We may identify the invocation of VP 10 as Iamblichean and may place *klêsis* within the ambit of theurgy. Mazur speaks of "the technical term for ritual 'calling' of a god—*klêsis*—that Porphyry uses (at *Vita Plotini* 10.20) to describe the blatantly theurgical evocation of Plotinus' guardian *daimôn*."<sup>44</sup>

The story of the séance is followed by Amelius' invitation to Plotinus to partake in his expedition of religious tourism of shrines in Rome on the festival of the New Moon. Plotinus answers: "They [the gods] ought to come to me, not I to them." Van den Berg interprets the reply of Plotinus' to Amelius' invitation in VP 10 to mean, not a categorical dismissal of popular piety, but an assertion that the true piety consists in a proper understanding of the metaphysics of divine presence which does not require the temporal situation or spatial location demanded by visiting shrines a the festival of the New Moon.<sup>45</sup> Addey, in her concern to revise our picture of Plotinus with reference to the later Neoplatonism that developed from his teaching, misrepresents Van den Berg by

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42. Addey, *Divination and Theurgy*, 209-10.

43. Addey, *Divination and Theurgy*, 10.

44. Mazur, "Unio Magica: Part II" 46n60. Mazur notes the use of κλειν in Plotinus 5.8.9.1-28 where Plotinus asks us to imagine a sphere containing all things in the world and then to think away its corporeal character. Having done this you should call upon (καλέσας) the god who made that which you have imagined and ask him to bring his own universe with him together with all the gods." Dillon, "The Platonic Philosopher at Prayer," 286 properly suggests: "the prayer envisaged here is really nothing other than the concentration on the image itself, and so a form of meditation, which itself provokes the presence of the god. No form of words is necessarily involved." I am willing to see in the image of the sphere a kind of *sumbolon* or *sunthêma*, although Plotinus does not use those words: cf. Schroeder, "Avocatio, Rhetoric, and the Technique of Contemplation in Plotinus," 158. For κλειν see also 5.1.6.9: ἐπικαλεσάμενοις.

45. Van den Berg, "Plotinus Attitude"

saying that he “argues that to invoke the gods to come as Plotinus did, conforms to common practice in Greek religion.”<sup>46</sup> Dillon observes, “A possible interpretation surely, however, is that our relations with the gods should be based, not on our going out of our way to solicit them for favours which we have not made an effort to deserve, but rather on our making ourselves ready, by the practice of spiritual exercises, to receive their power. It is not the expression of an impious or arrogant attitude to the gods; merely a properly Platonist one.”<sup>47</sup>

Mazur, exploring the Plotinian replacement of the external environment of religion with a context of inwardness, remarks: “This may also be illustrated by the comparison of the two much-discussed anecdotes in Porphyry’s *Vita Plotini* 10, where Plotinus on the one hand is an eager participant in ritual directed at his personal *daimôn*—his divine self located *within* and hence *beyond*—but on the other hand refuses to sacrifice to the planetary, encosmic deities, who are worshipped in the temple and thus firmly situated in both social and cosmic space.”<sup>48</sup> More important for the purposes of our present enquiry is that Plotinus is declining Amelius’ invitation and is showing that his understanding of piety is superior to that of Amelius. That the passage is dismissive of Amelius reflects the general character of Porphyry’s subtle rhetorical diminution of his influence as argued by Finamore.

Addey takes the view that the passage does not at all cast blame on Amelius and argues that Plotinus himself has a place for popular piety. In 4.3.11.1-7 Plotinus says:

And I think that the wise men of old, who made temples and statues of the gods in the wish that the gods should be present to them, looking to the nature of the All, had in mind that the nature of soul is everywhere easy to attract, but if someone were able to construct something receptive to it and able to receive a part of it, it would of all things receive soul more easily. That which it receptive to it is what imitates it in some way, like a mirror able to catch [the reflection of] a form.

