The Light of Truth: The Role of the Good in Human Cognition in Late Ancient Platonism[1]

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The theme of the conference from which this articles arises, namely that wisdom belongs to God, invokes the very essence of Neoplatonism. This school of thought posits a cosmos whose limits are inscribed by a God to whom all things are related as to their origin and end, and which is thoroughly penetrated at every level by the presence of that God. At the same time, this God is beyond all limit and is said to transcend the cosmos whose limits it circumscribes – as a whole and in its parts – and to be without relation to that cosmos or anything in it. According to this vision, real knowledge of things is indeed possible for human beings, but that possibility is progressively annulled the closer one attempts to approach God in thought. Outside of the manifold and essentially limited ways in which God is and becomes manifest to human beings there can be no knowledge of God's essence, which is to say that there is no knowledge of *what God in Himself is*: as beyond all limit, God is beyond form and being and so beyond any kind of knowledge. Thus, the limits of knowledge, like those of the cosmos, are inscribed by God, and knowledge itself is and is possible only because of the diffusive presence of God in the cosmos. What human beings can know is only what God has given them to know, directly and indirectly.

Access to this divine knowledge is an important part of the Platonic narrative of the self-alienation which is characteristic of the soul's embodiment, an alienation which is at the same time alienation from God and other human beings. And while the

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knowledge of the Good which is necessary for overcoming this alienation is ultimately obtained through the soul's reasoning faculties (and augmented sometimes by the grace of the God in supra-rational forms of knowing), it is my contention that access to this knowledge is already available, however vaguely, at the level of sense-perception. In other words, the discovery of the Good and the quest for self-perfection and union with God must begin already with the lowest form of cognitive activity. This might seem to be counter-intuitive to some. After all, sense-perception, especially in ancient philosophy, is generally described as a function and activity which grasps only sense-perceptible qualities of things, as for example colours, sounds, and smells. Goodness as a quality would not seem to fit into this category of cognitive objects, and to be more appropriately an object of some rational function and activity. Both of these things are certainly true, yet they are not the whole truth. Rather, as recent scholarship shows, we find that amongst Neoplatonic philosophers of Late Antiquity there seems to be a consensus that sense-perception is in some way penetrated by reason. This aspect of the faculty secures for it a positive role to counterbalance its better known negative role as a faculty which must ultimately be abandoned in the pursuit of union with God. And so, since much of the basic foundational work on the subject of the rationalization of sense-perception in Neoplatonism has been done already, I think that it is now time to consider some of the broader implications of this positive view of sense-perception.

I will begin, then, by outlining this narrative by way of a quick pass through its major sources in Plato's dialogues and how this translates into the understanding of soul's alienation which becomes common amongst later Platonists. I will then show how the Neoplatonists gave the faculty of sense-perception, in one form or another, a role in overcoming this alienation. In doing so, I will focus on Plotinus and Proclus, who have interesting and important things to say about this aspect of sense-perception, and then I will very briefly consider the version of this as it existed in the writings of two Christian Platonists, namely Gregory of Nyssa and Maximus Confessor. Through this survey, it should become clear that we are looking at a continuous trend in Late Ancient Platonism.[2]

2. Gregory and Maximus are Platonists insofar as Platonism provided

Soul's Self-Alienation

alienation in plato's dialogues

In order best to understand the importance of active sense-perception to the Platonists of Late Antiquity and of its relation to the Good, I think it is important to begin with a consideration of the ultimate problem that it is meant to address. I am referring to an original sense of alienation, a sense of estrangement from one's world (which includes self, others and the Other) of which these Platonists seem to have had intense experiences. It usually appears as a general sense of not belonging to or in the world of everyday activity and relationships, a sense that this world may be, to some extent at least, meaningless and arbitrary.[3] Although never expressed in terms of a determinate concept of alienation as such, it is present everywhere in their philosophical and theological literature. It conditions their accounts of human nature and its origins, and of the origins of individual human lives (often as interpretations of mythological narratives), and is inscribed in their metaphysical accounts of the origin of all things. Need for overcoming it is overt in their desire for union with the Good, for which they prepare through cultivation of a virtuous life and pursuit of the truth.

Neoplatonists found this experience of alienation described and dramatized in Plato's dialogues, and it is to those texts that they always refer (or at least always have in mind) when they offer their own descriptions and explanations of it.[4] It is worthwhile

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the philosophical terminology and conceptual apparatus which they used to develop their own Christian philosophies. Such a designation in their case does not imply any overt allegiance to Plato or any Platonic school, or a blind imitation of the doctrines thereof. Both Gregory and Maximus, like other Christian Platonists, freely adopted and adapted to their Christian points of view the parts of Platonism which they found useful and rejected those which they did not.

3. This is more or less the essence of Plato's critique of the Sophists, especially Protagoras and his famous dictum that 'man is the measure of all things, of the things that are that they are, and of the things that are not that they are not'.

4. This is true especially of the Neoplatonists, for whom the Platonic

examining the original Platonic context, then, since it provides the protological and eschatological framework in which later Platonists developed their own reflections. His *Phaedo*, for instance, captures the sense of alienation from the world quite well in Socrates' calm, and even eager, anticipation of his coming execution. While Socrates does not suggest that the world in which he lives is entirely without meaning, nevertheless he is certain that it is only a pale reflection of a higher, truer world to which his soul truly belongs. This is dramatized in *Phaedrus* as well, where Socrates describes the soul's time on Earth as its self-alienation from a disembodied vision of Reality, the soul's failure to maintain its own self-motion in a circuit about that supreme object of desire. The soul's self-alienation, conceived metaphorically as a loss of wings, results in its alienation from other human beings; in fact, the attainment of self-knowledge is represented as a necessity for overcoming the soul's alienation from others. As Socrates' story about the soul's flight suggests, souls exist ideally as a unity mediated by the shared vision of Reality, but embodiment results in forgetfulness of that shared vision. In turn, this forgetfulness results in relationships which are largely instrumental for the pursuit of material satisfaction. Hence the necessity for practicing the real or true art of speaking. Through speech grounded in the truth the wise can communicate their recollected memory of the shared vision to others in an effort to reinstate it in *this world*.

