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Plotinian Compatibilism: Reconciling Determinism, Autonomy, and Causal Responsibil

Weißmann, Giulia

Princeton, NJ : Princeton University

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PLOTINIAN COMPATIBILISM:
RECONCILING DETERMINISM, AUTONOMY, AND CAUSAL RESPONSIBILITY

Giulia Weißmann

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Abstract

This dissertation offers a systematic analysis of Plotinus' views on Fate, determinism, and Providence. Through close readings of key passages in the *Enneads* (particularly *Enneads* 3.1 [3], 3.2 [47], 3.3 [48], 4.4. [39] and 2.3 [52]), I reconstruct Plotinus' nuanced compatibilist position. I argue that Plotinus is a compatibilist in the sense that he holds universal causal determinism to be compatible with genuine agency. Moreover, sages can and do act freely, autonomously, and voluntarily. However, Plotinus is not concerned with defending a notion of freedom understood as the ability to act otherwise. And, unlike most compatibilists, Plotinus is not interested in upholding a notion of moral responsibility. Rather, I argue that Plotinus only wants to safeguard *causal* responsibility.

Chapter 1 examines Plotinus' early criticisms of deterministic positions, in particular that of the Stoics. Here I argue that nothing in this early treatise suggests that Plotinus rejects universal causal determinism (UCD). Rather, he rejects what I call the World Soul Primacy view (WSP) because for him, WSP leaves no room whatsoever for agency, individuality, voluntariness, and autonomy. Chapter 2 addresses Plotinus' engagement with astral deterministic. I first discuss Plotinus' criticism of their views before I then turn to his own positive account of astral causation. Chapter 3 explores the metaphysical underpinnings of Plotinus' account of astral signification. Here I argue that Plotinus' commitment to 'soft astrology' entails that he is a determinist about the sensible world – everything in the sensible realm is predetermined. Chapter 4 analyzes the kind of compatibilism to which Plotinus is committed. I argue that the sage's actions, though fully predetermined by Providence, can nonetheless be autonomous, free, and voluntary. As for non-sages, I challenge the standard view in the literature that Plotinus aims to preserve moral responsibility. Against this, I show that Plotinus holds that it is never appropriate to morally blame people. Instead, I show that he only accepts *causal* responsibility.

Acknowledgements

This dissertation project was inspired by a reading group on *Ennead* 2.3, which James Wilberding ran in the spring of 2020. Usually, close readings of Plotinus initially raise more questions than the text seems to set out to answer, and *Ennead* 2.3 proved no exception. Our discussion of this text sparked my interest in the question of whether Plotinus is a compatibilist, and James, as so often, encouraged and shared my excitement about this topic. Thus, first, I want to thank James for his ongoing support and encouragement. He is certainly *causally* responsible for my enthusiasm for studying Plotinus, and this dissertation would not exist without him. His thoughtful objections helped sharpen my arguments and were crucial in helping me figure out what position I actually wanted to defend. I owe him thanks not only for the meticulous feedback he provided, but also for the time and thought he has devoted to advising me over the past twelve years. He has made me a better scholar in more ways than I can list.

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Introduction

Fate (εἱμαρμένη) and Providence (προνοία) have always been a *topos* in Ancient Philosophy.[1] The idea that there is a god (or gods) who has a concern for the world, and that this god is causally involved in caring for the world became an especially pressing topic with the rise of the Hellenistic schools and the Middle Platonists, and so it is not surprising that Plotinus, too, deals with this topic in great detail. What was once one long treatise was divided into two by his student and editor Porphyry: *Enneads* 3.2 and 3.3, chronologically the 47th and 48th,[2] and thus two fairly late treatises. Surprisingly, Plotinus' views on Fate and Providence have not yet received the scholarly attention they deserve. One can only find six papers that explicitly deal with Plotinus' conception of Providence. Apart from Christopher Noble's paper 'Plotinus on Fate and Providence' (2022) which provides a concise overview of the topic, the other papers focus on specific problems raised by Plotinus' theory, such as the problem of free will, theodicy, or divine causality.[3] Needless to say, these questions and problems are interesting and important in their own right. But what is needed, in my view, is a careful philosophical study of Plotinus' conception of Fate and Providence – one that not only addresses these isolated problems but brings them together, allowing us to form a faithful overall

[1] To name just a few, προνοία comes up in Aesop, Aeschylus, Thucydides, Euripides, Sophocles, Antiphon, Leucippus, Aristophanes, Xenophon, Plato, and Aristotle. εἱμαρμένη comes up already in Heraclitus, Anaxagoras, Antiphon, Empedocles, Leucippus, Parmenides, and Isocrates.

[2] n what follows, I use the standard convention of indicating the chronological number of each treatise in square brackets, for example, *Ennead* 2.3 [52].

[3] Broadly speaking, we can divide the literature into three sections. Papers dealing with ethical questions, especially those concerning the free will and moral responsibility. See Frede (2011) and Brisson (2014). Next, there are papers dealing with metaphysical questions, namely Peroli (2020) and Noble and Powers, (2015); and finally, papers dealing with (3) exegetical problems emerging from Plotinus' texts, cf. Chiaradonna (2014) and Boot (1983).

picture of the view Plotinus is actually committed to. The picture that emerges, I shall argue, is that Plotinus clearly accepts universal causal determinism. By this, I mean that nothing is uncaused, and that all the causes are connected in the sense that everything results from a cause (or chain of causes) and, given that these causes are in place, things could not be otherwise. But I also argue that Plotinus is a compatibilist in a fairly specific way, namely that sages alone can and do act freely, autonomously and voluntarily. However, I also show that for Plotinus, determinism is compatible with agency and *causal* responsibility, and that this applies to non-sages as well.

There is also the question of how original Plotinus' view is. We know for a fact that Plotinus read Alexander, the Stoics, and many of the Middle Platonists.[4] To appreciate the originality of his thought, it is important to disentangle his own view from theirs. As I shall show, although Plotinus' position is clearly inspired by others, especially Plato and the Stoics, he departs from them in many ways. For instance, when Plotinus discusses the theater analogy (a Stoic favorite) to describe how everything has always already been predetermined by the World Soul, he criticizes the Stoics for leaving some things underdetermined. Though both Plotinus and the Stoics agree that your role has been assigned to you by the World Soul, the Stoics emphasize that it is still in your power how well you will play your assigned role. As we shall see, Plotinus disagrees. He urges us to see that the playwright did not leave any gaps to be filled – how well you play your role is contained in the script as well. For Plotinus, the World Soul's wisdom is complete and unchanging. This also means that the World Soul does not *react* to any sensible events. In fact, it is neither directed to the sensible world nor does it perceive any sensible events. There is simply no need – the World Soul always already knows what will happen. This presents a serious challenge to a view in the literature according to

[4] Cf., e.g., Porphyry *VP* 14, 10-16.

which Plotinus adopts the Middle Platonic concept of 'conditional fate.'[5] Conditional fate captures the idea that in any given action, the antecedent is *not* fated, only the consequence is.[6] This, I shall argue, is not a viable reading of Plotinus.

Another way in which Plotinus differs from the Stoics and other predecessors is that he maintains moral blame is *never* appropriate. As I show, Plotinus carefully distinguishes between causal and moral responsibility, and he maintains that we can only hold people *causally* responsible. To my knowledge, this, too, is something scholars have overlooked so far. The consensus seems to be that safeguarding moral responsibility is essential to Plotinus' project, but I will argue that this is not the case. My reading of Plotinus also draws out the originality of his position vis-à-vis later Platonists, especially that of his own student Porphyry who takes pains to come up with a reading of the Myth of Er that retains our autonomy on earth (understood as the ability to act otherwise), and which for him seems to ground the possibility of moral action.[7]

In the remainder of this introduction, I want to give a very brief overview of how Plotinus differentiates between Fate and Providence. This will give us the theoretical framework needed for the rest of our discussion. As we will see, although closely connected, Plotinus sees these concepts as quite distinct, especially in terms of their scope and metaphysical status.

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[5] See, e.g., Noble (2022:402); Eliasson (2013:213), Adamson (2014:440)

[6] On the Middle Platonists' conception of conditional fate see Boys-Stones (2007) and Opsomer (2014).

[7] Cf. his treatise 'On what is in our Power,' esp. 268F, 63-75. We do not have the full text but only a series of fragments preserved by John Stobaeus in his *Anthology* (2.8.39-42). Nonetheless, the main points of Porphyry's view can be extracted. For a discussion of this, see Wilberding (2013).

§Fate and Providence – some background

Fate for Plotinus, as for many of the Middle Platonists and unlike some of his predecessors,[8] is ontologically quite sharply distinguished from Providence. The Middle Platonists held that Fate depends on Providence but not vice versa and that Fate only encompasses the sensible world.[9] Plotinus accepts this as well. However, the Middle Platonists conceived of Providence as consisting of three parts, assigning each its own realm. First, there is Providence by the highest god over the heavens. Second, there is Providence by the heavens over species. Third, there is Providence by daemons over individuals.[10] Here, Plotinus departs from his predecessors. As we shall see, Plotinus, like Alexander and the Stoics, identifies Fate with Nature, the lower part of the World Soul. But, as we shall see below, for Plotinus Providence starts at the level of νοῦς and *via* the World Soul reaches everything. It is easy to see why the World Soul plays such an important role. Among other things, the World Soul is responsible for producing and administering the sensible cosmos. Thus, let me very briefly sketch how Plotinus conceives of the World Soul. For him, it consists of two parts (or powers): a completely transcendent higher part with direct access to the Forms, and a lower part, Nature, which is actively engaged in the sensible world and interwoven with the world body,

[8] For the Stoics, Fate, nature, Providence, λόγος and God amount to one and the same thing. Cf., *SVF* 2:928–29; Alexander of Aphrodisias *De Fat.* 22, 191.30–192.26 (= SVF 2.945); and Seneca *Epist.* 65.12. By contrast, the Middle Platonists subordinated Fate to Providence. Cf., e.g., Calcidius, *In Tim.* 143, 181.20–182.5; 145–47, 183.18–20; 184.12–185.2; Ps.-Plutarch *De Fat.* 9. 573b, and Nemesius *De Nat. Hom.* 109.16–18.

[9] See previous note. For a general overview of the Middle Platonic theory of Fate see Boys-Stones (2007).

[10] As Boys-Stones (2007: 445) remarks, 'According to ps. -Plutarch, the activities of (i) the demiurge, (ii) soul, and (iii) the tutelary daemons in the sublunary sphere are all forms of Providence'. For a discussion of the historical development of this concept see Sharples (2003).

imparting the Forms it receives from (its) νοῦς to matter.[11] In general, as James Wilberding remarks, '[i]t is difficult to overstate the scope of Nature's explanatory power in Plotinus' philosophy' and this is true of Fate and Providence as well:

> For he [man] is not only what he has been made to be, but he possesses another principle which is free although it is not outside Providence or the λόγος of the whole cosmos. For those [higher] things are not suspended from those [lower] things (οὐ γὰρ ἀπήρτηται ἐκεῖνα τούτων), rather what is superior illuminates what is inferior (ἐπιλάμπει τὰ κρείττω τοῖς χείροσι), and this [top-down illumination] is perfect Providence (ἡ τελεία πρόνοια). And there is λόγος – the one productive (ποιητικός), the other connecting the superior things to the things that have come into being (ὁ δὲ συνάπτων τὰ κρείττω τοῖς γενομένοις); and these [viz. superior things] are Providence from above (κἀκεῖνα πρόνοια ἡ ἄνωθεν), but [there is another Providence derived] from that which is above (ἡ δὲ ἀπὸ τῆς ἄνω), the other λόγος that is bound to that [higher] one (ὁ ἕτερος λόγος συνημμένος ἐκείνῳ). And from both [λόγοι] arises the whole intertwining (πᾶν πλέγμα) and the all-encompassing providence (πρόνοια ἡ πᾶσα).[12] (*Enn*. 3.3.4.6-13)

Plotinus begins by highlighting that the higher realities are not separated from the lower ones; rather, the superior principles illuminate and govern the inferior ones. Plotinus calls this top-down

[11] Plotinus often distinguishes between the World-Soul and the hypostasis Soul, making clear that the World-Soul (unlike the hypostasis Soul) consists of two parts: the non-descendent (higher) part of soul and Nature. The latter is actively engaged in the sensible world and in matter (cf., *Enn*. 2.3.17.15-17 und 18.8-14), whereas the hypostasis Soul always and fully remains in the intelligible world. Nevertheless, there are certain 'demarcation problems' because Plotinus sometimes conflates these two Souls, e.g., at *Enn*. 2.9.2.11-18; 3.8.5.9-11 and 4.3.22.7-11. For a detailed discussion of these demarcation problems, see Blumenthal (1993: 55-63).

[12] Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own, though I have consulted Armstrong's and Gerson's translations in the course of preparing them.

illumination, which starts at the level of νοῦς,[13] 'perfect Providence' and 'Providence from above.' He then goes on to introduce two λόγοι, which derive from this higher and perfect Providence:

1. A productive λόγος, responsible for the generation of things,
2. A connecting λόγος that links the superior principles to what has come into being.

These two λόγοι derive from the 'Providence from above' (πρόνοια ἡ ἄνωθεν) and together explain the entire providential arrangement of the world. But what are the connecting λόγος and the productive one? The former, I take it, is the one which is said to be bound to the lower, productive one. This echoes Plotinus's earlier remark that the higher principles are not suspended from the lower ones. Thus, the higher, connective λόγος illuminates the lower, productive one. I take it that with these two λόγοι, Plotinus refers to the two powers of the World Soul: the higher, transcendent one, and Nature, the lower, immanent one. Thus, Plotinus here highlights their interdependence and joint task of providentially ordering the sensible world. We find the same idea in the final sentence, where we learn that the whole intertwining (πᾶν πλέγμα) and the all-encompassing Providence arise from both of these λόγοι, implying that the universe is a whole that is providentially governed, generated and maintained by the two powers of the World Soul.[14] As we shall see in Chapter 3, Plotinus maintains that the World Soul governs the sensible world on the basis of a universal τάξις, which contains everything.

[13] Cf. *Enn.* 3.2.1.20-26: 'But since we affirm that the eternal and the never (τὸ ἀεὶ καὶ τὸ οὔποτε) are not present in this [sensible] world (μὴ τῷ κόσμῳ τῷδέ παρεῖναι), we would rightly and consistently say that Providence for the All (τῷ παντὶ) is its being κατὰ νοῦν, and that νοῦς is prior to it, not being prior in time, but because it is from νοῦς (παρὰ νοῦ ἐστι) and νοῦς is prior by nature and is its cause, being an archetype and, as it were, a model of the image, namely this [world].'

[14] I discuss this at length in Chapter 3, pp. 87-90.

Now, in the passage above, Plotinus does not mention Fate. However, he does so in the next chapter, *Ennead* 3.3.5:

> Fate starts from the inferior [part of Providence] (ἀπὸ τοῦ χείρονος ἀρξαμένη) while what is above is only Providence (πρόνοια μόνον). For everything in the intelligible universe (ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ τῷ νοητῷ) is λόγος or rather beyond λόγος (ὑπὲρ λόγον). For Intellect and Soul are pure. But what is from there, automatically (ἤδη), insofar as it proceeds from there (τὸ δὲ ἐντεῦθεν ἤδη ὅσον μὲν ἔρχεται ἐκεῖθεν), is Providence, insofar as it is in a pure soul (καὶ ὅσον ἐν ψυχῇ καθαρᾷ) and insofar as it [proceeds] from there into living beings (καὶ ὅσον ἐντεῦθεν εἰς τὰ ζῷα). (*Enn.* 3.3.5. 15-20)

The details of the passage are difficult, but I think the main points are the following. Plotinus clearly mirrors the distinction we already encountered above, namely between the intelligible and the sensible world. However, this time Plotinus uses this distinction to differentiate between Fate and Providence. At the top of the metaphysical hierarchy of Fate and Providence is the intelligible world, the realm of pure Intellect (νοῦς) and pure Soul, which are completely transcendent. Plotinus seems to contrast the purity of this domain with that of Fate. The influence that 'comes from there,' i.e., from the intelligible world, continues to be Providence, but only insofar as it remains within or is connected to a pure soul. In other words, whoever has a pure (rational) soul is governed by Providence. However, once we reach the domain of embodied existence, which is also the domain of Nature, Providence becomes Fate (εἱμαρμένη). This, I think, is what Plotinus means when he says that Fate starts from the inferior part of Providence. This also fits with another feature of Fate, namely that its scope is restricted the sensible world and the embodied existence of living beings, which Plotinus maintains elsewhere:

> But the motion of the other soul – the one outside [the body] – is upwards (πρὸς τὸ ἄνω), towards what is beautiful and divine, which no one controls (οὐδεὶς κρατεῖ), but either one makes use [of what is beautiful and divine] (ἀλλ' ἢ προσχρῆται) in order to become that and to live on the basis of it (ἵν' ᾖ ἐκεῖνο καὶ κατὰ τοῦτο ζῇ ἀναχωρήσας), having withdrawn [from the sensible world]; or, having become bereft of this soul (ἔρημος ταύτης τῆς ψυχῆς γενόμενος),

> he lives in the domain of Fate (ζῇ ἐν εἱμαρμένῃ) and in this case, the stars do not merely signify things for him (τὰ ἄστρα αὐτῷ οὐ μόνον σημαίνει), rather, he himself becomes, as it were, a part [of the cosmic order] and is carried along with the whole, of which he is a part (γίνεται αὐτὸς οἷον μέρος καὶ τῷ ὅλῳ συνέπεται, οὗ μέρος). (*Enn.* 2.3.9.24-30)

And

> And some [souls] have become entirely subject to the Fate that rules the sensible world (ὑποπεπτώκασιν εἱμαρμένῃ τῇ ἐνταῦθα), and some are sometimes [subject to it], and sometimes belong to themselves; and some accept whatever is necessary to endure, and are able [to ensure] that the things that are their own deeds belong to them, living on the basis of another lawcode that applies to all [real] Beings (ζῶσαι κατ' ἄλλην τὴν τῶν συμπάντων τῶν ὄντων νομοθεσίαν), having given themselves to this other ordinance (ἄλλῳ ἑαυτὰς θεσμῷ δοῦσαι.) (*Enn.* 4.3.15.10-15)

I shall have more to say about this over the course of this dissertation, but what is important for our current purposes is that Plotinus conceives of Fate as ruling the sensible world, and that only sages, i.e., those who have attained the purificatory virtues, can transcend the domain of Fate and cosmic causation. Thus, we can note that Plotinus maintains that 'perfect' Providence originates at the level of νοῦς and extends from there down to everything. It remains Providence both in the higher, pure, part of the World Soul and in purified rational human souls. Fate is both a product and an instrument of Providence, identified with Nature – the lower, immanent aspect of the World Soul – whose influence is limited to the sensible world. It is in this way that Plotinus can maintain that Providence reaches everything.

Chapter 1: Plotinus on Fate and Determinism - The early view

§Introduction

In this chapter, I will focus on Plotinus' earliest discussion of Fate and determinism, found in *Ennead* 3.1 [3]. As *Ennead* 6.7 makes clear, Plotinus posits intelligible causes (Forms and λόγοι) for almost all sensible things. In other treatises, Plotinus goes one step further by emphasizing that *nothing* is uncaused. That nothing is uncaused is certainly one commitment that we need to get universal causal determinism (UCD), but this alone is not sufficient. What we also need are the further commitments that all the causes are connected in the sense that everything (including both things and events) results from a cause (or chain of causes) and, given that these causes are in place, things could not be otherwise. In other words, there is absolute necessity. Before I turn to the later treatises, which, as I shall argue in Chapter 3, show that Plotinus is committed to universal causal determinism, we first need to discuss what Plotinus has to say in the early treatise *Ennead* 3.1 [3]. There, he is mostly concerned with refuting the conceptions of Fate and determinism brought forward by the Epicureans, the Astrologers, and the Stoics. In this chapter, I will focus on Plotinus' criticism of (what he takes to be) the Stoic view. The goal of this chapter is to show that despite some very targeted criticism, nothing in this early treatise suggests that Plotinus rejects UCD *tout court*.

§1 Some background

Plotinus begins *Ennead* 3.1 with a general observation about causation. By distinguishing between sensible things (τὰ γινόμενα)[15] and true Beings (τὰ ὄντα), Plotinus gives us the following exhaustive list of options:

(1) Both are caused (κατ' αἰτίας)

(2) Both are uncaused (ἄνευ αἰτίας)

(3) Both are mixed [viz. some κατ' αἰτίας, some ἄνευ αἰτίας]

  (a) Sensible things: all caused; Beings: mixed

  (b) Sensible things: all caused; Beings: all uncaused

  (c) Beings: all caused; sensible things: mixed

  (d) Beings: all caused; sensible things: all uncaused

Plotinus subscribes to the first option. The One, of course, is beyond being and does not have a cause but all intelligible and sensible things, that is, everything that is posterior to the One, does have a cause.[16] Plotinus emphasizes that sensible things always (ἀεί) come to be on the basis of causes and that nothing uncaused can be admitted (τὸ δ' ἀναίτιον οὐ παραδεκτέον).[17] One upside (as Plotinus sees it) of the claim that every sensible thing comes to be on the basis of a cause is that it is easy to grasp the proximate causes of each thing.[18] Now Plotinus acknowledges that all philosophers (including

[15] By this I mean things that exist in the sensible world as opposed to Beings which exist in the intelligible world.

[16] Cf., *Enn.*3.1.1.10-11: ὅσα δὲ ἐκ τῶν πρώτων ἤρτηται, ἐξ ἐκείνων τὸ εἶναι ἐχέτω. See also *Enn.* 3.8.9-10; 6.2.3.

[17] *Enn.* 3.1.1.15-16.

[18] *Enn.* 3.1.1.24-25.

those he is about to refute) recognize such proximate causes. Here, Plotinus gives the following examples:

> [T]he cause of going to the marketplace is the belief that it is necessary to see someone (τὸ οἰηθῆναι δεῖν τινα ἰδεῖν) or to recover a debt. And, in general, the cause of choosing this or that (τοῦ τάδε ἢ τάδε ἑλέσθαι) and of moving toward this particular thing is that it appeared good to this individual to do this (ὁρμῆσαι ἐπὶ τάδε τὸ φανῆναι ἑκάστῳ ταδὶ ποιεῖν). And some [causes] are referred back to the crafts (τὰς τέχνας): [the cause] of becoming healthy is medicine and the doctor; [the cause] of becoming wealthy is a treasure found, or a gift from someone, or making money from hard work or from a craft. And [the cause] of a child is the father and, if there is some external contributing factor toward procreation coming from elsewhere, certain kinds of food, or a more remotely (ὀλίγῳ προσώτερα), seed [γονή] suitable for procreation, or a woman fit for childbirth. And, in general, [the cause is referred] to Nature (εἰς φύσιν).
>
> (*Enn.* 3.1.1.26-36)

Again, grasping these causes is easy. However, Plotinus also agrees with the other philosophers that grasping such proximate causes is not sufficient. He illustrates the insufficiency of proximate causes by giving us examples where the same proximate causes are at work, but different (or even contrary)[19] results obtain:

> **Heavenly bodies:**
>
> For why is it that when the same things come about (τῶν αὐτῶν γενομένων), e.g., when the moon shines, one person becomes a thief, but another does not? (*Enn.* 3.1.2.4-5)
>
> **Environment:**
>
> And [why is it that] when similar conditions, which come from the environment, are present (τῶν ὁμοίων ἐκ τοῦ περιέχοντος ἡκόντων), one person falls ill but another does not? (*Enn.* 3.1.2.5-7)

[19] Cf. *Phd.* 68d2-69a4, where Plato tells us that if F is a genuine cause of S being X, F must be such that it cannot be responsible for S being Y (where X and Y are contraries).

Professions:

> And [why is it that] from the same lines of work, [one becomes] a wealthy person, but another one [becomes] poor? (Καὶ πλούσιος, ὁ δὲ πένης ἐκ τῶν αὐτῶν ἔργων;)[20] (*Enn.* 3.1.2.7)

These examples show that even if the proximate causes (the moon shining, environmental factors, lines of work) are the same or similar, they are not sufficient to explain the outcome.[21] They are not sufficient because we can observe that different outcomes obtain even if the proximate causes are the same. This is why, according to Plotinus, we need to go beyond proximate causes 'to the primary and ulterior'[22] ones (ἐπὶ τὰ πρῶτα καὶ ἐπὶ τὰ ἐπέκεινα αἴτια). As I mentioned, Plotinus thinks that all philosophers go beyond proximate causes. His criticism, then, is about what these other philosophers take the primary and ulterior cause(s) to be. Here, Plotinus gives a brief overview of different schools and what they take such cause(s) to be. He first mentions pluralists like the Epicureans (3.1.2.9-15) and other corporealists (3.1.2.15-17), before he then turns to the monists. Here,

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[20] I think what Plotinus has in mind here is the case of two people, e.g., farmers, both of whom work hard, but only one of them becomes wealthy due to favorable environmental factors. He paints this picture more clearly in *Ennead* 2.3.14.15-16, where the farmer is said to become wealthy due to farming, with the environment being a contributing factor: Εἰ δ' ἐκ πόνων, οἷον ἐκ γεωργίας, ἐπὶ τὸν γεωργόν, συνεργὸν τὸ περιέχον γεγενημένον. See also Chapter 2, pp. 79-80.

[21] Perhaps Plotinus is here implicitly referring to the Stoic distinction between an 'initiating' (προκαταρκτικὴν) and a 'perfect' (αὐτοτελῆ) cause (αἰτίαν), but Plotinus does not take over their vocabulary. Cf., Plutarch *De Stoic Rep.* 1056b; Cicero *De Fat*. 41. Note also that Plotinus does not claim that proximate causes have no role to play when you want to give a full causal account. What he emphasizes is that you cannot stop your analysis there.

[22] Note that these ulterior causes need to include atoms and the World Soul because everything starting in line 9 explains how other philosophers go beyond proximate causes, viz. he is giving us *their* primary and less proximate causes. This is why I choose to translate τὰ ἐπέκεινα αἴτια with 'ulterior causes' rather than 'transcendent' which seems to be the standard translation. Needless to say, for Plotinus these ulterior causes are transcendent.

he mentions the astral determinists (3.1.2.26-30), as well as two other groups, both of which sound Stoic:

> Others go up to the principle of the universe and derive everything from it (ἀπ' αὐτῆς κατάγουσι πάντα), saying that this cause, which passes through all things (διὰ πάντων φοιτήσασαν), not only moves (κινοῦσαν) but also produces (ποιοῦσαν) each [thing]. Having posited this as Fate and the most sovereign cause (κυριωτάτην αἰτίαν), [they say that] it is itself all things (αὐτὴν οὖσαν τὰ πάντα). [And they say that] not only the other things that come to be, but even our thoughts (τὰς ἡμετέρας διανοήσεις) proceed from its motions (ἐκ τῶν ἐκείνης ἰέναι κινημάτων), as when each of the parts of a living being is moved not by means of itself (οὐκ ἐξ αὑτῶν) but by means of the controlling principle (ἐκ δὲ τοῦ ἡγεμονοῦντος) in each living being. (*Enn.* 3.1.2.17-25)

And

> And indeed, the interweaving of causes with one another (τὴν τῶν αἰτίων ἐπιπλοκὴν πρὸς ἄλληλα), and the [causal] chain [that comes down] from above (τὸν ἄνωθεν εἱρμὸν), the fact that the later things always follow the former (τὸ ἕπεσθαι τοῖς προτέροις ἀεὶ τὰ ὕστερα), and that these later things go back up to the former (καὶ ταῦτα ἐπ' ἐκεῖνα ἀνιέναι) – having come to be through them (δι' αὐτῶν γενόμενα) and, without them, would not have come to be (ἄνευ ἐκείνων οὐκ ἂν γενόμενα) – and that the later things are enslaved to those before them (δουλεύειν δὲ τοῖς πρὸ αὐτῶν τὰ ὕστερα)– if someone were to say these things, he would be seen to be introducing Fate in another way (εἱμαρμένην ἕτερον τρόπον εἰσάγων φανεῖται). (*Enn.* 3.1.2.30-36)

One might wonder, as Armstrong does, why Plotinus distinguishes these two views in the first place: 'It is odd that Plotinus makes so clear a distinction between those who hold that all things are determined by the World Soul and those who hold that they are determined by the universal chain of causation.'[23] As I will try to show, this distinction is less puzzling than Armstrong thinks. I believe that this distinction makes sense because Plotinus rejects the idea of a World Soul[24] primacy

[23] Plotinus *Ennead* III (Loeb), p. 18 fn1.

[24] Plotinus, following the Stoics, sometimes refers to this primary principle as the principle of the universe (τὴν τοῦ παντὸς ἀρχὴν), other times he calls it the World Soul, ruling principle, or Fate. For ease of reading, in what follows, I will mostly refer to it as the World Soul.

(henceforth WSP) – the idea that the World Soul is the primary principle of *everything*. He does, however, I shall argue, accept the view expressed in the second passage, namely universal causal determinism (henceforth UCD). Thus, when Plotinus there notes that 'anyone' (τις) who embraces UCD 'introduces Fate in another way', I believe he chose this wording precisely because he does not intend to distance himself from UCD. As we shall see, Plotinus' criticism in *Ennead* 3.1. is directed at two different versions of WSP. He never takes issue with UCD. Hence, I suggest that by separating the two, Plotinus signals that the Stoic commitment to WSP is unacceptable, whereas UCD remains promising. With this in mind, let us now turn to *Ennead* 3.1.4 and 3.1.7, where he discusses the two different versions of WSP in detail.

§2 Plotinus' first criticism of WSP

Let us recall what Plotinus has so far told us about this view. First, proponents of WSP posit a first principle and cause, the World Soul, from which everything derives. They hold that the World Soul corporeally pervades everything, which in turn means that it also moves, creates, and is everything. Moreover, they hold that even our thoughts derive from this principle's movements. This is because the all-pervading World Soul moves all individual parts of the universe, ruling out the idea that parts (such as individual living beings) can move by means of themselves. Finally, they identify the World Soul with Fate. In *Ennead* 3.1.4, we find Plotinus' first detailed criticism of WSP. He there criticizes this view for two different (though, as we shall see, related) reasons:

- This view of causation does away with the very thing it seeks to establish (Fate, a causal chain, and the mutual interweaving of causes) because *everything will be one*.
- It also does away with human agency and individuality

Let us begin by looking at how Plotinus arrives at the idea that 'everything will be one.' He begins his criticism by offering the following analogy:

> But then, does one soul, permeating the universe, accomplish everything, each individual thing being moved as a part in the way in which the whole directs it? And must we, because the causal sequences (τῶν αἰτίων ἀκολούθων) are brought forth (φερομένων) by the World Soul (ἐκεῖθεν), call the sequential continuity of causes (τὴν τούτων ἐφεξῆς συνέχειαν) and interweaving (καὶ συμπλοκὴν) of these [causal sequences] 'Fate' (εἱμαρμένην) as if, when a plant has its principle from the root (ἐκ ῥίζης), one were to call the internal administration which extends from there over all its parts and interweaves them with each other (τὴν ἐντεῦθεν ἐπὶ πάντα τὰ μέρη καὶ πρὸς ἄλληλα συμπλοκήν) both in their actions and affections (ποίησίν τε καὶ πεῖσιν), a single internal administration (διοίκησιν μίαν) and, so to speak, Fate of the plant (εἱμαρμένην τοῦ φυτοῦ)? (*Enn*. 3.1.4.1-9)

Plotinus begins with the Stoic view according to which the World Soul corporeally permeates all parts of the cosmos, moving each of those parts wherever it wants them to move. I will discuss this claim below when we turn to Plotinus' second reason for rejecting this view. He then goes on to say that the World Soul also brings forth all causal sequences and, I take it, precisely because it pervades everything, this 'sequential continuity of causes' results in their interweaving. He then applies this to a plant. The plant has its principle in the root and from there all its parts – both the ones that are acting and the ones that are acted upon – are interwoven and administered by this principle. We should *not*, Plotinus insists, call this single internal administration the 'fate' of the plant. To see why, we need to turn to the first objection he raises against this view:

> But first of all, this vehemence of necessity and of such [a notion of] Fate (τοῦτο τὸ σφοδρὸν τῆς ἀνάγκης καὶ τῆς τοιαύτης εἱμαρμένης) does away with Fate itself, along with the chain (τὸν εἱρμὸν) and interweaving (τὴν συμπλοκὴν) of causes (τῶν αἰτίων). For just as, with respect to our own parts (ἐν τοῖς ἡμετέροις μέρεσι), which are moved on the basis of our ruling principle (κατὰ τὸ ἡγεμονοῦν), it is unreasonable (ἄλογον) to say that they are moved on the basis of Fate (καθ' εἱμαρμένην) – for it is not one thing that imparts (τὸ ἐνδεδωκὸς) the movement and another that receives it (τὸ παραδεξάμενον) and employs the impulse it gets from it (παρ' αὐτοῦ τῇ ὁρμῇ κεχρημένον), rather, *this very thing itself* [viz. the ruling principle] is what moves the leg in the first place (ἐκεῖνό ἐστι πρῶτον τὸ κινῆσαν τὸ σκέλος) – in the same way

> (τὸν αὐτὸν τρόπον), if with respect to the universe the All is one, acting and being acted upon (ἓν ἔσται τὸ πᾶν ποιοῦν καὶ πάσχον), and there is not one thing coming from another on the basis of causes which always lead back to something else (οὐκ ἄλλο παρ' ἄλλου κατ' αἰτίας τὴν ἀναγωγὴν ἀεὶ), it is certainly not true that everything comes to be on the basis of causes (κατ' αἰτίας τὰ πάντα γίγνεσθαι), rather everything will be one (ἓν ἔσται τὰ πάντα).
>
> (*Enn*.3.1.4.9-20)

Plotinus' main criticism is that on this view, 'everything will be one' and that this account does away with the very thing it wants to establish – Fate, a causal chain, and the mutual interweaving of causes. How does Plotinus arrive at this conclusion?