Addey sees in this passage the telestic practice of consecrating statues to receive oracles from the gods.<sup>49</sup> However much the

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46. Addey, *Divination and Theurgy*, 150.

47. “The Platonic Philosopher at Prayer,” 281-2.

48. Mazur, “*Unio Magica*: Part II,” 53.

49. Addey, *Divination and Theurgy*, 175-7; cf. Mazur, “*Unio Magica*: Part II,” 35-6: The passage “is consistent with post-Plotinian theurgical theory:—but that does not make Plotinus into a theurgist!”

Plotinian doctrine of presence may have influenced Iamblichean theurgy, it is rash to conclude that it amounts to the same thing. Addey observes: "there is nothing wrong in building temples and so it can be assumed that there is also nothing wrong in visiting temples as Amelius did." Yet Plotinus' response to Amelius is surely an assertion of independence from popular piety.<sup>50</sup> I am, on the other hand more sympathetic to Addey's view that Plotinus approaches Iamblichean theurgy in his use of the *intellectual sunthêma* or *sumbolon*. The thought experiments are often, not only descriptive, but performative.<sup>51</sup>

Plotinus in this passage is in the context of describing the presence of the intelligible to the sensible world distinguishing two forms of imitation, representation and reflection. In representation, the artist mediates between the original and the image. In reflection, the mirror contains the image with no act of mediation. The first belongs to art and the second to nature. Yet a very successful work of art may, not only represent, but reflect the original in iconic presence. In this case the original is reflected in two mirrors, one in the work of art and the other in the human mind that addresses it. In that case the human mind reflects not only the sensible particularity of the work of art, but also the original that it imitates. Plotinus is describing a manner of the presence of the intelligible to the sensible reality, not a theurgic prescription for architecture.<sup>52</sup> Surely Smith is correct in his observation: "One cannot deny that Plotinus here considers that the 'gods' may be 'present' in statues which reflect their character, but this, he claims, is the same with any recipient of certain forms or presences."<sup>53</sup> So we may continue to see that Plotinus asserts his superiority to Amelius in the matter of popular religious observance.

In chapter 10 then Porphyry shows the strength of Plotinus' soul and his innate superiority to those who represent successively magic, theurgy, and popular religion. We may notice that the response to magic, theurgy, and religion is not accomplished by Porphyry in his own voice. Rather it is Plotinus who does so. In the case of magic, Plotinus turns back a curse; in the case of the personal *daimôn*, this is accomplished by the eclipse of Plotinus'

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50. Addey, *Divination and Theurgy*, 175-77.

51. Cf. Addey, *Divination and Theurgy*, 199-205; cf. also Schroeder, "Avocatio, Rhetoric, and the Technique of Contemplation in Plotinus."

52. Cf. Schroeder, *Form and Transformation*. 57-60.

53. Smith, *Porphyry's Place*, 127.

personal *daimôn* by a god; in the case of personal religion it is the voice of Plotinus himself. What is presented here is not academic debate but existential response. We see again and again the power and presence of Plotinus.

Of course, there is plenty of material in the *Life* to show that Plotinus showed anything but that disdain toward Porphyry. Porphyry's purpose to inherit the sacral personality of Plotinus is obvious. When Porphyry read a poem that he had composed for the feast in honour of Plato's birthday, Plotinus praised him saying, "You have shown yourself at once poet, philosopher, and expounder of sacred mysteries (ἱεροφάντην)" (15.4-6). He here invokes the three kinds of madness described in Plato's *Phaedrus* 244a-245a: prophetic, initiatory and poetic. Addey compares the prologue to Porphyry's *Philosophy from Oracles*<sup>54</sup> where he enjoins his readers to keep the content of the oracle silent and comments: "For Porphyry then, the divine truth contained within oracles is at the very least analogous to the vision gained in the final stage of the mystery ceremonies." We see here that merging of poetry, philosophy, and oracle that Addey sees as typical of late antique philosophy. This description accords well with the narrative technique of the *Life*.<sup>55</sup> Plotinus' praise of Porphyry contrasts with the dismissive portrayal of Olympius, Iamblichus and Amelius in chapter 10. Another point of comparison, of course, is Porphyry's account of his presence during Plotinus' union with the One in chapter 23.