These connected, and indeed inseparable, problems of self-alienation and alienation from others appear again in *Alcibiades I*,

dialogues were the primary vehicles of divine truth. Yet, it is still true to a certain extent for Christian Platonists like Gregory of Nyssa and Maximus Confessor, for whom Holy Scripture was the fundamental source of truth. This is evident in their interpretations of Adam's fall from grace and in their accounts of the re-integration of the soul, or restoration of its unity. Sometimes it is even evident in the very structure of their texts, as it is in Gregory's *De Anima et Resurrectione*, which imitates Plato's *Phaedo*, not only in subject matter (i.e. the immortality of the soul) but also in its dramatic structure as a dialogue between members of an intimate relationship (here brother and sister), one of whom is expected to die shortly. For Gregory's dialogue, as for Plato's, the importance of the subject, as well as the difficulty of accepting it, is heightened by the approaching death of one of the interlocutors (Macrina for Gregory – Socrates for Plato).

where Plato this time emphasizes the problem of self-alienation. The dialogue is guided by an antithesis of one and many. It begins from an initial opposition between a supposedly self-sufficient (*autarchēs*) Alcibiades and his many inferior lovers, but the opposition is overturned by Socrates' *elenchus* which leads Alcibiades to an awareness of his lack of self-sufficiency. Along with this awareness comes a similar awareness of his lack of (both general and self-) knowledge and of his prior but unconscious adoption of the same unreflective concepts as the many whom he in his imagined superiority had hoped to counsel. Finally, Socrates leads Alcibiades to a conception of true self-sufficiency, namely the discovery of the self or soul or 'what is one's own' in the mirror of another self, namely Socrates. This discovery begins to draw him away from the many, who only love Alcibiades' body ('what belongs to him') but not his soul, and back to himself. However, at the same time, since this happens through the mirror of another self, and only through that other's wisdom, it also brings him toward the cultivation of a likeness to God. Finally, this discovery is not Alcibiades' alone; it is an experience which he shares with Socrates in a spirit of friendship and love.[5]

Plato, of course, deals with these same themes of alienation in *The Republic*. We see it, for example, in Socrates' deployment of the story of Gyges as an attempt to persuade his interlocutors that justice is worth pursuing for its own sake. Gyges in his invisibility is separated from the community, and he expresses this alienation by contemplating and then committing crimes against it. It becomes clear later in the dialogue that everyone is essentially alienated in this way since everyone is an invisible soul who cannot see others as they really are.[6] The city generated

5. It is especially noteworthy in this regard that the dialogue ends with Socrates' worry that the power of the city (the many) might come to rule over him and Alcibiades (two unified selves bound by divine love through shared self-discovery). At this point, the relationship between Socrates has reversed, so that whereas at the beginning of the dialogue it appeared that Socrates was pursuing Alcibiades, by the end it is now Alcibiades who is pursuing Socrates.

6. Plato illustrates this in particularly dramatic fashion in the tenth book of the dialogue, in the 'Myth of Er', where Socrates recounts Er's description of the

by Socrates in dialogue with his friends is a means to overcome this alienation and restore justice and unity both in the souls of its citizens and in their relations to each other in a community founded upon knowledge of the Real and of its cause, the Form of the Good.

It is in this same *Republic* that Plato introduces the Form of the Good as the cause or underlying principle of all being and intelligibility – indeed it is 'beyond essence' (*epekeina tēs ousias*) – by analogy to the Sun as the cause of growth and light. The Form of the Good is thus the cause of truth, or of the intelligibility of things including the Idea of Justice, without which we could not establish justice either within the soul or within the community. In fact, it is the very presence of goodness in the Idea of Justice that makes it not only intelligible, but also desirable as an end: the Form of the Good is the ultimate end of all human activity. Therefore, while establishment of justice within and without is the proximate means of overcoming alienation, it is the pursuit of the Good which is the ultimate motivation for doing this at all.

Alienation in later Platonism in relation to alienation in Plato

What I want to do now is to explore a certain aspect of how Platonists in Late Antiquity developed further this vision of the Form of the Good as ultimate unifier of self with self, and of self with other, or as the ultimate means of overcoming the soul's original alienation. Let me begin with a brief outline of the narrative of alienation common amongst these later Platonists.

The Neoplatonists follow Plato in the belief that individual human beings are born into a condition of alienation, a condition about which they are largely unconscious on account of their immersion in the pseudo-reality already constructed for them by their community. That is to say that already from birth their conscious lives are shaped by the notions of what their family and society take – largely incorrectly – to be true goods. So long as they accept these notions unreflectively, they remain in a condition of alienation along with their similarly

meeting in a meadow of disembodied souls preparing to choose their next life.

unreflective fellow citizens, at least to the extent that the content of those notions is removed from what is really good.[7] This alienation can only be overcome through philosophical training.

For Neoplatonists, the very possibility of philosophical inquiry hinges upon the fact that human beings, like all beings, have an innate pre-disposition to desire and seek the Good, even if they do so only by pursuing the most particular, and thus inappropriate, goods. This pre-disposition requires, in human beings at least, a corresponding capacity for cognizing the Good in its various manifestations. However, cognition of the Good cannot come first with the use of the soul's higher, rational faculties, of which many people may never come to make much use. Even the most ignorant or uneducated person still perceives objects of desire as goods, regardless of their true worth. It stands to reason that apprehension of the Good must already begin with the individual's first acts of cognition, in sense-perception. It is only because of this innate capacity for apprehending the Good at even the lowest levels of cognition that the individual can even begin the philosophical training necessary to overcome the alienation experienced in embodiment and perpetuated by society's confused notions of good and bad. This will become clear in what follows.

Sense-perception and the Good in Neoplatonism

Plotinus on Active Sense-Perception and the Erotic Ascent to the Good

A better description of alienation in Plotinus' *Enneads* than the one at *Enn*.5.1.1 is hardly to be found:

> What, then, is that which has made the souls forget [their] Father, God, and be ignorant of themselves and of Him, although they are parts which come from there and are entirely of that [region]? The beginning of evil for them was audacity and generation and the first otherness

7. Naturally, the 'Cave' in Plato's *Republic* is reflected in this description, but so are the many lovers and, moreover, the city of Athens in Plato's *Alcibiades I*. In the latter dialogue, while it is true that Socrates attempts to make Alcibiades aware of the absurdity of his intention to provide political counsel at the assembly, it is strongly implied that this intention would not have been considered absurd by his fellow citizens.

> and the wishing to be of themselves. Since they appeared to delight in their self-determination, and made great use of their self-movement, running the opposite [way] and effecting the greatest possible defection, they were ignorant of the fact that they came from there.[8]

This passage bears the hallmarks of Platonic alienation: the soul's origin in an extra-terrestrial region, its failure to maintain continuous attention to the primary object of desire, its fall from unity into multiplicity (or from universal to particular individual), and its ignorance of its own alienation. Plotinus makes clear that this defection results in the soul's immersion in a world of inferior objects which the soul unreasonably honours instead of its Father – there is no doubt here that Plotinus means the world in which we all find ourselves at present. The remainder of the treatise from which this passage is drawn aims to show how souls ignorant of their alienation can be persuaded of their own higher origin, the Good. But what is the role of the Good in overcoming this alienation?