The answer lies in yet another analogy. This time, Plotinus adduces the example of a body part being moved. Here, I take Plotinus' point to be that if we accept WSP, there will never be a causal chain to begin with because the ruling principle acts *directly* – without any intermittent steps – on the leg.[25] As Plotinus says, 'there is not one thing which imparts the movement and another which receives it and takes its impulse from it.' Rather, the ruling principle itself is the first (and only) mover of the leg. Accordingly, it is unreasonable speak of 'Fate' either in the case of the plant or in the case of the leg. It is unreasonable in the case of the plant, because this plant is administered by a ruling principle which extends from the root to all other parts, and thus, if the principle moves, say, a leaf, it will *directly* move it, just like the ruling part directly moves the leg. The same applies to the case of the universe. Thus, in none of the cases could a causal chain arise. The problem with that is that proponents of WSP want there to be a causal chain – for them, Fate *is* the causal chain and the mutual interweaving of causes.

[25] I take it Plotinus here ignores the Stoic theory of transmission (which he criticizes at length in *Enn.* 4.7.7) because it presupposes a causal chain. According to this transmission theory, affections (pain, pleasure, impressions, movements) get transmitted *via* a causal chain from their point of origin to the ἡγεμονικόν, where the πάθος in question is then perceived and processed.

Now one might object that the ruling principle's action on the leaf or leg constitutes a causal chain: A acts on B, forming the causal sequence (AB). Here, I think, it is important to highlight that Plotinus repeatedly says that one and the same thing will be that which acts and that which is acted upon. We already saw this claim in the plant analogy, where he said that all the parts are mutually interwoven, including the ones that act and those that are acted upon (ποίησιν τε καὶ πεῖσιν). And, here, too, when Plotinus brings in the case of the universe, we get a very similar claim. As he says, if the universe 'is one thing acting and being acted upon (ἓν ἔσται τὸ πᾶν ποιοῦν καὶ πάσχον), and one thing does not come from another on the basis of causes which always lead back to something, it is certainly not true that everything comes to be on the basis of causes, but everything will be one (ἓν ἔσται τὰ πάντα).' Thus, it is clear that there is a connection between the lack of a causal chain and the claim that everything will be one, but it is less clear how Plotinus is justified in inferring that if A acts on B, there is no causal chain but rather everything will be one. My suggestion is this. Plotinus here presupposes the Stoic idea that everything can be analyzed into two principles. One the one hand, we have matter (passive, that which is acted upon), and on the other hand, we have God/the World Soul/λόγος/pneuma/Zeus/Fate (active, that which acts).[26] The Stoics also hold that together, the active and passive principles make up the cosmos and everything in it. Matter in and of itself is entirely without qualities, formless and inert. It is only when there is a complete corporeal blending[27] of matter and God that we actually have a (qualified) thing. This, I take it, was uncontroversial and well known to Plotinus. I suggest that what Plotinus targets in these two analogies is precisely this Stoic view of active and passive principles, which on Plotinus' view eliminate any meaningful patient-agent distinction.

[26] See *SVF* 2.300 (= Diogenes *VP*. 7.134) and *SVF* 1.88 (= Calcidius 292-3). See also *Enn*. 2.4.1.

[27] Plotinus devoted an entire treatise, *Enn*. 2.7 [37], to refuting this view.

If we apply this to the plant analogy, we get the following idea. The plant is a composite of matter and God, here, the World Soul. The World Soul pervades the entire matter, and this mixture is what makes it a plant. The Stoics would also say that it is the World Soul (not matter), that administers the plant since only the World Soul (*qua* active principle) can act on something. I take it that Plotinus' criticism is this: If matter is inert and formless, then it is really only the World Soul that (i) makes the plant a plant and (ii) administers it such that it remains a plant. Note that this need not imply that, for the Stoics, the plant is numerically identical to the World Soul – they would say that the *pneuma* of the World determines its specific tenor such that it is a plant. However, as Plotinus points out, since the World Soul (or its *pneuma*) corporeally pervades all parts of the plant and acts on them, and since all the parts are interwoven, all parts ultimately seem to be some manifestation of the World Soul. In other words, there is no real agent-patient distinction: the World Soul is both the agent and the patient – ποίησίν τε καὶ πεῖσιν.

We can apply the same reasoning to the second analogy. Suppose Fred moves his leg. Plotinus, I take it, claims that on the Stoic view, Fred's ἡγεμονικόν is itself pervaded by the World Soul, and thus it is really the World Soul that acts on the leg. However, the leg, too, is a leg only because it is pervaded by the World Soul. Thus, the World Soul yet again acts upon itself. Here too, then, the agent and the patient turn out to be one and the same.

It is in this sense that I want to suggest Plotinus infers that on this view 'everything will be one.' Thus, what is important to Plotinus is that we retain an agent-patient distinction, which the Stoic theory (as he presents it) lacks. And without an agent-patient distinction, no causal chain can arise. We can now see how Plotinus arrives at the conclusion that everything will be one and that this view does away with the very thing it wants to establish namely Fate, a causal chain, and the mutual interweaving of causes. For if everything is one, and the World Soul always just acts on some

manifestation of itself, then there really is no chain of causes, not even the chain AB. For B really just is a manifestation of A, and so there is only A (the World Soul) acting on A. Thus, no causal chains whatsoever could arise. As a result, there is no interweaving of causes either. And since the Stoic definition of Fate rests on this very interweaving of a plurality of causes, WSP also does away with Fate.

The idea that everything will be one also seems to underlie Plotinus' second reason for rejecting WSP:

> So on this assumption, neither are we ourselves (οὔτε ἡμεῖς ἡμεῖς), nor is anything our own deed (οὔτε τι ἡμέτερον ἔργον). Nor do we reason (λογιζόμεθα) ourselves, but our resolutions (βουλεύματα) are the reasonings of another (ἑτέρου λογισμοὶ). Nor do we act (πράττομεν), just as the feet do not kick, but it is we who kick through parts of ourselves (ἡμεῖς διὰ μερῶν τῶν ἑαυτῶν). For really, each individual thing must be an individual thing (δεῖ καὶ ἕκαστον ἕκαστον εἶναι); there must be actions and thoughts that belong to us (πράξεις ἡμετέρας καὶ διανοίας ὑπάρχειν); the good and bad actions of each must come from each individual himself (παρ' αὐτοῦ ἑκάστου), and we must not attribute, at least the doing of bad actions (τὴν γοῦν τῶν αἰσχρῶν ποίησιν), to the universe. (*Enn*. 3.1.4.20-28)

Here, Plotinus concludes that this same view also does away with human agency and individuality. In a way, this already follows from his previous argument. For if there are no causal chains, the World Soul will be the only agent and the only patient. Here, Plotinus lists further ramifications the view that everything will be one brings with it. For one, if everything (including our ἡγεμονικόν)[28] is pervaded by the World Soul, then 'our' resolutions really just are reasonings of the World Soul. For the same reason, 'we' don't engage in actions – the World Soul does.

[28] Cf. *SVF* 2.634 (= Diog. *VP*. 7.138-09): 'The world is directed by intelligence and providence, since intelligence pervades every part of it, just like the soul in us. But it pervades some parts to a greater extent and others to a lesser degree. Through some parts, it passes as tenor, as through bones and sinews. Through others as intelligence, as through the commanding-faculty.'

Plotinus then once more returns to the example of the leg. This time, he makes an interesting point about kicking. Suppose George kicks Fred. The question that seems to linger in the background here is: when some kicking happens, who or what is doing the kicking? What Plotinus implies here is that it is an inappropriate answer to say that it is George's foot that kicked Fred. Rather, we want to say that it is George who kicked Fred, and he kicked Fred by means of (διὰ) one of his parts, namely his foot. I take it that Plotinus' point is that even though George's foot is the *proximate* cause of the kicking (after all, it is the thing that hits Fred), it is not the agent that does the kicking.[29] George is the agent. The next step, which is crucial, seems to me to be that on the Stoic view, individuals will be analogous to the foot. But if this is the case, then individuals would not have any agency whatsoever. Rather, what implements their activities (say the brain or ἡγεμονικόν) is not their own ruling principle. Rather, it is the World Soul's ruling principle that pervades everything, including the ruling principles of all individual human beings. Thus, the World Soul simply uses 'you' as a tool through which it enacts *its* decisions, just like George's ruling principle uses the foot to kick Fred. The foot has no role to play in this decision. Since this applies to all individual living things, Plotinus concludes that WSP eliminates the possibility of agency and individuality. Finally, Plotinus notes that if we accept WSP, we will also have to attribute bad actions to the World Soul and the universe – a consequence Plotinus clearly rejects and takes pains to avoid elsewhere.[30] One thing that emerges from these passages is that for Plotinus, agency is closely connected to self-motion. One of

[29] Perhaps Plotinus means to go a step further and point out that arguably, a foot could not ever kick because in order to kick you have to have a leg, a hip, etc. What is more, if we think of kicking as an action (rather than just a mechanical motion), then we also need a brain, a soul, and so on. It seems that we are making a category mistake if we say that it is the foot kicks because a foot is not the kind of thing that is able to kick (which is somewhat surprising since the foot plays such an important role in kicking).

[30] Cf., e.g., *Enn.* 3.3.4; 4.4.31; 1.4.7.

the points he keeps returning to is that according to WSP, the World Soul would also *move us* wherever it wants 'us' to move. It is the principle responsible for setting everything in motion. Now, for any Platonist, the soul is a *self*-mover, and thus, it is not surprising to see Plotinus firmly rejecting the idea that we could be agents if we were always moved by something else. However, as we shall see in the final chapter of this dissertation, Plotinus argues that agency and determinism are perfectly compatible. That is to say, you can have agency even if the actions you do are fated. This, I think, helps explain why Plotinus here, in the midst of a discussion of Fate and determinism, insists that we need to safeguard agency. The Stoic view (as he presents it) fails to achieve this.

Let us take stock. In *Ennead* 3.1.4, Plotinus' main reason for rejecting WSP is that for him, this view is tantamount to saying 'everything will be one.' This, in turn, has several undesirable consequences. For one, there will be no agent-patient distinction, and thus, no causal chains can arise. This, in turn, means that WSP does away with the very principles it wants to establish – a causal chain, their mutual interweaving, and Fate. Moreover, WSP removes all individuality, because everything will turn out to be some manifestation of the World Soul. Finally, WSP leaves no room for human agency. Since every part of the universe is corporeally pervaded by the World Soul, we are at best instruments that the World Soul uses to enact *its* decisions. Self-motion and acting 'from oneself' would be impossible.

It is worth emphasizing that nothing in this criticism suggests that Plotinus rejects the idea that WSP is meant to establish, namely that there is Fate, a causal chain, and a mutual interweaving of causes. Plotinus himself, as we shall see, endorses such a view. His criticism here is simply that a corporeally all-pervading World Soul is a non-starter, because it does away with the very possibility

of causal chains. Let us now turn to *Ennead* 3.1.7, to see what Plotinus' second round criticism of WSP amounts to.

§3 Plotinus' second criticism of WSP

As I mentioned above, despite his announcement in *Ennead* 3.1.2, in *Ennead* 3.1.7, Plotinus does not criticize UCD. Instead, he once more criticizes WSP, but this time, he argues against a modified version:

> It remains to look at [the theory of] the principle, which interweaves (τὴν ἐπιπλέκουσαν) and as it were, links together (οἷον συνείρουσαν) all things with each other (ἀλλήλοις πάντα), and how this principle, posited to be a single one, brings itself to bear on each individual thing (τὸ πὼς ἐφ' ἑκάστου ἐπιφέρουσαν ἀρχὴν τιθεμένην μίαν), from which everything (ἀφ' ἧς πάντα) is accomplished on the basis of seminal form principles (κατὰ λόγους σπερματικοὺς περαίνεται). This opinion, too, is close (ἐγγὺς) to the one which states that every motion and relation (σχέσιν καὶ κίνησιν), both of ourselves and of everything else, comes from the World Soul, even if it wishes to grant something to us and to each individual (βούλεταί τι ἡμῖν καὶ ἑκάστοις χαρίζεσθαι), in order that something may be done 'from ourselves' (εἰς τὸ παρ' ἡμῶν ποιεῖν τι). In fact, it contains an absolute necessity of all things (τὴν πάντως πάντων ἀνάγκην), and once all causes have been included (πάντων εἰλημμένων τῶν αἰτίων), it is not possible for any individual thing not to come about (οὐκ ἔστιν ἕκαστον μὴ οὐ γίνεσθαι). For there is no longer anything to prevent or make anything come about in any other way (τὸ κωλῦσον ἢ ἄλλως γενέσθαι ποιῆσον), if everything has already been taken up in Fate (εἰ πάντα εἴληπται ἐν τῇ εἱμαρμένῃ). (*Enn.* 3.1.7.1-12)

Here, too, we have a single principle, the World Soul, which interweaves and connects everything. However, this time, Plotinus adds two new points. The first one is that he here introduces a core component of standard Stoic theory, the seminal form principles (σπερματικοί λόγοι). I take it Plotinus introduces these causes in order to attack WSP from a different angle. For with the introduction of seminal λόγοι, we no longer have the problem that Plotinus' first criticism drew out, namely that everything will be one. Rather, we now have a *plurality* of causes. Still, as Plotinus notes, this view remains close to WSP – it still posits the World Soul as the ultimate principle from which everything derives, and which sets everything in motion. The other new point is that Plotinus now

mentions that this view wants (but fails) to make room for human agency – that things may be done 'from ourselves' (παρ' ἡμῶν).[31] Plotinus seems to think that this fails because WSP entails 'an absolute necessity of all things' – *all* causes are included in Fate and so things could not be otherwise. One consequence of this is that the generation of things is necessitated, but Plotinus does not have a problem with this. Thus, let us see what it is that he takes issue with. The passage continues as follows:

> But if things are such as to be set in motion by a single principle (Τοιαῦτα δὲ ὄντα ὡς ἀπὸ μιᾶς ἀρχῆς ὡρμημένα), there will be nothing left for us (ἡμῖν οὐδὲν καταλείψει) except to be carried wherever those things (ἐκεῖνα)[32] might be pushed (ἂν ὠθῇ) [by this first principle]. For our representations (φαντασίαι) will depend on preceding causes (τοῖς προηγησαμένοις) and our impulses (ὁρμαὶ) will be based on these [representations], and something being 'in our power' (τὸ ἐφ᾽ ἡμῖν) will be just words. For the fact that *we* have impulses does not make these impulses any more *ours*, if the impulse comes to be on the basis of these [preceding causes] (κατ᾽ἐκεῖνα). And what is ours (τὸ ἡμέτερον) will be of the same kind as that of other animals and as that of infants proceeding on the basis of blind impulse (καθ᾽ ὁρμὰς τυφλὰς ἰόντων), and as that of people who are out of their mind. For they, too, move (ὁρμῶσι). And by Zeus, the impulses of fire as well, and of all things that are enslaved to their own constitution (δουλεύοντα τῇ αὐτῶν κατασκευῇ) are moved on the basis of their constitution (φέρεται κατὰ ταύτην). And seeing this, no one disputes [that impulses exist], but seeks other causes (ἄλλας αἰτίας) of this impulse, and does not stop (οὐχ ἵστανται) as if this [viz. the World Soul] were *the* principle (ὡς ἐπ᾽ ἀρχῆς ταύτης). (*Enn.* 3.1.7.8–24)

Note that here, Plotinus does not criticize the general idea that there will be an absolute necessity of all things. Rather, his concern is once more about autonomous motion, which is yet again triggered by the idea that we have a single principle from which everything derives and which sets everything in motion. If this is the case, then, even if we have a plurality of causes, we are still being

[31] With this, Plotinus implies that WSP in its original form does not even try to safeguard human agency. I do not think that this is an accurate representation of any Stoic view, but Plotinus might have just taken over some of the polemic from Alexander of Aphrodisias' *De Fato.*

[32] This is presumably pointing forward to the φαντασίαι and ὁρμαί mentioned just after, or the προηγησαμένοις.

carried wherever the World Soul moves us. Here, Plotinus assumes that our representations and impulses are also 'pushed' by the World Soul, presumably *via* the seminal λόγοι. Our representations, Plotinus says, will always depend on 'preceding causes' and our impulses will in turn depend on our representations such that both are part of a single causal chain. This causal chain, I take it, begins with the World Soul, since we are still operating with the premise that everything is set in motion from this one principle.[33] As a result, every single representation and impulse, and thereby every single ensuing action, would – without exception – come to be on the basis of *these* preceding causes. But if this is the case, then the very possibility of agency and autonomy is removed. This, in turn, would mean that 'what is ours' i.e., our true self, becomes indistinguishable from the automatic drives of non-rational animals, infants, insane people, or even physical things like fire.[34] So if *all* impulses always arise from prior causes that are included in Fate, then *all* actions would amount to mere mechanical responses. In other words, the psychological make up of all human beings would be indistinguishable from that of other living things. This, as we shall see, Plotinus finds untenable, because he wants to make room for the idea that some human beings, namely sages, do have voluntary impulses and have things in their power.[35] Moreover, Plotinus seeks to safeguard agency even for non-sages.

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[33] Plotinus here does not acknowledge that the Stoics did not in fact think that a representation determines the assent. Perhaps his point still stands: If both impulses and representations are ultimately determined by the World Soul, and each person's ἡγεμονικόν is pervaded by it, then it seems that there is simply no conceptual space for agency.

[34] Nemesius ridicules a similar view, ascribing it to Philopator. Cf., *De Nat. Hom.* 35. 293.7-13.

[35] Plotinus also wants to ascribe actions to non-sages. Though fated, they still have rich phenomenological experiences which cannot be compared to those of inanimate things, children, or animals. For reasons of space, I cannot discuss this here.

Nonetheless, it is worth highlighting that once again Plotinus does not criticize the general idea that such a causal chain exists. And he also does not object to the idea that there are people that are entirely subject to Fate, and whose every action and impulse is fated. However, as we shall see in Chapter 4, Plotinus thinks that this is perfectly compatible with ascribing agency and causal responsibility to agents. Thus, the problem Plotinus sees with WSP is that it is not sufficiently developed, since it leaves no room whatsoever for agency, voluntariness or autonomy. As we shall see in the next section, for Plotinus, sages can transcend the domain of Fate and thus voluntary impulses, and autonomous actions are possible.[36]

To sum up. We have now seen what Plotinus thinks a theory of Fate and causal determinism should *not* look like: we should not posit an all-pervading World Soul as the primary principle of everything – then everything would be one. And even if we introduce further causal agents (σπερματικοί λόγοι), but include *all* of them in Fate, then, Plotinus says, we do away with agency, voluntariness, and autonomy. However, this does not mean that Plotinus objects to the general idea of there being absolute universal necessity and a casual chain or network. As we shall see in the next section, he explicitly endorses it – albeit with important qualifications. Thus, let us now turn to *Ennead* 3.1.8-10, the chapters where Plotinus tells us a little more about his own views on the matter.

§4 Plotinus' Response in *Enn*. 3.1.8-10

In what follows, I will focus on the positive doctrine Plotinus sets out in the last three chapters of *Ennead* 3.1. It is worth highlighting that at this point, Plotinus has not yet developed a

[36] However, no one can transcend Providence, as Plotinus will argue in the much later treatises on Providence (*Enn.* 3.2 [47] and 3.3. [48]). I discuss this in detail in Chapters 3 and 4.

comprehensive account of Fate and Providence; the full picture only emerges much later, in *Enneads* 3.2 [47] and 3.3 [48]. Still, although he does not yet have all the metaphysical tools that will become available in those later treatises, I don't see any tensions between what he proposes here and what he will go on to say. I flag this only because the positive view presented in *Ennead* 3.1 is rather preliminary, concerned mainly with establishing that human autonomy and voluntariness is at least possible for *some* individuals. This is to be expected, given the detailed refutations of Stoic, Epicurean, and astral-determinist views that occupied him in earlier chapters of this treatise. For Plotinus, all of these views eliminate human autonomy altogether. That said, in chapter 8, he does offer a kind of preview of what a viable account of Fate and causation should look like:

> What other cause (Τίς οὖν ἄλλη αἰτία), then, comes to mind, besides these [viz. atoms, bodies, the all-pervading World Soul, and the stars/revolution of the universe], which will leave nothing uncaused (ἀναίτιόν τε οὐδὲν καταλείψει), will preserve (τηρήσει) both causal sequence (ἀκολουθίαν) and order (τάξιν), will also allow us to be something (ἡμᾶς τέ τι εἶναι συγχωρήσει), and will not do away with prophecy and divination (προρρήσεις τε καὶ μαντείας οὐκ ἀναιρήσει)? (*Enn.* 3.1.8.1-4)

Thus, Plotinus (eventually) wants to establish a view of Fate and causation that accommodates the following four principles:

(1) Nothing is uncaused

(2) Order and causal sequences are preserved

(3) Prophecy and divination are possible (which requires that the future be determined)[37]

(4) Agency, autonomy, individuality, and voluntariness are possible

As we have seen, in his criticism of WSP, Plotinus targets two central claims – they cannot uphold (2) and (4). WSP does away with causal sequences and Fate because there is no agent–patient

[37] Cf. *Enn.* 3.1.3.17.

distinction and 'everything will be one.' If we bring in σπερματικοί λόγοι, they can maintain (2) but not (4), since every single impulse and action would come about through causes that are included in Fate. On Plotinus' view, this does away with agency, autonomy, individuality and voluntariness. Note that from the first three points on our list, we can see that Plotinus endorses UCD. His concern, then, is to fix what (in his view) WSP gets wrong. That is, he wants to have a theory which makes universal causal determinism compatible with (4). He introduces his solution in chapter 8:

> Indeed, it is necessary, by introducing soul as another principle into the realm of Beings (Ψυχὴν δὴ δεῖ ἀρχὴν οὖσαν ἄλλην ἐπεισφέροντας εἰς τὰ ὄντα) – not only the World Soul (τὴν τοῦ παντός) but also that of each individual (τὴν ἑκάστου) along with it, since such a principle is no small matter (ὡς ἀρχῆς οὐ σμικρᾶς οὔσης) – to interweave all things (πλέκειν τὰ πάντα),[38] because soul itself does not – like other things – come to be from seeds (οὐ γινομένης καὶ αὐτῆς, ὥσπερ τὰ ἄλλα, ἐκ σπερμάτων), but is a primary initiating cause (πρωτουργοῦ αἰτίας). (*Enn.* 3.1.8.4-8)

[38] Plotinus here picks up on the language of interweaving which we already encountered in his discussion of WSP. Note, however, that Plotinus here chooses a word that is related to the one Timaeus uses when he describes how the World Soul is interwoven with the world body (διαπλακασα, *Tim.*, 36e2). Plotinus will repeatedly use the language of interweaving, but for him, things can be 'permeated' without implying spatial extension. Cf. συμπλέκειν, which Plato uses in the Sophist and Statesman, and which gets picked up by Plotinus in numerous places. I take it Plotinus thinks that πλέκειν is the verb to express how something immaterial can pervade as opposed to διήκω (3.1.4.1) and ἐπιπλέκω (3.1.7.1) which he uses when he talks about the Stoic view. For διαπλεκειν see *Enn.* 1.1.4.13 and 16-17; 2.2.3.2, for συμπλέκειν see *Enn.* 1.1.12.8; 1.3.5.3; 3.3.2.3 and 9; 4.3.16.5; 4.4.38.17; 3.3.6.3; 6.3.9.16, for πλέκειν see *Enn.* 1.3.4.15; 3.1.8.7; for ἐμπλέκειν see *Enn.* 2.2.3.10; for συνυφαίνειν see *Enn.* 3.2.9.29; 4.3.15.18; 4.3.16.17; 4.4.39.3 and 14. This is in line with Plotinus' view that the World Soul is 'present without being present,' the idea being that although the World Soul is present everywhere, only suitable recipients will actualize this power. This can be illustrated best by thinking about radio waves: they are everywhere, though the waves only get actualized when there is a functional device (radio) suited for receiving the waves. Thus, Plotinus can hold (with the Stoics) that the World Soul is present everywhere. The crucial difference is that for Plotinus, this presence amounts to incorporeal powers permeating the cosmos, and not everything will be subject to these powers.

Plotinus' solution for making all four points compatible is to bring the individual soul into the realm of Beings and make it principle (ἀρχή).[39] With this, Plotinus does not necessarily downplay the role of the World Soul. Rather, he is introducing the individual soul as *another principle* (ἀρχή ἄλλην) that belongs to the realm of Beings.[40] The individual soul, Plotinus says, is an important principle, one which is a *primary initiating cause* (πρωτουργοῦ αἰτίας).[41] I take it that with this, Plotinus addresses a concern we saw in his criticism of WSP, namely that this view eliminates agency. For Plotinus, the individual soul must be able to initiate activity from itself. Once we allow for this, we can see how the notions autonomy and voluntariness become possible. And in some sense, this even helps us safeguard individuality. After all, if souls can initiate their own motions, then the concern about individuals being only manifestations of the World Soul is alleviated. Note, however, that Plotinus thinks this works *even though* he agrees that everything is woven together and thus part of a causal chain. Moreover, Plotinus emphasizes that the individual soul 'does not come to be from seeds,' which is another stab at the Stoics. With this, Plotinus seems to want to achieve three things. First, he makes clear that the soul is not corporeal (and thus not created by the World Soul);[42] second, it

[39] Cf. Plato *Phdr*. 245c9-d7 and *Laws* 10, 896e8–897b3

[40] What he means by 'realm of Beings' is made much more explicit in his later treatises on Providence, namely that the domain of Fate – *qua* product of Providence – is limited to the sensible world. But even here in this early treatise, Plotinus makes clear that the individual soul is on a par with the World Soul in the sense that they both belong to the realm of Beings.

[41] This is *hapax* in Plotinus, but it is frequently used by almost all later Neoplatonists, e.g., Iamblichus (*De Myst.*); Hermias (*In Plat. Phdr.*); Hierocles (*In aur. Carm.*); Syrianus (*In Meta.*) and Proclus (*In Remp.; Theol. Plat.; In Tim.*).

[42] That souls cannot come to be from seeds was a common concern among Platonists. For instance, Porphyry in his *Ad Gaurum* argues extensively against this conception. See *AG* 14.1–4 (53,28–54,20). For a discussion of this, see Wilberding (2017): 133-136.

highlights the individual soul's ontological superiority vis-à-vis the sensible world; and third it helps Plotinus secure the third point on his list, namely that divination and prophecy are possible. After all, the very possibility of divination presupposes a knower that can transcend the sequence of corporeal causes in order to foretell the future.

Thus, by making the individual soul itself another principle, an intelligible one that can initiate motion from itself, Plotinus thinks that all the issues WSP raises can be resolved. As I noted above, here we do not yet have Plotinus' fully developed account of Fate and Providence. But to give a preview, in his later treatises, the following compatibilist picture emerges. Agency and Fate are compatible. Thus, even non-sages are causally responsible for their actions and initiate their own actions even though all their actions are fated. The individual soul (understood by Plotinus as purified Reason and thus belonging only to sages) transcends Fate, though it is subject to Providence. Here, too, Plotinus opts for a compatibilist account. Sages can and do act voluntarily, freely, and autonomously even though their actions are prescribed by Providence.[43] In this early treatise, we can see the traces of this view, as the continuation of our passage shows:

> Now when the soul is without body it is in absolute control of itself (κυριωτάτη τε αὐτῆς) and free, and beyond cosmic causation (κοσμικῆς αἰτίας ἔξω); but once it has been brought into body it is no longer in control with respect to all things (οὐκέτι πάντα κυρία) because it has been made part of an order with others (μεθ' ἑτέρων ταχθεῖσα). The fortunes (τύχαι) – all the things surrounding the soul (τὰ κύκλῳ πάντα), which it encountered (συνέπεσεν) when it came into their midst (ἐλθοῦσα εἰς μέσον) for the most part took the lead (τὰ πολλὰ ἤγαγον), so that the soul does some things because of these (τὰ μὲν ποιεῖν διὰ ταῦτα) while other things, being in control, it leads them where it wants (τὰ δὲ κρατοῦσαν αὐτὴν ταῦτα ὅπῃ ἐθέλει ἄγειν).
>
> The better soul has control with respect to more things (Πλείω δὲ κρατεῖ ἡ ἀμείνων), the worse with respect to fewer things (ἐλάττω δὲ ἡ χείρων). For the one that yields something

[43] As we shall see in Chapter 4, sages do what virtue dictates, but this, too, is predetermined by Providence. It is worth noting that there, too, Plotinus concedes that necessity is always involved in any given action, and thus even for the sage, acting fully autonomously is not always possible.

> (τι ἐνδιδοῦσα) to the mixture with the body (κράσει σώματός) is compelled (ἠνάγκασται) to desire (ἐπιθυμεῖν) or to be angry (ὀργίζεσθαι), or [to have] low self-esteem through poverty (πενίαις ταπεινὴ), or [to be] full of oneself (χαῦνος) through wealth, or [to be] tyrannical through power (δυνάμεσι τύραννος). But the other soul, the one which is good by nature (ἡ ἀγαθὴ τὴν φύσιν), resists in such situations (ἐν τοῖς αὐτοῖς τούτοις ἀντέσχεν), and changes them rather than being changed [by them] (ἠλλοίωσεν αὐτὰ μᾶλλον ἢ ἠλλοιώθη) with the result that it changes some (τὰ μὲν ἑτεροιῶσαι) and accepts others (τοῖς δὲ συγχωρῆσαι) if there is no vice (μὴ μετὰ κάκης) [in accepting them]. (*Enn.* 3.1.8.9-20)

Here, Plotinus begins by drawing a contrast between the soul in its original, disembodied state and the state it is in once it is embodied. In its original state, it is completely outside the 'cosmic causation' and thus 'absolutely in control of itself and free.'[44] However, once the soul has descended into a body, this kind of sovereignty and freedom diminishes. This is in part because the soul then forms part of 'an order with others.' That Plotinus here makes reference to a cognate of τάξις is not surprising, given that the second item on his list was that 'order (τάξις) and causal consequences' be preserved. The role the universal τάξις plays in Plotinus' theory of Fate and Providence is something we will investigate in detail in Chapter 3 of this dissertation. But already here Plotinus signals that every individual human soul forms part of a τάξις, and that this imposes some restrictions on them. Another thing we learn here is that embodied souls are not outside the 'cosmic causation.' Thus, even sages, insofar as they are embodied, are not in a position to be in absolute control. This state belongs to disembodied souls alone.

Plotinus then highlights the differences between individual souls. Here, he simply distinguishes between two kinds of soul: the one that's 'good by nature' or 'better,' and the one that

[44] Note that this leaves room for the claim, found in later treatises, that even souls which transcend the realm of Fate remain subject to Providence. However, as I show in Chapter 4 of this dissertation, this does not threaten their autonomy or freedom.

is 'worse.' It is not entirely clear whether with this Plotinus intends to contrast a virtuous, morally better soul from a non-virtuous, morally worse one, or whether he simply distinguishes Reason from the non-rational part of soul. He may, in fact, mean both. For if Reason is in charge, then we are dealing with a virtuous and therefore morally better soul; if Reason is not in charge, we are dealing with a non-virtuous and therefore morally worse soul. Be that as it may, what matters here is that the better soul is in control of more things than the worse one is. Note that Plotinus uses the comparative, emphasizing once more that no embodied soul – not even that of the sage – is in control with respect to *all* things. Plotinus then identifies two domains where the better soul is in control of more things, though to different degrees. The first domain is that of fortunes (τύχαι), which Plotinus, in the opening paragraph, identifies with external circumstances. There, he tells us that once the soul has descended, it is 'for the most part' subject to and led by these τύχαι. However, when it is in control, it 'leads them where it wants' (τὰ δὲ κρατοῦσαν αὐτὴν ταῦτα ὅπῃ ἐθέλει ἄγειν). Unfortunately, Plotinus does not elaborate on this point, but it will become clear in the later treatises that he has in mind cases where the sage's virtue dictates whether or not to act, e.g., by saving or refraining from saving a person in danger.[45] Saving the person would, I think, be an example of a soul 'leading' the external circumstances 'where it wants,' though, as we shall see, this 'leading', too, would be predetermined.