In the received view of late antique intellectual history Porphyry is, in the *Letter to Anebo*, engaging in polemic against the theurgy of Iamblichus. Addey argues ably that the correspondence between Porphyry (in the *Letter to Anebo*) and Iamblichus (in the *De Mysteriis*) is not an exercise in polemic and apology, but rather an aporetic and dialogic exchange. In so doing, she believes that she is rendering Porphyry more amenable to Iamblichean theurgy than was thought to be the case.<sup>56</sup>

However, in advancing an aporetic argument one need not take sides: one is rather setting forth problems surrounding a given topic. Addey adds that "this mode of intellectual honesty, open-minded and questioning attitude toward knowledge, his

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54. *Phil. Orac.* 304F, lines 3-9=PE 4.7.2-8.1 (177.18-178.6) (Girgenti and Muscolino).

55. Addey, *Divination and Theurgy*, 54-5.

56. Addey, *Divination and Theurgy*, 131-6.

'paratactic' style of thinking, where various interpretations are placed alongside others, typify his literary style as does his fondness for quoting extensively from other works."<sup>57</sup> Addey also says, "Porphyry asked a wide range of questions many of which he would not have personally endorsed, in order to gain a comprehensive account of pagan religious phenomena for educational and protreptic purposes."<sup>58</sup> So when Porphyry advances the question concerning astrological discovery of the personal *daimôn* he is not necessarily personally involved in putting this question. Nor is he bound by the Iamblichean response concerning *klêsis*. In any case, the incident in the temple of Isis is not a matter of intellectual agreement or disagreement on the nature and acceptability of theurgy. It is a contest of spirits.

Those who would revise our image of Plotinus in the direction of rendering his position closer to that of later Neoplatonism import their concerns into the interpretation of the *Life of Plotinus*. Thus the story of Amelius' religious pilgrimage is interpreted in such a way that Plotinus is closer to popular piety than we might have thought. Surely the view that Plotinus is endorsing the activity of Amelius loses the whole point. The same may be said of the story of the Egyptian priest: the story is dissociated from theurgy so that Plotinus will not condemn that movement. In these attempts the *Life* is treated as an artifact of intellectual history. In fact it is not so much philosophical but rhetorical and hagiographic. The *Life* is an exercise in justifying Porphyry's position in the Plotinian succession. In this context we may look for a less accommodating tone than that which we might otherwise discover in the correspondence between Porphyry and Iamblichus.

We have seen that Porphyry is concerned to eliminate the rivalry of Amelius. In chapter 10 Iamblichus is put into an awkward position of shame or fear when the *daimôn* of Plotinus proves to be a god who confounds his rite. It is in the same chapter that Amelius is reproached by Plotinus for his religiosity. Saffrey claims that there is a succession from Amelius, disciple of Plotinus, to Iamblichus.<sup>59</sup>

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57. Addey, *Divination and Theurgy*, 135.

58. Addey, *Divination and Theurgy*, 141.

59. Saffrey, "Pourquoi Porphyre", 54: A year before Plotinus' death Amelius left Rome and settled in Apamea in Syria, the homeland of his adoptive son. Amelius remained in Syria and founded a school in which Iamblichus succeeded him. Iamblichus returned to Apamea after the death of Amelius in order to ensure the latter's succession.

This idea, originally put forth by Saffrey and Westerink,<sup>60</sup> must remain conjectural, but accords well enough with the evidence. If this is so, then Porphyry might have tried to establish a line of succession that would rival that of Amelius and Iamblichus.