We find an answer, albeit only the barest hint of it, near the beginning of *Enn*.5.3.3. In this passage, Plotinus begins his account of the soul's self-reversion by explaining how it has understanding (*sunesin*):

> Sense-perception sees a man and gives the impression [of him] to discursive reason. What does [discursive reason] say? It does not yet say anything, but it only knows and halts there. Unless it should say to itself "who is this," if it has met this one before and should say, using its memory, that he is Socrates. But if it should unfold the figure [of the man], it divides what the imagination has given. And if it should say whether he is good, it says this from those things which it has known through sense-perception, but what it says with respect to these things, it already has from itself, since it has the standard or model [*ho kanōn*] of the Good from itself. How does it have the Good from itself? It exists in the form of the Good [*agathoeidēs*] and is strengthened in its sense-perception of such a thing by the Intellect which illuminates it.[9]

This passage, rare in the *Enneads*, points to the total penetration of the soul by the Good. Furthermore, it shows that, for Plotinus, this penetration is first mediated to discursive reason (*dianoia*) by the soul's constant contact with Intellect which illuminates it, and then to sense-perception through the *kanōn* of the Good which discursive

8. Plot.*Enn*.5.1.1.1-9.

9. Plot.*Enn*.5.3.3.1-12.

reason possesses. Although Plotinus does not explicitly say so, it follows from this account that cognition of the Good is present already at the level of sense-perception: the passage implies that sense-perception incites discursive reason's judgment of the thing perceived using the *kanōn* of the Good within itself as a criterion.

We find in at least three other passages in the *Enneads* more detailed descriptions of this account of the penetration of the soul by Intellect through the soul's essential rational principles and standards. The first is at *Enn*.3.1.1, where Plotinus opens his treatise on the impassibility of incorporeal entities by denying that sense-perceptions are affections. Rather, he says, they are "activities and judgments concerning affections", where "affections come into being about something else, for example a body bearing such a [quality], but judgments come into being about the soul, and judgment is not an affection". Next, at *Enn*.1.1.7.9-17, he says that:

> The soul's power of sense-perception need not be of things subject to sense-perception, but rather [it must be] able to apprehend the impressions produced by sense-perception in the living being; for these are already intelligible objects.[10] Thus, external sense-perception [must be] the image of this [perception in the soul], and the latter, since it is in the essence [of the soul], [must be] the truer contemplation of the forms alone without affection. Indeed, from these forms, from which the soul alone already receives dominion over the living being, come discursive reasonings, opinions and intellections; and this is where we are most of all.

Thus, sense-perception is properly a critical or judging power of the rational soul, free from external affection and already a kind of contemplation of the forms (*eidē*) in the soul. By separating the faculty of sense-perception in the soul from that in the bodily sense-organs, Plotinus ensures that the former is able to provide a basis for the soul's higher activities without contaminating them with material alien to the soul's incorporeal and active nature.

10. I have translated *antilēptikēn* as 'able to apprehend', instead of 'receptive of', as Armstrong has in his translation. I think that this is a better choice for two reasons: 1) it conforms with the active sense of the accepted definitions of *antilēptikos* (and of its cognate noun, *antilēpsis*); and 2) it conforms better with Plotinus' position on the impassivity of the soul, for which he argues in *Enn*.3.6.

The spirit of these two passages, as well as of *Enn*.5.3.3.1-12, cited above, is expressed in a third passage, in Plotinus' description of sense-perception at *Enn*.1.6.3.10-17:

> When sense-perception sees the form in bodies binding and mastering the opposite nature, which is shapeless, and shape riding splendidly upon other shapes, while gathering into a whole this thing which is dispersed it brings it back and introduces it within, now without parts, and gives it to what within is harmonious and fitting [with it] and dear [to it]. It is just as when a soft trace of virtue in a youth, a trace which is harmonious with the truth within, presents itself to a good man.

Plotinus describes sense-perception here as an active power directed upon a series of external objects, "shapes riding splendidly upon other shapes", which constitute the total form of a body.[11] Sense-perception gathers these shapes into a single whole perception which it then fits and harmonizes with something within the soul. It is hard to imagine that this 'something within the soul' is anything other than the forms (*eidē*) or standards (*kanōnes*) which Plotinus mentions at *Enn*.5.3.3 and 1.1.7, both quoted above. As in the previous passages, and even though Plotinus represents the process figuratively as if the sense-faculty were a messenger and discursive reasoning the king to which it reports, yet there is no mention of the involvement of any kind of reflective activity on the part of the subject.[12] On the contrary, this is Plotinus' way of representing the presence of discursive reasoning in the very act of sense-perception which, as the lowest form of cognition, happens immediately and unreflectively. And, as Plotinus' example shows, even the Good – here in the form of a trace of virtue – can be perceived by way of sense-perception, whose function is always in-formed by the forms in the soul.

11. This is my best guess as to what Plotinus means by 'shapes riding splendidly upon shapes'. Necessarily, the form of a body will be composite, as the body itself is composite, and so, with respect to the sense of sight which he implies in the use of *idē* ('sees'), the 'shapes upon shapes' likely refers to the shapes which taken together constitute the body's form.

12. At *Enn*.5.3.3.45-46, Plotinus makes this analogy explicit: "Sense-perception is our messenger, but [Intellect] is king in relation to us". Here he represents intellect as King, but within the soul itself, whose highest part is *dianoia*, it would not be unreasonable to say that *dianoia* plays this role in relation to sense-perception, as Plotinus seems to imply at *Enn*.5.3.3.1-12.

Note that I quoted the last passage, at *Enn*.1.6.3, from Plotinus' treatise *On Beauty*. This is Plotinus' account, clearly inspired by Plato's *Symposium*, of the soul's ascent to the primal Beauty, namely the Good, beginning from the perception of beautiful things. His account in this treatise of the critical function of sense-perception serves to explain not only how sense-perception works, but also how the subject is able to make the transition from the perception of external beauty to perception of forms of beauty which cannot be grasped by the sense-faculty. This ascent, although considered in terms of beauty and desire, is also a cognitive ascent. For Plotinus, beauty is not only an object of desire, but also an object of cognition; in other words, beauty is not a subjective interpretation, but rather an objective quality of that in which it manifests. Thus, beauty is a component in the soul's quest for knowledge of higher principles and in the ascent to God, which is just its way of overcoming its alienation and of restoring itself to itself and to its world.

In this account of the Good in relation to active sense-perception is the germ of a solution to the problem of perceiving the Good which is developed further by later Platonists.[13] Among these, it is Proclus whose extant works offer the most detailed development of Plotinus' reflections on the subject. He holds to Plotinus' notion of sense-perception as an active judgment rather than a passive reception, but gives more detailed accounts of this aspect of its functioning, particularly in relation to the role of the common sense faculty. It is to this account that I now turn.