The rest of the passage concerns the domain of psychology. Unsurprisingly, Plotinus maintains that the better soul is more in control of the body than the worse one. What is in the background here are Plotinus' views on virtue. Even though his treatise on virtue (*Enn*. 1.2 [19]) has not been written at this point, Plotinus here clearly foreshadows the idea that in order to be truly

[45] Plotinus says this in *Ennead* 6.8., which I discuss in Chapter 4.

good, one not only needs the civic virtues (which amount to the four cardinal virtues we get in Plato's *Republic*) but also the purificatory ones (which he gets from Plato's *Phaedo*). The latter require us to purify our soul as far as possible from the influence of the body and to turn the lower soul 'upwards' such that all parts of the soul listen to and support the rational part of the soul.[46] Thus, when Plotinus describes the worse soul as being compelled because it grants something to the bodily mixtures, he is referring to a soul that has not been purified. As a result, such a soul, when confronted with power, wealth, or poverty, inevitably picks up vices such as low self-esteem, conceit, or becoming tyrannical.

This stands in stark contrast to the better, purified soul, which is said to be able to 'resist' in such situations. Moreover, this soul is said to 'change them rather than being changed [by them] (ἠλλοίωσεν αὐτὰ μᾶλλον ἢ ἠλλοιώθη). I take the 'αὐτὰ' to refer back to the situations that the worse soul succumbs to. The better soul, by contrast, will only accept a powerful position or money if doing so does not harm either himself or someone else. As Plotinus says, the better soul will only accept these 'if there is no vice in accepting them.' Poverty, as Plotinus emphasizes elsewhere, is not an inconvenience for good people, and so unless giving up one's wealth would harm others, the better soul would presumably accept poverty without hesitation.[47]

We can now see how by introducing the individual soul as another principle, there is now conceptual space for autonomy and voluntariness. But this also addresses the problems WSP raises, because it shows that souls do not merely respond mechanically. Nonetheless, as I already

[46] Cf., *Enn*.1.2., especially chapters 2-5. I take it that it is the latter, i.e., the person that attained the purificatory virtues that Plotinus labels the 'good' person here.

[47] Cf., e.g., *Enn.* 2.9.9.1-6; 3.2.5.6-7; 3.2.13.7.

mentioned, Plotinus does accept that there is absolute necessity. Thus, let us now turn to chapter 9, where Plotinus makes this explicit:

> Now things that come about by a mixture (κραθέντα γίνεται) of choice and circumstance (προαιρέσει καὶ τύχαις) are necessary; for what else could there be besides? And since all causes are included (Πάντων δὲ ληφθέντων τῶν αἰτίων), everything happens with absolute necessity (πάντα πάντως γίνεται). And even if anything from the revolution of the universe contributes, that, too, is among the external causes.
>
> So then, whenever the soul engages in some action (πράττῃ τι) when it has been changed by external things (ἀλλοιωθεῖσα παρὰ τῶν ἔξω), and initiates motion (ὁρμᾷ), engaging in a motion that is, as it were, blind (ὁρμᾷ οἷον τυφλῇ τῇ φορᾷ χρωμένη), we must not call either its action or its disposition voluntary (οὐχὶ ἑκούσιον τὴν πρᾶξιν οὐδὲ τὴν διάθεσιν). The same is also true whenever it is worse of itself (παρ' αὑτῆς χείρων) – when the soul uses impulses that are not in its control (ἡγεμονούσαις ταῖς ὁρμαῖς ᾗ χρωμένη) or that are not *absolutely correct* (ὀρθαῖς πανταχοῦ).
>
> But whenever the soul initiates motion (ὁρμᾷ) while it has its own Reason as its pure and unaffected ruler (ἡγεμόνα καθαρὸν καὶ ἀπαθῆ), then we must say that this impulse alone (ταύτην μόνην τὴν ὁρμὴν) is in our power and voluntary (ἐφ' ἡμῖν καὶ ἑκούσιον), and that this is our own *deed* (τὸ ἡμέτερον ἔργον) – one that has not come from anywhere but from within (ἔνδοθεν), from the pure soul (ἀπὸ καθαρᾶς τῆς ψυχῆς), from the first ruling and sovereign principle (ἀπ' ἀρχῆς πρώτης ἡγουμένης καὶ κυρίας), and not from error suffered due to ignorance, nor from defeat by the compulsion of desires, which, having come upon it, lead and drag it away, no longer allowing [its acts] to be deeds (οὐκέτι ἔργα), but rather only passive experiences of ours (παθήματα παρ' ἡμῶν.) (*Enn.* 3.1.9.1-16)

Plotinus here tackles two different (though related) topics. The first is that of absolute necessity, the second is a continuation of what Plotinus discussed in chapter 8. However, he now explicitly discusses the domain of actions, and he also introduces the concepts of freedom and autonomy. In what follows, I will discuss each of these topics in turn. Let us begin with the first.

What we learn here is that Plotinus maintains that (i) what comes about by 'a mixture of προαίρεσις and τύχαι is necessary' and that (ii) everything happens with complete necessity since all causes, including external ones such as the revolution of the universe, are included. *Prima* facie this claim is somewhat surprising given that part of Plotinus' criticism of WSP was that on this view *all*

causes are included in Fate. Here, then, he seems to accept the very thing he refuted in previous chapters. As I shall show, this apparent tension can be resolved. But in order to see how, we first need to understand what exactly Plotinus means when he says that 'things that come about through a mixture of choice and fortune are necessary.' As I see it, there are two readings available, a strong and a weak one.

According to the strong reading, what Plotinus means to say is that every single action is necessitated because every single action comes about by a mixture of choice and circumstances. This view would be in line with what Plotinus will express in a much later treatise, *Ennead* 6.8 [39], which I discuss at length in Chapter 4. In a nutshell, Plotinus there insists that insofar as actions take place in the sensible world, every action is mixed with necessity. Thus, external circumstances can always impede, even if the action itself was formed autonomously, or as he says here, by choice.[48]

According to the weaker reading, Plotinus means to say that only those actions that result from a non-virtuous soul are necessitated. Thus, if your Reason is pure and your impulses are up to you, your action is *not* necessitated. One reason that speaks against the weaker reading is that it is not clear why Plotinus would insist that *all* causes are included (Πάντων δὲ ληφθέντων τῶν αἰτίων), if indeed the actions of a virtuous soul would not be necessitated. Because our current treatise does not settle the issue decisively, I will postpone a full defense of the strong reading until Chapter 4. For now, my aim is simply to show that nothing in *Ennead* 3.1 rules it out. To this end, let us now turn to the second part of our passage, where Plotinus now explicitly contrasts the virtuous and the non-virtuous soul.

Here we learn that the non-virtuous person will neither be in control of their impulses nor

[48] *Enn.* 6.8.2.36-37: κἂν κρατῇ ὁ λόγος, μικτὸν καὶ οὐ καθαρὸν δύναται τὸ ἐφ' ἡμῖν ἔχειν.

their actions nor their dispositions. This is because the soul is consistently altered by external things and merely *reacts* to these. As Plotinus says here, these people act, but their actions are rather passive experiences (παθήματα), not deeds (ἔργα). Such people are certainly subject to the absolute necessity that rules the sensible world. Plotinus then contrasts this with the virtuous person, and what he says here seems to me to be very much in line with the strong reading, more specifically the view Plotinus will endorse in *Ennead* 6.8. As he says here, it is only when impassive Reason produces an impulse that 'this impulse alone' can be said to be in our power. Moreover, such impulses are *always correct*. As we shall see in Chapter 4, this is because the sage's Reason gets correct and 'truly free' premises from νοῦς.[49] But even here, we already see that at least one condition needs to be met to generate autonomous and voluntary impulses, namely that impulses must be formed on the basis of the purified rational part of soul. Such impulses, as Plotinus also maintains in *Ennead* 6.8, will always be *absolutely correct*. If actions are formed on the basis of such autonomous and voluntary impulses, we have true actions, or *deeds* (ἔργα), as Plotinus says here. If impulses are formed on the basis of beliefs or some other sub-rational input, then we don't have deeds but rather would-be actions that amount to mere passive experiences (παθήματα).

Note, however, that the passage implies that even *deeds* (and the corresponding impulses) are included in the causal network. After all, Plotinus emphasizes that *all* causes are included. Thus, any action, no matter whether the agent's impulse was in their power or not, is predetermined. This is exactly what the strong reading suggests. But how does this view differ from the one he rejected in chapter 7? Note that Plotinus' more nuanced view allows for impulses that are autonomously and

[49] Cf. *Enn*. 6.8.3.19-23: 'But we will designate as autonomous those who, due to intellect, are free of the affections of the body. In explaining what is in our power by reference to the most beautiful principle, we will grant that the activity of intellect and the premises arising from it are truly free.' Cf. also *Enn*. 1.8.2.13ff.

voluntarily formed. This is not true of WSP. Recall that this view entails that *all* our impulses are fated. For Plotinus, this amounts to saying that the psychological make up of *all* human beings is indistinguishable from that of animals and even inanimate things. However, Plotinus clearly wants to make room for sages, who are in fact able to transcend Fate, at least in their formations of impulses and desires. However, as we shall see in Chapter 4, sages are always subject to Providence. If we take this into account, we can see why Plotinus would insist that *all* causes are included.

In the final chapter of *Ennead* 3.1, we get a somewhat uncharacteristic summary[50] of what Plotinus has argued so far:

> The conclusion of this account asserts (Τέλος δή φησιν ὁ λόγος) that all things are both signified (σημαίνεσθαι) [by the stars] and come to be on the basis of causes (γίνεσθαι κατ' αἰτίας), and that these [causes] are twofold (διττὰς δὲ ταύτας): some things [come to be] from soul (ὑπὸ ψυχῆς), and others through the causes surrounding us (δι' ἄλλας αἰτίας τὰς κύκλῳ).[51]
>
> As for souls that act (Πραττούσας δὲ ψυχὰς), insofar as they act on the basis of reason (ὅσα πράττουσι κατὰ μὲν λόγον), they make doing what is right [arise] from themselves (ποιούσας ὀρθὸν παρ' αὑτῶν πράττειν), whenever they act (ὅταν πράττωσι), but the other souls, being hindered from doing their own actions (τὰ δ' ἄλλα ἐμποδιζομένας τὰ αὑτῶν πράττειν) passively experience rather than act (πάσχειν τε μᾶλλον ἢ πράττειν). Accordingly, there are other causes (ἄλλα αἴτια εἶναι) that make souls not think (μὴ φρονεῖν). And it is perhaps correct (ἴσως ὀρθὸν) to say that those act on the basis of Fate (καθ' εἱμαρμένην πράττειν), to whom Fate indeed appears to be an external cause (οἷς γε καὶ δοκεῖ ἔξωθεν τὴν εἱμαρμένην αἴτιον εἶναι).

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[50] Bréhier suggests that this chapter may have been written and added by Porphyry, and Brisson and Pradeau appear to agree (2002: 113). Their suspicion is based on the chapter's synoptic character as well as its opening words (Τέλος δή φησιν ὁ λόγος…). I'm not convinced this is right. For one, at the beginning of *Enn.* 3.1.8, Plotinus explicitly poses the question of what kind of notion of causality will be required to account for everything he aims to preserve. As I have shown, this treatise does not yet present a fully developed account, and Plotinus was surely aware of this. It would therefore be reasonable for him to state what the conclusion of the *current* account is. Furthermore, this chapter is not merely a summary. For example, only here do we encounter the idea that bad people might be *permitted* to act nobly. This point will be taken up in his treatises on Providence, but it had not appeared in the earlier chapters of *Enn.* 3.1.

[51] This is a reference back to *Enn.* 3.18.11-12: Τύχαι δὲ τὰ κύκλῳ πάντα…

> [10] But the best things [come] from us (τὰ δὲ ἄριστα παρ' ἡμῶν). For this is our nature when we are alone (μόνοι). And good people (τούς σπουδαίους) have it in their power to act nobly (ἐπ' αὐτοῖς τὰ καλὰ πράττειν); but the others, insofar as they may catch their breath (καθ' ὅσον ἂν ἀναπνεύσωσι), when they have been permitted (συγχωρηθέντες) to do noble things, [do so] not by receiving their thought from a different source (οὐκ ἄλλοθεν λαβόντας τὸ φρονεῖν), whenever they do think (ὅταν φρονῶσι), but only not having been hindered.[52]
>
> (*Enn*. 3.1.10. 1-15)

The first point reaffirms what Plotinus already stated in chapter 1: nothing is uncaused. Another point worth highlighting is that in his first criticism of WSP, Plotinus defended a very specific understanding of what 'coming to be on the basis of causes' means: one thing comes to be from another on the basis of causes which always lead back to something else. Thus, that everything comes to be on the basis of causes for Plotinus clearly implies a causal chain. Note that he never criticizes or rejects the idea a causal chain or network. The fact that Plotinus concludes that everything is signified by the stars also lends support to this. For if the stars signify *everything*, then everything must be predictable and thus predetermined. Plotinus then adds that this chain includes both internal and external causes without, however, clarifying what the latter amounts to. We shall gain more clarity of this in Chapter 3.

In line 10, Plotinus returns to the idea that only the purified soul is truly free. The best things, he says, come from us 'when we are alone.' This, I take it, goes back to chapter 8, where we learned the better soul, which is purified, remains unfazed by bodily desires and circumstances. Virtuous people do good deeds, and it is in their power to do them. The treatise ends with a *prima facie* rather obscure redescription of the non-virtuous people. The details are murky, but the main point seems

[52] Unlike Kalligas, I do think we can make good sense of ἀναπνεύσωσι. Kalligas (2014:439) proposes to change the text: 'The correction I have proposed of *anapneusōsi* ("they have a breathing space") to *ananeususosi* ("they look up") helps us to link this transitory turning of the simple man toward the truth residing within him to that occasional "contemplation through examination" that is discussed in III 8.6.32–36.'

to be that even non-virtuous people can at times act nobly. But for this to happen, the following two conditions need to be met:

1. They have to be able to 'catch their breath.'
2. They have to be *permitted* to act nobly.

Now it is not clear what exactly is meant here, but I take it that the first point is meant to express that non-virtuous people can only ever act nobly if they get a reprieve from the forces that normally constrain or overwhelm them. Presumably the idea is that there needs to be a moment where they are not enslaved to strong passions or external circumstances, thus enabling them to step back and catch their breath. The second point is interesting, because it makes clear that some other agent determines whether they are allowed to act nobly. As will become clear in later treatises, this other agent is the World Soul. With this, Plotinus reinforces the contrast between the virtuous people who do noble things *of themselves*.

The last point that is being made in this chapter is that if these two conditions are met, then it is not the case that these non-virtuous people act nobly by taking over someone else's thought, it's rather that they are simply not being hindered. This seems to go back to WSP. Recall that one of the issues Plotinus raises with this is that on this view, the World Soul that implants thoughts into our ἡγεμονικόν. This last point seems to be a reaction to this claim. Plotinus maintains that thoughts are not supplied by another source. Rather, the rational nature of non-virtuous people is always already there, but it is usually obstructed by vice, disorder, and passions.

§Conclusion

In this chapter, I examined Plotinus' earliest discussion of Fate and determinism in *Ennead* 3.1 [3], focusing on his engagement with (what he takes to be) the Stoic view. I argued that Plotinus does not reject universal causal determinism (UCD) but instead targets two distinct versions of what I call the World Soul Primacy view (WSP). The first, more straightforward version posits a corporeally all-pervading World Soul as the sole active principle, thereby collapsing the agent–patient distinction and making everything 'one.' Plotinus refutes this view by showing that it eliminates the very things it aims to establish, namely causal chains and Fate.

The second, modified version of WSP introduces a plurality of causes, the σπερματικοὶ λόγοι, thus avoiding the result that 'everything will be one.' However, Plotinus shows that even this modified version still fails to preserve agency, voluntariness, or autonomy, since *all* impulses and actions remain fully determined by antecedent causes originating in the World Soul.

In response, Plotinus introduces the individual soul as another principle (ἀρχή), which is capable of initiating motion from itself. While affirming that absolute necessity exists, this move lays the groundwork for a compatibilist account in which voluntary and autonomous action remain possible, at least for purified souls. As we shall see in Chapter 3, Plotinus will make his commitment to universal causal determinism much more explicit in later treatises (especially *Enneads* 3.2 [47] and 3.3. [48] and 2.3 [52]). But before we turn to this, I want to examine Plotinus' criticism of the astral determinists and what, on Plotinus' view, an account of astral causation should look like.

Chapter 2: Plotinus on astral causation

§Introduction

For Plotinus, the question of what role the stars play in administering the universe is not only highly complex but also of great importance. Not only did he write one extensive treatise that deals exclusively with this question (*Ennead* 2.3 [52] 'On Whether the Stars are Causes'), but he returns to this topic throughout his career.[53] Plotinus' main interest in astrology lies in the philosophical issues it raises.[54] In this paper, I will focus on issues of causation, which are well displayed by Plotinus' extensive criticism of 'hard astrology' as A.A. Long calls it.[55] According to Long, proponents of 'hard astrology' hold that the stars are the causes of everything that happens in the sensible world. Plotinus rejects this claim, but, as I shall argue, he does not entirely reject the idea that the stars can be causes of changes in the sensible world.[56] As Peter Adamson put it, Plotinus ends up accepting 'a

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[53] Cf., e.g., *Enn.* 2.1 [40 and 2.2 [14]; 2.9. [33] 13; 3.1. [3] 5-6; 4.4. [28] 30-39; 5.1.[10].2 and 9; 5.8. [31] 4 and 9.

[54] As Adamson (2008: 266) points out, despite Plotinus' criticism of many of the theses brought forward by astrologers, Plotinus does not 'focus on the idea that astrologers are often wrong in their predictions or say that they get things right only by luck. Rather, he concedes that astrology is often successful. He is also happy to admit that other methods could genuinely tell us about future events. For instance, he accepts prophecy based on the observation of birds. What interests him is rather the philosophical implications of astrology's success. And he is surely right to be interested in this.'

[55] Long (1982): 165-192.

[56] Note that in his discussion, Plotinus does not specify what sense of cause he (or the astrologers) have in mind. It is clear from his earlier treatise on Fate that Plotinus and the astrologers disagree on what it means to be a primary cause. There, Plotinus criticizes the astrologers for stopping at the proximate causes (τὰς προσεχεῖς) and not ascending to the 'primary and ulterior ones' (ἐπὶ τὰ πρῶτα καὶ ἐπὶ τὰ ἐπέκεινα αἴτια ἀνιόντων). Unlike the astrologers, Plotinus wants to reserve the label 'primary' for higher, intelligible causes. As we shall see, Plotinus accepts that the stars (more precisely the composite of their body and lower soul) can be causes of things in the sensible world. However, since this is (strictly speaking) not a case of causation by transcendent principles, I will refrain from calling the stars 'primary' causes and simply say 'causes of

more nuanced middle position.'[57] Thus, in some cases, Plotinus concedes that the stars are causes of changes but in others, they are mere contributing factors (συνεργά). But, as we shall see, at least on the standard conception of agency,[58] the stars are never agents because whatever it is they cause in the sublunary world is caused unintentionally (ἀπροαιρέτως).[59]

§1 Plotinus on the mode of astral causation

Let us begin with the latest and most detailed treatise on the topic, *Ennead* 2.3. [52]. There, Plotinus is mostly concerned with refuting three views certain astrologers held. The first two points concern two accounts of ways in which stars cause. Some people maintain that (i) the stars are compelled

change'. Plotinus does not use Aristotle's framework and language of the four causes, but if pressed I would say 'efficient' cause best captures the meaning of ποιεῖν.

[57] Adamson (2008): 289. This paper owes much to Adamson's excellent analysis of Plotinus' views on astrology and what the stars' influence amounts to. In this paper, I am hoping to add to his discussion in two respects. First, I provide some details on Plotinus' view about the manner in which the stars cause. Second, in this context, I also offer an account of what Plotinus means when he says that the stars' action on the sublunary world is accidental and how this is not necessarily in tension with Plotinus' other commitment that the stars can be causes of changes in the sensible world.

[58] See especially Anscombe (1957) and Davidson (1997) both of which maintain that intentionality is essential to agency.

[59] For a defense of the view that for Aristotle, agency does not require intentionality, see Coope (2004). As I argue below, for Plotinus this appears to hold only in cases where the action is an external activity, that is, a necessary and automatic byproduct of a thing's internal activity. More generally, he seems to regard προαίρεσις as a condition for standard human agency. Cf., e.g. *Enn.* 6.3.26.9-13: "Η τὰς μὲν φύσει, τὰς δὲ τέχνῃ, τὰς δὲ προαιρέσει. φύσει μὲν αὐξήσεις, φθίσεις, τέχνῃ δὲ οἰκοδομεῖν, ναυπηγεῖν, προαιρέσει δὲ σκοπεῖσθαι, μανθάνειν, πολιτεύεσθαι, ὅλως λέγειν, πράττειν. As these examples show, the προαίρεσις of divine beings such as the stars is different from that of most human beings.

by their positions and configurations[60] and that this results in them having mood swings.[61] These non-rational states in turn determine what kinds of gift the stars give to human beings. Moreover, these people also think that the stars' different configurations cause them to become different in their thoughts (ταῖς διανοίαις).[62] Others, by contrast, hold that (ii) the stars cause effects in the sensible world voluntarily (ἑκών)[63] and intentionally (προαιρέσει) and thus their gifts are the results of deliberation.[64] The third view Plotinus sets out to refute concerns the scope of the stars' causal powers. According to Plotinus, the majority believes that (iii) the stars cause *everything* (πάντα ποιεῖ) in the sensible world.[65] Plotinus will reject all three of these claims. In what follows, we shall carefully examine his reasons for doing so. Let us begin with Plotinus' criticism of the first two claims ((i) and (ii)) before we turn to the view concerning (iii) the scope of the stars' causal powers.

Plotinus' refutation of (i)

This view, i.e., that the stars act under compulsion of their positions which causes them to have mood swings, needs some unpacking as it contains several claims that – importantly – need to be understood together. After all, we could just take the claim that the stars are compelled by their positions and have some account according to which the stars do what they do but not because they

[60] *Enn*. 2.3.3.1-2.

[61] *Enn*. 2.3.1.14-15.

[62] *Enn*. 2.3.1.12-16. Presumably, the idea is that the non-rational parts (which are reacting to the different positions) in turn cause changes in the rational part.

[63] Plotinus also speaks of the stars 'voluntarily' causing effects. Cf. *Enn*. 2.3.2.16-19 (ἑκόντα) and 2.3.3.1-2 (ἑκόντες). Note that Plotinus, unlike Aristotle, insists that voluntariness is always a mark of rational behavior. See *Enn.* 6.8.1-2, which I discuss in Chapter 4 of this dissertation.

[64] *Enn*. 2.3.2.17.

[65] *Enn.* 2.3.1.2.

are experiencing emotions and undergoing mood swings. Thus, it cannot just be the claim that the stars are compelled by their positions that Plotinus is objecting to here. Rather, he seems to take issue with the astrologers' claim that this compulsion makes the stars emotional and that this emotional state affects their thinking: if they are angry, they will cause bad things; if they are happy, they will cause good things. Thus, the stars are emotionally unstable and constantly changing both in their moods and in their thoughts. For Plotinus, this is unacceptable. He devotes four chapters (*Enn*. 2.3.3-6) to ridiculing this view and gives several counterarguments that aim to show that the astrologers' views are inconsistent. But the response that is of interest to us reveals a more fundamental disagreement between the astrologers and Plotinus. Plotinus concludes his series of counterarguments against (i) with the following statement:

> In general, one should not grant that the stars are either distressed or delighted at select moments (ἐπὶ καιροῦ), but that they are always (ἀεὶ) propitious and delight in the goods that they have and in the goods that they see. For each has a life that is in its power (ἐφ' αὑτοῦ), i.e., the good life for each lies in its activity (ἐν τῇ ἐνεργείᾳ). But this [activity] is not directed towards us (τὸ δὲ οὐ πρὸς ἡμᾶς).
>
> (*Enn*. 2.3.3.21-28, Gerson et al transl. slightly modified)

Here, Plotinus does not target the general claim that the stars are compelled by their positions and configurations. Rather, he objects to the general idea that the stars' mood can change and that they have moods in the first place.[66] This much is suggested by Plotinus' emphasis on the stars'

[66] One could think that just by virtue of their physiology, the stars cannot have moods: they lack sense-organs, blood, bile etc. This is supported by *Enn*. 4.4.28.58-60, where Plotinus says that trees do not experience spiritedness because they lack blood and bile. However, at *Enn*. 2.3.12.24-30 Plotinus maintains that in the universe, 'something analogous to the spirited element and bile [...] and something else analogous to the other [element]' is required. Some people have suggested that Mars might be playing the role of spirit in the universe. As Wilberding ('Plotinus on becoming like the Universe', p.8) points out, 'Plotinus might well have been struck by the similarities in the descriptions of certain astrological phenomena to Plato's description of

continuous contemplative activity: they are always (ἀεὶ) propitious and 'delighted in the goods they see' (i.e., the Forms)[67] – not just at select moments (ἐπὶ καιροῦ). Thus, just as we would expect divine beings to be, they are always rejoicing in their intellectual activity. As he notes in a later chapter, 'given the uncountably many living beings that exist and are coming to be, what kind of life would the planets have if for each living being the planets had to always grant the fulfilment of life's details?'[68] Since, then, the stars are always contemplating the Forms, they are always propitious and so there is no conceptual space for moods and mood swings. As a result, (i) is ruled out. This brings us to Plotinus' refutation of (ii), the astrologers' claim that the stars cause things in the sensible world voluntarily (ἑκών) and intentionally (προαιρέσει). Plotinus' reasons for rejecting this will also shed some light on his views about the stars' manner of causation.

Plotinus' refutation of (ii)

The passage cited above continues as follows:

> And because the stars are living beings that do not associate with us (οὐ κοινωνοῦσιν ἡμῖν), [the good of their activity that affects us] is accidental (κατὰ συμβεβηκός) and not their principal activity (οὐ προηγούμενον). And in general, their deeds are not directed at us (οὐδὲ ὅλως τὸ ἔργον πρὸς ἡμᾶς), even if, as with birds, they accidentally provide us with signs (κατὰ συμβεβηκὸς τὸ σημαίνειν).
>
> (*Enn*. 2.3.3.25-28, Gerson et al transl. slightly modified)

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the way bile is instrumentalized in the human body. Just as the planets and the signs of the Zodiac can form astrological configurations and patterns (σχήματα) that 'cause fear in those who see them' (4.4.35.50), so too does the *Timaeus* describe bile [as] being instrumentalized to project 'images and phantoms' (εἰδώλων καὶ φαντασμάτων) that cause fear in the appetitive part of the soul (*Tim*. 71a3-e1).' Be that as it may, even if Plotinus agrees that the stars can cause fear *in other people* by virtue of some element that is analogous to bile, this need not imply that the stars themselves experience this fear.

[67] Cf. 2.9.8.36-38; 2.3.9.38; 4.8.2.52.

[68] *Enn.* 2.3.6.6-10.

Here, Plotinus advances three different (but, as we shall see, related) claims. The stars (')

- accomplishments are not directed to us (οὐ πρὸς ἡμᾶς)
- do not have dealings with us (οὐ κοινωνοῦσιν ἡμῖν)
- effects of their non-principal activity on us are accidental (κατὰ συμβεβηκός)

Regarding the first two points, I will argue that Plotinus is not just saying that the stars do not direct their activity towards us (and thus cause things down here *intentionally*) but also that to whatever extent they influence human beings, they are *not aware* that they are doing so and so they cannot have dealings with us.[69] The third claim is about the stars' manner of causation. As we shall see, it is not just here that Plotinus connects lack of awareness and intentionality with accidentality. I will discuss this in more detail below. But for now, let us focus on the distinction between awareness and intentionality, which is only implicit in our passage, but which is made explicit in earlier treatises. Let us begin with the awareness claim, which we can find in *Ennead* 4.4.7-8 where Plotinus discusses whether or not we should ascribe memory to the stars.

The awareness claim

At the end of *Ennead* 4.4.6, Plotinus affirms the first point on our list. So far, he has conceded that the stars have sense-perception (hearing and sight). This, of course, could technically enable them to perceive the goings-on in the sensible world and so Plotinus yet again has to refute the claim that they tend to human affairs. Similar to what we saw in *Ennead* 2.3., Plotinus here, too, insists that the stars do not have 'thoughts and contrivances relative to human affairs by which they regulate things

[69] I take it that 'κοινωνοῦσιν' is supposed to convey a notion of mutual interaction. The point is that the stars do not concern themselves with us.

having to do with us or generally things on earth.'[70] However, he still has to show that the stars do not have memory. In chapter 7 of this treatise, Plotinus begins by refuting both that the stars remember their motions and positions (e.g., that they went round the earth yesterday or last year) and that they remember that they were alive (e.g., yesterday or last year). He explains that first, the stars are *always* alive, and 'always' implies that their lives are unitary and unchanging. Thus, the stars themselves are not subject to temporal division (even though we, of course, perceive this differently).[71] Second, Plotinus makes the point that in the intelligible world, there is no day and night - 'there is only one day.'[72] The general idea is clear: memories are of the past, but the stars do not experience time and duration. Therefore, they do not have memory.[73]

Plotinus then deals with an objection that states that the stars in fact traverse different intervals (and so they are not unchanging in this sense). Accordingly, one could think that they do notice changes in their locations. And if they notice this, then they should also be able to notice changes in the sensible world and human affairs. Plotinus' response is this:

> In fact, it is not necessary either to deposit in one's memory however much one observes (ὅσα τις θεωρεῖ), or that things that result entirely accidentally (τῶν πάντη κατὰ συμβεβηκὸς ἐπακολουθούντων) should ever reach the imagination (ἐν φαντασίᾳ γίγνεσθαι).
>
> (*Enn*. 4.4.8.1-3, Armstrong transl. slightly modified)

[70] *Enn*. 4.4.6.13-15: Ἀλλ' οὐδὲ περὶ τῶν ἀνθρωπίνων αὐτοῖς ἐπίνοιαι καὶ μηχαναί, ἐξ ὧν διοικήσουσι τὰ ἡμέτερα ἢ ὅλως τὰ τῆς γῆς·

[71] Cf. *Enn.* 3.7.12.

[72] *Enn*. 4.4.7.11.

[73] Plotinus gives the same argument in *Enn*. 4.3.25.13-20, where he says that gods, being, and Intellect have no memory because they are always in the same state and have no element of time. I take 'gods' to refer to the heavenly bodies.

The first point is clear enough: not everything that is perceived enters into one's memory. The second claim is much more puzzling and will be our primary focus, since it is there that Plotinus once more introduces the notion of accidentality. Fortunately, he has more to say on this:

> The second point is that it is not necessary for things that happen entirely accidentally (τῶν πάντη κατὰ συμβεβηκὸς γινομένων) to reach the imagination, and that even if this were to happen, it would not be in such a way that it preserves them and watches over them (φυλάξαι καὶ παρατηρῆσαι), rather an impression of such a kind (ὁ τύπος τοῦ τοιούτου) does not give rise to conscious perception (δίδωσι συναίσθησιν).
>
> (*Enn*. 4.4.8.16-21, Gerson et al transl. slightly modified)

Recall that part of Plotinus' disagreement with the astrologers in *Ennead* 2.3.3.21-28 was that on his view, the stars do not have dealings with us and that they do not direct their activity to us. I was suggesting that Plotinus there implicitly advances two different claims: one about intentionality and one about awareness. This passage gets us the awareness claim. As he tells us, the stars do perceive things, but they do so without, as it were, processing what they perceive: the sense impressions do not reach the faculty of imagination and thus they are not retained by the soul.[74] We then get a counterfactual: even if it were the case that these impressions reached the faculty of imagination,

[74] Cf. also the preceding lines, *Enn*. 4.4.8.14-16: 'But when the soul's activity is directed to other things - and entirely so - it would not take up the memory of things of this kind when they have passed on, seeing as it did not cognize the sense-perception of them even when they are present (μηδὲ παρόντων γινώσκει τὴν αἴσθησιν).' Here, however, Plotinus makes the claim about φαντασία (and not memory), which is puzzling given that φαντασία is usually taken to be the seat of consciousness. Thus, whatever reaches φαντασία should be conscious. For reasons of space, I cannot address this problem adequately here, but I suspect that Plotinus thinks that φαντασία does not automatically get active whenever something reaches it. Rather, being an *active* faculty, it has to act on incoming impressions for the soul to become conscious of them, just like we are not aware or conscious of everything that is in our field of vision.

such an impression (τύπος) could not give rise to conscious perception (συναίσθησιν).[75] If we import this into our previous passage from *Ennead* 2.3.3, it is clear why (on Plotinus' view) the stars could neither intentionally nor consciously cause anything in the sensible world. And it is in this sense that we might say the stars are not agents of anything they cause down here.[76] The awareness claim, then, rules out (ii). This is exactly the conclusion Plotinus draws in 4.4.8:

> If, then, the heavenly bodies, while being carried along (φερόμενα), are engaged in their own activities (τὰ αὑτῶν πράττοντα), and are carried along (φέρεται) not with the aim (οὐχ ἵνα) of passing by the things they do pass, and if their task (τὸ ἔργον αὐτοῖς) is neither the seeing (θέα) of what they pass nor the act of passing itself, then their passage is incidental (κατὰ συμβεβηκός), and their mind (γνώμη) is directed toward other and greater things (πρὸς ἄλλοις τε... μείζοσι). (*Enn*. 4.4.8.34-38)

It is worth highlighting that here, too, Plotinus contrasts the stars' (true) function and intention with what happens 'entirely accidentally.' That is, the contemplation of the Forms is their true ἔργον – it is what their mind and προαίρεσις are directed to.[77] By contrast, their passing of other heavenly bodies and (unconscious) perceptions of them are purely accidental. This is consistent with the

[75] Note that this does not mean that the stars do not have any kind of self-awareness. Rather, just as in the case of Intellect, self-thinking for Plotinus amounts to the highest form of self-awareness. Given that the stars' internal activity is nothing but contemplation, the stars might very well have this kind of self-awareness that souls that are purely in the intelligible world have. Cf. *Enn*. 4.3.2.23-33 and 4.4.2.30-33. For a general discussion of awareness in Plotinus see Hutchinson (2015).