At the time of Plotinus' death (270) Amelius was in Apamea in Syria (*VP* 2.32-3).<sup>61</sup> It is possible that Iamblichus knew Amelius personally. The Iamblichus of the *VP* is probably Iamblichus of Chalcis whose birth is to be placed between 245 and 250 and his death around 325.<sup>62</sup> Ariston, the son of Iamblichus, married Amphicleia, one of the women in Plotinus' circle (*VP* 9.3-5). Iamblichus up to the 320's directed a Neoplatonic school in Apamea. One of his disciples, Sopatros, who succeeded him, is portrayed as presiding over the Plotinian succession (Sozomen, *Hist. Eccl.* I.5.1). Thus there is a link between the school of Iamblichus in Apamea and the school of Plotinus. Amelius is thought to have founded or revived a school in Apamea (for which there is archaeological evidence). We know that Iamblichus was familiar with the doctrine of Amelius because he entitled one of his books *Refutations of Amelius and also of Numenius* (Proclus, *In Tim.* II.277.28-31).<sup>63</sup>

Goulet argues that the Delphic Oracle given to Amelius (*VP* 22) took the form of a funeral hymn traditionally recited at the death of theurgists in Neoplatonic conventicles in Syria. What we know of milieux that are influenced by the Chaldaean Oracles, especially in Apamea, from Numenius to Iamblichus suggests where we should seek the *Sitz im Leben* for the hymn.<sup>64</sup> The hymn

60. Saffrey and Westerink, *Proclus Théologie Platonicienne*, XLIV.

61. The Souda s.v. Ἀμέλιος, Adler number alpha,1549 has the epithet Ἀμέλιος, "citizen of Apamea." According to Porphyry, *VP* 3.46-8 Amelius presented his notes on Plotinus to Hostilianus Hesychius of Apamea, his adopted son.

62. Cf. Dillon, "Iamblichus of Chalcism," 866.

63. Brisson, "Amélius" 817-18; it is possible that Iamblichus settled, not in Apamea, but in Daphne (which is, in any case, near Apamea): Dillon, "Iamblichus of Chalcis," 870; Clarke, Dillon and Hershbell, *Iamblichus. De Mysteriis*, xxiii and n31 and John Malalas, *Chron.* 12.240.8-9.

64. Goulet, "L'Oracle D'Apollon" 404-9; "Sur quelques interpretations," 605; however, cf. Addey, *Divination and Theurgy*, 77: "Such an origin for the oracle is certainly possible, but it is important to recognize that for Neoplatonist philosophers, utterances produced by a philosopher whose mind was thought to have fully realized and attained to *Nous* and was thus close to the divine were considered to be oracles, and no less 'genuine' than those produced by an institutional oracle centre." *Theurgy in Late Antiquity*, 55n56: "Here we come quite close to the

would bear witness to the theurgic interest of Amelius in Apamea. The connection with theurgy, in the sense that people used the term for their rituals and also in using the Chaldaean oracles, must remain hypothetical. Also the hymn might have come from a traditional oracular shrine, or, indeed, have been composed by Amelius or Porphyry.

Amelius split the Intellect into three parts: that which is, that which has, and that which sees (Proclus, *In Tim.* I.306.2-3). As Armstrong remarks: "Here we find Amelius taking the opposite direction to Porphyry's monistic interpretation of Plotinus, with its 'telescoping' of the hypostases, and thinking in a way which points forward to Iamblichus and post-Iamblichean Neoplatonism."<sup>65</sup>

Whatever the relationship the theurgic tradition that Iamblichus' school developed in the orient might be to Plotinus' teachings, we may yet see a wish on the part of that school to claim some sort of legitimate succession from the school of Plotinus in Rome. If Saffrey and Westerink are right, that tradition would stem from Plotinus and reach through Amelius to Iamblichus. It would be against that putative claim that Porphyry wishes to establish the legitimacy of his position as an interpreter of Plotinus, even if he has no claim to found a school of his own. Porphyry is insistent on his claim to be the authentic editor of Plotinus. He remarks (*VP* 4.3-6) that Amelius, although he had been with Plotinus for eighteen years before the arrival of Porphyry, had completed only notebooks. Thus the attempt to undermine the authority of Amelius would establish the legitimacy of Porphyry's recension and (if we were to accept Saffrey's tentative<sup>66</sup> argument) would also call in question any title Amelius and his school would have to Plotinian legitimacy.