13. Not all scholars have been convinced that Plotinus really describes a kind of active sense-perception, informed by forms in the soul. Even E. Emilsson, who is convinced, nevertheless has expressed reluctance to make any definite conclusions on the subject (Emilsson, *Plotinus on Sense-Perception*, 126-140). Nevertheless, I am encouraged in making the stronger claim that Plotinus in fact does hold this doctrine by some more recent scholarship. The most recent and most detailed account is found Helmig, *Concepts and Concept Formation*, 184-204. Helmig makes a strong case for active sense-perception and forms in the soul in Plotinus, and he does so against scholars who deny that this is the case. A rather different approach is taken by D.G. MacIsaac, "Sensation and Thought", but his conclusion is equally positive in this regard.

Proclus onactive sense-perception and Alcibiades' perception of the Good

Proclus, although known for his vast multiplication of entities and kinds of entities within Plotinus' simple schema of One – Intellect – Soul, generally held to Plotinus' metaphysical framework. For Proclus, as for Plotinus, the One and Good both transcends and is immanent in the cosmos which proceeds from It, and is the ultimate object of all desire. He also followed Plotinus, and the Platonic tradition generally, in regarding the soul's descent into body as a falling away from, or failure to maintain, contemplation of the highest principles. This turning away from the higher is a turning toward the lower, a descent into body which, he says, "has joined [the soul] to a nature productive of generation and to en-mattered entities from which it is filled with forgetfulness and error and ignorance".[14] Thus, the embodied soul, in its attachment and orientation to the multiplicity inherent in material things, is alienated from itself and from its causes, and thus from other souls as well. The overcoming of this alienation, which is at the same time the restoration of the soul to its proper mode of being, is the goal of all philosophical and practical activity.[15]

It is clear that Proclus considers this overcoming of alienation the primary subject of Plato's *Alcibiades I*, although he describes it in terms of attainment of the 'knowledge of ourselves' whose end result is 'care for ourselves' and the 'knowledge of [this care]'.[16] This is a reasonable claim about the unifying theme of the Platonic dialogue, and one which Proclus takes seriously. He takes pains to explain in great detail how Socrates, at the time of their first meeting, brings a young Alcibiades to the painful point of recognizing that he is alienated from himself, from the truth, and from his community. It is fitting then, that it is in this commentary that we find some of Proclus' most interesting descriptions of the function of sense-perception in relation to the Good.

14. Pr.*In Alc*.224.3-4.

15. Pr.*De Mal. Sub*.23.

16. Pr.*In Alc*.9.16-10.11.

But before getting to that, it is worthwhile to consider Proclus' general conception of sense-perception and how it operates in relation to other faculties of the soul. Generally, he follows the mainline of the Plotinian view on sense-perception as twofold, the impassive perception within the soul and that divided about the sense organs.[17] Yet, Proclus elaborates the relationship between these forms of sense-perception and the other faculties of the soul in greater detail than Plotinus, and perhaps, in novel ways. The foundation of Proclus' account of sense-perception is his belief that it belongs to the irrational soul and is wholly irrational in itself.[18] This is so because sense-perception is incapable of making judgments about the objects of its activities: the particular senses divided about the sense organs only receive impressions from sense objects and the inner, common sense only produces the particular senses and discriminates between their impressions, but neither faculty makes any judgment about the objects of perception themselves. However, this is not the end of the matter. Proclus is clear that the activity of sense-perception is bound up with the activity of the rational faculty of opinion.[19] At *Tim.*1.248.22-29, Proclus argues that sense-perception has a cognitive component (*ti gnōstikon*) "insofar as it is established in the faculty of opinion and is illuminated by it and becomes *logoeidēs*". The faculty of opinion, *doxa*, has its own *logoi*, derivative of and projected from the soul's essential *logoi*, and it projects them onto the objects apprehended by sense-perception.[20] In fact, Proclus

17. At *In Tim.*1.251.18-19, Proclus even affirms Plotinus' metaphorical description of the relation between sense-perception and Intellect as the relationship of messenger to King: "Intellect is our king, but sense-perception is our messenger, as the great Plotinus says". As D. Runia, at Runia and Share, *Commentary on Plato's* Timaeus, p.96, remarks in a note to this comment (n. 284), Proclus reverses the order of subjects in Plotinus's statement ("Sense-perception is our messenger, but [Intellect] is king in relation to us"). It is hard to disagree with Runia's suggestion that this revision of Plotinus's formulation (whether intentional or not) is suggestive of Proclus' tendency toward strict hierarchical systematization – a minor point, but indicative of the bent of Proclus' mind.

18. Pr.*In Tim.*3.248.22-251.32.

19. C. Helmig gives an extensive analysis of Proclus' doctrine of *doxa* and its relation to sense-perception at Helmig, *Concepts and Concept Formation*, 232-262.

20. How does this work? Proclus asserts that the rational soul is a totality of

argues that "everything that comes into being is graspable by opinion along with sense-perception, the one [faculty] reporting affections within, the other projecting the *logoi* [of things that come into being] from itself and knowing [their] essences".[21] The faculty of opinion knows the essences (*ousiai*) of the objects of sense and knows them as wholes. Thus, when it informs the activities of sense-perception, it unifies the data apprehended by the senses into a singular apprehension of the whole object. Clearly, then, although sense-perception in itself is irrational, it is made rational by illumination from the rational part of the soul.

These passages still do not yet make clear how this cooperation between the faculties of opinion and sense-perception actually work out in practice. I think that we can get a better sense of this in Proclus' commentary on Plato's *Alciabides I*. It is in this commentary that we find one of Proclus' most important descriptions of the relation between the forms in the soul and the soul's lower faculties. At *In Alc*.189.8-11, Proclus explains why it is that although souls always possess knowledge of the Forms, they cannot say at what time they acquired it. He argues that:

> the knowledge of souls is twofold, the one inarticulate and according to mere notion {*kat' ennoian psilēn*}, the other articulated and scientific and unambiguous. "For," as [Plato] says somewhere, "it is as though we do not know while awake these very things which we have known while we were dreaming," since we possess the *logoi* essentially, as it were breathing out the knowledge of them, although we do not possess them in act and through projection.

Knowledge of the Forms is always present in souls and somehow informing their cognition of things, even when they are not intentionally activated through reflection upon them. In a slightly

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rational-principles (*plērōma tēs logoi*) which the soul projects toward the rational soul's faculties of discursive reasoning and opinion. Thus, each faculty has its own set of *logoi* derived from the soul's essence, so that there are *dianoetic logoi* and *doxastic logoi*. The *locus classicus* in modern scholarship for this doctrine is C. Steel, "Breathing Thought". Helmig's *Concept and Concept Formation* draws on this article and traces the history of the doctrine as part of his general account of concept formation in Platonism. He finds its roots in Plato's *Theaetetus*, but the first appearance of something like – but not quite yet – the doctrine which comes to be found in Proclus's work is already in Alcinous' *Didaskalikos*.