[76] Note that Plotinus explicitly makes room for cases of causation that lack awareness and intention. We find the most famous example in *Enn*. 3.8, where Plotinus describes how Nature (the lower part of the World Soul) produces without awareness and intention. Cf. also *Enn*. 4.4.13.8-9: διδοῦσα ἀπροαιρέτως and 4.4.36.25: ποιεῖ γὰρ καὶ προαιρέσεως οὐ δεηθέν. On this manner of production, see also Wilberding (2008).

[77] Cf. *Enn.* 2.9.8.36-39: 'And why, in this untroubled state, are they not always in a state of comprehension, taking god and the other intelligible gods in with their intellects? Why should our wisdom be superior to that of these heavenly things? What man of sound mind would maintain such views?'

point Plotinus made in *Ennead* 2.3.9: the stars' primary activity has nothing to do with us. Only their non-primary activity accidentally causes effects in the sensible world. We will return to this below once we have sufficiently understood the reasoning behind Plotinus' rejection of the first two claims. Thus, let us now turn to the intentionality claim.

The intentionality claim

As we saw, Plotinus holds that neither the stars' accomplishments nor their principal activity is directed to us. In a later chapter of *Ennead* 2.3, Plotinus adds that 'the star's προαίρεσις and the soul which is really itself is looking to (πρὸς) the Best.'[78] I take it that the language of directedness (expressed by πρὸς) is meant to convey a claim about intentionality. To better understand these claims, it will be helpful to get clear on how Plotinus conceives of the constitution of the stars, which he discusses in *Ennead* 2.3.9. As the passage in question is both difficult and relevant, it is cited here in its entirety:

> For each [human being] is double: on the one hand, [each is] a certain composite, and on the other hand [each is] the [true] self. And the entire cosmos, too, on the one hand, consists of the body and some soul which has been bound to body, and on the other hand, [it consists of] the World Soul, which is not in a body, but which shines forth a trace to the soul in body.
>
> And the sun and indeed the other [heavenly bodies] are double like this, too. And they give nothing mundane[79] with their other, pure soul (καὶ τῇ μὲν ἑτέρᾳ ψυχῇ τῇ καθαρᾷ οὐδὲν φαῦλον δίδωσιν) but what comes into the universe from them [they give] insofar as each of them is a part of the universe, a body and something ensouled, the body, which is a part, gives to another part, while the star's intention and its true soul is looking at what is best (προαιρέσεως τοῦ ἄστρου καὶ ψυχῆς τῆς ὄντως αὐτοῦ πρὸς τὸ ἄριστον βλεπούσης). And other

[78] *Enn.* 2.3.9.38: προαιρέσεως τοῦ ἄστρου καὶ ψυχῆς τῆς ὄντως αὐτοῦ πρὸς τὸ ἄριστον βλεπούσης.

[79] I translate φαῦλον with 'mundane' because in the present context, Plotinus is not concerned with the stars' nobility. Rather, he wants to make a general point about astral causation: it is only the composite (and not the true star) that causes changes in the sensible world. 'Mundane' nicely captures this thought. That φαῦλον is used in the more neutral sense of 'trivial' or 'ordinary' is already evident in Plato (e.g. *Theaet.* 173c7; *Rep.* 519a3).

> things follow for the [true] sun (δ' αὐτῷ), or rather not for it but for the things surrounding it, just as heat from fire goes out to the whole [environment], and perhaps something goes out from one soul to another soul by being of the same kind (συγγενῆ).
>
> (*Enn.* 2.3.9.30-42)

The first thing to note here is that Plotinus invokes a certain structural likeness that holds for human beings, the cosmos, and the stars: Each is 'double' in the sense that each is the true self (when we consider the higher, pure soul which is not embodied), but each is also a certain composite (when we consider the lower soul which animates and administers its body). This distinction also bears on our understanding of the intentionality claim, because Plotinus is very clear that the star's 'προαίρεσις and genuine soul' is directed to the Forms and *not* to the sensible world.[80] This is very much in line with what we saw above: the stars' primary activity is contemplation, and this activity has nothing to do with us. Thus, we can infer another reason why the stars do not cause anything in the sensible world intentionally: The stars' προαίρεσις is linked to its genuine soul, but this part is entirely directed upwards. Thus, the composite of the astral body and its lower soul are non-rational and therefore 'below' προαίρεσις.[81] This, then, is another reason why Plotinus rejects (ii).

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[80] Given the structural likeness between the stars and us, we should expect Plotinus to maintain that that *our* true προαίρεσις is also directed to the Forms. But if that's true, then we would seem to get the undesirable result that we do not cause anything in the sensible world *intentionally*. For reasons of space, I simply want to underline that my proposed reading of κατὰ συμβεβηκὸς as 'unintentionally' is restricted to productions that come about through external activities. Thus, it is only sages that do not cause things intentionally in the sensible world *whenever their actions are external activities*. On such 'automatic actions' see Wilberding (2008).

[81] By 'lower soul' I mean the vegetative soul (which for Plotinus comprises appetite and spirit) as well as the faculties of imagination and sense-perception. For the vegetative soul see *Enn.* 4.4.28.55-75. For the other faculties, see *Enn.* 1.1., where Plotinus significantly 'rationalizes' the lower part so that he can maintain that reason is infallible.

However, this passage also tells us something interesting about the stars' manner of causation. As Plotinus says, they give nothing mundane (φαῦλον) with their pure soul. In other words, whatever they cause in the sensible world they do so only with their composite, i.e., with their ensouled body and not with their genuine soul. Plotinus then explains how the composite can cause things in the sensible world. It is because the stars' bodies and lower souls are parts of the universe and *qua* parts of the universe, they can act on other parts of the universe, i.e., on other composites. Importantly, for Plotinus the rational part of soul is *not* a part in this sense, as he also makes clear in *Ennead* 2.3:[82]

> But the motion of the other soul – the one outside [the body] – is upwards (πρὸς τὸ ἄνω), towards what is beautiful and divine, which no one controls (οὐδεὶς κρατεῖ), but either one makes use it (ἀλλ' ἢ προσχρῆται) in order to become that and to live on the basis of it (ἵν' ᾖ ἐκεῖνο καὶ κατὰ τοῦτο ζῇ ἀναχωρήσας), having withdrawn [from the sensible world]; or, having become bereft of this soul (ἔρημος ταύτης τῆς ψυχῆς γενόμενος), he lives in the domain of Fate (ζῇ ἐν εἱμαρμένῃ) and in this case, the stars do not merely signify things for him (τὰ ἄστρα αὐτῷ οὐ μόνον σημαίνει), rather, he himself becomes, as it were, a part [of the cosmic order] and is carried along with the whole, of which he is a part (γίνεται αὐτὸς οἷον μέρος καὶ τῷ ὅλῳ συνέπεται, οὗ μέρος). (*Enn.* 2.3.9.24-30)

We shall return to this below. For now, let us simply note two things. First, Plotinus makes clear that it is only the composite of the lower soul and body that causes effects in the sensible world – the genuine soul contemplates the Forms. Second, Plotinus describes the effects of this kind of causation by invoking the example of fire and the heat it emits, which is his standard example of the doctrine of double activity. This, too, as we shall see, bears on Plotinus' understanding of how the stars cause things in the sensible world. But first, let us take stock.

Pace the astrologers, Plotinus maintains that the stars (i) do not have mood swings, nor (ii)

[82] Cf., *Enn.* 2.9.2.11.

do they cause anything in the sensible world *voluntarily* or *intentionally*. Plotinus rejects (i) because on his view, the stars *always* contemplate the Forms and *always* rejoice in this intellectual activity. This also goes some way towards explaining why Plotinus rejects the second claim (ii): because the stars' προαίρεσις is always directed to the Forms, they cannot cause anything intentionally in the sensible world. In other words, continuous contemplation (being directed upwards) and being in any way aware of what happens in the sensible world (being directed downwards) are mutually exclusive. Moreover, that the stars do not consciously perceive anything that happens in the sensible world implies that they do not have dealings with us and that their works are not directed to us. However, I believe that there is a further explanation for why he rejects (i) and (ii), namely a metaphysical reason which will also help us understand in what sense the stars' effects of their non-primary activity in the sensible world are accidental.

The accidentality claim

In the context of the stars' unconscious perception of passing other heavenly bodies, we already saw Plotinus connecting claims about awareness and intentionality with accidentality: even in the sublunary realm, the stars' (unconscious) perception of other heavenly bodies is merely accidental, because the stars' true function and activity is directed at something else (the Forms). Thus, in this context, Plotinus uses 'accidentally' to mark a sharp contrast between the stars' προαίρεσις and their true activity or function (which are directed upwards) and the unconscious perceptions that are not retained by the soul. This already suggests that the stars' lack of intentionality and awareness concerning the sensible world play some role in explaining why their effects are accidental. In this section, I want to bring in one other concept – the doctrine of double activity. As I shall argue, if we take the awareness and intentionality claims and bring them together with the doctrine of double

activity, we can see why Plotinus describes the stars' effects in the sensible world as both accidental and necessary.[83] This, as I shall argue, allows Plotinus to maintain that

> X can be the cause of a change Z, even though X causes this change Z by its external activity and thus both necessarily and κατὰ συμβεβηκός.

Hence, I will argue for two related points. First, I will argue that for Plotinus, external activities can act as causes of changes. Second, I will show that in the case of productions that come about through external activities, what is caused κατὰ συμβεβηκὸς will also be caused unintentionally (ἀπροαιρέτως).[84] Thus, something can be the cause of a change despite causing this change both necessarily and accidentally. On this view, then, Plotinus can accommodate the idea that a heavenly body, say, the sun, can be the cause of a change in the sensible world (e.g., heat) while also maintaining that it causes this heat by its external activity and thus necessarily and κατὰ συμβεβηκός. But before we look at the relevant texts, it will be necessary to provide some background on the so-called doctrine of double activity.

The doctrine of double activity

Given Emilsson's excellent and detailed account of this doctrine,[85] I shall here limit myself to pointing out the most important features. The main idea is this. There are two kinds of activities:

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[83] Thus, neither in Plotinus nor in Aristotle does accidental causation imply any form of contingency.

[84] As Adamson (2008:271) points out, Alexander of Aphrodisias, in his treatise 'On Providence' denies that the stars cause things intentionally, and he also describes this as κατὰ συμβεβηκὸς (*Prov.* 56 and 59), which might have inspired Plotinus. According to Adamson, 'nothing […] presumes that Plotinus actually read the relevant works of Alexander, though it is not unlikely that he did.' (271: fn14). Be that as it may, what Alexander mentions only in passing gets substantially developed by Plotinus, in that this view is firmly grounded in his metaphysics and also informs his views on the stars' psychology.

[85] Cf. Emilsson (2007): 22-68.

the activity in itself and that proceeding into another."[86] The former is referred to as the internal activity of something and it is identical to this thing's substance. This internal activity is self-contained, that is, it is independent and free (see also Plotinus' use of ἐφ' αὑτοῦ above at *Enn.* 2.2.3.24). This also means that the internal activity is self-directed. However, this internal activity is always accompanied by an external activity which is an inferior image (a 'trace') of the internal activity. The external activity is directed to something else and dependent on its source.[87] The most prominent example to demonstrate these two activities is fire and the heat it emits:

> There is activity (ἐνέργεια), one that is of the substance (τῆς οὐσίας) and one that arises from the substance (ἐκ τῆς οὐσίας) of each thing. And the activity of the substance is itself each thing (ἡ μὲν τῆς οὐσίας αὐτό ἐστιν ἐνέργεια ἕκαστον), while the activity from it, which for all things necessarily follows (ἣν δεῖ παντὶ ἕπεσθαι ἐξ ἀνάγκης), is something else belonging to it (ἑτέραν οὖσαν αὐτοῦ). For example, in the case of fire, there is the heat which completes the fire's substance, and there is another heat deriving from it (ἀπ' ἐκείνης), which automatically (ἤδη) comes to be when fire actualizes what is innate to its substance (ἐνεργοῦντος ἐκείνου τὴν σύμφυτον τῇ οὐσίᾳ) by remaining fire (ἐν τῷ μένειν πῦρ).
>
> (*Enn.* 5.4.2.27-33)

Here, Plotinus distinguishes the internal activity of fire (its substance) from its external activity (the heat it gives off). The latter is a necessary byproduct and an inferior image of the internal activity. This is exactly what we saw in our passage from 2.3.9: Plotinus invokes the example of fire and its external activity and aligns it with the stars' corporeal effects in the sublunary world. Thus, just as the heat that fire emits has certain effects on the environment, so too, do the stars' external activities

[86] *Enn.* 2.9.8.22-23*:* Εἶναι γὰρ αὐτοῦ ἐνέργειαν ἔδει διττήν, τὴν μὲν ἐν ἑαυτῷ, τὴν δὲ εἰς ἄλλο.

[87] Cf. *Enn.* 5.3.7.13–25. Note that the notion of directedness we get here is not to be confused with the one we saw above, i.e., that which is related to intentionality. When it comes to external activities, Plotinus will use 'πρὸς' language even in cases of inanimate things, that is, of things that do not have προαίρεσις. I will return to this below.

(say, the sun's external activity of emitting heat)[88] cause certain effects in the sensible world. As we saw, Plotinus assigns this external activity to the composite (the lower soul plus the body). The internal activity, by contrast, belongs to the stars' προαίρεσις and genuine soul. We can now see how this fits with the doctrine of double activity: the stars' internal activity is self-contained and has nothing to do with the sensible world. The external activity, by contrast, is other-directed and causes things in the sublunary world. Thus, not only do we get a reference to the doctrine of double activity, but Plotinus also makes clear that the stars' external activity - 'what comes into the universe from them' – is caused only by the composite of their body and lower soul. It is causation by the composite, then, that has effects in the sensible world.

Another passage that is of interest here is *Enn*. 4.5.7, where Plotinus again invokes the distinction between internal and external activity when he explains how the sun can give off light over a large distance:

> Now the activity inherent in the sun (ἡ μὲν ἐν αὐτῷ ἐνέργεια) is, as it were, the life of the luminous body, superior, and as it were, a principle and source of the activity (οἷον ἀρχὴ τῆς ἐνεργείας καὶ πηγή); but the activity beyond the limit of the body is an image of what is inside (εἴδωλον τοῦ ἐντός), a secondary activity (ἐνέργεια δευτέρα), though not detached from the primary one (οὐκ ἀφισταμένη τῆς προτέρας). (*Enn*. 4.5.7.13-17)

Thus, there is good reason to believe that Plotinus conceives of the stars' external activity as the cause of changes in the sensible world - just like the heat that fire emits. This is exactly what we saw Plotinus do in our passage from *Ennead* 2.3.9: he aligns the composite with the external activity, and the true star with its primary activity which has nothing to do with us. We can now see that there is

[88] Plotinus never explicitly lists all the external activities he ascribes to the stars. One example he gives is the emitting heat (*Enn.* 4.4.35.37-41) and light (*Enn.* 2.3.18.19-22) in the case of the sun. One other example of an external activity that Plotinus explicitly ascribes to the stars is of signifying future events. I discuss this in Chapter 3.

another, metaphysical reason underlying Plotinus' rejection of the claim that the stars cause things intentionally in the sensible world: because the stars' προαίρεσις is aligned with their internal activity, and because this internal activity is self-directed, the stars do not direct their primary activity to us.[89] It is only their external activity that plays a role in explaining the effects they cause in the sensible world. In the next section, I will explain why, by Plotinus' lights, only external activities can have immediate effects in the world, before I then venture a suggestion as to how the claim that the stars' effects in the sensible world are 'accidental' is best understood in the context of the stars.

External activities as causes of change in the sensible world

I mentioned above that Plotinus describes the internal activity as self-contained, self-directed, independent, and free. The external activity, by contrast, depends on the internal activity and is directed towards the outside. In what follows, I will argue that these features of directedness suggest that Plotinus thinks that only external activities can act as causes of change in the sensible world. The idea is this. Internal activities – precisely because they are self-directed and self-contained – cannot have any effects outside themselves, only external activities can. Let us begin with a passage where Plotinus emphasizes the self-directedness of internal activities:

> But stillness (ἡσυχία) for Intellect is not going out of Intellect (οὐ νοῦ ἐστιν ἔκστασις), but the stillness of Intellect is an activity taking its rest from all other activities (σχολὴν ἄγουσα ἀπὸ τῶν ἄλλων ἐνέργεια) [...]. The being [of Intellect], therefore, is activity, and there is nothing to which the activity is directed (καὶ οὐδέν, πρὸς ὃ ἡ ἐνέργεια). Therefore, it is self-directed

[89] Above, we saw that Plotinus also says that the stars' προαίρεσις is directed at the Forms, which might seem to be in tension with the claim we get here. Note, however, that Plotinus maintains that being directed to what is above is equivalent to having self-knowledge (cf., e.g., *Enn.* 2.9.1.50; 2.9.9; 5.3.3.31), and this is true of the stars as well. Thus, for Plotinus, these two claims (being directed at the Forms and being self-directed) are compatible.

> (πρὸς αὑτῷ ἄρα). For it had to be first in itself (πρῶτον ἐν ἑαυτῷ), then also directed to something else (εἶτα καὶ εἰς ἄλλο), or rather (ἢ) something else must have come from it (ἀπ' αὐτοῦ) having been made in likeness to it (ὁμοιούμενον αὐτῷ), just as in the case of fire it is because it is previously fire in itself and has the activity of fire that it is able to produce a trace of itself in another (ἴχνος αὐτοῦ δυνηθῆναι ποιῆσαι ἐν ἄλλῳ).
>
> (*Enn.* 5.3.7.13–25)

Here we learn that the internal activity (a thing's 'own proper activity') is not directed to anything but itself. Plotinus connects this to the notion of stillness (ἡσυχία) and 'taking rest from all other activities' (σχολὴν ἄγουσα ἀπὸ τῶν ἄλλων ἐνέργεια). This suggests that internal activities do not have any effects on the world. What has effects 'in another' (ἐν ἄλλῳ) is the external activity. This is because, unlike the internal activity, the external activity is directed to its exterior, as Plotinus explains elsewhere:

> And all beings, so long as they remain, from their own substance (ἐκ τῆς αὐτῶν οὐσίας) give off (δίδωσιν) a necessary existent surrounding them, directed toward what is outside them (ἀναγκαίαν τὴν περὶ αὐτὰ πρὸς τὸ ἔξω αὐτῶν …ἐξηρτημένην ὑπόστασιν), a [necessary existent] dependent on the power present in them (ἐκ τῆς παρούσης δυνάμεως), being an image (εἰκόνα οὖσαν) of the, as it were, archetypes (οἷον ἀρχετύπων) from which it has sprung (ὧν ἐξέφυ). Fire [gives off] its heat from itself (παρ' αὐτοῦ), and snow does not hold its coldness only within itself. But above all, all fragrant things bear witness to this. For so long as they are (ἕως γάρ ἐστι), something goes forth from them to their surroundings (πρόεισί τι ἐξ αὐτῶν περὶ αὐτά), which the nearby person enjoys for as long as they exist (ὑποστάντων).
>
> (*Enn.* 5.1.6.30-37)

Here, Plotinus is very clear that the external activity is directed to its exterior (πρὸς τὸ ἔξω). If we take Plotinus' example of perfumes, it becomes especially clear that it is the external activity that has an effect outside itself. After all, it is the external activity, that which necessarily 'flows' from the internal activity, that a bystander enjoys. Given that Plotinus contrasts the internal and external activities in terms of their directedness, it seems reasonable to take him to be saying that only external activities can have effects outside themselves and thus in the sensible world. If this is right,

then we can also see why Plotinus would want to make room for the idea that external activities can be causes of change. For it would be rather odd to deny that, e.g., the heat that fire emits can be the cause of something else's being heated. Moreover, if we take the case of the sage's automatic action (which is a non-deliberative external activity) we still want to say that the sage's practical actions can be causes of changes in the world even though these are automatic byproducts of the sage's contemplation.

The ἀπροαιρέτως claim

From what we have seen, it is plausible that Plotinus would think of external activities as neither conscious nor intentional. For one, we saw that on Plotinus' view, the stars do not consciously perceive anything that happens in the sensible world. Second, we also saw that on Plotinus' view, the stars' effects in the sensible world are external activities of the star's composite of body and lower soul. In fact, we can find several passages where Plotinus makes explicit that this causation is *unintentional*. For example, in *Ennead* 4.4.13.8-9, he describes the external activity of both the World Soul and of fire as ἀπροαιρέτως. We can find the same idea in *Ennead* 4.4.35.42-44, where Plotinus tells us that 'any other heavenly body, as though radiating light, unintentionally (ἀπροαίρετον) gives off a power from itself.' But the main textual evidence I want to focus on comes from *Ennead* 6.1. [42]:

> Nor should one call all activities (πάσας ἐνεργείας) productions (ποιήσεις) or a kind of producing (ποιεῖν τι). For production is accidental (κατὰ συμβεβηκὸς δὲ ἡ ποίησις). What, then? If the walking person makes footprints (εἰ βαδίζων ἴχνη εἰργάσατο), do we not say that he has produced (πεποιηκέναι) them? [...] In fact, the producing [of footprints] is accidental (Ἡ ποιεῖν κατὰ συμβεβηκὸς), and the activity [of producing footprints] is accidental (τὴν ἐνέργειαν κατὰ συμβεβηκός), because this is not what he was looking to do (μὴ πρὸς τοῦτο ἑώρα). For we speak of 'producing' also in the case of inanimate things (ἐπὶ τῶν ἀψύχων ποιεῖν λέγομεν), for example, fire heats, and the drug acted (ἐνήργησε). (*Enn.* 6.1.22.27-34)

Here again, Plotinus invokes the now familiar example for illustrating the doctrine of double activity: fire and the heat it gives off. But we also get an interesting division between primary activities on the one hand, and accidental activities and productions on the other. As Plotinus makes clear, not all activities (ἐνεργείας) are productions (ποιήσεις). He gives the example of a person who is engaged in the primary activity of walking. The person was looking to walk, as he puts it, not, however, looking to produce a footprint. Thus, he explains the accidentality of the production of footprints by reference to the agent's lack of intention to produce footprints. In other words, producing footprints is accidental precisely because the agent did not intend to produce footprints. For Plotinus, this lack of intentionality seems to explain why we speak of 'producing' also in cases of inanimate things. Thus, fire and drugs, too, produce things *accidentally,* simply because their manner of production lacks intentionality. Thus, Plotinus here seems to make a general point about external activities: regardless of whether or not something has the capacity for προαίρεσις, when it comes to external activities προαίρεσις is never involved, and thereby such activities or productions are always κατὰ συμβεβηκὸς. I think this example can help us shed light on the case of the stars. With everything we have seen so far it seems natural to understand the internal activity of the stars (contemplation) and their external activities (e.g., making contributions to the sensible world) as exactly analogous to the walking case. The analogous case would run as follows:

> If a star that is engaged in the activity of contemplation makes certain contributions to the sensible world, do we not say that it has produced them? In fact, the production is accidental and the activity [of making contributions] is accidental because this is not what it was looking to do.

Thus, on my proposed reading, making footprints is an automatic and necessary byproduct of walking just as making contributions and signifying the future is an automatic and necessary byproduct of the stars' contemplation. It seems, then, that none of these external activities or

productions involve deliberate choice or intention (προαίρεσις), as he also confirms at *Enn*. 4.4.31.47-50:

> We must certainly not, either, attribute to the deliberate choice (προαιρέσει) of stars and the judgment of the All (τῇ τοῦ παντὸς γνώμῃ), and to their rational calculations (τοῖς τούτων λογισμοῖς) what happens to each of the things beneath them (περὶ ἕκαστα τῶν ὑπ᾽ αὐτά).

Thus, we can summarize Plotinus' view as follows. In cases of productions by external activities, what the stars cause κατὰ συμβεβηκὸς will also be caused unintentionally. As Plotinus emphasizes, the external activity is an automatic and necessary byproduct and the results it produces were not intended. This fits nicely with Plotinus' refutation of (ii), where he emphasized that the stars do not cause anything voluntarily or intentionally in the sensible world. We can now see that this view is firmly grounded in Plotinus' metaphysics: the effects the stars cause in the sensible world come about through their external activity. And, as we saw, this external activity is linked to the composite of the astral body and its lower soul and as such, it is non-rational and therefore 'below' προαίρεσις. As we shall see in the next section, that the stars can be causes of changes (despite causing such changes accidentally) does not mean that Plotinus agrees with the astrologers that the stars cause *everything* in the sensible world.

§2 Plotinus' criticism of 'hard astrology'

The view that the stars and the revolution of the heavens cause everything in the sensible world emerges a couple of times in the *Enneads*. Plotinus mentions this view in the early treatise 3.1 [3], but also in 4.4. [28], 2.9. [33], 3.2 [47], and 2.3 [52]. In the latter treatise, Plotinus tells us that this is something the masses believe (τοῖς πολλοῖς δοξάζεται) which explains why Plotinus felt it necessary to deal with this view in detail. The first thing we need to get clear on is what exactly people mean

(or rather what Plotinus takes them to mean) when they say that the stars cause everything in the sensible world. Fortunately, we get some helpful examples. According to Plotinus, most people believe that the stars are causing effects in three different domains:

- the domain of the body (e.g., beauty, ugliness, sickness, health)
- the psychological domain (e.g., characters, ways of life, virtues, vices)
- the domain of external circumstances (e.g., poverty, wealth, reputation)

Thus, Plotinus focuses his criticism on points that seem to affect our lives and well-being. This may seem surprising, but we should remember that Plotinus critiques astrologers for attributing excessive causal power to the stars, especially regarding our whether or not we are well-off. Let us begin by looking at what Plotinus has to say about the first point.

The domain of the body

That the stars can influence our bodies in some way was a widely accepted theory. Plotinus does not discuss this thesis in much detail, but he does refer to it occasionally, always in the midst of criticizing the astrologers. In what follows, I will discuss three passages where we can see that Plotinus accepts that the stars can be causes albeit with qualifications. The first passage that is of interest to us is the following:

> Let the revolution of the universe also be a contributing factor (συνεργὸς) – even though it yields the majority [of contributions] (συγχωροῦσα τὸ πολὺ) to the parents;[90] granted, too, that the stars give physically to many aspects of the body (δὲ πρὸς τὰ τοῦ σώματος πολλὰ σωματικῶς διδόντες), heat and cold and the resulting corporeal mixtures (θερμότητας καὶ ψύξεις καὶ σωμάτων κράσεις ἐπακολουθούσας) [...] (*Enn.* 3.1.6.3-7)

[90] Reading τοῖς γειναμένοις with HS[4].

Here, we get an important concession: the stars 'give physically to many aspects of the body.' By this, Plotinus means not only that the stars give heat and cold to a body,[91] but, importantly, he also accepts that the resulting corporeal mixtures are influenced by the stars. I will discuss the consequences of this view when we turn to the psychological domain. For now, let us focus on the first claim – that the stars give heat and cold to bodies. Given that Plotinus accepts that we receive these elemental qualities from the stars, it seems that he would also have to agree that they are in some sense involved in causing ugliness or beauty. Now in our passage, Plotinus emphasizes that the main contribution to the offspring's physical features comes from the parents. This is not surprising, given that Plotinus holds that the offspring is produced by a mixture of maternal and paternal λόγοι.[92] These λόγοι include all of the embryo's bodily parts,[93] and so it is reasonable to limit the stars' scope to the basic qualities of the four elements. For example, the stars do not supply the λόγος of snub nose, the parents do. However, it seems that Plotinus would agree that the heat or cold the stars give off influences the mother's (and thereby also the offspring's) matter, thereby contributing to the resulting snob nose being beautiful or ugly.

I think the following would be fair representation of Plotinus' view. The stars give certain

[91] Note, that at *Enn*. 4.4.42.23-29, Plotinus makes clear that even if the stars give off something, their souls and bodies remain the same. Cf. also *Enn*. 2.1, his main treatise on cosmology, where Plotinus argues that there is no efflux from the heavens. This is an important step towards showing that heavenly bodies, despite being matter-form composites, are numerically everlasting. For an in-depth study of this treatise see Wilberding (2006).

[92] Cf. *Enn*. 5.7.2.1–12. However, Plotinus sometimes makes the father the sole cause of the offspring (e.g. *Enn*. 3.1.1.32-25) but this need not mean the mother is merely providing the matter. In fact, at *Enn*. 3.6.19.19-22 Plotinus criticizes people who refer to matter as 'mother' thinking that the mother 'only receives and gives nothing to the formation of her offspring.' On this, see also Wilberding (2017): 59 and 82-83.

[93] Cf. *Enn*. 5.9.12.4–12 and 5.7.3.3–6.

qualities (hot, cold) to human bodies, and as such, they are causally responsible for certain corporeal mixtures. Needless to say, the parents also play a major role. As Plotinus points out, 'the sameness in external appearances to the parents suggests that beauty and ugliness come from the family and not from the motion of the stars.' (*Enn.* 3.1.5.53-55). But for our question it is important to bear in mind that the parents' bodily mixtures are also influenced by the stars. Thus, whether or not the offspring's underlying matter is well-suited for an unimpeded unfolding of λόγοι does to some extent depend on the effects the stars have on the parents and their offspring.[94] That and to what extent this happens, is, as we shall see in the next chapter, fully predetermined. However, it is worth highlighting that Plotinus insists that the stars cannot change a λόγος. Rather, they only effect non-substantial changes in the underlying matter which at times causes it to dominate. The result might be a less perfectly shaped snub-nose, not however, a beak. This is exactly what Plotinus highlights in the second passage that is of interest to us:

> [The star-influences] do not produce (ποιεῖ) the horse; they give something (τι δίδωσιν) to the horse. A horse comes from a horse and a human from a human: the sun is a contributing factor (συνεργὸς) in their formation (τῇ πλάσει), but a human comes from the λόγος of human being. The outside influence sometimes harms or helps. A man is like his father, but often he turns out better, sometimes worse. But the outside influence does not force anything out of its underlying [nature] (Ἀλλ' οὐκ ἐκβιβάζει τοῦ ὑποκειμένου); however, sometimes it is matter that dominates, not nature (ὁτὲ δὲ καὶ ἡ ὕλη κρατεῖ, οὐχ ἡ φύσις) so that, as a result of the form's being overcome (ἡττωμένου τοῦ εἴδους), the thing fails to reach perfection (μὴ τέλεον γενέσθαι). (*Enn.* 2.3.12.4-11)

[94] As Plotinus makes clear in *Enn.* 3.1.1.32-35, there are other factors that play a role, e.g., the particular diet (possibly of both the father and the mother), whether there is 'easy flowing' seed, and whether the woman is suited to childbirth.

Here, too, Plotinus accepts that the stars contribute something to sublunary living things, and he again limits their influence. As he says, the heavenly bodies do not cause or produce (ποιεῖ) a living thing – a λόγος does.[95] Rather, the stars 'give something' to the living thing's formation. Such qualitative contributions can be for the better or the worse, but the stars cannot make any essential changes to the λόγος of something.[96] Let us take an example. If we think of a plant, we can see that the sun is certainly contributing to the growth of the plant. Thus, in most cases, the qualitative change that results from the sun's warmth and light is for the better. If, by contrast, the sun is too powerful, the plant might dry out and decay, in which case this external influence harms the plant. However, and this is Plotinus' main point, in both cases, the sun could never make a substantial change to the plant's λόγος.[97] That is, it could not turn a sunflower into a succulent plant to make it more suitable for hotter conditions. Thus, *pace* the astrologers, Plotinus maintains that the stars are neither the causes of living beings nor do they cause any *substantial* changes in living beings.

Before we move on to our last passage, it is worth noting that even though the stars can be said to be causes of ugliness or beauty, Plotinus rejects the view that the stars are *blameworthy* for causing such effects. The only thing we can say is that, in some limited sense, they are causally responsible – they cause these effects *accidentally*. However, we cannot say that they are *morally*

[95] Presumably he has in mind the rational form-principle that results from the 'mixtures' (μίξεις) of male and female form-principles. Cf. *Enn*. 5.7.2.1–12.

[96] Cf., also *Enn*. 2.3.13.39-40.