It is not necessary to suppose that there was in fact a Plotinian succession of sorts in Apamea to imagine that Porphyry (or others) *perceived* such a succession and wished to assert his own line of succession against it. Nor does his claim to succession have to do particularly with matters of doctrine. Throughout I have

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attitude which characterizes Iamblichus' defence of divinization understood as theurgy – paradoxically against the objections of Porphyry himself." (Obviously Tanaseanu-Döbler adheres to the received view regarding the enmity between Porphyry and Iamblichus).

65. Armstrong, "Connecting Note," 265.

66. For the tentative character of the argument, see Saffrey, "Pourquoi Porphyre," 56-7.

maintained that the dominant theme of the *Life* is the presence of Plotinus to his disciples and the influence that that presence exerted upon them. We shall return to this theme in the next section.

### PLOTINIAN ORDINATION

What political end is served by such a description of Plotinus as sage? Peter Brown, in an admirable study of the political influence of the philosopher in late antiquity, observes:

The philosophical life assumed a model of the personality that placed the topmost layer of the soul—the *nous*—above the tensions of the material world ... The philosopher, therefore, made his own an ideal of the self whose potential other educated men had realized only imperfectly or fitfully ... In this way, the philosopher was held to wield his authority from the “core” of the traditional culture of the governing class of the Empire.<sup>67</sup>

Plotinus was full of praise for the senator Rogatianus who abandoned the praetorship in order to pursue the philosophic life (7.31-46). Plotinus did nevertheless exercise some political influence. Porphyry states: “Though he spent twenty-six years in Rome and acted as arbitrator in very many people’s disputes, he never made an enemy of any of the officials” (9.20-22). The story of his failed attempt to found Platonopolis, a city to be governed by Plato’s laws, suggests influence at the court of Gallienus (12).<sup>68</sup> Indeed Porphyry’s adaptation of Plotinus’ doctrine concerning the upper and lower levels of the soul to the philosopher himself lays a foundation for the political influence of the late antique philosopher as described by Brown. Certainly, the structure of personality that Porphyry describes would be appropriate, if not to Brown’s political arbitrator or mediator, to the influence of a Plotinian successor.

Porphyry is trying to establish, perhaps to counter the success of the emerging church, a pagan, Platonic community that

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67. Brown, “Philosopher and Society,” 12.

68. Cf. Goulet-Cazé, “L’Arrière-plan,” 253-4; the senator Sabinillus (*VP* 7.31) shared the consulship with Gallienus as *consul ordinarius* in 266 (CIL VI.2819; cf. Nagl, “Sabinillus”; Brisson, “Notice sur les noms propres,” 110). However, when we consider the contentious relationship that Gallienus had with the senate, that fact might not have worked in Plotinus’ favour (cf. Harder et al., *Plotinus Schriften* Vc: *Anhang* 103).

would serve as its rival.<sup>69</sup> (We may think here of his story about Platonopolis). That community has its origin in the force of Plotinus' personality and example. Porphyry intends the *Life* as a preface to his edition of the *Enneads*. While Porphyry endorses the philosophy of Plotinus, he wishes to provide for the community that he projects a foundation myth built upon the personality of Plotinus himself. Porphyry's strategy to undermine the position of Amelius in the Plotinian succession seeks to assure that a line of authority that might extend from Plotinus to Amelius to Iamblichus would not usurp the unique position that Porphyry claimed for himself.