21. Pr.*In Tim*.1.251.4-7.

earlier passage, Proclus describes this same process in terms of the soul's *logoi* 'pulsating' (*sphuzontas*) and in this way "having notions or concepts {*ennoia*} about them which [souls] are unable to articulate {*diarthroun*} and reduce {*anapempein*} to science".[22] If we connect this with what Proclus wrote about the faculty of opinion in his commentary on Plato's *Timaeus*, then we can say that this faculty 'breathes out' its *logoi* into the faculty of sense-perception. Since this 'breathing out' is not the result of deliberate reflection (not *kata probolēn*) it produces inarticulate notions which inform sense-perceptions and are, then, imperfect derivatives of the *logoi* in the faculty of opinion. This occultation of the soul's *logoi* is the result of embodiment at birth, but it still does not prevent the *logoi* from informing the soul's lower cognitive functions, even if this only happens by way of inarticulate notions.

This process is illustrated for Proclus by the reactions of a younger Alcibiades' to other boys breaking the rules of games. According to Socrates, Alcibiades clearly perceived these acts of cheating as acts of injustice, although he had no clear idea then – nor even at the time when Socrates was reminding him of these events – of what justice is.[23] Connecting this illustration to Proclus' conception of sense-perception informed by the faculty of opinion, I think we can reasonably say the following: Alcibiades perceived the activity of another boy, and since this perception was informed by an inarticulate notion of the Just, it indicated to him, without

22. Pr.*In Alc*.189.6-8.

23. Although Proclus discusses *Alc.Maj*.109d-110d, where Socrates recounts Alcibiades' perception of injustice as a small boy, later at *In Alc*.232.10-239.13 and 240.5-241.18, he very clearly has in mind his discussion of learning and discovery at 174.3-192.12, which comments on *Alc.Maj*.106c-e (divided into several passages for comment) and explains the significance of Socrates' whole refutation of Alcibiades' double ignorance. According to Proclus' organization of the dialogue, the text at *Alc.Maj*.109d-110d also belongs to this refutation. Both passages from the dialogue are connected by the question of when Alcibiades could have learned about the subject upon which he wished to counsel his fellow Athenians, since he claimed to know but could not in truth say that he had ever enquired about it or learned it from anyone. Thus, Proclus does not explicitly mention the 'breathing out' or 'pulsating' of the soul's *logoi* at *In Alc*.232.10-239.13 and 240.5-241.18 because he has already handled the problem of 'knowing when' earlier at *In Alc*.187.7-192.12.

any deliberate reflection upon the event, that the boy's activity was unjust. For Proclus, justice in the soul is a good for it – if justice is present in the soul then all the virtues are present – and so Alcibiades is able to perceive indirectly a quality pertaining to the essence of the other boy's soul, by way of an un-reflective judgment upon his perception of the boy's unjust action.[24] If this is correct, then it would seem that, in Proclus' view, the soul is constantly engaged in recollection of the Forms, even if it is only in an unconscious and inarticulate recollection stirred by sense-perceptions.

If this is a correct way to understand Proclus' version of active sense-perception, as I think it is, then it seems that even at the level of sense-perception the soul has a capacity to recognize the Good, even if it is only with respect to a particular form or instantiation of goodness that this recognition is made. If so,

24. At *In Alc*.315.5-331.13, Proclus embarks upon a long discourse about the nature of 'the Just' as a proper good of the soul. This is offered as an explanation of Socrates' refutation of the distinction that Alcibiades makes between the Just (*to dikaion*) and the Advantageous (*to sumpheron*). Proclus argues that the Just is within the soul, so that if the Just and the Advantageous are identical, then the latter is within the soul too. That this identity is real is necessitated by the very nature of the soul and its relation to the Good: "where our good especially subsists, there also we have our being {*to einai*}. For our essence {*ousia*} is not in one thing, whereas we are perfected in another, but where the form of a man is, there also is the perfection of the man. Therefore, the man too is in the soul. For each being has the Good as a partner within itself. For the very first being {*to prōtiston on*} subsists because of the Good and about the Good. Thus, where being {*to einai*} is in all things, there also is well-being {*to eu einai*}. Now, it is impossible for the man to be body, but to have his perfection outside of the body in another thing; it is also impossible to be the composite, but for the human good to be defined according to the soul alone. Still further, the desire for the Good is preservative of what desires it. Thus, as Socrates defined it in *The Republic*, what is preservative of each thing is its good, while what is destructive of it is its evil. If, therefore, while having our good in the soul, we also have our being {*to einai*} in it, then we would naturally attain the good [which is the object] of our desire. If, on the other hand, we [have our good] according to the soul, but [our being] is according to the composite, then it must come about that we desire the destruction of ourselves, if indeed the good is immaterial and outside of the body. But no being desires its own destruction, so that the person who doubts if the Just is advantageous does not say that our good is in the soul". Later in the same discourse, now discussing the theological implications of Socrates' refutation, Proclus places the Just in a triad along with the Beautiful (*to kalon*) and the Good (*to agathon*), where the divine sources of the elements of the triad are arranged hierarchically from higher and more universal in its effects (*to agathon*) to lowest and least universal (*to dikaion*). However, as it exists in the soul itself, the Just is both good and beautiful, the Beautiful good and just, and the Good beautiful and just. To briefly sum up his thinking here, Proclus clearly considers the Just (or Justice) a proper good of the soul.

then this must have profound implications for the soul's ability to pursue its self-knowledge and perfection. In fact, I think that Proclus was aware of these implications, and that he shows this in his depiction of the master and student relationship which binds Alcibiades to Socrates. For instance, at *In Alc*.165.11-166.15, he describes how Alcibiades regards Socrates as a though he were a *daimon*, since he inspires the young man with wonder, not only before Socrates approaches and speaks to him but even more so afterward. Proclus describes Alcibiades' experiences here precisely in terms of sense-perception: "[Alcibiades] now perceives him [i.e. Socrates], whereas earlier he only saw him remaining silent and waiting" (*nuni gar autou sunaisthanetai, en de tō prosthen chronō sigōnta monon heōra kai parepomenon*).[25] Whereas prior to speaking, Alcibiades only sees Socrates with the dispositions 'being silent' and 'waiting', after he hears Socrates speak he perceives Socrates himself, rather than his particular dispositions. Socrates' speech reveals his essence and the goodness there – this is implicit in Proclus' comparison to Asclepius who, although revered for his gift of health and preservation, is praised even more when he reveals himself (in *epiphaneia*) – and this inspires wonder in Alcibiades. In other words, Alcibiades is able, even only at the level of sense-perception, to perceive Socrates' goodness and this inspires him with wonder, the very condition which makes the pursuit of philosophy possible.[26] And this is only possible because Alcibiades' soul possesses the same *logoi* as Socrates' (as does every soul) and his perception of Socrates is informed by them.