[97] One question is what Plotinus counts as substantial changes. Obviously, the sun not only makes things grow, but it can also destroy living beings, as Plotinus himself points out (Cf. *Enn*. 6.3.22.23) and destruction should count as a substantial rather than a qualitative change. However, here Plotinus seems to be concerned about changing a living thing's *underlying nature*.

responsible.[98] There are (at least) two reasons for this. First, we already saw the stars do not cause things in the sensible world intentionally or voluntarily. Thus, they should not be blamed for the effects they cause. Moreover, for Plotinus true beauty and ugliness is found in souls, not bodies. To him, it does not matter if a good person is ugly – what really moves us is what is internal, i.e., a person's soul.[99] Thus, for Plotinus, *corporeal* ugliness is not indicative of a person's soul, and thus it does not deserve praise or blame. Finally, Plotinus also distinguishes between a local and a global perspective, which enables him to maintain that at the global level, everything is good.[100] So even though the stars can be causes of local ugliness by causing non-substantial changes in a bodily mixture, their nobility is retained.

Lastly, Plotinus gives us an empirical argument where he again maintains that both the parents and the stars are causes of physical features:

> We admit also that things come to us from regions and from differences in the surrounding environment (παρὰ τῶν τόπων καὶ τῆς διαφορᾶς τοῦ περιέχοντος), for example, heat or cold in the bodily mixtures (ἐν τῇ κράσει), but these also come from our parents (παρὰ τῶν γειναμένων). For we at least resemble our parents in appearance (τὰ εἴδη), and in most cases (ὡς τὰ πολλὰ) also in some of the soul's non-rational affections (καί τινα τῶν ἀλόγων τῆς ψυχῆς παθῶν). Yet, even if people are alike in appearance, corresponding to their regions (παρὰ τοὺς τόπους), the greatest variation (πλείστη παραλλαγὴ) is observed in their characters (ἔν γε τοῖς ἤθεσι) and thoughts (καὶ ἐν ταῖς διανοίαις) so that such things would come from a different source (ἀπ' ἄλλης ἀρχῆς). (*Enn*. 3.1.5.24-31)

Here, Plotinus is happy to grant that both environmental factors and the parents contribute to and determine bodily mixtures. Thus, these two kinds of influence need not be mutually exclusive.

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[98] I return to this distinction in Chapter 4, where I argue that Plotinus maintains that nothing and no one is to be held *morally* responsible – he only accepts a notion of *causal* responsibility.

[99] Cf. e.g., *Enn*. 3.2.6.8-9; 3.5.1.34-36; 5.8.2.30.

[100] I discuss this in more detail in Chapters 3 and 4.

Rather, they can be complementary. This is very much in line with what we saw above. However, what Plotinus emphasizes here is that neither the influence of the parents nor that of the stars can explain behavior and thoughts. Thus, even though we can see that people who live in the same regions are the same in appearance, we can also see that they still differ in their characters and thoughts. That is, in these respects, they differ both from one another and their parents. This, Plotinus says, shows that such characters and thoughts must come from another principle (ἀπ' ἄλλης ἀρχῆς). As we saw in his criticism of the Stoics, Plotinus identifies this principle with the individual soul.[101] This brings us to the most important claim Plotinus seeks to refute, namely that the stars are the causes of all psychological states.

The psychological domain

According to Plotinus, the astrologers hold that the stars cause the following: ways of living (ἐπιτηδεύματά), characters (ἤθη), temperaments and desires (θυμοὺς καὶ ἐπιθυμίας),[102] and lastly, 'states of vice and virtue; and even the particular actions that stem from these states at crucial moments' (κακίας καὶ ἀρετὰς καὶ δὴ καὶ τὰς ἀπὸ τούτων πράξεις καθ' ἕκαστα ἐπὶ καιρῶν ἑκάστων), e.g., adultery. The main goal of this section is to show that Plotinus disagrees with the astrologers on account of the scope of the stars' causal powers. For Plotinus, the stars can affect all sorts of things pertaining to the composite. However, anything that belongs to the true self transcends the realm of astral causation. Let us begin by briefly looking at Plotinus' rejection of the view that the stars cause us to be virtuous or vicious.

[101] *Enn*. 3.1.8.4-8, which I discuss in Chapter 1, pp. 33-35.

[102] Cf. *Enn*. 3.1.5.14.

Virtue and vice

Now one could think that Plotinus rejects the idea that virtue and vice are caused by the stars because this would do away with moral responsibility. Moral blame and praise would, in a way, be empty and superfluous concepts – virtuous people and actions could not be praiseworthy, and vicious ones could not be blameworthy. As we shall see in Chapter 4 of this dissertation, this is in fact the position Plotinus defends. This, I think, also explain why Plotinus does not explicitly engage with the idea that the stars cause states of vice and virtue. Aside from the astrologers' claim I mentioned above – that the stars cause 'states of vice and virtue; and even the particular actions that stem from these states at crucial moments,' there is only one very brief passage in this treatise in which Plotinus returns to the question of what the causes of virtue and vice are:

> Wealth and poverty, then, are due to the encounter of external factors (συντυχίᾳ τῶν ἔξω), but what about virtues and vices? Virtues are due to the original state of soul (διὰ τὸ ἀρχαῖον τῆς ψυχῆς), while vices are due to the soul's encounter with external factors (κακίαι δὲ συντυχίᾳ ψυχῆς πρὸς τὰ ἔξω). (*Enn*. 2.3.8.12-15)

Here, we get an interesting asymmetry between virtue and vices. Vices are due to external factors, whereas virtue seem to be tied to the 'original' state of the soul. Presumably, Plotinus means that once souls have entered into the cycle of reincarnation, the soul loses its original pure and virtuous state. Be that as it may, what is important for our purposes is that Plotinus makes clear that the stars have no role to play in the attainment of virtue.[103] This should come as no surprise given that for

[103] For reasons of space, I will not get into the details of Plotinus' theory of virtues. Let it suffice to say that in *Enn.*1.2., his treatise on virtue, he develops a quite sophisticated theory that requires truly virtuous people (sages) not only to attain the lower (civic) virtues but also to ascend to the higher (purificatory) ones. The goal of the latter is to separate oneself from the body as much as possible. This, of course, also diminishes the effects the stars could have on the sage. For a detailed analysis of Plotinus' theory of virtues, see O'Meara (2003) and Linguiti (2013).

Plotinus virtuous actions follow upon correct contemplation and reasoning,[104] and the rational part of soul is outside the domain of cosmic causality and Fate.[105]

However, things look different when it comes to vice. As we shall see below, the stars do contribute to the external circumstances and thus we can say that they have some causal role to play in producing states of vice either *via* external circumstances or *via* their influence on bodily mixtures. Once again it is worth highlighting that this does not make the stars *blameworthy*, as Plotinus also stresses elsewhere:

> And it is not a wrongdoing (οὐκ ἄδικον) that someone who has become such a person (τοιόνδε) should suffer the consequences of his disposition (ἀκόλουθα πάσχειν τῇ διαθέσει); nor should those people demand to have happiness who have done nothing to be worthy of happiness. Only the good are happy and it is for the same reason that the gods, too, are happy. (*Enn*. 3.2.4.44-48)

As we saw, Plotinus maintains that for the person who does not make use of their purified rational part of soul, the stars do more than just signify.[106] By this Plotinus means that because the majority of people identify themselves with their composite (i.e., their body and lower soul),[107] they are also susceptible to astral effects. Sages, by contrast, are not.[108] Thus, there is an interesting asymmetry in that in the case of non-sages, the stars play an ongoing causal role because these people are constantly at the mercy of all kinds of external influences, including astral ones. For sages, by

[104] Cf. *Enn*. 6.8.3.17-26. I discuss this in Chapter 4.

[105] Cf., *Enn*. 3.1.8.9-10; 3.4.6.30-37; 4.3.15.10-15 and 2.3.9.27-30.

[106] *Enn.* 2.3.9.27-30.

[107] See also *Enn*. 4.4.18.13-19.

[108] For an in-depth discussion of Plotinus' theory of the two selves, see Remes (2007). But see Hutchinson (2018) who argues for three levels of consciousness which correspond to three levels of selfhood.

contrast, the stars merely signify.[109] Again, this does not mean that the stars are to be blamed or held *morally* responsible for the things they cause. Rather, as we shall see over the course of this dissertation, because everything is exactly the way it is supposed to be, even *local* evils (such as vicious people and actions) are necessary and, *globally* speaking, good. For, they, too, contribute to the completion of the universe. Let us now turn to the second point on our list.

Characters, characteristic actions, and ways of living

In *Ennead* 3.1, his early treatise on Fate, Plotinus gives the following response to the astrologers who maintain that the stars cause our characters, actions, and so on:

> In response to these points, this must first be said: that this person too, in a different way, attributes (ἀνατίθησι) what is ours (τὰ ἡμέτερα) – deliberation and affections (βουλὰς καὶ πάθη), vices and impulses (κακίας τε καὶ ὁρμάς) – to those [viz. the stars], granting nothing to us (ἡμῖν δὲ οὐδὲν διδοὺς) and leaving us to be stones being carried along, and not human beings who have a function (ἔργον) of themselves (παρ' αὑτῶν), i.e., from their own nature (ἐκ τῆς αὑτῶν φύσεως). But one must give to us what is [truly] ours (τὸ ἡμέτερον ἡμῖν) while acknowledging that some things – already existing and proper to us (ἤδη τινὰ ὄντα καὶ οἰκεῖα ἡμῶν) – enter into what is ours (εἰς τὰ ἡμέτερα) from the universe (ἀπὸ τοῦ παντὸς), and we must make a distinction between what we do ourselves (ἡμεῖς ἐργαζόμεθα) and what we experience of necessity (πάσχομεν ἐξ ἀνάγκης) and [we must] not attribute everything to those principles [viz. the stars]. (*Enn*. 3.1.5.16-2)

Here, Plotinus is clearly concerned that if the stars cause all these things, then there is no agency. To avoid this, Plotinus wants to distinguish two things. On the one hand, there are the things 'we do ourselves'; on the other, there are the things 'we experience of necessity.' The former appears to include deliberation, vices, and impulses. The latter comprises all the things that enter from the universe (and thus from the stars) 'into what is ours.' These are the things we experience of necessity.

[109] Plotinus subscribes to the claim that the stars signify everything that is going on in the sensible world, including future events. I discuss this in Chapter 3.

Note that Plotinus here emphasizes that whatever the stars supply us with already exists and is proper to us. Plotinus does not spell out what he means by this here, but I think we can answer this question if we turn to *Ennead* 2.3.9. There, Plotinus invokes Plato's *Timaeus* to explain what it is that we receive from the stars:

> And in the *Timaeus* the god who is the producer of the cosmos gives (δίδωσιν) 'the soul's principle', while the moving gods [give] the 'dreadful and necessary πάθη, anger' (θυμοὺς) and desires (ἐπιθυμίας), and 'pleasures' (ἡδονὰς) and also 'pains' (λύπας), and 'another form of soul' (ψυχῆς ἄλλο εἶδος), from which these affections (παθήματα) arise. These λόγοι bind us to the stars (συνδέουσιν ἡμᾶς τοῖς ἄστροις) since we receive soul from them (παρ' αὐτῶν ψυχὴν κομιζομένους), and, upon coming here, subject us to necessity (ὑποτάττουσι τῇ ἀνάγκῃ ἐνταῦθα ἰόντας). And therefore [we receive] also our characters (ἤθη) from the stars (παρ' αὐτῶν) and, in accordance with the characters (κατὰ τὰ ἤθη), actions and affections (πράξεις καὶ πάθη) that stem from a passive permanent state (πάθη ἀπὸ ἕξεως παθητικῆς οὔσης).
>
> (*Enn.* 2.3.9.6-14)

Thus, according to Plotinus, we receive the following things from the stars:

- all necessary affections (anger, desires, pleasures, pains)
- the vegetative soul
- characters
- actions and affections corresponding to the character 'that stem from a passive permanent state.'

All of these, I take it, belong to the category of things we experience *of necessity*. In other words, none of these things are 'truly ours.' This is confirmed in the next line, where Plotinus (or perhaps a student) asks: 'So what is left that is 'we'?' Plotinus' answer is that 'we' is to be identified with the purified rational part of the soul. Thus, whatever we receive from the stars' composite only affects our composite. It cannot affect Reason, since Reason is not subject to Fate or cosmic causality. This also fits with other examples we get. In *Ennead* 2.3.11, Plotinus maintains that the stars also give us:

- a disposition to friendship (φιλιακὴ διάθεσις: 2.3.11.3-4)
- a disposition to spiritedness (θυμὸς: 2.3.11.5)
- a disposition to being in love with honor and to be concerned with beauty (τὸ τιμῆς ἐν ἔρωτι ὂν καὶ περὶ τὸ καλὸν: 2.3.11.7)

Note that these, too, only concern the soul-body composite. Nonetheless, in this context, Plotinus is concerned with retaining the nobility of the stars, and so he emphasizes that the dispositions that come from the stars (παρ' ἐκείνων ἔρχεται) are not always received in the way they were sent forth. Thus, dispositions that are initially good might not remain so when they become mixed with a body. Plotinus gives the following example: if a disposition to spiritedness is not received in due measure (οὐκ ἐν μέτρῳ), it will become a disposition to rage or faintheartedness (ἀκροχολίαν ἢ ἀθυμίαν).[110] Plotinus accounts for such changes by saying that it depends on the recipient how well the disposition in question will be received.[111]

We can note, then, that Plotinus is not concerned about ascribing to the stars the role of providing souls with all these features. Neither is he concerned about introducing necessity into the picture. I will discuss this in the next chapter, but for now let me simply state that the reason Plotinus

[110] This passage, as well as *Enn*. 4.4.28.28-35, suggests that Plotinus accepts Aristotle's view that the different mixtures of blood correlate with certain innate physiological predispositions. Thus, on Aristotle's view, someone whose blood is hot and moist has a natural or innate disposition for courage and intelligence. Cf. *PA* 2.2, 647b35–648a11. On this, see Leunissen (2017). That this mixture can then be influenced by environmental factors was argued by Hippocrates *Aer*. 12–24, Herodotus *Hist*. 9.122.3 and Aristotle *HA* 8.28, 606b17–19.

[111] Cf., *Enn.* 2.3.15 (discussed below), where Plotinus makes clear that we choose all the external circumstances of our next life, including our body. This choice also already includes how well the λόγος is going to inform the matter.

is not concerned about this is that, for him, everything in the sensible world is predetermined (including actions, characters, and external circumstances). This, however, does not mean that Plotinus agrees with the astrologers. In fact, he does not even fully agree with Plato. He disagrees with the astrologers about the scope of the stars' causal involvement. For Plotinus, the stars do not give us anything that pertains to the true self. He also disagrees with Plato, though for a different reason. Recall that in the *Timaeus*, the lesser gods construct the mortal soul in such a way that it contains all the 'dreadful but necessary affections.'[112] Note, however, that Plotinus does not speak of the stars causing or constructing our mortal souls, characters, affections, and so on. Rather, he tells us that the stars give us these things. Thus, Plotinus reformulates the passage from the Timaeus so that the stars are no longer producers or causes. This makes perfect sense if we recall that, in our passage from *Ennead* 3.1.5, Plotinus emphasizes that what enters into 'what is ours' from the universe 'already exists and is proper to us.' Let us now turn to the last domain, that of external circumstances.

The domain of external circumstances

Plotinus discusses this domain in *Ennead* 2.3.14, where he focuses on the example of wealth.[113] In total, he gives us six cases as to how one might have attained one's wealth. The stars only appear in three of them,[114] and it is these that we shall focus on. But before we turn to these examples, it is necessary to provide some context. Plotinus is here concerned with cases (wealth, reputations,

[112] *Tim.* 69c8.

[113] Other examples include poverty, reputations, positions of power, marriages, and the generation of children following upon marriages. But, as Plotinus himself points out (*Enn.* 2.3.14.24-25), the account he gives for wealth will also apply to the other examples.

[114] The two cases where he does not mention the stars are where virtue or vice is the cause of attaining wealth. (*Enn.* 2.3.14.9-10 and 10-15) Unsurprisingly, here the stars do not play any causal role at all. The other case is that of someone who was born into a rich family. Here, the stars merely signify the wealth (*Enn.* 2.3.14.2-4)

offices) that clearly depend on a number of *external* factors. Thus, we can expect the stars to play some role here. But, as we shall see, Plotinus' main point is that the stars only play a role insofar as they influence these external factors. The main contribution to attaining wealth comes from the agent, since neither the bodily mixtures nor certain preconditions are sufficient to account for wealth. Let us begin with the first case.

Here, (2.3.1.4-7) Plotinus envisions a person who is wealthy through brave deeds (ἐξ ἀνδραγαθίας). Presumably he has in mind a soldier, where not just bravery but also bodily strength plays a role. Thus, the cause of wealth does not solely depend on the soul. This is why Plotinus then turns to the body. If, he says, the body was a contribution factor (σύνεργον), then those who produced (ἐργασάμενοι) the body's strength (ἰσχὺν) contributed. These are primarily the parents (γονεῖς μὲν πρῶτον), but also the stars if the body derived anything from the surroundings. Thus, in this case, the stars indirectly contribute to the wealth *iff* the person's body has been influenced by the environment. Since, however, Plotinus accepts that the environment influences corporeal mixtures, we can say that the stars have some causal role to play here but their contributions are limited to the brave person's body.

Next, (2.3.1.15-16), Plotinus presents the example of someone having attained wealth through hard work, more specifically, farming. Here, Plotinus is clear that the farmer is the cause of the wealth. The environment (and by extension the stars) is a contributing factor (συνεργὸν)[115] to the wealth, e.g., by providing favorable conditions for growing crops. The idea seems to be that if the farmer did not work hard, he would not be wealthy no matter how favorable the environmental conditions are. But since the farmer is the agent of the hard work, the wealth is not caused by the

[115] *Enn*. 2.3.14.16.

stars.

Our final example (2.3.1.12-17-18) is familiar to us from Aristotle's *Physics*: someone discovers a buried treasure. Here, Plotinus grants that the stars have some causal influence, but his statement is extremely concise and opaque. If, he says, someone finds a buried treasure then 'something from the universe must have contributed, and if so, it is signified by the stars.' Plotinus here does not tell us what the cause of wealth is, but it seems clear that he has in mind the person (or, more specifically, the person's digging), and *not* the stars.

Thus, in this chapter, Plotinus clearly restricts the stars' causal powers. This is not surprising if we keep in mind what question Plotinus is asking here, namely: what is the cause of someone's *wealth*? If the question in Case 1 was: 'What is the cause of the brave person's bodily strength?', Plotinus surely would have listed the stars and/or the parents. However, being the causes of bodily strength does not make them causes of *wealth*. In order to explain this, we need to make reference to the agent's actions. Similarly, Plotinus is not asking whether the stars are the causes of the treasure being buried in the first place (for instance by causing an earthquake). If Plotinus were interested in this example, he would tell us that the stars are the causes. What Plotinus asks about is the cause of the discoverer's *wealth*. Here, too, the answer makes reference to the agent: the person's digging. The stars are, as it were, downgraded to being contributing factors, but only because Plotinus discusses cases where the agent's contribution is more important than the external factors. The latter are necessary but not sufficient to explain the outcome in question.

§3 Conclusion

Regarding the manner in which the stars cause changes in the sensible world, we saw that Plotinus insists that they do not cause anything intentionally or consciously. Their primary activity is

contemplation, and this is what their προαίρεσις is directed to. This activity is internal, that is, self-directed, and so has nothing to with us. It is only the *external* activity that has effects outside itself. We also saw that external activities are necessary and automatic by-products of internal activities. As such they lack προαίρεσις and can therefore be described as 'accidental'. This is how Plotinus can maintain that X can be the cause of a change Z, even though X causes Z by its external activity (and thus necessarily) and accidentally. We also saw that Plotinus clearly distinguishes between the composite and the genuine soul. In general, he maintains that it is only the stars' lower soul and body whose external activity causes changes in the sensible world. The stars' true self, by contrast is always contemplating the Forms and has nothing to do with us.

Regarding the scope of the stars' influence, we saw that in the corporeal domain, Plotinus is willing to concede that the stars can be causes in our bodies and corporeal mixtures to varying degrees by providing certain qualities (e.g., hot and cold). However, *pace* the astrologers, Plotinus is very clear that the stars can only cause *non-substantial* changes. In the psychological domain, Plotinus is happy to accept that the stars provide us with numerous things pertaining to our soul-body composite. However, the stars give us nothing that pertains to the true self. Lastly, in the domain of external circumstances, we saw that Plotinus again restricts the stars' causal powers. He describes the stars as mere contributing factors (συνεργά). This is because Plotinus is here concerned with cases that clearly depend not just on *external* factors but also on agency. In such cases, the stars play some causal role but only insofar as they influence these external factors. In the next chapter, I will discuss Plotinus' commitment to the idea that everything is signified by the stars. This will also support some of the claims I made in this chapter, specifically that Plotinus maintains that everything in the sensible world is predetermined.

Chapter 3: Plotinus on astral signification and its deterministic implications

§Introduction

In the previous chapter, we thoroughly examined Plotinus' criticism of the astrologers. However, we saw that Plotinus grants that the stars (more specifically, their composite of lower soul and body) can be causes of changes in the sensible world. We also saw that for Plotinus, such earthly effects are to be understood as the stars' external activities. As such, the stars cause changes in the sensible world accidentally, unintentionally, and as an automatic by-product of their internal activity (contemplation). One of their external activities includes signification, and it is this activity that I want to focus on in this chapter. The idea that stars signify (σημαίνειν) particular events in the sensible world might seem odd to modern readers, but it was widely accepted both before and after Plotinus' time,[116] and so Plotinus has good reasons for making room for such a claim in his philosophy.[117] In what follows, I will begin by briefly sketching what Plotinus (and the ancients) meant by astral signification. Next, I will discuss how, on Plotinus' view, it is possible that the stars signify things in the sensible world, and how this answer relies on his metaphysics. In the third part, we will look at the scope of the stars' power to signify. The goal of this chapter is to argue that Plotinus' acceptance of 'soft astrology' entails that he is a determinist about the sensible world.

[116] The origins of western astrology can be traced back as far as 4,000 years to ancient Mesopotamia and Egypt. Astrology then found its way into the Hellenistic world sometime after the conquests of Alexander the Great. It remained a topic of interest in late antiquity, the Middle Ages, and the Renaissance. See, e.g., Burnett and Greenbaum (2015).

[117] The same goes for the art of divination (μαντική) which Plotinus also wants to accommodate. See, e.g., *Enn.* 3.3.6.23-29; 3.1.5.5-8.

§1 Signification

Astrologers attempted to predict future events by collecting numerous data points, which they organized into tables. As Ptolemy tells us, to make predictions, two sets of data are of prime importance:

> Of the means of prediction (προγνωστικὸν) through astronomy, O Syrus, two are the most important and valid (τῶν μεγίστων καὶ κυριωτάτων). One, which is first both in order and power (καὶ τάξει καὶ δυνάμει), is that whereby we apprehend the aspects of the movements of sun, moon, and stars in relation to each other and to the earth (σχηματισμοὺς τῶν κινήσεων ἡλίου τε καὶ σελήνης καὶ ἀστέρων πρὸς ἀλλήλους τε καὶ τὴν γῆν) as they occur from time to time; the second is that in which by means of the peculiar quality (ἰδιοτροπίας) of these aspects themselves we investigate the changes which they bring about in that which they surround (τὰς ἀποτελουμένας μεταβολὰς τῶν ἐμπεριεχομένων).
>
> (*Tetrabib.* 1.1.1.1-9, Robbins transl. slightly modified)

Thus, most important are the 'aspects' (σχηματισμοί) that heavenly bodies are in. By this, Ptolemy means the relationship the planets have to each other and the earth. The second point is about the 'peculiar quality' (ἰδιοτροπίας) these aspects have, and how they cause certain changes in the world. Ptolemy, unlike Plotinus, holds that each planet (and sign) possesses an individual character or quality, influencing individuals born under its sign. For Ptolemy, each heavenly body's natural character is ultimately determined by the mixture of the four elemental qualities. For instance, the sun is primarily hot and dry, the Moon wet, and Mars is dry and hot and burning.

These data points form the basis for predicting future outcomes: astrologers would use the aspects and positions in addition to, e.g., the location and time of an individual's birth to make predictions about both individuals themselves (character traits, dispositions) and their future (external circumstances, trajectories, and individual actions). As we learn from Porphyry, Plotinus was familiar with such astronomical tables and the horoscopes that were produced from them, but

he was not interested in getting into the technical and mathematical details of them.[118] And yet, as we shall see, Plotinus, subscribes to the idea that the stars signify *all* sensible goings-on. However, unlike Ptolemy, who produced and worked with a vast number of astronomical tables to predict earthly outcomes, Plotinus' main interest lies in explicating how signification of all sensible goings-on is possible. As we shall see, Plotinus' explanation is entirely based on his metaphysics.

§2 How signification is possible – the τάξις of the universe

Our key passage for understanding Plotinus' view on how signification works comes from *Ennead* 2.3.7, where he raises and provides a first answer to this question:

> But if these planets are signifying future events – just as we say many other things are indicative of the future – what would be the cause (τὸ ποιοῦν) [of this]? And how does this order (τάξις) arise? For there would be no signifying if individual events did not come about in a certain order (τεταγμένως μὴ ἑκάστων γιγνομένων).
>
> (*Enn.* 2.3.7.1-4)

Thus, that there is a certain order (τάξις) that determines how (and possibly when) particular things come about is a necessary condition for signification. In his first attempt to spell out what this τάξις amounts to, Plotinus then makes reference to the heavenly bodies:

> Well, let us suppose that the stars are like letters always being written (γραφόμενα ἀεὶ) in heaven – or rather, already written and set in motion (ἢ γεγραμμένα καὶ κινούμενα). They would be performing some other function but let the significations that they give follow from this function, just as based on a single principle (ἀπὸ μιᾶς ἀρχῆς) in a single living being one might understand one part from another part (παρ' ἄλλου μέρους ἄλλο). For one might even know someone's character, and the dangers he presents as well as means of guarding

[118] Porphyry, *VP* §15.21-26.

against them, by looking at his eyes or some other part of the body.[119] The stars, then, are parts, and we are, too. Some parts, then, will be understood by means of other parts. Everything is full of signs, and the one who understands one thing from another (ἐξ ἄλλου ἄλλο) is a certain kind of expert (σοφός τις).[120] There are at present many things that happen routinely which are known to all.

What, then, is this single order (ἡ σύνταξις ἡ μία)? For the existence of a single order makes reasonable the prediction by means of birds and all the other living beings by which we predict individual events (ἀφ' ὧν σημαινόμεθα ἕκαστα). All things must be joined to one another (Συνηρτῆσθαι δὴ δεῖ ἀλλήλοις τὰ πάντα) – and it is not only in the unified whole of particular living beings that one finds what has been nicely called 'a single united breath'[121] (σύμπνοια μία) but especially and in a prior manner in the universe – and a single principle must make the universe a complex unitary living being, one from all.

(*Enn.* 2.3.7.4-19, Gerson et al transl. slightly modified)

Here, I want to highlight five key points. First, (i) we learn that the content of the signification has already been determined – individual events are 'already written' (γεγραμμένα) in the heavens. Second, Plotinus states that (ii) signification is not the stars' primary function. This is consistent with what we saw in the previous chapter, namely that signification is one of the stars' external activities, i.e., an automatic and unintentional byproduct of their primary function and activity (contemplation). Third, (iii) Plotinus emphasizes that the possibility of signification depends on

[119]That Plotinus believed this is suggested by a story Porphyry recounts in *VP* (§11.1-8). In it, someone stole a necklace from Chione, one of the widows that lived with Plotinus, and he identified the thief simply by looking into everyone's eyes.

[120] I take this to be reference to a special kind of expertise, namely divination. As we shall see below, Plotinus does acknowledge that diviners know the 'that' (τὸ ὅτι). However, they do not know the 'why' (τὸ διότι). In this sense, the diviner can make inferences that others cannot. Yet, this expertise does not equate to the true wisdom that belongs to the World Soul. Plotinus generally accepts that for most people, Providence 'has unclear causes and allows grounds for complaint to those who do not know them.' (*Enn.* 4.3.16.24-25).

[121] This may be a reference to Galen's *De causis puls*. 4,88.13, where, in discussing the unity and interconnectedness of the body's parts, he cites Hippocrates, who states 'σύμπνοια μία, πάντα πᾶσι συμπαθέα, φύσις κοινή.' Simplicius (*In Phys*. 461.17-18) and Philoponus (*In GC* 106.34-35 and *Aet Mund*. 283.19-20) also quote this phrase, attributing it to Hippocrates as well.

there being a single order (τάξις/ σύνταξις).[122] At this point, it is unclear what sense of order Plotinus has in mind. He could mean order in the sense of (i) an organized system, (ii) sequence or (iii) both. What is clear is that the τάξις Plotinus refers to here encompasses and governs the entire universe, where each part is connected and has a specific function to perform. Thus, this τάξις is spelled out in terms of interconnectedness: everything in the sensible world is part of a unified whole, and as such, everything is interconnected. This idea is essential to Plotinus' explanation of the epistemological possibility of predicting future events: parts can be known by means of other parts *because* they all belong to one and the same whole (the cosmos). Fourth, (iv) I want to highlight that Plotinus twice mentions predictions about *individual* events (ἑκάστων/ ἕκαστα). This will be important when we discuss the scope of this τάξις. Finally, (v) we learn that all parts of the universe originate from a single principle that unifies them, ensuring that no part is separate from the whole. This unifying principle, as we shall see, is the World Soul.

But how does this explain that signification is possible? Part of the answer must be that the function of each individual part (and whole)[123] derives from (or is at least in some important way connected to) the τάξις of the universe. However, it is far from obvious how knowing one part

[122] Note that the Stoics, too, speak of a (σύν-)ταξις (see, e.g., Gellius *NA* 7.2.3 and Stobaeus *Ecl.* 1 79.1-12). And they, too, hold that 'the world was from its beginning set up in such a way that certain things should be preceded by certain signs […]' (Cicero, *De Div*. 1.117– 18). However, unlike Plotinus, the Stoics identify this τάξις with Fate. For Plotinus, the τάξις originates from νοῦς and as such, is first and foremost connected to Providence. This, as we saw in the Introduction (pp. 10-14), is metaphysically prior to Fate.

[123] As this quote makes clear, Plotinus also considers sensible wholes (such as living beings) 'parts' of the universe. The analogy to the human body suggests that even parts of such wholes perform individual functions and are thus part of the τάξις as well.

enables predictions about other parts even if all parts are interconnected. There must be more to this τάξις than the function that each part has been assigned.

The World Soul and the τάξις of the universe

We can find many references to this τάξις throughout the *Enneads*. Unsurprisingly, aside from *Enneads* 2.3 and 4.4 (treatises that extensively deal with the stars), we get the most detailed discussion in Plotinus' treatises on Providence (*Enneads* 3.2 and 3.3.), more specifically in connection with the World Soul which (on Plotinus' view) administers this cosmos both providentially and effortlessly.[124] The passage I want to focus on comes from *Ennead* 4.4.39.22, because here, Plotinus not only refers to the τάξις of the universe, but also talks about laws of the universe that are created and interwoven by the World Soul. Due to its relevance and difficulty, the passage is here cited in its entirety:

> Since all things are always arranged in an ordered system (Συνταττομένων δὲ ἀεὶ πάντων) and since all things contribute to one single end (καὶ εἰς ἓν συντελούντων πάντων), everything is signified (σημαίνεσθαι πάντα). 'Virtue has no master'[125] but even its works are woven together (συνυφαίνεσθαι) in the order (τῇ συντάξει) inasmuch as what is here depends on (ἐξηρτημένων) what is there: the things in this universe depend on more divine beings, and this universe, too, participates in those. Accordingly, things in this universe do not come to be on the basis of seminal principles, but on the basis of [intelligible] principles (οὐ κατὰ σπερματικούς, ἀλλὰ κατὰ λόγους) that also include things which are prior to those on the level of seminal principles. For there is nothing in the seminal principles that happens outside the sphere of the seminal principles themselves, nor of the things that derive from matter and contribute to the whole, nor of the mutual interactions that derive from the things that have come to be (τῶν δρωμένων εἰς ἄλληλα παρὰ τῶν γενομένων).

[124] E.g., *Enn.* 2.3.8.4-5; 2.9.7.28-39; 3.1.8.1-8; 3.2.4.25-32; 3.2.13.18-25; 3.2.5.9-15; 3.2.15.13-15; 3.3.1.9-12; 3.3.2.6-15; 4.3.10.10-13 and 25-27; 4.3.12.12-25; 4.3.16.15-17; 4.4.10.6-15; 4.4.33.1-7; 4.4.35.8-12; 4.7.3.28-35.

[125] Plato, *Rep.* 617e3.