Porphyry's unique knowledge of Ammonius would further extend the line of tradition in which he would be the last link. Thus he would replace a line of authority which would extend from Plotinus to Amelius to Iamblichus with another which extends from Ammonius to Plotinus to Porphyry. We have seen that Porphyry begins by describing the engagement with Ammonius as a catalyst to a Plotinus who, as a sage, needs not progress either in philosophy or in the philosophical life. Porphyry then tells us about the doctrinal tradition that would stem from Ammonius to Plotinus. This allows Porphyry the editor and publisher to have unique knowledge of Plotinus' intellectual ancestry closed to others (although tellingly he does not tell us what that doctrinal tradition would be). We generally stress the latter aspect of Ammonius' influence. Surely the mantle of sagehood and divine personality would be the more important part of the Ammonian tradition. This form of illumination would also extend as a string of lights to Porphyry and his followers. Porphyry's claim to succession (however we are to understand that word) is founded, not simply on doctrinal orthodoxy or ascetic practice, but on a kind of ordination that proceeds from his contact with the sacred person of Plotinus.

We have been discussing Porphyry's *Life of Plotinus*. This *Life* is attached to Porphyry's edition of Plotinus' works. Porphyry tells

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69. Cox-Miller, *Biography in Late Antiquity*, 143: "Porphyry's emphasis in this biography on school and disciples shows that he, like Eusebius, was concerned to create a scholastic tradition that might serve as a solid foundation for uniting his peers ... The creation of a school tradition also entailed, of course, the creation of a revered founder. Plotinus' godlike image in the *Life* might be interpreted as Porphyry's apologetic statement to fellow pagans whose commitment was flagging; it reminded them that disciples are measured by the greatness of their founder."

us the chronological order of Plotinus' writings and also provides us with his own organization (sometimes procrustean) of the treatises into six Enneads. Saffrey argues that the organization into Enneads reflects Porphyry's own interpretation of the hypotheses concerning the One in Plato's *Parmenides*.<sup>70</sup> Thus that very arrangement is itself an act of interpretation. In a way, the Enneads as organized by Porphyry and the *Life of Plotinus* can be read, not as two works, but as one. They each form the side of an arch. We have seen how Porphyry, in his composition of the *Life*, incorporates language from the Enneads to describe Plotinus himself. The text of Plotinus becomes the material cause of the icon of his master erected by Porphyry. In a sense the book becomes the man. In the writings of Plato there is considerable distrust of the book which is lacking in dialogue and cannot respond to our questions and is associated with death.<sup>71</sup> For Plotinus to be reduced to a book would be a form of death. By embodying the book in the man Porphyry is bringing Plotinus to life. Plotinus' daimonic presence to his disciples reflects an extra-philosophical vision of sagehood described, as we have seen, in the *Theages* and in the oblique Plotinian description of the sage. The *Life* wishes to recover this electrifying *sunousia*. The edition of Plotinus' works bequeaths the written philosophical tradition. The *Life* expresses its existential complement. The person of Plotinus made palpable in the Porphyrean description is, as it were, an abiding icon (a *sunthêma* or *sumbolon* if you will) contemplation of which may summon the *daimôn* of Plotinus and exalt the souls of Porphyry's readers and confirm the unity of Porphyry's projected Platonic community.<sup>72</sup>

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70. Cf. note 36 above.

71. Plato, *Protagoras* 329a1-b1: the orator is compared unfavourably to books that cannot answer questions; cf. *Phaedrus* 274c5-275b1 which condemns Thoth for destroying memory and dialectic by the gift of letters; *Phaedrus* 276a8-9: the living word of dialectic is compared to the implicitly dead letters of a book. See my "The Final Metamorphosis" for the argument that Lucius undergoes a kind of death by being transformed into a book.

72. I wish to thank Robert Berchman for reading this essay in MS. Needless to say, any remaining faults are my own.

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