This is a fairly positive account of sense-perception, as it functions in cooperation with the rational part of the soul, and is perhaps unexpected when considering the often negative statements about sense-perception and its objects that Proclus, like all ancient Platonists, make about it. However, the account given by (Ps.-?)Simplicius, which I will now briefly address, takes this positive evaluation even further.

25. Pr.*In Alc*.166.7-9.

26. Pr.*In Alc*.42.9: *to de thaumazein touto philosophias estin archē*.

(Ps.-?)Simplicius on logoi in sense-perception: a brief excursus

The author commonly referred to in recent scholarhsip as (Ps.?) Simplicius seems to have been a student of Damascius, the last successor to the headship of the Platonic Academy in Athens in the 6th century CE.[27] This philosopher offers an account of sense-perception which substantially upgrades the faculty's status in the soul when compared to the earlier accounts of Proclus and Plotinus.

In his commentary on Aristotle's *De Anima*, (Ps.-?)Simplicius makes a break from his illustrious predecessors by not only attributing *logoi* to the faculties in the rational soul, but also to the faculties that had long been considered irrational, even to the particular senses. For him, all of the soul's cognitive faculties are rational.[28] (Ps.-?)Simplicius develops this new doctrine through an exegesis of Aristotle's assertion that the particular senses are themselves responsible for the fact that the soul perceives that it perceives.[29] His argument follows a chain of reasoning which may be summarized as follows: the perception of the soul's perceiving bespeaks a kind of self-reflexivity, self-reflexivity implies reversion upon self, reversion implies separation from body, separation implies rationality; therefore, the particular senses are rational. This is a clear step beyond the doctrines of Plotinus and Proclus, who only allow to sense-perception a borrowed rationality derived from its cooperation with the rational faculties.

At *In De An*. 210.11-211.15, (Ps.-?)Simplicius argues that the perception of sensible objects is a twofold cognition (*gnōsis*). In the first instance there is a cognition of the sense-object, and this is followed by a cognition that the first cognition is true (or not). The first cognition is perceptual (*aisthētikē*),

27. As is well known, the authorship of the commentary on Aristotle's *De Anima* attributed to Simplicius in the manuscripts has long been in question. For my present purposes, this problem is not relevant, and I take no position on the question here.

28. (Ps.-?)Simp.*In De An*.187.27-36.

29. I. Hadot has explained the importance of the exegesis of *De Anima* 425b12 for the accounts of sense-perception in the Neoplatonic commentaries on *De Anima* (i.e. those of (Ps.-?)Simplicius and Philoponus but also for Priscians *Metaphrasis* of Theophrastus' treatise on sense-perception) in Hadot, "Aspects de la théorie de la perception".

but the second is rational (*logikē*). Thus, sense-perception is capable of judging its own activity, of assessing whether its cognitions present sense-objects in agreement with its own *logoi*. Toward the end of the same passage, (Ps.-?)Simplicius makes a distinction between the sense-perception in irrational animals and sense-perception in rational animals (i.e. human beings):

> But every irrational life aims toward the external object alone, since it grasps for external objects alone and cognizes only these. And the appetite for external objects is not as for things that are good, but only as for things that are pleasant; neither is the cognition [of them] as of things that are true, but as of sense-objects alone. For in the perception of [an external object] as good or true it is necessary that [the perception] bring along with it the [principle of] showing itself to be of benefit or of showing itself to be true.[30]

Although the author's expression is somewhat awkward, the point of the distinction is clear, I think. Whereas the sense-perceptions of irrational animals are bare apprehensions of objects or of their immediate sensible appeal, the sense-perceptions of rational animals carry with them an additional judgment of the object's relation to the truth or the Good. As per (Ps.-?)Simplicius' version of active perception, this additional judgment is a function of sense-perception's self-perception, its comparison of its activities with its own innate *logoi*.

This later version of active sense-perception certainly follows the same line of thinking as those of Plotinus and Proclus, although it extends the quality of rationality to the lower faculties of the soul, typically considered irrational by the author's predecessors.[31] In this view, the soul is poised to recognize the Good in even its faintest forms with even its weakest forms of cognition.

Sense-Perception and the Good in Gregory of Nyssa and Maximus Confesssor

Finally, I want to quickly outline a couple of versions of active sense-perception and its relationship to the Good in the realm of

30. (Ps.-?)Simp.*In De An*.211.7-12.

31. If (Ps.-?)Simplicius was indeed a student of Damascius, then one might reasonably wonder whether Damascius too held that the senses had their own *logoi*. L.G. Westerink seems to think so, at least according to a note in his

Patristic philosophy which, despite its very different textual and spiritual traditions (and different aims and concerns), often drew from the arguments of the Neoplatonists.[32] For reasons particular to the philosophical projects in which they were involved, their accounts of sense-perception are relatively undeveloped, at least in their written texts. Gregory and Maximus both operate within a tradition of Christian philosophy which regards the Holy Scripture as revelation of the highest truth and philosophy, and thus susceptible to rational interpretation and investigation. In this view, the fruits of non-Christian philosophy are not to be rejected when they can be shown to agree with, or help elucidate the truth in, Scripture.[33] Accordingly, I will present just a few of their ideas which point, I think, to accounts of active sense-perception with elements common to those which we find among the Neoplatonists.

First, it is perhaps helpful to give a general sketch of the broader philosophical agreement between Gregory, Maximus and their Neoplatonic counterparts. I will list some of these points of agreement here. First, they agree that God simultaneously is transcendent over His creation and immanent in it. Second, they

translation of Olympiodorus' commentary on Plato's *Phaedo*. At *In Phaed*.4 §6, Olympiodorus asserts that sense-perception apprehends not only *pathē* but also *ousiai*. This would seem to be the function which Proclus attributes to *doxa* and, in fact, Olympiodorus argues against this in the same passage. In his note on this passage, he seems to suggest a connection to Damascius and points to Dam.*In Phil*.157.10-11: "Therefore, sense-perception is not a motion through the body and ending in the soul, but a judgment evoked in such a motion." I am not sure that this evidence is sufficient to say that Damascius thought that the senses possessed their own *logoi*. After all, Plotinus could have written this same statement, but there is no suggestion in his *Enneads* of such *logoi*.