> [11] Rather, the λόγος of the universe [viz. the World Soul][126] is more like a λόγος (κατὰ λόγον) that lays down the order and law of a city (κόσμον πόλεως καὶ νόμον), knowing already what actions the citizens will perform (ἃ πράξουσιν) and why they will perform them (δι' ἃ πράξουσι). And the λόγος of the universe [viz. the World Soul] makes laws with a view to all this (πρὸς ταῦτα πάντα νομοθετοῦντος) and weaves together with the laws (συνυφαίνοντος τοῖς νόμοις) all the things the citizens undergo and all the things they do (τὰ πάθη πάντα αὐτῶν καὶ τὰ ἔργα), as well as the honor and dishonor attaching to their deeds, with everything moving towards harmony by a path where everything happens *as if* spontaneously (οἷον αὐτομάτῃ). But the signification is not for the purpose of signifying things beforehand (προηγουμένως), rather, since things come about in this way (οὕτω), one thing is signified by another (σημαίνεται ἐξ ἄλλων ἄλλα). For from the fact that all things are one and derive from a unity, one thing can be known from another, a cause from its effect, and the subsequent from the preceding, or the composite from one of its parts (τὸ σύνθετον ἀπὸ θατέρου), because the universe produces one part and another together (θάτερον καὶ θάτερον ὁμοῦ ποιῶν).
>
> (*Enn.* 4.4.39.1-22, Gerson et al transl. slightly modified)

There is a lot to unpack here. I shall return to this passage below but for now let us begin with a couple of general observations. First, here, too, (i) Plotinus connects the τάξις of the universe to signification. The thought seems to be the same as above: because everything is part of the τάξις of the universe, everything is signified. Second, we learn that it is (ii) the World Soul (the λόγος of the universe) that creates the laws that govern the sensible world, and by virtue of these laws, it also weaves everything together. I shall return to this below. For now, it suffices to note that the World Soul always providentially orders the sensible world in such a marvelous manner that everything *appears* to happen spontaneously, when in reality, *nothing* happens spontaneously from the global, i.e., the World Soul's perspective. This is reflected in the third point I would like to highlight which concerns the scope. Here (iii) Plotinus maintains that *everything* is part of the τάξις of the universe – even the works of virtue are 'woven together in the order'. Fourth, (iv) that all things are contained

[126] That the λόγος of the universe corresponds to the World Soul is made clear in numerous passages. Cf., e.g., *Enn.* 3.2.4.18-19; 3.2.5.9-5; 3.2.12.1-7; 3.2.16.10-17; 6.7.7.8-16.

in this τάξις is in turn explained in terms of metaphysical dependence: because every part of the sensible world depends on and derives from a unified whole, one thing can be known from another. This, too, is in line with what we saw above. Finally, Plotinus links the discussion of the contents of the τάξις to signification. Here his main point is that (v) signification does *not* exist for the purpose of predicting future events. Rather, it automatically results from the fact that all things everlastingly unfold according to the τάξις of the universe which is implemented by a single principle (the World Soul).

In what follows, we shall focus on (ii) and (iii). That is, we will investigate what the World Soul's administration consists in and what the scope of the τάξις of the universe amounts to. This discussion will provide support for thinking that we should take the above passage at face value: the World Soul has foreknowledge of all sensible goings-on. This, I shall argue, implies that these things are always already contained in the τάξις of the universe. Let us begin with (ii). Here, I will show that on Plotinus' view, the World Soul's administration is effortless. This, I shall argue, rules out an indeterminist reading that rejects the strong view that everything we do is already contained in the τάξις. Instead, one might claim, the World Soul *reacts* to our actions and maintains the τάξις and tapestry of the universe accordingly. After all, Plotinus holds that the rational part of the soul is not subject to Fate, suggesting our actions are not predetermined. In the next section, I will provide ample evidence that this reading is not viable.

How the World Soul administers the cosmos

Plotinus, following Plato's *Timaeus,* thinks of the cosmos as a rational living thing, a composite of body and soul. The cosmos is administered and unified by the World Soul whose lower part, Nature,

is 'woven' throughout the entire universe.[127] The higher, undescended part of the World Soul has direct access to the Intellect (and thus to all the Forms). At the same time, it also endows Nature, its lower part, with images (λόγοι) of all these Forms.[128] Thus, the World Soul has a foot in both realms, as it were. This is important for two reasons. First, it explains how it can produce the sensible world as image of the true intelligible cosmos. The cosmos is an inferior image and automatic byproduct of the World Soul but nonetheless, by virtue of being ensouled by the World Soul, it is a perfect rational living being. Second, it also explains how the World Soul can produce and administer the sensible world by looking to higher principles:[129]

> The World Soul gave to the body of the universe as much of itself as it could receive (ἔδωκε τῷ παντὶ σώματι αὐτῷ τε ἔχειν ὅσον δύναται παρ' αὐτῆς ἔχειν), and it itself remains without care (ἀπραγμόνως), not administering the universe by discursive thought (οὐκ ἐκ διανοίας διοικοῦσα), nor making any corrections (οὐδέ τι διορθουμένη); rather, it is by looking to what is before it [viz. Intellect] (τῇ εἰς τὸ πρὸ αὐτῆς θέᾳ) that it orders the body of the universe (κατακοσμοῦσα) through its astonishing power (δυνάμει θαυμαστῇ).
>
> (*Enn.* 2.9.2.12-15)

[127] Cf. *Enn.* 2.2.3.2. Note that for Plotinus 'permeating' and 'weaving' do not imply spatial extension, which is why he is willing to use this kind of language in numerous places. For διαπλέκειν, see *Enn.* 1.1.4.13 and 16-17; 2.2.3.2, for συμπλέκειν see *Enn.* 1.1.12.8; 1.3.5.3; 3.3.2.3 and 9; 4.3.16.5; 4.4.38.17; 3.3.6.3; 6.3.9.16, for πλέκειν see *Enn.* 1.3.4.15; 3.1.8.7; for ἐμπλέκειν see *Enn.* 2.2.3.10; for συνυφαίνειν see *Enn.* 3.2.9.29; 4.3.15.18; 4.3.16.17; 4.4.39.3 and 14.

[128] Cf., e.g., *Enn.* 2.3.17.19.

[129] Given the structural similarity between the World Soul and human beings, this principle also applies to humans. However, there is a significant difference between the World Body and our bodies: our bodies require constant care and attention. Consequently, most people are preoccupied with mundane activities and fail to recognize their higher soul's contemplation. As a result, they don't achieve the effortless administration exhibited by the World Soul.

One problem Plotinus has to address is how, given the variety and differences of all the parts that make up the cosmos, we still have a unified whole. As we can see from *Ennead* 3.2. Plotinus is well aware of this issue:

> But just as in the λόγοι in a seed everything is together in the same place, and nothing is vying or at odds with or hindering anything else, yet once something develops into a mass, different parts could be in different places and one part could actually hinder another, and one thing could consume something else, so, too, this universe has actually arisen from a single Intellect and the λόγος which flows from it [viz. Soul], and this universe has been divided, and, of necessity some things are friendly and well-disposed, others hostile and at war, some willingly, others even unwillingly harming each other, some things destroyed to effect the generation of others; and yet it [the λόγος, viz. the World Soul] imposes a single harmony on the things that are producing and undergoing these effects – each of them utter its own notes but the λόγος over them [viz. the World Soul] produces a harmony and *single order* in the whole (τοῦ δὲ λόγου ἐπ' αὐτοῖς τὴν ἁρμονίαν καὶ μίαν τὴν σύνταξιν εἰς τὰ ὅλα ποιουμένου.) (*Enn.* 3.2.2.18-31, Gerson et al transl. slightly revised)

Plotinus acknowledges that the sensible world must be divided because, unlike the intelligible realm, it involves space and extension. Thus, conflicts and opposition necessarily arise at the microcosmic (or local) level,[130] presumably because each part 'utters its own notes'. Note, however, that Plotinus maintains that the World Soul imposes a universal harmony and a single order (σύνταξις) on all particulars such that the conflicts that we perceive as such at the microcosmic (local) level are in fact harmonious at the macrocosmic (global) level.

Regarding the administration of the cosmos, Plotinus, echoing Plato's *Phaedrus*,[131] maintains that the World Soul 'is certainly managing this sensible universe on the basis of a λόγος.'[132] We find

[130] By microcosmic level I mean not just conflicts between parts of a single animal but also conflicts between wholes (e.g., animals, cities, states). Note that such wholes count as parts from the macrocosmic perspective. Cf., *Enn.* 2.3.7.16-23.

[131] 246c1-2.

[132] *Enn*. 2.3.13.3-4: ψυχῆς δὴ τὸ πᾶν τόδε διοικούσης κατὰ λόγον.

Plotinus' most elaborate discussion of this in *Ennead* 2.3.16, which is almost exclusively devoted to figuring out how exactly we should understand this Platonic claim. Plotinus begins by presenting us with three different options:

(1) The World Soul produces each species sequentially but is otherwise not at all involved in sensible events. That is, it merely watches (ἰδοῦσα μόνον) as these things destroy and benefit one another. (*Enn.* 2.3.16.6-13)

(2) The World Soul produces each species and is also the cause of what its products experience at each other's hands, as their actions are ultimately due to its having created them. (*Enn.* 2.3.16.13-15)

(3) Nature[133] produces each species and 'includes this particular thing's acting or being acted on in this particular way, so that not even these particular events happen at random or by chance but occur in the way they do of necessity.' (*Enn.* 2.3.16.15-17)

I take it that these three options are meant to cover different degrees of involvement and power. Whereas on option (1) the World Soul is only minimally involved, option (2) extends the World Soul's power in that it is the *ultimate* cause of sensible events. However, it is not *directly* causing these things, and it also does not seem to have foreknowledge of any events. Rather, it is only by assuming that causation is transitive that we can say that the World Soul is the cause of sensible goings-on. Option (3) is maximally inclusive. Here, the World Soul/Nature is said not only to produce each species – it also includes what each particular thing will do or undergo. Thus, nothing happens

[133] Plotinus here just says 'ὁ λόγος'. But given that Nature is a λόγος of the higher part of the World Soul and given that it is the one that is actively engaged in creating the sensible world, it is plausible to infer that Plotinus here means Nature.

randomly –everything is predetermined.

It is not immediately obvious which option Plotinus favors, since he does not explicitly argue for or against any of them. However, what he says in the remainder of this chapter strongly suggests that he accepts the third option, which is also the only option he engages with. Having just presented the three options, Plotinus goes on by emphasizing that the World Soul, by virtue of its λόγοι 'knows what comes about from all its works' (2.3.16.20-21). Thus, instead of dismissing the first two options, Plotinus immediately zeroes in on the third option, making it even more inclusive by adding that the World Soul also has (fore-) knowledge of what its products will do. Thus, we now have a first answer as to what he means when he says that the World Soul manages this universe κατὰ λόγον: it (i) produces each species;[134] (ii) necessitates what individuals will do or suffer, and (iii) it also has (fore-) knowledge of what will come about from all its works. However, this answer is not sufficient. The implicit question Plotinus wants to tackle next concerns the way the World Soul manages the universe in this maximally inclusive way. Given the complexity of Plotinus' discussion, I will first quote the remainder of 2.3.16 and then analyze it step by step:

> [23] So the soul, either by taking these things in (παραλαβοῦσα) or by foreseeing (προιδοῦσα) them, completes the subsequent effects (τὰ ἐφεξῆς) and connects the latter to the former, such that antecedents and consequences are completely connected, and to these the soul completes and connects the subsequent effects as antecedents to further consequences, starting from the present conditions (ἐκ τῶν παρόντων). And perhaps because of this, the subsequent effects are always worse. For example, men today differ from the men of old, because the λόγοι give way to the affections of matter on account of the distance between

[134] In lines 17-19, Plotinus appears to deny the production claim, restricting the claim to the World Soul's knowledge: Ἆρ' οὖν τῶν λόγων αὐτὰ ποιούντων; Ἢ ὄντων μὲν τῶν λόγων, οὐχ ὡς ποιούντων δέ, ἀλλ' ὡς εἰδότων. Note, first, however, that Plotinus here talks about the World Soul's λόγοι, not the World Soul itself. Moreover, he is quick to add: μᾶλλον δὲ τῆς ψυχῆς τῆς τοὺς λόγους τοὺς γεννητικοὺς ἐχούσης εἰδυίας τὰ ἐκ τῶν ἔργων συμβαίνοντα αὐτῆς ἁπάντων· Thus, the World Soul does have generative λόγοι but it also knows what comes about from all of its works/ λόγοι.

the men of old and us and ever-present necessity. The soul, then, always paying attention (Συνορῶσα) to different things and being consciously aware (παρακολουθοῦσα) of the things that happen to its works (τοῖς τῶν αὐτῆς ἔργων παθήμασι), has a corresponding kind of life and is not delivered from fretting about its work (οὐκ ἀπήλλακται τῆς ἐπὶ τῷ ἔργῳ φροντίδος), *as it would be had it brought its work to a close, once and for all fixing things so that they will be in a good state* (ὅπως ἔξει καλῶς καὶ εἰς ἀεὶ ἅπαξ μηχανησαμένη); it is rather like some farmer who, having sown seeds or even planted a tree, is always setting all the things right (ἀεὶ διορθοῦται) that winter rains and sustained frosts and wind-storms have damaged.

[36] But if this is absurd, then must we say that the destruction (ἡ φθορὰ) and the effects deriving from bad deeds (τὰ ἀπὸ κακίας ἔργα) were already known (ἤδη ἔγνωσται) or even contained within the λόγοι (κεῖται ἐν τοῖς λόγοις)? But if this is the case, then we will end up saying that the λόγοι themselves produce these bad things (τὰς κακίας), even though in the crafts and in their λόγοι there are no errors (ἁμαρτία) nor is there what is contrary to the craft (παρὰ τὴν τέχνην), nor the destruction of what is in accordance with the craft (ἡ φθορὰ τοῦ κατὰ τέχνην).

[41] But here someone will reply that there is nothing that is contrary to nature (μηδὲν παρὰ φύσιν) or bad (μηδὲ κακὸν) for the whole universe. But he will nevertheless concede that there is better and worse (χεῖρον καὶ τὸ βέλτιον). Why, then, if what is worse also makes a [positive] contribution to the whole universe, shouldn't we say that *everything* is good? For even the contraries help towards completion, and there would be no cosmos without them. [46] For this is also how things stand with particular living beings. The λόγος compels and shapes (ἀναγκάζει καὶ πλάττει) the better things [to exist], but whatever is not such lies potentially in the λόγοι (δυνάμει κεῖται ἐν τοῖς λόγοις) but actually in the things that come to be (ἐνεργείᾳ δὲ ἐν τοῖς γενομένοις), with the soul no longer having to produce nor stir up the λόγοι, since matter, by virtue of the shaking (τῷ σεισμῷ) of the primary λόγοι (προηγουμένων λόγων), already (ἤδη) produces the things that come from it, [i.e.,] the worse things (τὰ χείρω) and yet it [matter] is nonetheless mastered towards (πρὸς) [producing] the better things (τὰ βελτίω). (*Enn.* 2.3.16.23-52)

The first part runs from lines 23-36. Here, Plotinus presents the first option as to how the World Soul administers the universe on the maximally inclusive picture. This option, which he will ultimately dismiss as 'absurd,' amounts to the following view. The World Soul 'knows what comes about from its works' either by actively taking in (παραλαβοῦσα) or foreseeing (προιδοῦσα) cause–effects pairs. Note that both verbs imply some kind of perceptual awareness, and, as the subsequent lines show, a discursive process. The World Soul's primary function seems to be to establish and maintain a

chronological connection between preceding events and their subsequent outcomes. Plotinus again highlights the temporal nature of this account by adding that the World Soul would start 'from the present conditions (ἐκ τῶν παρόντων). One absurd consequence that Plotinus believes may result from such a view is a retrograde evolution, where living beings would degenerate over time.[135] It is not entirely clear why he thinks this could result but what Plotinus seems to have in mind is that the World Soul would be overwhelmed by its task. This is suggested by the next lines, where the World Soul is described as always being consciously aware of what is happening to its works (παρακολουθοῦσα τοῖς τῶν αὐτῆς ἔργων παθήμασι). Here Plotinus compares the World Soul to a farmer who must constantly devise strategies to improve the condition of his crop. This view, Plotinus says, is 'absurd'. This brings us to the next step, which runs from lines 36-41.

Here, Plotinus (or someone in the classroom) raises the following concern. If we dismiss the interventionist farmer picture, then the only remaining option would be to say that bad things and their effects are already contained in the λόγοι and known to the World Soul. But there are many reasons why we should avoid this view. For one, not even in the λόγοι of τέχναι are there any errors or things that are contrary to the craft (implied: so there better be no errors in the λόγοι of Nature!). Moreover, in the case of τέχναι, the destruction of the products is not contained. Why, then, should we accept that in the much more perfect domain of Nature destruction, vices, and παρὰ φύσιν things are contained in and produced by the λόγοι? These are serious concerns, and Plotinus addresses them in lines 41-52. I take his response to be this.

[135] Perhaps Plotinus here expresses his disapproval of the Statesmen myth, according to which the World Soul first manages everything 'very well' but over time becomes forgetful and ends up being 'in danger of destroying both itself and the things in it.' (273c4-d4). Or else, this could be a stab at Philo, who in his commentary on the *Genesis* appears to defend a version of retrograde evolution. See *De Opific. Mund.* 140-141.

We need to distinguish between what is bad in an absolute sense, and what is worse or inferior relative to other things. This distinction, I shall argue, allows us to say that there is a sense in which 'bad' and 'παρά φύσιν'[136] things are already contained in the λόγοι, but at the same time, we can safeguard the World Soul's nobility. Plotinus' reasoning seems to be as follows:

1. From the global perspective, there is nothing that is παρὰ φύσιν or bad.
2. This does not rule out that there are better and worse things.
3. [Implied:] From the local perspective, there are παρὰ φύσιν or bad things.
4. If we were to take the things that are bad or παρὰ φύσιν from the local perspective and, as it were, zoomed out, we would see that these, too, make a positive contribution to the whole.

C_1 Everything is – globally speaking – good.

C_2 Not everything is – locally speaking – good.

C_2 Nonetheless, we can still describe things in terms of the relative goodness or badness of things in relation to one another, both from the local and from the global perspective.

The idea is that while, globally speaking, everything is good, locally speaking there are genuinely bad and παρὰ φύσιν things, e.g., vice and *terata*.[137] However, if we consider such things from the global

[136] I put these terms in scare quotes because Plotinus' response suggests that he thinks that such a concern can only arise from the local perspective – on the global level, there are no bad things.

[137] The example Plotinus gives in *Enn.* 5.9.10.1–6 is (congenital) lameness. There, he emphasizes that τέρατα occur when λόγοι fail to dominate the matter. *Prima facie*, this appears to be in tension with the view he expresses in lines 46–52, according to which cases of teratology result from the universal λόγος *dominating* the matter. However, if we keep in mind the distinction between the global and the local perspective, the tension can be resolved. For locally speaking, it is correct that certain λόγοι failed to dominate a particular matter. But this is perfectly compatible with saying that the universal λόγος succeeded precisely because

perspective, we can no longer say that they are *bad* or παρὰ φύσιν. Globally speaking we cannot say that vice is *bad*[138]– only that it is *worse than* virtue.[139] Likewise, we can say that dogs are *better than* rats, and orcas are *worse than* the sun. Note, however, that this relative inferiority does not mean that rats or orcas are *bad*. After all, if we compared orcas to cats, we would say that orcas are *better* than cats. Plotinus' point, then, is that relative judgments of value do not imply absolute badness. This is why, on the global level, there is nothing bad or παρὰ φύσιν; such judgments apply only at the local level. The reason for Plotinus' optimism regarding the global perspective is that everything has always already been set up such that it will always ultimately benefit the whole. Here, Plotinus gives the example of contraries. As he says here, they too 'help towards completion, and there would be no cosmos without them.' The point, I take it, is that from the local perspective, contraries are constantly in conflict. Yet globally speaking, these very contraries necessarily make the whole harmonious and good. Plotinus already made this very point in an earlier treatise, where he uses the helpful analogy of a play whose plot is overall harmonious even though it contains many conflicts.[140]

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those λόγοι were supposed to fail the matter in exactly the way they did. Thus, I take Plotinus' account of teratology, as discussed in Wilberding (2011 and 2014), to be consistent with the account we find here.

[138] This is also confirmed in *Enn.* 3.2.5.15-21, where Plotinus maintains that poverty, illness, and vice all accomplish something useful for the whole (εἰργάσατό τι χρήσιμον εἰς τὸ ὅλον). See also *Enn.* 2.3.18.5-8. A similar idea is found in Chrysippus, who holds that vice accords with the λόγος of the universe and is not without usefulness in relation to the world as a whole. See Plutarch, *De Stoic. Rep*. 1050f and 1051a–b (= *SVF* 2.1181).

[139] Now, we might have expected Plotinus to say that vice is 'less good' than virtue, rather than 'worse than' virtue, given his view that, globally speaking, everything is good. This would be in line with what Aristotle suggests at *Topics* 2.11, 115b3–7, namely that we should not use the comparative if the adjective does not apply: 'a bad thing will never be said to have a greater or less degree of goodness, but always of badness.' However, as we can see from his use of χεῖρον, Plotinus does not seem to be concerned about this point.

[140] Cf., *Enn.* 3.2.16.32-39.

There, too, the point is that even though contraries might cause conflicts at the local level, we should always remember that the World Soul created these very conflicts because at the global level, they are harmonious and good.

In the final bit (lines 46-52), Plotinus tells us that the same reasoning applies to the case of particular living beings. Thus, whatever is 'bad' or 'παρὰ φύσιν' for this particular living being is globally speaking good. Let's take an example. George was born with one leg. From a local perspective (his own, his parents', etc.), this may seem bad and contrary to nature (παρὰ φύσιν). However, it seems that Plotinus would insist that from a global perspective, George's condition makes a positive contribution to the whole and is actually an expression of goodness. Unfortunately, Plotinus does not go into details here, but I think he would agree with the following explication. The World Soul always already knows that this malformed body would be the appropriate body for a given individual. Thus, the malformation is – from the global perspective – good, because it is the appropriate body for such and such a soul. For instance, the soul that chose George's life and body, in its previous incarnation, did something bad that warranted this exact kind of punishment. Needless to say, George and his family probably see things differently. This, however, is due to their lack of knowledge of the bigger picture.[141]

Note that one rather surprising view Plotinus expresses here is that the one-leggedness is strictly speaking *not* due to the matter. Rather, it results because the universal λόγος has

[141] I intentionally avoid mentioning ignorance here because I want to exclude any notion of normative ignorance, specifically the idea that George *ought* to have knowledge of the bigger picture. This cannot be right, as his lack of knowledge seems necessary for punishments to be effective: if George knew all along that his one-leggedness was – in the global sense – good, he would not *experience* it as something bad. This, in turn, would render the very concept of punishment superfluous. By this, I don't mean to suggest that punishment is exclusively retributive; it may well be restorative.

dominated.[142] This, I think, is the reason Plotinus emphasizes that the soul[143] does not have to do anything – the matter which *by virtue of the shaking of the primary* (global) λόγοι produces these (locally!) 'bad' outcomes. However, from the global perspective everything went according to plan and a good thing resulted. Thus, Plotinus can say that everything – including what we take to be 'bad' and 'παρά φύσιν' things – is already contained in the World Soul's λόγοι. However, this does not compromise the World Soul's nobility. There are indeed better and worse things, but this does not imply that anything is, at this level, bad or contrary to nature (παρὰ φύσιν).

Let us take stock. We started with the question of how Plotinus conceives of the maximally inclusive manner in which the World Soul administers this universe. He presented us with two options. On the first option, the World Soul administers the cosmos discursively by establishing and maintaining a chronological link between events. This is how it necessitates what individuals will do or undergo. However, this constant awareness makes the World Soul's life extremely laborious and such an overwhelming burden that the degeneration of the world could result. He also likens the World Soul's life to that of a worried farmer who perpetually has to manage and rectify outcomes. On this picture, the World Soul does not really have true foreknowledge. Granted, it does 'know how its products turn out' but this knowledge results from a process of deliberation and is not the stable and unchanging kind of wisdom Plotinus ascribes to the World Soul. Thus, what Plotinus criticizes

[142] Cf., *Enn.* 3.3.4.29-34, where Plotinus makes the same point.

[143] It is unclear which soul Plotinus has in mind. He could mean the father's soul, the mother's soul, or the soul of the child in question. Be that as it may, the main point is that the one-leggedness has been accounted for by προηγούμενοι λόγοι (i.e., those at the level of the World Soul). Thus, it has been predetermined at a higher level that the father's seed and/or the mother's καταμήνια will be impeded such that a one-legged child will result.

here is an interventionist picture that attempts but fails to retain the World Soul's nobility. All of this explains why Plotinus takes this view to be untenable and absurd.

The view Plotinus puts forward is one on which the World Soul has stable and unchanging foreknowledge of everything that is going to happen in the sensible world. *Everything* is already contained in the World Soul's λόγοι. This is why 'not even these particular events happen at random or by chance but occur in the way they do of necessity.' Unfortunately, this response does not spell out how exactly the World Soul administers the cosmos. Now, I do think we can infer from Plotinus' criticism of the first that he favors a picture on which the World Soul administers the universe in a non-discursive, effortless, manner that does not require it to pay attention or perceive sensible goings-on. But given that elsewhere Plotinus discusses the World Soul's effortless manner of administration in more detail,[144] I want to look at one such passage.

The passage I have in mind is from *Ennead* 4.4.10. Having just described the Intellect's non-discursive manner of thinking, Plotinus sets out to inquire whether the World Soul's manner of thinking is different from that of the Intellect:

> But the life of the cosmos which contains the ruling principle (τὸ ἡγούμενον) in itself still requires discussion, asking whether this, too, does not have its life in calculative reasoning (ἐν τῷ λογίζεσθαι), or in considering what it must do (ἐν τῷ ζητεῖν ὅ τι δεῖ ποιεῖν). *For what it must do is already known and ordered* ("Ηδη γὰρ ἐξεύρηται καὶ τέτακται ἃ δεῖ), *without having ever been set in order* (οὐ ταχθέντα). For things that have been set in order (τὰ γὰρ ταχθέντα) are things that come to be (ἦν τὰ γινόμενα), but what causes them is the order (τὸ δὲ ποιοῦν αὐτὰ ἡ τάξις). But this [order] is the activity of a soul which depends on a stable wisdom (ἐξηρτημένης μενούσης φρονήσεως), of which the order in it is an image. *And since that soul does not change, it is necessary that this order does not change either* (Οὐ τρεπομένης δὲ ἐκείνης

[144] E.g. ἀπραγμόνως: 2.9.2.13-15 and 4.8.2.52-53; ἀπόνως: 2.9.18.17 and 4.3.10.26, ἄπονος καὶ ἀβλαβὴς ἡ διοίκησις: 2.1.4.31-32; οὐ καμεῖται: 2.2.1.38.

> ἀνάγκη μηδὲ ταύτην τρέπεσθαι).[145] For it is not the case that the soul sometimes looks there (ἐκεῖ) [to the intelligible world], and at other times it does not (ὁτὲ δὲ οὐ βλέπει). For if it ceased [to look] it would find itself at a loss (ἀπολειπομένη γὰρ ἂν ἀποροῖ). For it is one soul and has one function. For what controls is one and it always rules (κρατοῦν ἀεί), not ruling sometimes and at other times being ruled.
>
> (*Enn*. 4.4.10.6-16, Gerson et al transl. slightly modified)

First, we can note that the World Soul does not deliberate.[146] Accordingly, it also does not consider possible interventions. In fact, there are no options to consider, because the World Soul derives the blueprint of the cosmos from νοῦς.[147] Thus, it always already knows what it must do.[148] Plotinus explains that the World Soul derives this knowledge from the intelligible World: by always looking *there*, it also always knows precisely what to do *here*. It knows this because it itself imposes the order (τάξις) that makes all things come about. This is why Plotinus can describe the World Soul's wisdom as stable and unchanging. Plotinus is also clear that the τάξις does not change either – any changes, that is, any options that would arise would lead to the undesirable consequence that the World Soul is ruled in the sense that sensible goings-on would bring the World Soul into a state of puzzlement

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[145] Alternatively, as both Armstrong and Gerson et al do, we could take the ἐκείνης to refer to the higher soul (i.e., that which has stable wisdom) and the ταύτην to refer to ψυχῆς…ἐξηρτημένης: 'And since this [stable] soul does not change, it is necessary that this lower one (Nature) does not change either.' This does not affect my argument because even this alternative translation implies that the τάξις that Nature has as an image is not subject to change.

[146] Cf., *Enn.* 4.4.11.11-13; 3.2.1.20-26.

[147] The sensible world is an *automatic* byproduct, and thus there are no alternative possibilities to consider. Cf., e.g., *Enn.* 3.2.2.1-18; 3.2.14.1-6; 5.8.7.1-28 and 12.15; 6.7.12. Here I disagree with Caluori (2015: 56) who argues that the Soul thinks about how to best create the sensible world and in thinking about this, chooses from several options: 'the paradigm alone [viz. νοῦς] cannot completely determine in which way the sensible world has to be arranged – it could have been determined in a number of excellent ways.'

[148] Cf. *Enn.* 4.4.12.27-28, where he tells us that the World Soul's 'wisdom about future things, therefore, in its stability, is of the same kind as that of present things, and this is outside the sphere of calculative reasoning.'

about what it should do next. And this, as we saw, is something Plotinus emphatically and consistently denies. All this strongly suggests that Plotinus would reject the idea that the World Soul reacts to any sensible goings-on and revises the τάξις of the universe. Finally, I want to highlight that Plotinus here tells us that the τάξις is an activity (ἐνεργεία) of a soul that depends on stable wisdom. By this, Plotinus means that the ordering is the activity of Nature – the soul that depends on its higher part (in our passage τὸ ἡγούμενον) which is in a state of 'stable wisdom.' Thus, it is the order which Nature bears as an image that causes it to produce sensible things. This brings me to another objection I would like to address.

One could think that what I have shown so far only applies to the higher part of the World Soul. Nature, by contrast – as Plotinus himself emphasizes – is actively engaged in the sensible world and so we could just say that it is Nature that 'steps in' and reacts to sensible goings-on. On this view, the higher part of the World Soul would administer the sensible world in a non-interventionist manner, whereas Nature maintains the sensible world in an interventionist manner such that it reacts to sensible goings-on. In what follows, I will provide several reasons that speak against this reading. First, Plotinus makes it very clear that Nature's activity is simply an automatic byproduct of the contemplation of its higher part. Thus, Nature produces 'unintentionally' (ἀπροαιρέτως),[149] 'automatically, as if under orders' (ὡσπερεὶ ἐπιταχθεῖσα ἤδη)[150] and has 'no apprehension or conscious perception of anything' (οὐθενὸς ἀντίληψιν οὐδὲ σύνεσιν ἔχει).[151] This alone seems sufficient to rule out

[149] *Enn.* 4.4.13.8-9.

[150] *Enn.* 2.3.17.17. For a thorough discussion of Nature's manner of production, see Wilberding (2008) and (2022).

[151] *Enn.* 4.4.13.14. The context is important here. As Plotinus' discussion of Nature in *Enn.* 3.8 makes clear, he does not want to deny that Nature has *any* cognitive capacities – it certainly has the capacity to contemplate itself (*Enn.* 3.8.4.25). What Plotinus wants to highlight in our passage is that Nature does not have (and does

that Nature reacts to sensible goings-on. That Plotinus would reject the view that Nature reacts to sensible goings-on is also suggested by another passage, which lends further support to my suggested reading of the farmer analogy above:

> The soul of the universe is always transcendent, because it does not have the property of descending even with its lower part [viz. Nature], nor by turning towards the things here below (τῷ μηδὲ εἶναι αὐτῇ τὸ κατελθεῖν μηδὲ τῷ κάτω μηδὲ ἐπιστροφὴν τῶν τῇδε), but ours are not, because they have a part cut out for them here, and because they turn towards what requires care (καὶ τῇ ἐπιστροφῇ τοῦ προσδεομένου φροντίσεως). The one [viz. Nature] is like the soul in a large plant which manages the plant without toil (ἀπόνως) and noise (ἀψόφως), being the lowest part of the soul of the universe (τοῦ κατωτάτω τῆς ψυχῆς τοῦ παντός), but the lower part of ours is as if worms were to arise in a rotten part of the plant; for this is the status of our ensouled body in the universe. But our other soul, which is of the same kind as the higher part of the soul of the universe (ὁμοειδοῦς τῷ ἄνω τῆς ὅλης), is like some farmer were he to become concerned about the worms in the plant and were he to be afflicted with worries in respect of it (ταῖς μερίμναις πρὸς τῷ φυτῷ γίγνοιτο) [...].
>
> (*Enn.* 4.3.4.21-33, Gerson et al transl. slightly modified)

Plotinus begins by comparing the World Soul's lowest part (Nature) to our soul's lowest part (the vegetative part). This makes sense because the World Soul has a body to take care of and so do we. However, as Plotinus makes clear, there is a crucial difference: the World Soul (and importantly, this includes Nature)[152] does not turn towards the sensible world at all, because there is there is no need to do so.[153] What the analogy suggests is that the way Nature maintains the world body is importantly different from how our individual natures take care of our bodies. The difference, I think, is twofold.

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not need to have) φαντασία, because φαντασία is comprehension of 'what comes from outside' and 'allows one who has an image to have knowledge of what has happened to him.' This goes back to a point he emphasized in the previous lines, namely that Nature 'does not know but merely produces' (οὐδὲ οἶδε, μόνον δὲ ποιεῖ).

[152] Cf. *Enn.* 3.8.4.17 and.3.4.4.1-9.

[153] Another reason Plotinus gives elsewhere is that Nature knows exactly how its products will turn out. Thus, there is no need for it to turn towards what comes after it. See *Enn.* 4.4.12.