32. They also drew significantly from Middle Platonic as well from Stoic sources, as also the Neoplatonists did.

33. Urbano, *The Philosophical Life*, shows through analysis of Late Antique *bioi* how both Christians and Hellenes used these texts as weapons in a cultural competition (sometimes with real political implications) to see which group would get to direct the future of Greek *paideia* and what values it would transmit to successive generations. He shows how, in the context of this competition, figures like Gregory of Nyssa, although they presented Holy Scripture as the true source of *paideia* and philosophy, and despite their antagonistic rhetorical strategies against Hellenic *paideia* and philosophy, were concerned to carry on those traditions of *paideia* and philosophy (especially Platonic), but under a new, Christian form.

believe that God created willingly through his goodness, so that God's goodness permeates all of creation; the Neoplatonists reject such a willing creation in favour of an eternal world produced by the Good in a manner exceeding will or necessity, but they likewise believed the world to be permeated by the Good.[34] Likewise, they share with the Neoplatonists a view of human individuals in their embodiment as essentially alienated from their own selves and from God. And, even though the origin of their account of the individual's alienation is clearly the creation account of the Book of Genesis, they explained this alienation through the medium of Platonic terms and concepts. In their common view, the alienation of the original human beings is the fall from an original condition of harmony with their archetype, God the source of all good. God created human beings in His image, with the capacity for enjoying Divine Goodness, but also as a mixture of the intelligible and sensible natures in order to elevate the latter. Nevertheless, the original human beings allowed themselves to be persuaded to turn away from God, and this turn involved an error in judgment about the nature of the good and a subsequent choice to pursue objects of the senses as though they were goods worthy of desire: evil entered through will and alienated them from God. Thereafter, all human beings were and are born into the alienated condition of sin.[35] Of course, the difference of detail between this account of the introduction of evil and original sin and the Neoplatonic account of the soul's fall is not inconsequential; nevertheless, both accounts involve a failure on the part of the individual to remain in harmony with

34. Of course, contrary to the Neoplatonists, Christian thinkers did not posit principles like the Good and Being as hypostasized entities in a clear hierarchical order. Rather, for them, these principles express aspects of God's indivisible activity in creation. Thus, e.g., Gregory seems to identify the Good and Beautiful with God (Ramelli, "Good / Beauty"), whereas Plotinus and Proclus distinguish the Good and Beauty (see, e.g., Plot.*Enn*.1.6 & 5.8), arguing that the former is identical to the One and the latter inferior to it as characteristic of Intellect.

35. Gr.Nyss.*Or.Cat*.6; idem, *Op.Hom*.20 & 12. For Maximus, see, e.g. Max. Conf.*Ep*.2; idem, *Qu.Thal*.Prol. & 61. Gregory and Maximus also differ from each other on certain details. For instance, L. Thunberg, *Microcosm and Mediator*,

his or her origin and a responsibility to attend to the restoration of that harmony through recognition of the inferior nature of material goods and a corresponding pursuit of the one and true Good.

Similarly, their accounts of sense-perception and its relation to the Good differ in important ways from those of the Neoplatonists, even while remaining within a Platonic conceptual framework. For instance, both Gregory and Maximus implicitly reject Platonic recollection – for them the soul is created simultaneously with body and so has no pre-existing knowledge – although in other respects, their accounts of human psychology contain Platonic elements and share a Platonic orientation. As a case in point, they both hold to the basic Platonic bipartite and tripartite divisions[36] of the soul, and maintain that the soul is ontologically superior to the body, although it gives the body its form by being present in it. However, their accounts of sense-perception differ in interesting ways, and so I will consider them separately.

In his *De Opificio Hominis*, Gregory makes it clear that he regards the soul, as well as the body, as thoroughly penetrated by the soul's intellect (*nous*).[37] The intellect is implanted in the soul by God – it is the *egkeimenos nous* – and it is the source of unity in soul and body and of the unity of both together. It is present in the operation of every one of the soul's faculties and the body's actions:

> the one [faculty] which passes through each of the sense organs and lays hold of beings. It sees through the eyes what appears; it understands through hearing what is said, loves what is agreeable and turns away from what is not pleasurable, uses the hand for what

154-156, points out the essential similarity of Maximus' account to those of earlier patristic thinkers, but he emphasizes the roles of self-love (*philautia*) and of pleasure and pain in the fall from grace, aspects which Gregory does not mention explicitly at all.

36. In the first case, division into rational and irrational parts; in the second, division into rational, spirited and appetitive parts (*logos*, *thumos* and *epithumia*), the latter well known from Plato's *Republic*. On the other hand, both Gregory and Maximus feel free to divide the soul in other ways when it suits the requirements of their exposition. Thunberg, *Microcosm and Mediator*, 169-207, gives an excellent account of these divisions in the works of Maximus Confessor and investigates their background in his predecessors, including Gregory of Nyssa.

37. Gr.Nyss.*Op.Hom*.14.

> it wills, taking possession and pushing away by means of it that which it judges profitable.

In Gregory's view, then, there is no sense-perception without intellect.[38] On the other hand, intellect needs the data of sense-perception to perform its own particular activity of concept formation. Thus, the two faculties are intertwined, the intellect informing the activity of sense-perception, and the latter providing the cognitive material needed for the function of the former. The data of sense-perception, then, is never simply a passive reception of external data, but is always accompanied by a classifying, discriminating judgment.

For Gregory, sense-perception, like the other faculties of the soul and indeed the soul as a whole, is grounded in the notion that human beings have been created in the image of God. At *Op.Hom*.16, 181D-184B, he discusses this in terms of God's goodness, through which he created all things. God is 'in his own nature every good that can at all be conceived [*kat'ennoian labein*]', and yet transcends every good which can be conceived. The affirmation of his transcendence only emphasizes that God is the source of all good and goods in the world. And, since God made human beings in his image, he made them to be complete, so that they are able to participate in every kind of good (indeed, the list of goods is so long that its contents cannot be enumerated). In fact, it is in being 'full of every good' (*plēres pantos agathou*) that the image has its similarity to its Archetype (*archetupon*). It is no stretch of the imagination, then, to suppose that Gregory thinks that the good can be perceived by the senses.

38. Stated explicitly at *Op.Hom*.14: *oute oun aisthēsis chōris hulikēs ousias, oute tēs noeras dunameōs chōris, aisthēseōs energeia ginetai.*

Maximus Confessor tends to be less systematic[39] than Gregory in the presentation of his thinking, but he still has left us some clear statements about the involvement of reason in the activity of sense-perception.[40] At *Amb*.10, he describes sense-perception as a motion (*kinēsis*) which is "composite, according to which [the soul], as it touches the things outside of it, obtains to itself *logoi* of visible things, as though from certain symbols."[41] This very description suggests that sense-perception actively reaches for and brings cognitive data into the soul.[42] It is suggested again at *Amb*.21, where he describes sense-perception operating in harmony with the faculty of reason (*logos*):

> In accordance with the law of God who fashioned all things with wisdom, the soul as it is carried along naturally by means of its powers and is transported in various ways to sense-objects, if it should use the senses well by way of its own powers, gathering up the manifold *logoi* of beings, and being able to transfer to itself with wisdom everything which is seen, in which God is hidden in silence, then it will have fashioned by way of choice in its faculty of reasoning a most beautiful and spiritual world.[43]

Sense-perception carries the soul to sense-objects. The soul, when it makes use of sense-perceptions "in view of the good"

39. This flexibility seems to be a result of Maximus' insistence on the unity of soul and its inseparability from its body. In his view, the soul has no definite parts which could ever be separated from each other (as Proclus maintains is the case with respect to the rational and irrational souls), and so all divisions in the soul are made for the sake of analysis and discourse. Gregory is similarly flexible relative to the later Neoplatonists but, unlike Maximus, he is willing to separate *thumos* and *epithymia* from the soul proper, as somehow accidental to it. Proclus similarly separates them from the rational soul, but does so by placing them in the lower *pneumatikos* and *ostreous* bodies, the latter of which dissolves into the earth after death while the former survives for some time, but not indefinitely like the *augoeidēs* body which the rational soul eternally animates.