The first point concerns directedness. Whereas Nature can administer the World Body without directing its attention to it, we have to turn towards our bodies. The second point concerns the amount of care the respective kinds of body requires. As Plotinus says, the World Body is 'perfect and sufficient to itself and autonomous' (τέλεόν τε ὂν καὶ ἱκανὸν καὶ αὔταρκες) and 'needs only a, as it were, brief prompting' (βραχέος οἷον κελεύσματος δεῖται).[154] This is because on Plotinus' view everything is contained in the World Body[155] and so it is not in need of any external bodies. Moreover, there is nothing outside the World Body that could attack or destroy it.[156] Finally, as Plato already stated in the *Timaeus,* the World Body has no need of organs.[157] Consequently, the World Body does not have any bodily desires that Nature would need to fulfill.[158] By contrast, our bodies are always in need of nourishment and constantly attacked by external bodies.[159] Accordingly, our bodies require of care and attention as the comparison to a rotten part infested with worms quite forcefully highlights. We are like farmers who become concerned with this rotten part, dragging down even our higher soul in order to deal with the needs of our body.

This nicely fits with the reading of the farmer analogy in 2.3.16 that I suggested above. In

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[154] Cf., *Enn.* 4.8.2.15-16.

[155] Cf., *Enn.* 2.9.17.52ff.; 3.2.3.20ff.; 4.3.10.41-42. Needless to say, no sensible thing – not even the cosmos – could ever be as self-sufficient as intelligible things are, because the former always depend on the latter. Note also that strictly speaking we should say that everything is contained in the World Soul because Plotinus generally holds that body is in soul and not vice versa. Cf., *Enn.* 3.9.3, 5.5.9.29-31; 6.4.1.1-8.

[156] *Tim*. 32c5 ff. Cf. also *Enn*. 1.2.1.11-12 and 2.1.1.12-15. Even though Plotinus does not think that this is an adequate explanation of the universe's numerical persistence, he generally accepts this point. For a thorough discussion of this see Wilberding (2006): 95-104.

[157] *Tim*. 33c-34a.

[158] Cf., *Enn.* 4.8.2.17-18.

[159] Cf., *Enn.* 4.8.2.12-14.

both passages, Plotinus is very clear that the farmer picture does *not* apply to the World Soul – crucially, not even to Nature. This lends further support to my claim that Plotinus subscribes to option (3). Thus, the World Soul has eternally fixed everything 'once and for all.' It always already knows everything that is going to happen in the sensible world, including what individuals will do and undergo. This safeguards the idea that the World Soul administers the cosmos in the effortless manner Plotinus envisions while also ensuring that the World Soul's wisdom is stable and unchanging. All of this explains why Plotinus rejects the interventionist farmer picture.

To sum up. I have argued that on Plotinus' view, the World Soul's administration is effortless in the following sense. The higher part of the World Soul does not deliberate about (or perceive) any sensible goings-on. Likewise, Nature is not directed towards its products. Rather, its activity in the sensible world is simply an automatic byproduct that results from the contemplation of its higher part.[160] Accordingly, neither the World Soul nor Nature perceive or react to anything that happens in the sensible world. Thus, we can now see that the view that the World Soul maintains the τάξις of the universe in an interventionist manner is not a viable reading. By contrast, Plotinus makes clear that the administration of the sensible world happens on the basis of λόγοι that *never change*.[161] Thus, neither the World Soul, nor the λόγοι, nor the τάξις ever change. Rather, the World Soul always already knows what is going to happen and thus administers the cosmos in an effortless manner.

[160] Cf., e.g., *Enn.* 3.8.4.5–29; 4.4.13.1-12.

[161] At least not until all the heavenly bodies to realign to their starting position, i.e., until the arrival of the Great Year.

The law of the universe

If we return to our passage from *Ennead* 4.4.39 cited above, we can see that there Plotinus makes a very similar point. Recall that he describes the World Soul's administration by using the well-known analogy of comparing the World Soul to a lawgiver of a city.[162] The lawgiver is said to know already 'what' and 'why' the citizens will do certain things and makes laws accordingly. In the same way, Plotinus says, the World Soul makes the laws of the universe. This sounds as though everything we (the citizens) do is already known to the lawgiver and thus all our actions are predetermined. This is the strong reading I will defend. However, there is also a weaker reading available, which is grounded in the following two objections. First, laws are universal and thus cannot be about particulars and their actions. Second, the lawgiver does not in fact know that an individual S will do X at t_1. On this view, we could only say the following. Suppose the lawgiver has some knowledge about human nature and thus anticipates both vicious and virtuous deeds. The lawgiver then makes laws that determine appropriate punishments and rewards. For example, the lawgiver knows that it is part of human nature that we have to nourish our bodies, and they anticipate that certain circumstances might prompt someone to steal food. Knowing this, the lawgiver will design a law stating that if someone steals in circumstance C, then punishment P will follow. This reading would limit the lawgivers' scope to universal laws – he would neither design laws *with a view to particulars* nor with a view to *particular actions.* This is exactly the view certain Middle Platonists held:

> All things, he [viz. Plato] says, are within the sphere of Fate, but not all things are fated. For Fate has the structure of a law (νόμου τάξιν). *It does not say, for instance, that such and such a person will do this* (ὅδε μὲν τάδε ποιήσει), *and that such and such a person will suffer that* (ὅδε

[162] Cf., e.g. Philo, *De Opific. Mund.* 17–20; Alcinous, *Didask.* 16.2 (172.8–13); Plutarch, *Dem.* 42.9, Eusebius *Preparation for the Gospel* 15.6.12 (= Atticus, Fr. 4 Des Places), Ps.-Aristotle, *De Mundo* 6.398, Ps.-Plato, *Epist.* 2, 312e–313a.

> δὲ τάδε πείσεται). For this would lead to infinite [statements], since the things that happen are infinite and the circumstances concerning them are infinite; and since what is in our power (τὸ ἐφ' ἡμῖν) would vanish and so would praise and blame and everything of this sort.
>
> (*Didask.* 179.2-8, Dillon transl.)

I do not think that Plotinus agrees with his predecessors. For one, we already saw in our passage from *Ennead* 2.3.7 that Plotinus does not shy away from stating that individual events are part of the τάξις of the universe. Moreover, if I am right that in *Ennead* 2.3.16 Plotinus accepts the third option, we have another explicit commitment that the World Soul knows that 'the individual does or undergoes this (τὸ τόδε τόδε ποιῆσαι ἢ παθεῖν). Also, as we shall see in the final chapter of this dissertation, Plotinus maintains that moral blame is *never* appropriate. Thus, he does not share Alcinous' concern about specific laws doing away with moral responsibility.[163] Finally, I do not think that Plotinus subscribes to the idea that laws are exclusively universal. Rather, he seems to think that the laws that the World Soul lays down can (and must be) both universal and particular. This, I think, is suggested by the following passage:

> But things of a certain kind always have a fate of a certain kind, for a thing of one kind being realized, perhaps, now, for another later. The Intellect prior to the cosmos has its fate, too, to remain in the intelligible world, and sends forth as much as possible, that is, particular things are sent forth subject to the universal law (τὸ καθέκαστον τῷ καθόλου ὑποπῖπτον νόμῳ). For the universal (τὸ καθόλου) bears down upon each individual (ἑκάστῳ), and the law does not derive its power of fulfilment from outside (οὐκ ἔξωθεν) but is given to be in things themselves that use it (δέδοται ἐν τοῖς χρησαμένοις εἶναι) and bear it wherever they go. And when the law is put in place (ἐνστῇ) and when the time comes, what the law wants to happen (ὃ θέλει γενέσθαι) then happens through the agency of the things which have it (γίνεται τότε ὑπ' αὐτῶν τῶν ἐχόντων αὐτόν), with the result that they bring it to fulfilment in that they are bearing it, and it derives its strength from being established in them (ἰσχύσαντα ἐν τῷ ἐν αὐτοῖς αὐτὸν ἱδρῦσθαι), as though weighing down upon them and producing in them a desire and a pang (προθυμίαν ἐμποιοῦντα καὶ ὠδῖνα) to go where, in a way, the law in them tells them to go (οἷον ἐλθεῖν φθέγγεται).
>
> (*Enn.* 4.3.13.20-32, Gerson et al transl. slightly modified)

[163] Plotinus also thinks that τὸ ἐφ' ἡμῖν is compatible with determinism. This, too, I discuss in Chapter 4.

Here we learn that everyone bears the universal law, but Plotinus also maintains that this law produces *specific* desires[164] in different individuals. This, I think, is implied because if the desires in question were not tailored toward each individual, the law would have everyone going to the same place. Thus, here Plotinus describes how a universal law operates both universally and individually. But at least *prima facie*, this seems problematic or even contradictory. How can a law be both universal *and* individual? I think we can make sense of this if we bring in how Plotinus conceives of Fate and Providence. Recall that for him, Providence begins in νοῦς (this is 'perfect providence') and from there, extends to the higher World Soul. Once it reaches Nature, the lower part of the World Soul, it becomes Fate and as such, rules the sensible world.[165] This, I think helps us reconcile the tension as follows. According to Plotinus, the universal law originates at the level of νοῦς,[166] and is then handed down to the higher part of the World Soul, where it exists as undivided and all-encompassing. However, when it operates within the sensible world, the law is instantiated in individuals through Nature. As he says in *Ennead* 4.3.13:

> For the inescapable rule and the justice, which is in a ruling nature [viz. Nature], in this way [compels] each individual by virtue of the τάξις (ἐν τάξει) to go towards that which each has become (πρὸς ὅ ἐστιν ἕκαστον γενόμενον), an image of the model of its original choice and disposition (εἴδωλον προαιρέσεως καὶ διαθέσεως ἀρχετύπου) [...]
>
> (*Enn.* 4.3.13.1-3)

[164] I translate 'desire' because here, Plotinus uses προθυμία in an ordinary, non-technical sense. As Wilberding ('Plotinus on the Prepassions') shows, in *Ennead* 4.4.18-22, Plotinus develops a theory of the prepassions where προθυμία becomes a technical term for the preliminary affections (appetites, pains, and pleasures) the so-qualified body undergoes. However, this technical sense of προθυμία does not appear outside Plotinus' discussion of these prepassions.

[165] See Introduction, pp. 10-14.

[166] Cf. *Enn.* 5.9.5.28, where Plotinus describes νοῦς as the 'as it were primary lawgiver' (οἷον νομοθέτης πρῶτος).

In other words, that this law is instantiated within individual beings and tailored to their specific choices reflects the law's operation at the level of Nature (Fate), which simply acts out what the τάξις contains, and this includes sending individuals to their appropriate place. Thus, because Providence provides Nature (Fate) with an all-encompassing τάξις, Plotinus can ensure that the individualized manifestations of the universal law are not deviations but rather expressions of a divine, providential, and intelligible order:

> But when it is eternally necessary (ἀναγκαῖον ἀιδίως) by a law of nature (φύσεως νόμῳ) that the soul should do and experience (πάσχειν καὶ ποιεῖν) these things [viz. things in the sensible world], and, descending from that which is above it, in its procession (ἐν τῇ προσόδῳ) as a result meets the need of something else – if anyone said that a god sent it down he would not be out of accord with the truth or with himself. (*Enn.* 4.8.5.10-14)

On my proposed resolution, then, universality does not negate individuality but grounds it. This is what ensure that everything happens exactly as the divine plan has it. Whether we describe the law as universal or particular simply depends on the ontological level we are talking about. This, I think, successfully avoids the objection that motivates the weaker reading.[167] Before we move on, there is

[167] One might wonder what kind of law Plotinus has in mind. Unfortunately, his statements about this are rather vague, but we can see from our passage that actions are included. For the law includes that the soul πάσχειν καὶ ποιεῖν things in the sensible world. We can find the same thought in *Enn.* 3.2.9, where we learn that living by the law of Providence means 'actually doing what its law dictates' (πράττοντα ὅσα ὁ νόμος αὐτῆς λέγει). That the law also always already includes both actions and the appropriate, specifically tailored punishments is made clear in other passages. Cf., e.g., *Enn.* 4.3.24.8-11, where Plotinus makes clear that the divine law is inescapable, 'since it at once contains within itself *both the doing and the thing already judged*' (ὁμοῦ ἔχων ἐν ἑαυτῷ τὸ ποιῆσαι τὸ κριθὲν ἤδη). See also *Enn.* 3.2.13.14-15, where Plotinus follows Plato in subscribing to the *lex talionis* principle: 'Someone who once murdered his mother will become a woman and be murdered by her child and one who has violated a woman will become a woman to be violated in turn.' For Plato, see *Laws* 9, 870d4-e3, especially e2-3, where the Athenian says that the *lex talionis* principle is prescribed by 'the law of nature.'

one more issue that requires our attention – Plotinus' language of interweaving. Let us refresh our memory. In *Ennead* 4.4.39, Plotinus says the following:

> Rather, the λόγος of the universe [viz. the World Soul][168] is more like a λόγος (κατὰ λόγον) that lays down the order and law of a city (κόσμον πόλεως καὶ νόμον), knowing already what actions the citizens will perform (ἃ πράξουσιν) and why they will perform them (δι' ἃ πράξουσι). And the λόγος of the universe [viz. the World Soul] makes laws with a view to all this (πρὸς ταῦτα πάντα νομοθετοῦντος) and weaves together with the laws (συνυφαίνοντος τοῖς νόμοις) all the things the citizens undergo and all the things they do (τὰ πάθη πάντα αὐτῶν καὶ τὰ ἔργα), as well as the honor and dishonor attaching to their deeds, with everything moving towards harmony by a path where everything happens *as if* spontaneously (οἷον αὐτομάτῃ). (*Enn.* 4.4.39.11-22)

Here, Plotinus not only says that the World Soul lays down laws, but he also states that the World Soul 'weaves together' with the laws everything the citizens do and undergo. This, one might argue, strongly suggest that the World Soul reacts to sensible events. Thus, it is not the case that all our actions are predetermined and foreknown. Rather, the interweaving follows upon our actions, and this yet again suggests that our actions are free in the sense that they are not part of the τάξις and predetermined by the World Soul. I certainly agree that this passage *allows* for such reading. However, I think that this passage also allows for a reading that is compatible with the non-interventionist and maximally inclusive picture Plotinus clearly prefers. On this reading, we understand the metaphor of interweaving to expresses the idea that sensible goings-on have always already been fully determined at a higher ontological level. In other words, the interweaving that occurs in the sensible world is simply an image of the everlastingly fixed and predetermined pattern that we find at the level of νοῦς and the World Soul.

[168] That the λόγος of the universe corresponds to the World Soul is made clear in numerous passages. Cf., e.g., *Enn.* 3.2.4.18-19; 3.2.5.9-5; 3.2.12.1-7; 3.2.16.10-17; 6.7.7.8-16.

If we apply this to our passage, we get the following. The World Soul (or, more specifically, Nature) interweaves what citizens do and what they undergo in a non-interventionist manner. This is possible precisely because all these things are always already foreknown by its higher part. This is why Plotinus says that sensible goings-on might appear to happen 'as if spontaneously' (οἷον αὐτομάτῃ), when from the World Soul's perspective, *nothing happens spontaneously.* In other words, we, who lack the World Soul's complete foreknowledge, think that there is room for spontaneity. We, however, mistaken because everything has always already been foreknown and predetermined at a higher level.

To conclude, I believe that I have provided ample textual evidence in support of the strong reading according to which Plotinus is committed to the idea that all sensible goings-on are already contained in the universal τάξις and always already foreknown by the World Soul. In the next section, I want to discuss some specific examples of things that Plotinus explicitly tells us are included in the τάξις of the universe. The inclusiveness of the τάξις will provide further support for the strong reading I am defending.

§3 The scope of the World Soul's foreknowledge and the τάξις of the universe

We saw above that Plotinus holds that everything (πάντα) is part of the universal τάξις and thus everything is signified. This, of course, is a very generic claim. In this section, we will go through some of the more specific examples Plotinus gives as being part of this τάξις. Before we begin, I want to note that here I will not be discussing any issues that might arise from the inclusive view (such as

questions concerning our autonomy or moral responsibility).[169] For now, I simply want to provide more textual evidence for the inclusive reading and get clear on what Plotinus envisions the τάξις and the λόγος of the universe to contain. The complete list of the examples we get looks as follows:

(1) Living things (ζῷα),[170] including the heavenly bodies: *Enn.* 2.3.13.35-36
   - These living things include their actions and mixed dispositions: see (4) and (8)

(2) Lives (βίοι): *Enn.* 4.3.12.23
   - people reborn to become victims of their own crimes: *Enn.* 3.2.13.1-17
   - the descents and ascents of souls (τε καθόδοις ψυχῶν καὶ ἀνόδοις): *Enn.* 4.3.12.18

(3) Characteristic features (οἷος ἕκαστος καὶ ὅσα): *Enn.* 3.3.6.22

(4) Mixed dispositions (διαθέσεις κραθεῖσαι): *Enn.* 3.3.6.12

(5) Fortunes (τύχαι): *Enn.* 4.3.12.22; 3.2.17.36-37

(6) Misfortunes (τύχαι):
   - diseases, punishments, poverty (κολάσεις ἢ πενίαι ἢ νόσοι): *Enn.* 4.3.16.4

(7) Circumstances (συντυχίαι): *Enn.* 3.3.2.1-3

(8) Actions (πράξεις): *Enn.* 3.3.6.11
   - the works (ἔργα) of virtue: *Enn.* 4.4.39.2-3
   - virtuous deeds (τὰ χρηστὰ): *Enn.* 4.4.39.2-3; 3.2.18.19; 3.3.1.1
   - vicious deeds (τὰ πονηρά): *Enn.* 3.2.18.19; 3.3.1.2
   - acting on and suffering at the hands of others, causes pain or pleasure to others: *Enn.* 2.3.7.25-28

(9) Choices (προαιρέσεις; ἑλέσθαι):
   - embodied: choosing 'this or that' (τάδε ἢ τάδε): *Enn.* 3.3.3.1
   - whether or not we grant forgiveness (τὸ τῆς συγγνώμης καὶ μὴ): *Enn.* 3.2.17.14-15
   - not granting forgiveness to vicious people (μηδὲ συγγνώμονας): *Enn.* 3.2.17.15-16

[169] I will discuss this in the final chapter of my dissertation.

[170] That the World Soul produces all living things I take to be fairly uncontroversial. There are some *prima facie* tensions concerning the role that the parents play in reproduction. For if the World Soul produces all living things, then the parents seem superfluous. For a possible solution to this problem see Wilberding (2020) who argues that these two claims are in fact compatible and even complementary.

- disembodied: original choice and disposition (προαιρέσεως καὶ διαθέσεως ἀρχετύπου) [for the next life]: *Enn.* 4.3.13.3

(10) External circumstances (τὰ ἔξω):

- coming to be when the universe is such as it was when the soul went into the body (τὸ τοῦ παντὸς ἔχοντος οὕτως, ὡς τότε εἶχεν, ὅτε εἰσήεσαν εἰς τὸ σῶμα): *Enn.* 2.3.15.5-6
- going into this particular body (τὸ εἰσελθεῖν εἰς τόδε τὸ σῶμα): *Enn.* 2.3.15.7
- having these particular parents (τῶνδε γονέων): *Enn.* 2.3.15.7
- coming to be in these places (ἐν τοιούτοις τόποις γίγνεσθαι): *Enn.* 2.3.15.7-8

In what follows, I will focus on the last three categories (actions, choices, and external circumstances) as Plotinus discusses those much more extensively than the other categories.

Actions

We already saw in our passage from *Ennead* 4.4.39 that Plotinus is committed to the idea that 'virtue has no master' but at the same time, he insists that 'its works, too, are woven together (συνυφαίνεσθαι) in the order (τῇ συντάξει)."[171] Building on this, I will now examine a passage from *Ennead* 3.2.18, where Plotinus also asserts that specific actions are part of the τάξις of the universe and that the World Soul has foreknowledge of these actions.[172] Before presenting the relevant excerpt, however, it is necessary to consider some context from the preceding chapter.

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[171] One might think that Plotinus cannot hold on to this Platonic principle: if virtuous deeds are predetermined, then virtue has a master. I believe this is correct, at least with respect to civic virtue—but for a different reason. As Plotinus states in *Enn.* 6.8.56-20, civic virtue always depends on external circumstances and is 'always forced to bring about this or that.' In contrast, purificatory virtues have no master. They are purely intellectual activities, grounded in νοῦς, and thus not dependent on anything external to the purified soul.

[172] Since in the opening of *Ennead* 3.3.1 Plotinus merely reaffirms what he argued for in *Ennead* 3.2.18, my focus will be on this latter passage.

At *Ennead* 3.2.17.49, Plotinus introduces the 'playwright analogy,' a metaphor commonly employed by the Stoics.[173] Here, the sensible world is likened to a stage, the World Soul (or God) to the playwright, and human beings to actors. In this same chapter, Plotinus outlines a view somewhat reminiscent of Epictetus,[174] though, as is often the case, he does not acknowledge that he is reproducing another's perspective. However, as chapter 18 will reveal, Plotinus' interpretation of this analogy diverges significantly from the one he presents in chapter 17. To appreciate the changes he makes, I will first briefly summarize the analogy as it appears in chapter 17.

In chapter 17, the playwright assigns roles to each actor, taking into account their inherent characteristics. Based on these traits, the author chooses suitable lines, costumes, and fortunes and assigns each their proper place. Thus, the actors' roles are determined both by the author and by their individual natures. However, the actors – or, more precisely, their souls – themselves contribute the goodness or badness of their performances. Moreover, it is said that the soul itself and its deeds are *not* part of the play. Thus, on this account, the actors retain control over their actions. Consequently, the actors determine the rewards or punishments appropriate to their actions. From this, we can infer that the future is not completely predetermined. Even though you do not get to choose which role you play, it is up to you what actions you will engage it and thus also how well you are going to play your assigned role. With this in mind let us now turn to *Ennead* 3.2.18, where

[173] See, e.g., Epictetus *Ench.* 17; Cicero *De Fin.* 7.24.; Seneca *Epist.* 94.

[174] See especially *Ench.* 17: 'Remember that you are an actor in a drama, whatever kind the playwright desires. If he wishes it to be short, it is short. If he wants it to be long, it is long. If he wishes you to play the part of a beggar, remember to act even this role adroitly; and so too if your role be that of a disabled person, an official, or a layman. For this is your business, to play admirable the role assigned to you; but the selection of that role belongs to another.'

we get a heavily revised version of this analogy and full commitment to the view that everything in the sensible world is predetermined. Given its relevance, I cite the passage in its entirety:

> But we must say again, on the other hand, as follows, for the argument calls for a great deal more clarity. We must certainly *not* introduce the kind of actors who utter words other than those of the playwright (οἳ ἄλλο τι φθέγγονται ἢ τὰ τοῦ ποιητοῦ) as though the play was incomplete in itself (ἀτελοῦς παρ' αὐτοῦ) and they filled in what was lacking, and the playwright had left blank spaces in the middle, with the result that the actors will no longer be actors (ὡς τῶν ὑποκριτῶν οὐχ ὑποκριτῶν ἐσομένων) but a part of the playwright (ἀλλὰ μέρος τοῦ ποιητοῦ) who knows in advance (προειδότος) what they are going to say (ἃ φθέγξονται) so as in this way to be able to string together the rest of the play and its consequences (τὰ λοιπὰ συνείρων καὶ τὰ ἐφεξῆς οἷός τε ᾖ). For in the universe, the λόγοι [string together][175] the consequences (τὰ ἐφεξῆς) and what follows evil deeds (καὶ ἑπόμενα τοῖς κακοῖς τῶν ἔργων) and do so based on a λόγος (κατὰ λόγον). For example, from adultery there may come children in the course of nature and, perhaps, better men, or from the leading away of captives other cities better than those that have been plundered by vicious men.
>
> If the introduction of souls, some of which will actually do vicious deeds (αἳ δὴ τὰ πονηρά), some good deeds (αἱ δὲ τὰ χρηστὰ ἐργάσονται), is not absurd – in fact, if we deprive the λόγος of vicious deeds we will be depriving it of good ones, too – what is to prevent us *making the deeds of the actors parts* (τὰ τῶν ὑποκριτῶν ἔργα μέρη ποιεῖν) [of the universal drama], just as on stage they may be made parts of the play*, and include in it doing good or bad deeds*, so that to each of the actors there comes much more from the λόγος itself since the universal drama is more perfect [than the human play] and everything derives from the λόγος (πάντα παρ' αὐτοῦ)?
>
> (*Enn.* 3.2.18.7-26, Gerson et al transl. slightly modified)

Here, Plotinus acknowledges that our deeds are part of the play. In fact, he cautions us not to think of the play as unfinished or imagine that the actors fill in any gaps. Instead, Plotinus emphasizes that the playwright (i.e., the World Soul) has written the entire script – there are no blanks for us to fill. Our role is merely to speak the lines we have been assigned. Another difference to the version we get in chapter 17 is that the actors no longer determine their rewards and punishments.[176] For

[175] Supplying συνείροντες.

[176] Nagy (2017:130) acknowledges the deterministic nature of this analogy, but still seems to want to maintain that Plotinus, like the Stoics, allows for actors to determine the quality of their performance.

Plotinus, foreknowledge of the consequences of the actors' actions is restricted to the playwright, i.e., the World Soul. We also learn that it is the World Soul's λόγοι that string together the consequences of these actions. Plotinus yet again makes clear that this stringing together is not a response or reaction. For he explicitly states that future actions (ἐργάσονται) – both virtuous and vicious ones – are contained within the World Soul. Plotinus once more confirms this in the first two lines of *Ennead* 3.3:

> So, what is our view on these issues? In fact, it is that the universal λόγος already includes (περιείληφεν) both vicious and good deeds (καὶ τὰ πονηρὰ καὶ τὰ χρηστὰ) and even these [viz. the vicious deeds] are parts of the universal λόγος (οὗ μέρη καὶ ταῦτα).

Thus, Plotinus here reaffirms his view that specific actions are contained in the τάξις of the universe and are parts of the universal λόγος. One question this raises is whether the τάξις includes only vicious and good deeds or if Plotinus subscribes to the stronger claim that *all* actions are included – e.g., that I will have oatmeal for breakfast today. The answer to this question must remain somewhat speculative, since Plotinus never explicitly says that such 'mundane' actions are included in the τάξις. However, everything we have seen so far suggests that such mundane actions are also included in the τάξις – there are no gaps to be filled, and everything is contained in the World Soul's λόγοι. This conclusion is also suggested by other treatises, e.g., *Ennead* 4.3 [27], where Plotinus maintains that

> we must not believe that some things have been subjected to the order (Οὐ γὰρ τὰ μὲν δεῖ νομίζειν συντετάχθαι), while others have been left on a looser rein, in the interests of preserving autonomy (τὰ δὲ κεχαλάσθαι εἰς τὸ αὐτεξούσιον). For if it is necessary that things happen on the basis of causes (κατ' αἰτίας) and natural consequences (φυσικὰς ἀκολουθίας), and on the basis of a single λόγος (κατὰ λόγον ἕνα) and a single order (τάξιν μίαν), it is necessary to believe that even the smaller things have also been included in the order and woven together (συντετάχθαι καὶ συνυφάνθαι).
>
> (*Enn.* 4.3.16.13-17)

We can still find the same idea in the much later treatise on Providence (*Ennead* 3.2). There, Plotinus emphasizes that 'the everlasting order of everything (τὴν τάξιν ἀεὶ τῶν ὅλων) is something of the kind to extend to everything and to the most minute thing."[177] And in *Ennead* 2.3.7.25-30, Plotinus maintains that actions such as individuals acting on and suffering at the hands of others or causing pain or pleasure in others also derive from the World Soul. Thus, these passages, in addition to the ones we looked at, as well as the fact that Plotinus is committed to the idea that everything is signified by the stars, strongly suggest that Plotinus accepts the inclusive view, according to which *all* actions (including mundane ones) are always already included in the τάξις, known to the World Soul, and signified by the stars. If this is correct, then choices we make in the sensible world should also be included in the τάξις of the universe. Thus, let us now turn to the next point on our list.

Choices

As I indicated above, here we get two specific examples. One concerns choices we make when we are embodied, the other one is about the otherworldly choices and thus happens when we are disembodied. However, as we shall see, both kinds of choices are contained in the τάξις of the universe. Textual evidence for the former comes from *Ennead* 3.3.3. There, Plotinus addresses an objection which is a reaction to the previous chapter, where Plotinus emphasizes that the World Soul – unlike the general who cannot control the enemy camp – is in control of *everything* and thus, 'what would be unordered (ἀσύνταχτον), what would not be fitted into the plan? (οὐκ ἂν συνηρμοσμένον εἴη)' This prompts the following question:

> What if someone says: 'I am in control of choosing this or that' («εἰ ἐγὼ κύριος τοῦ τάδε ἑλέσθαι ἢ τάδε»;)?
>
> But what you *will choose* (ἃ αἱρήσει) is already included in the universal order

[177] *Enn.* 3.2.13.18-20.

> (συντέτακται), because you are not something that is added to the universe (ὅτι μὴ ἐπεισόδιον[178] τὸ σὸν τῷ παντί,) but you are counted in as just the person that you are (ἀλλ' ἠρίθμησαι ὁ τοιόσδε.). (*Enn*. 3.3.3.1-3)

At this point, Plotinus' response to this objection should come as no surprise: the soul's nature is completely determined by the life it chooses. That is, even choosing 'this or that' when we are embodied and active in the sensible world is already contained in the universal τάξις.[179] Another, and perhaps the most powerful example of a specific action being predetermined is that of granting forgiveness, which we get in *Ennead* 3.2.17:

> Perhaps, though, the vicious may be forgiven, unless even granting forgiveness or not is determined by the λόγος (εἰ μὴ καὶ τὸ τῆς συγγνώμης καὶ μὴ ὁ λόγος ποιεῖ). And the λόγος determines (ποιεῖ δὲ ὁ λόγος) that we do not grant forgiveness (μηδὲ συγγνώμονας) to such people (ἐπὶ τοῖς τοιούτοις εἶναι). (*Enn.* 3.2.17.8-16)

Here, Plotinus asserts that the λόγος determines that vicious people will not be forgiven. Thus, what we take to be a self-determined and voluntary act is really something that has always already been

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[178] Perhaps a reference to Aristotle who says that 'nature is not episodic (οὐκ… ἡ φύσις ἐπεισοδιώδης), like a bad tragedy' (*Metaph*. N 3, 1090b19). Proclus seems to go into a direction similar to Plotinus: 'That also the beings superior to us must have knowledge of the indeterminate if this too is to partake of order (τοῦτο τάξεως μεταλαγχάνειν) and not be, as it were, *an episode unconnected to the universe* (καὶ μὴ εἶναι οἷον ἐπεισοδιῶδες τῷ παντί) let this be granted since it has been demonstrated elsewhere. […] For the universe will not be one nor will its administration be on the basis of intellect (οὐδὲ διοίκησις κατὰ νοῦν), unless there is also some causal chain (τις εἱρμός) linking this [indeterminate being] to the things that are determined (πρὸς τὰ ὡρισμένα) and unless they belong to the same order (καὶ ὦν ἡ τάξις ἡ αὐτὴ).' (*De decem dub.* 15,1-3).

[179] It is clear from the context that Plotinus is not thinking about choices we make in the afterlife. For the explanation of why these choices are already contained in the τάξις is that the τάξις also contains everything that makes you this particular individual. Cf. *Enn.* 3.4.3.8-10, where he makes clear that once we have chosen our daemon and life, our embodied life is fully determined, which prompts the question of how we are in control of anything (πῶς ἔτι τινὸς κύριοι) when we are embodied (*Enn.* 3.4.5.1-2).

determined by a higher principle. Perhaps, Plotinus takes this to be a universal law: vicious people will not be forgiven. As we shall see, external circumstances (for instance whether or not we will encounter vicious people) are part of the τάξις of the universe as well. But before we turn to external circumstances, let us see what Plotinus says about otherworldly choices. Here, I want to focus on two questions. The first concerns the level of detail Plotinus envisions the otherworldly choices to have. The second question is whether the otherworldly choices are also contained in the τάξις and thus predetermined. Let us begin with the first question.

From both this passage and what we have seen throughout this paper, Plotinus seems to have an extremely inclusive view of these choices. This is perhaps somewhat surprising, especially since this Plotinus clearly gets his inspiration from the Myth of Er but at the same time departs from what Plato suggests in the Myth of Er. For although the first life that gets chosen ('the greatest tyranny') includes one specific action, namely that the chooser is fated to eat his own children,[180] the other examples of the models (παραδείγματα) of lives are much less detailed. The examples are:

- life-long tyrannies (618a4-5)
- tyrannies ending halfway through, resulting in poverty, exile, and beggary (618a5-7)
- being famous due to beauty of appearance; strength; athletic prowess; high birth; virtue/excellence of one's ancestors (618a8-b1)
- 'normal' lives (*Rep.* 618b2)

Thus, Plato certainly seems to think that *some* psychological characteristics are inherent in a chosen life. For example, to be a tyrant, one must possess certain traits (e.g., injustice, greed, recklessness).

[180] *Rep*. 619b7-c6.