40. V. Karayiannis recognizes and gives a fairly detailed account of Maximus' doctrine of active sense-perception at Karayiannis, *Essence et énergies*, 283-290.

41. Max.Conf.*Amb*.10, 1112D-1113A. Sense-perception is one of "three general motions" (*treis katholikas kinēseis*) in the soul, which are "brought together into a single [motion]" (*eis mian sunagomenas*). The first and second motions are those according to intellect (*kata noun*) and reason (*kata logon*), and are directed toward intelligible things. Motion according to sense-perception (*kat'aisthein*) is the third.

42. 'Touching' translates *ephaptomenē* here. Although the participle is in the middle voice, it bears a transitive meaning.

43. Max.Conf.*Amb*.21, 1248C.

(*kalōs*), gathers in the *logoi* of beings from those perceptions and acquires understanding of beings and God's presence in them.

The *logoi* are the means by which God the Word created and creates beings through goodness; they are the individual natures or essences of things, the presence of God's goodness in beings according to their particular modes of expressing goodness.[44] There are also *logoi* of the virtues, which are situated in God, and so those who participate in the virtues as a cultivated disposition also participate in God.[45] Such a person, Maximus says, "genuinely cultivates the natural seed of the Good through choice." Later in the same discussion, he explains how sense-perception factors into contemplation and the cultivation of virtue: the senses act as rational vehicles of the soul's powers (sense-perception has been rationalized, *logistheisas*):

> Thus, moving wisely and acting in accordance with the divinely perfect *logos* according to which it is and has come to be, the soul apprehends sense-objects through the senses in a beneficial manner, appropriating the spiritual *logoi* in them. And the soul admits the senses themselves, which have been rationalized [*logistheisas*] already by the wealth of [the faculty of] reason, as rational vehicles of its own powers; it joins these powers to the virtues and, through the virtues, joins itself to the more divine *logoi* themselves. The more divine *logoi* of the virtues [are joined] to the spiritual intellect hidden obscurely in them, while the spiritual intellect of the more divine *logoi* in the virtues, pushing away every natural and choice-making relation of the soul which the soul has to what is present [to it], gives the simple, whole soul to the whole God.[46]

The proper use of the sense faculties makes possible the ascent to God through contemplation of the *logoi* of things and habituation to the *logoi* of virtue. In fact, according to Maximus, this harmonious co-operation of sense-perception and reason is their natural condition and is only disrupted because the soul turns away from its natural good (God) and fastens its attention on sense-objects.[47]

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44. Max.Conf.*Amb*.35, 1288D-1289A; *ibid*., 7, 1077C-1080C.

45. Max.Conf.*Amb*.7.

46. Max.Conf.*Amb*.21, 1249BC.

47. See, e.g., Max.Conf.*Amb*.10, 1113A on the natural co-operation between sense-perception and reason; *ibid*., 1112AB, for the disruption of the natural condition.

In precisely this way, sense-perception for Maximus is instrumental in the apprehension of the Good as it appears in the world.

Conclusion

With this last survey of two Christian versions of active sense-perception, I think that I have shown a certain continuity of thought in Late Ancient Platonism about the role sense-perception plays in overcoming alienation through its capacity for apprehending the Good. All of the philosophers I have discussed offer similar narratives of the soul's alienation which go back, in one way or another, to those in Plato's dialogues. They all exhibit a general pattern of a fall from an original unity with the highest principle (or principles), which is also a unity with self, and a subsequent need for restoration of that unity. Furthermore, all of these philosophers argue that the whole soul must be involved, to a greater or lesser degree, in this restoration of the soul to its proper unity with itself, God and other souls.

This is not an imperative reserved for only a select few, but rather extends to all human souls. The restoration is effected through philosophical contemplation and practice, which return individuals to their proper participation in the Good. Accordingly, each of our philosophers seems to have had an awareness of the need to explain how even non-philosophically educated individuals are able to recognize the goodness of objects. Without some such explanation it would be difficult to explain how human beings are able to desire any object at all prior to philosophical study, since these philosophers agree that every being seeks what is good for it, whether its judgments about the goodness of objects are correct or not.[48] The solution to this problem is to

48. In this piece, I have mostly neglected to consider the role of desire (*orexis*) with its higher and lower forms in the pursuit of the Good. This has been addressed in many places already, for obvious reasons, and very recently by K. Corrigan in Corrigan, "How did Aristotle's Unmoved Mover come to love". In truth, desire and cognition constitute two sides of the soul's life, the *orektikē* (sometimes *zōtikē*) and *gnōstikē* lives of the soul, and correspond to *theoria* and *praxis*. For all of the philosophers considered here, these two aspects operate simultaneously, and so it should become the task of a future work to draw them

recognize that the goodness of things is already apprehensible at the level of sense-perception. But goodness is not a physical quality like color or scent, or even size; rather, it requires some kind of knowledge of the being of the object perceived to inform the perception. The Platonists achieve this by arguing that sense-perception somehow participates in the rational character of the soul's higher faculties, however dimly it may do so. In this way, the ability to perceive goodness through the senses is a crucial component for turning oneself onto the path of philosophy and virtue and away from the unexamined and confused conventional 'wisdom' of society. Not only is it pertinent, then, to Platonic epistemology and ethics (in the ancient understanding of this subject), but also to Platonic criticism of society.

And yet – to return to and conclude with the theme on account of which this essay was undertaken – the wisdom or knowledge of the Good for the attainment of which sense-perception can be used as an aid is not a purely human construction. To be sure, the truths discovered through philosophical inquiry and interpretation must be arranged in their proper order by rational human minds. Yet, the truths themselves are only available for the soul's discovery because of the presence of the Good within all things, no matter how attenuated that presence may be. In this way, wisdom really does belong to God who, as the Good, not only distributes it throughout the world for souls to find, but also gives souls the faculties they need to find it and recognize it. As I have shown, one of these faculties is sense-perception, which provides souls their first, albeit obscure, access to God's wisdom. For our Platonists, Christian or Hellenic, it is only through sense-perception that a soul can begin its discovery of God's wisdom, and thus learn how to overcome its own alienation and find its place in the world.

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together in an investigation of both their common and particular relations to the Good.

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