Thus, choosing the life of a tyrant would entail acquiring specific characteristics of the soul, and these will be contained in the life one chooses. Plato seems to accept this, with one exception:

> But the τάξις of the soul was not included [in the model] because the soul, by choosing a different life, necessarily becomes different. But all the other things were there, mixed with each other and with wealth, poverty, sickness, health, and the states intermediate to them. (*Rep.* 618b2-6, Grube/ Reeve transl.)

It is not obvious why the τάξις of the soul should not be included. Perhaps Plato wants to emphasize that the soul has to create its inner order *after* it has made its choice. For you could think that if the τάξις of the soul were included in the model, it would imply that the soul's internal structure is fully determined by the life it chooses. But this would remove all the accomplishments (or mistakes) of the previous life, and Plato clearly wants to preserve the idea that living a virtuous or vicious life has lasting effects on the soul. Thus, the τάξις of the soul seems to reflect what the soul was prior to its choice, and this influences the choice the soul will make. Be that as it may, Plotinus does not seem to follow Plato in excluding certain things from being contained in the lives that we choose. Perhaps this is also why Plotinus never refers to *models* (παραδείγματα) of lives. Rather, the choices we make in the afterlife will fully determine our characters, actions, and choices in the sensible world. This idea is still present in his later treatise on Providence:

> For it is not the role of the diviner to indicate the why (τὸ διότι), but only the that (τὸ ὅτι). And his skill consists in reading the letters written in nature, which reveal an order (τάξιν δηλούντων) and never deviate into disorder (οὐδαμοῦ πρὸς τὸ ἄτακτον ἀποκλινόντων) or rather [his skill consists in] reading the revolution of the heavens (τῆς φορᾶς) which bears witness to and brings to light (καταμαρτυρούσης τῆς φορᾶς καὶ εἰς φῶς ἀγούσης) *what kind of person each individual is going to be like and however many* [characteristics they will have] (οἷος

ἕκαστος καὶ ὅσα)[181] *even before they are brought* [*to light*] *by people themselves* (πρὶν παρ' αὐτῶν φανῆναι). (*Enn.* 3.3.6.17-22)

Above, we saw that Plotinus maintains that our fortunes, lives, and choices are contained in the τάξις of the universe. Here, he includes further details about particular aspects of our character. At this point, it should come as no surprise that Plotinus maintains that what each individual is going to be like and however many characteristics they have is signified by the stars. It is worth highlighting that here, Plotinus is very clear that the signification is independent of whether or not we have already experienced certain fortunes, made specific choices, or displayed certain characteristics. In other words, the stars signify these things regardless of whether they are already instantiated in the sensible world. This also provides a first answer to our second question. For what Plotinus says here suggests that otherworldly choices, too, are contained in the τάξις. After all, there are many cycles of reincarnation and lives one soul goes through, and there is no reason to think that the stars would only signify one such life. In fact, this would be highly problematic. For it would suggest that the stars (and by extension the τάξις and the World Soul's foreknowledge) are incomplete and subject to change, which of course, Plotinus denies:

> For what it [viz. the World Soul] has is already the universe, and that is and will be sufficient to itself, and it completes its revolution periodically (ἐν χρόνοις περαινόμενον) on the basis of everlastingly fixed λόγοι (κατὰ λόγους ἀεὶ ἑστηκότας). And it everlastingly returns to the same state period by period, in measures consisting of determined lives (ἐν μέτροις βίων ὡρισμένων), these things here being brought into harmony with and [occurring] on the basis of those in the intelligible world (εἰς συμφωνίαν ἀγόμενα ταῦτα ἐκείνοις καὶ κατ' ἐκεῖνα), the things here (τῶνδε) being completed under a single λόγος (περαινομένων ὑφ' ἕνα λόγον), since everything has been ordered (πάντων τεταγμένων) – with respect to the descents and ascents of souls (τε καθόδοις ψυχῶν καὶ ἀνόδοις), and with respect to all other things, too (καὶ εἰς τὰ ἄλλα).

[181] This is difficult to translate. While I agree that actions are predetermined, the translation by Gerson et al – 'brings to light the nature of each person *and their actions*' – is not warranted by the text.

> Evidence of this is the harmony of the souls with the order of this sensible universe (πρὸς τὴν τοῦδε τοῦ παντὸς τάξιν), souls which are not separate [from it], but in their descent put themselves in touch with it, and with its circuit produce a single harmony (μίαν συμφωνίαν), so that their fortunes (τὰς τύχας αὐτῶν), lives (καὶ τοὺς βίους), and choices (καὶ τὰς προαιρέσεις) are signified through the configurations of the stars (σημαίνεσθαι τοῖς τῶν ἄστρων σχήμασι), and they sing, as it were, a single melody without discord.
>
> (*Enn.* 4.3.12.12-25)

The first thing to note is that the universe is – at any point in time – already complete and self-sufficient[182] because it completes its cyclical revolutions on the basis of 'everlastingly fixed λόγοι.' These λόγοι, I take it, are the contents of the τάξις of the universe and contain, among other things, all the fortunes, lives, and choices that will be instantiated with the Great Year. This, I think, we can infer from the fact that Plotinus explicitly says that all the ascents and descents of souls are contained in the τάξις of the universe.[183] Now, the fact that Plotinus talks about descending souls 'putting themselves in touch with the τάξις' might *prima facie* suggests that the τάξις undergoes some sort of change. This, however, is not what Plotinus says. Note that starting in line 19, Plotinus talks about the τάξις of the *sensible* universe (τὴν τοῦδε τοῦ παντὸς τάξιν) as opposed to the intelligible one he mention before, on the basis of which all sensible things occur.[184] Now, from the perspective of a

[182] As mentioned above, this needs to be qualified. The self-sufficiency of the sensible universe cannot be compared to that of any intelligible principle. Sensible things always depend on higher, intelligible principles. The comparison here is to other *sensible* parts or wholes.

[183] Some scholars seem unwilling to take this claim seriously because they want to maintain that ascents are not predetermined. However, not only does this contradict what Plotinus says here but such a view also brings its own set of problems. See, e.g., Stern-Gillet (2014:401) who describes Plotinus' view as 'paradoxical': 'Why, the reader might ask, is the ascending soul a soul who ascends of her own initiative while the descending soul is a soul who complies with "a law" inscribed in her?' If, however, we take Plotinus' claim at face value, no such paradox arises.

[184] We might say that the former τάξις corresponds to the higher part of the World Soul, and the latter to Nature.

descending soul it makes perfect sense to say that it 'puts itself in touch with' the τάξις of this sensible universe. It is trivially true that descending souls are not yet ordered by this sensible τάξις, precisely because this is the order of a world which they are about to enter. Plotinus happily grants this. However, nothing he says suggests that these souls are not already always ordered by the higher τάξις. Accordingly, nothing suggests that Plotinus would deny that all otherworldly choices are already contained in the (higher) universal τάξις. Again, it would be problematic if Plotinus deprived the World Soul of this knowledge. Let us now discuss our last category. This will further support my claim that the World Soul has complete foreknowledge of all the available lives and the details that each life comes with.

External circumstances

From what we have seen throughout this paper, Plotinus has an extremely inclusive view of the otherworldly choices souls make. These choices fully determine our characters, actions, and choices in the sensible world. Thus, we should expect Plotinus to maintain that external circumstances, too, are contained in the otherworldly choices and thus in the higher order τάξις. Plotinus addresses this in *Ennead* 2.3.15, where he explicitly invokes Plato's Myth of Er and gives the following interpretation:

> Prior to the revolution of the Spindle, Plato had given the souls lots and choices (κλήρους καὶ προαιρέσεις), and he subsequently gave them the beings on the Spindle as contributors (συνεργοὺς) in order to bring the souls' choices to accomplishment without exception (ὡς πάντως τὰ αἱρεθέντα συναποτελοῦντας). For the daemon, too, is a contributor to the fulfilment of these choices. But what are these 'lots' (οἱ κλῆροι)?
>
> Well, *coming to be when the universe is such as it was when the soul went into the body, and going into this body and having these parents and coming to be in such places and in general* (καὶ ὅλως), as we said, *the external factors* (τὰ ἔξω). And that all things are connected and, in a way, spun together, is revealed through one of the so-called Fates [Clotho], *both in the case of individuals and in the case of the whole*. Lachesis reveals the lots, and Atropos

necessarily brings these circumstances about without exception.

(*Enn.* 2.3.15.1-12, Gerson et al transl.

At first, Plotinus spells out some of the details of the Myth of Er exactly as we find them in the *Republic*: the souls were given lots and choices, and once chosen, they will be necessitated by the 'beings on the Spindle', viz. the three daughters of Necessity (Lachesis, Clotho, and Atropos). However, Plotinus departs from Plato when it comes to the meaning of the lots (οἱ κλῆροι). In the *Republic,* it is very clear that the lots simply represent the order in which the souls get to make their choice. This order is somewhat randomly imposed by the Speaker, who takes the lots from Lachesis' lap and then throws them around. Thus, the souls pick up the lot that landed next to them and thereby learn when they would get to make their choice.[185] Plotinus, by contrast, identifies the lots with all sorts of *external circumstances*. The examples he gives include:

- The state of the world when soul enters the body
- Choosing this particular body
- Having these particular parents
- Choosing this particular place/ region

It is far from clear why Plotinus identifies the lots with external circumstances rather than simply following Plato. After all, Plotinus mentions both the choices and the lots, and he could have easily spelled out the choices in terms of the life patterns we get in the *Republic*. Be that as it may, Plotinus is very clear that specific and detailed circumstances are part of the choice the soul makes in the afterlife. It is easy to see how any of these four examples align with the inclusive reading. If I choose a particular body, then this body comes with a certain suitability for receiving psychological

[185] Cf., *Rep.* 617d-e.

dispositions.[186] If I choose these particular parents, then I make a choice about my upbringing and education, as well as about my appearance and some non-rational affections that these parents will likely transmit to me.[187] The state of the world at the time of my reincarnation will even determine to some extent whether or not I can engage in certain virtuous actions. For instance, as Plotinus himself points out, in order to act courageously, we have to rely on certain external circumstances, e.g., that there be a war.[188] On the inclusive reading I proposed above, it is not surprising that Plotinus wants our choices to include such specific external circumstances. In fact, it is *necessary* that the choices we make are this detailed. As we saw, the World Soul has foreknowledge of all sensible goings-on, and all of these are also contained in the τάξις of the universe. This, after all, is what enables predictions in the first place.

§Conclusion

In this chapter, I argued that Plotinus' commitment to soft astrology also comes with a commitment to determinism about the sensible world. I showed that for Plotinus, the possibility of signification depends on the fact that all sensible goings-on (including choices and actions) are part of the τάξις of the universe. This τάξις is fixed and is not subject to change. We also saw the World Soul administers the cosmos on the basis of this unchanging τάξις. Importantly, this administration is both effortless and non-interventionist. This is only possibly because the World Souls has complete foreknowledge of what is going to happen, and so Nature can simply act 'as if under orders.' For

[186] Cf., *Enn.* 4.4.28.28-35; 4.4.38.7-13; 2.3.11.

[187] Cf., *Enn.* 3.1.5.27-28: οἷς γοῦν γονεῦσιν ὅμοιοι καὶ τὰ εἴδη ὡς τὰ πολλὰ καί τινα τῶν ἀλόγων τῆς ψυχῆς παθῶν.

[188] *Enn.* 6.8.5.7-10: 'But how is even that in our power? For example, if we are courageous because there is a war. I mean how is the activity then in our power, when, if war had not taken control of the situation, we would not have engaged in this activity?'

Plotinus, the World Soul's all-encompassing foreknowledge and the accompanying metaphysical predetermination ensures that – from a global perspective – the sensible world is (and always will be) as good and just as possible. What this means for Plotinus' views on human freedom, autonomy, and moral responsibility will be our focus in the next and final chapter.

Chapter 4: Plotinian Compatibilism and the Problem of Moral Responsibility

§Introduction

In the previous chapter, I argued that Plotinus is a determinist about the sensible world. That is, he holds that everything (πάντα) in the sensible world is part of the universal τάξις and thus predetermined and foreknown. We also saw that this includes both actions and choices. Consequently, there seems to be no room for efficient agency – the future is closed, and no one, not even sages, can change it. Yet, as we shall see, Plotinus clearly distinguishes between sages and non-sages – a distinction with significant implications. The most important implication is that it makes Plotinus a compatibilist. Sages (and only sages) are 'free' – they do things that are entirely 'up to them,' such as forming wishes and making decisions. As we shall see, this does not mean that Plotinus is interested in defending a notion of freedom in which, given the same circumstances, sages would have the ability to act otherwise.[189] Rather, sages form their motivations for actions freely, voluntarily, and autonomously,[190] but their actions are still necessary and subject to the λόγος of the universe and Providence. By contrast, non-sages (which we can further divide into practically virtuous,[191] ordinary,[192] and vicious people) do not act freely, voluntarily, and autonomously. Non-sages are subject to Fate and cannot transcend the cosmic causality that governs the sensible world.

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[189] As for instance Alexander and the Stoic source he discusses do. Cf., *De Fato* 13, 181.13–182.20. For a discussion of this, see Bobzien (1998): 361ff.

[190] It is worth noting that in *Enn.* 6.8., Plotinus does not carefully distinguish between τὸ ἐλεύθερον, τὸ ἐφ' ἡμῖν and τὸ αὐτεξούσιον. Thus, in my discussion I am also using these terms and their translations interchangeably.

[191] By these, I mean people who have attained the civic virtues, and who thereby have attained μετριοπάθεια. See *Enn.* 1.2.2.13-18.

[192] See *Enn.* 2.9.9.10-11, where Plotinus says that 'the common mass (ὁ φαῦλος ὄχλος) is there, in a way, to do the manual work necessary to provide for the better kind.'

This classification raises several issues,[193] one of which I will address in this final chapter. The first issue concerns moral responsibility: if only sages can act voluntarily, it seems that non-sages (including vicious people) should not be held morally responsible for their actions. Yet, according to the standard view in the literature, Plotinus denies this. Against this, I will show Plotinus distinguishes between causal and moral responsibility and holds that non-sages can be held *causally* but not morally responsible for their actions.

§1 The Plotinian sage

Before we discuss what kind of freedom and autonomy sages have and how Plotinus understands these notions, I want to provide a brief characterization of what I take a Plotinian sage to be. To count as a sage, it is not enough to have the civic virtues – one must have successfully attained the purificatory virtues.[194] This also means that the Plotinian sage has attained ἀπάθεια and likeness to

[193] One issue arising from this qualified form of compatibilism concerns the psychology and phenomenology of non-sages. Most people, Plotinus holds, live in the domain of Fate. Governed by the lower parts of the soul, their every action and choice is fated, and they do not freely form the motivations for their actions. However, it is clear both from Plotinus' criticism of what he takes to be the Stoic view – which would leave us to be nothing but 'stones set rolling' – and from his extensive interest in the psychology and phenomenology of non-sages that Plotinus wants to account for such experiences and not simply dismiss them. For reasons of space, I cannot discuss this issue here, but I am hoping to address this in a future paper.

[194] Cf., e.g., *Enn.* 1.2.7.23-28, where Plotinus draws a stark contrast between the sage and the practically wise person, viz. the one who has the civic virtues. For Plotinus, the sage is 'separating himself entirely as far as possible, *absolutely not living the life of the good human being*, *which civic virtue values*, but leaving this, and opting for another, the life of the gods. For assimilation is to the gods, not to good human beings.' Cf. also *Enn.* 1.4.14 and 16, and 6.3.16.27-31.

God as much as possible.[195] As many scholars have pointed out, this results in an inward and upward directed life and ethics – contemplation is the goal. Consequently, the sage is not primarily concerned with the sensible world and its goings-on. This need not mean that the sage is a coldhearted egoist. As Plotinus emphasizes, the sage will not be 'unfriendly or insensitive'[196] but they will be 'most of all a friend, while also possessing intelligence'[197] and they might occasionally act on civic virtues.[198] Thus, the Plotinian sage is fully integrated into society and not some lone wolf who neither cares about nor is aware of their fellow citizens. However, Plotinus emphasizes that whenever the sage engages with the sensible world, they adopt the correct mindset, viewing whatever they pursue as *necessary* rather than intrinsically good.[199] The sage knows that the true good lies in the contemplative life. In general, Plotinus often emphasizes that the sage's psychological makeup is very different from that of non-sages. To begin, let us look at a passage we

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[195] It's not exactly clear what God we should strive to become like. In *Enn.* 1.2.1.4-13, Plotinus says that since we are embodied, it is reasonable that we should become like the ἡγεμονικόν of the World Soul, but immediately after this, he suggests that we should instead strive to become like νοῦς. As J. Wilberding ('Plotinus on becoming like the Universe') shows, these two claims can be made compatible by distinguishing between the two different kinds of likeness Plotinus introduces at *Enn.* 1.2.1.31-50.

[196] *Enn*. 1.4.15.22: Οὐ μὴν διὰ ταῦτα ἄφιλος οὐδὲ ἀγνώμων ὁ τοιοῦτος.

[197] *Enn*. 1.4.15.23-25: Ἀποδιδοὺς οὖν ὅσα αὐτῷ καὶ τοῖς φίλοις φίλος ἂν εἴη μάλιστα μετὰ τοῦ νοῦν ἔχειν.

[198] Nonetheless, I don't think we should call Plotinus' ethics an 'ethics of care,' as Schniewind (2003) does. A similar view is defended by Smith (1999), O'Meara (2003), Remes (2006) and Caluori (2011). This seems hard to square with the numerous passages where Plotinus makes clear that the sage's priority is not the practical but the contemplative life. Moreover, in *Enn.* 1.4, Plotinus grounds happiness in νοῦς and eternity, not in the temporal, sensible life. As we shall see, the fact that the sage prioritizes the contemplative life need not be in tension with them displaying behavior that is other-directed. On the compatibility of theoretical contemplation and other-directed action, see Wilberding (2008) and Emilsson (2017): 322-325.

[199] Cf., *Enn*. 1.4.4.25-26; 4.4.44.16-20. By contrast, people who have the civic virtues pursue beautiful deeds as προηγούμενον, and not as something that is necessary (ἀναγκαῖον). See *Enn.* 6.3.16.27-31.

encountered earlier,[200] *Ennead* 3.1.9, where Plotinus draws a sharp distinction between the psychology of sages and non-sages:

> Now things that come about by a mixture (κραθέντα γίνεται) of choice and fortune (προαιρέσει καὶ τύχαις) are necessary; for what else could there be besides? And since all causes are included (Πάντων δὲ ληφθέντων τῶν αἰτίων), everything happens with absolute necessity (πάντα πάντως γίνεται). And even if anything from the revolution of the universe contributes, that, too, is among the external causes.
>
> So then, whenever the soul engages in some action (πράττῃ τι) when it has been changed by external things (ἀλλοιωθεῖσα παρὰ τῶν ἔξω), and initiates motion (ὁρμᾷ), engaging in a motion that is, as it were, blind (ὁρμᾷ οἷον τυφλῇ τῇ φορᾷ χρωμένη), we must not call either its action or its disposition voluntary (οὐχὶ ἑκούσιον τὴν πρᾶξιν οὐδὲ τὴν διάθεσιν). The same is also true whenever it is worse of itself (παρ' αὑτῆς χείρων) – when the soul uses impulses that are not in its control (ἡγεμονούσαις ταῖς ὁρμαῖς ᾗ χρωμένη) or that are not *absolutely correct* (ὀρθαῖς πανταχοῦ).
>
> But whenever the soul and initiates motion (ὁρμᾷ) while it has its own Reason as its pure and unaffected ruler (ἡγεμόνα καθαρὸν καὶ ἀπαθῆ), then we must say that this impulse alone (ταύτην μόνην τὴν ὁρμὴν) is in our power and voluntary (ἐφ' ἡμῖν καὶ ἑκούσιον), and that this is our own *deed* (τὸ ἡμέτερον ἔργον) – one that has not come from anywhere but from within (ἔνδοθεν), from the pure soul (ἀπὸ καθαρᾶς τῆς ψυχῆς), from the first ruling and sovereign principle (ἀπ' ἀρχῆς πρώτης ἡγουμένης καὶ κυρίας), and not from error suffered due to ignorance, nor from defeat by the compulsion of desires, which, having come upon it, lead and drag it away, no longer allowing [its acts] to be deeds (οὐκέτι ἔργα), but rather only passive experiences of ours (παθήματα παρ' ἡμῶν.)
>
> (*Enn.* 3.1.9.1-16)

Let us begin by looking at what Plotinus tells us about the sage. First, we can note that the sage has a rational part of soul that is pure and unaffected (καθαρὸν καὶ ἀπαθῆ). This, I take it, tells us that the sage has successfully attained the purificatory virtues and is thus as free from passions and godlike as possible. Second, we learn that the sage's pure and unaffected soul is not changed by anything external, and their soul does not engage in some 'blind motion'. Thus, what Plotinus implies here is a contrast between impulses that are formed by being changed by external things and ones that

[200] See Chapter 1, pp. 39-42.

arise from the sage's pure and unaffected Reason. It is only when one's own purified Reason is in charge and initiates the motion that the impulse can be said to be *autonomous* and *voluntary* (ἐφ' ἡμῖν καὶ ἑκούσιον) and 'absolutely correct' (ὀρθαῖς πανταχοῦ). Thus, Plotinus wants to rule out cases where action-guiding impulses originate in the lower soul. For example, if Fred is hungry, his impulse and desire to eat will be formed by his vegetative soul, and he would act on this sub-rational desire. For Plotinus, this means that Fred's impulse to eat is neither in Fred's power nor voluntary. By contrast, Socrates' impulse to eat will be formed by his purified Reason. As we shall see below, Plotinus will spell this out in terms of forming the correct rational desire to eat something. Moreover, we can note that in our present passage, Plotinus draws a sharp contrast between actions (πρᾶξεις) and deeds (ἔργα). The actions of sages are *deeds* rather than mere passive experiences or reactions (παθήματα).

This passage also lets us infer some points about non-sages. First, such people do not act voluntarily, nor are their dispositions voluntary. This is because the souls of non-sages are changed by external things. More generally we can say that according to Plotinus, any action or disposition whose formation includes any kind of force cannot be voluntary. As we shall see below, Plotinus reiterates this commitment in a much later treatise, *Ennead* 6.8 [39]. Plotinus then says that the same applies to their impulses: non-sages do not have impulses which are voluntary nor are they in control of them. Presumably, this is explained by Plotinus' previous point that they form their impulses on the basis of external things, and that their soul engages in 'blind' motions. This also seems to explain the second point, which is that impulses of non-sages are not *absolutely correct* (ὀρθαῖς πανταχοῦ). What exactly he means by this will become clearer when we turn to *Ennead* 6.8. Finally, we learn that non-sages act, but their actions are not *deeds*. Here, Plotinus seems to think of πρᾶξεις as ordinary actions which do not involve or require that the impulse derive from a pure

rational part of soul. Rather, you can act even if your soul was changed by external circumstances. However, such actions are mere *reactions* rather than genuine actions or deeds (ἔργα). Likewise, Plotinus presumably thinks the same about other would-be 'actions,' e.g., those that are done on the basis of beliefs and which are themselves the result of external influences. These, too, would be mere *reactions,* or παθήματα, as he says here. Now, from this passage alone, it is not clear what exactly Plotinus counts as 'changing' the soul, and what it means to have 'absolutely correct' impulses. To answer this, let us now turn to *Ennead* 6.8, where he discusses the topic of autonomy at length. This discussion will also be relevant to explaining the kind of compatibilism Plotinus subscribes to.

§2 The sage's autonomy

In *Ennead* 6.8.1.27-34, Plotinus gives us a first account of what τὸ ἐφ' ἡμῖν requires. There, he lists three conditions:

> The upshot is that something that is ἐφ' ἡμῖν would be as follows: [i] something we would do (πράξαιμεν ἄν), without being enslaved to fortunes (μὴ τύχαις δουλεύοντες) or necessities (μηδὲ ἀνάγκαις) or strong passions (μηδὲ πάθεσιν ἰσχυροῖς), [ii] because we wish it (βουληθέντες), when nothing opposes our wishes (οὐδενὸς ἐναντιουμένου ταῖς βουλήσεσιν). If this is so, then the notion of ἐφ' ἡμῖν is that which is enslaved to our wishing[201] (ὃ τῇ βουλήσει δουλεύει) and would occur or not precisely to the extent to which[202] we wish it.
> [iii] Everything is voluntary that occurs without force and with knowledge (μὴ βίᾳ μετὰ τοῦ εἰδέναι); while what is ἐφ' ἡμῖν is what we are also[203] in control of doing (ὃ καὶ κύριοι πρᾶξαι).

[201] Plotinus never defines or offers a clear account of βούλησις, which makes it difficult to determine how best to translate the term. I have chosen 'wish,' as I'm not convinced that Plotinus has developed a concept of a faculty of the will.

[202] Trying to capture παρὰ τοσοῦτον... παρ' ὅσον.

[203] Alternatively, the καὶ could be translated as 'in fact' as Delcomminette (2014: 386fn6) does. On this reading, voluntariness would not be a necessary condition for ἐφ' ἡμῖν. What supports this reading is that immediately after our passage, Plotinus gives an example of a case where something is 'perhaps' ἐφ' ἡμῖν but *not* voluntary

In what follows, I will discuss each of the three conditions. As we shall see, in later chapters, Plotinus introduces important qualifications to the second condition. For now, however, we can take the three conditions to be as follows:

(i) The agent is not enslaved to strong πάθη or external forces.

(ii) The agent wishes the act and nothing opposes the wish. In other words, we are in control (κύριοι) of doing the action.

(iii) The agent acts voluntarily, that is, without force and with knowledge.

The first condition helps us answer our question from above: what are the external things that change the soul? Here, Plotinus provides some examples: external forces such as fortunes and necessities or internal ones such as strong πάθη.[204] Thus, whenever the agent's motivation for an action comes from any of these, the ensuing action is not ἐφ' ἡμῖν. As will become clearer in our discussion of the second condition, with this, Plotinus intends to rule out any bottom-up formation of impulses. In other words, much like we saw in our previous passage, only impulses formed by a purified Reason will be ἐφ' ἡμῖν καὶ ἑκούσιον.

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because the agent lacks the relevant knowledge (*Enn.* 6.8.1.36-39). However, I think that this is merely a provisional dialectical point. At this point, Plotinus has not yet developed his account of τὸ ἐφ' ἡμῖν. As we shall see below, once we get a fuller account, it is clear that there cannot be cases where something is ἐφ' ἡμῖν but not voluntary.

[204] The qualification ἰσχυροῖς suggests that for this first condition μετριοπάθεια is sufficient – the πάθη are moderated such that no 'strong' ones befall the soul. However, as we shall below, in chapter 3 of this treatise Plotinus makes clear that autonomy requires ἀπάθεια. But note that even here, Plotinus also mentions not being enslaved to fortune or necessity. The most natural way to understand this is to take it as meaning that one should not be swayed by any external circumstances, which again implies that this first condition can only be met by sages. Thus, I suggest we do not read too much into this qualification, especially since, in this same treatise, Plotinus ultimately settles on the view that ἀπάθεια is required. See also note 211.

The second condition has two components. The first one is that we wish what we do. The second one is that nothing opposes our wish. The latter then gets spelled out in terms of external circumstances not impeding or hindering the action. In other words, the external circumstances must cooperate with the wish so that we are in control of doing the action. Plotinus only makes this point in the final sentence of our passage, but if we look at *Ennead* 6.8.2-3, it is clear that it forms part of the second condition. There, Plotinus makes significant additions to the second condition such that sages alone can really wish something. The first bit of new information we get there is that being in our power (τὸ ἐφ' ἡμῖν) is to be attributed to *correct reasoning* and *correct desire* (τῷ ὀρθῷ λογισμῷ καὶ τῇ ὀρθῇ ὀρέξει).[205] Regarding the latter, Plotinus immediately clarifies the now familiar point that Reason alone must serve as the source of the desire's motivation:

> For even if the desires are natural (κατὰ φύσιν) – in the sense that they belong to the animal, i.e., the composite – the soul would be guided by (ἠκολούθησεν) the necessity of [the composite's] nature (τῆς φύσεως ἀνάγκῃ). (*Enn.* 6.8.2.12-14)

Here, I take Plotinus' point to be that even natural desires that necessarily belong to living beings (e.g., hunger, thirst, reproduction) will not count as 'correct' if such desires were initiated by the vegetative soul. However, this does not mean that sages will not have any of these necessary desires. Rather, his point is that for sages, such desires will always be motivated by Reason alone.[206] In other words, in the case of sages, there are never any bottom-up cases of desire formation – all desires are

[205] *Enn.* 6.8.2.10.

[206] As Wilberding ('Plotinus on the Prepassions') argues, for Plotinus there are cases where Reason is not involved in rejecting πάθη. This is possible, because Plotinus equips the vegetative soul with the ability to undergo training and thus to accept or reject affections coming from the so-qualified body. In the case of the sage, the vegetative soul is presumably trained to reject almost all affections coming from the so-qualified body. Some πάθη, as Plotinus concedes elsewhere, will remain. See also note 219.

formed top-down. As we shall see below, Plotinus goes even further, maintaining that νοῦς and the activity of contemplation must provide the source of the desires and not Reason. This is why the sages' desires and impulses are always correct, or, as Plotinus says in *Ennead* 3.1.9, 'absolutely correct.' This, then, explains what he means by 'correct desire' (τῇ ὀρθῇ ὀρέξει).

But what about the second claim, that of correct reasoning (τῷ ὀρθῷ λογισμῷ)? Plotinus returns to this in chapter 3 of *Ennead* 6.8. Having just restated that wishing is to be located in *correct reasoning* (ἐν λόγῳ ὀρθῷ θέμενοι)[207] he then adds that one also has to have 'correct understanding' (τῷ ὀρθῷ τῷ τῆς ἐπιστήμης).[208] He adds this, because he wants to exclude cases where someone does the right thing because they just happen to have the right belief by virtue of some φαντασία. This, according to Plotinus, is not sufficient to count as truly *wishing* something and thus it does not qualify for being ἐφ' ἡμῖν, voluntary or autonomous:

> For it is not the case that, if someone has the right belief and acts on it, he would really uncontroversially have autonomy, unless he knows *why* it is right (εἰδὼς διότι ὀρθῶς), and is not driven towards his duty by some fortune or imagination (τύχῃ ἢ φαντασίᾳ τινὶ). Since we maintain that imagination is not in our power (τὴν φαντασίαν οὐκ ἐφ' ἡμῖν εἶναι λέγοντες), how could we rank those who do things on the basis of their imagination (τοὺς κατ' αὐτὴν δρῶντας) as having autonomy (τὸ αὐτεξούσιον)? [...] And we do not rank those who act on the basis of such imaginative representations [viz. the ones roused from bodily states[209]] (οὐς κατὰ τὰς τοιαύτας φαντασίας ἐνεργοῦντας) under the principle of autonomy (εἰς ἀρχὴν αὐτεξούσιον). For this reason, we do not designate the actions of bad people, who do the majority things on the basis of these [imaginative representations], as being up to them or voluntary (οὔτε τὸ ἐπ' αὐτοῖς οὔτε τὸ ἑκούσιον).
>
> (*Enn.* 6.8.3.5-19, Gerson et al transl. slightly modified)

[207] *Enn.* 6.8.3.2-3.

[208] *Enn.* 6.8.3.4-5.

[209] *Enn.* 6.8.3.11-12: τὴν ἐκ τοῦ σώματος τῶν παθημάτων ἐγειρομένην. I will return to this below.

Thus, we can infer that the ἐπιστήμη requirement helps rule out all and any cases where something is done on the basis of some sub-rational power of soul. Once more, we can say that Plotinus removes all bottom-up formations of impulses and desires from the domain of autonomy. Thus, the ἐπιστήμη requirement ensures that the agent knows why the action is right (εἰδὼς διότι ὀρθῶς, 6.8.3.7).[210] Plotinus then spells out what exactly correct reasoning and understanding amounts to and what they produce:

> But to the one who, through intellect, is free from the affections of the body (τῷ δὲ διὰ νοῦ τῶν ἐνεργειῶν ἐλευθέρῳ τῶν παθημάτων τοῦ σώματος),[211] we will grant autonomy (τὸ αὐτεξούσιον). In tracing back what is ἐφ' ἡμῖν to the most beautiful principle, we will grant that the activity of intellect (τὴν τοῦ νοῦ ἐνέργειαν) and the premises arising from it (καὶ τὰς ἐντεῦθεν προτάσεις) are *truly* free (ἐλευθέρας ὄντως), and we shall say that the desires that arise from contemplating (τὰς ὀρέξεις τὰς ἐκ τοῦ νοεῖν ἐγειρομένας) are not involuntary (οὐκ ἀκουσίους), and that they are present in the gods living in this manner, that is, those who live by intellect and desire on the basis of it.[212]
>
> (*Enn.* 6.8.3.18-26, Gerson et al transl. slightly modified)

Here a number of things are important. First, Plotinus makes clear that autonomy requires having attained the purificatory virtues and thus, to the greatest extent possible, ἀπάθεια. This, I take it, is

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[210] Recall that Plotinus denies that diviners know the 'why.' Thus, sages are clearly epistemologically superior to diviners, but they are not on a par with the World Soul because they lack the stable and complete wisdom it has. Humans, Plotinus holds, cannot attain the summit of virtue since they would thereby no longer be a part (*Enn.* 3.2.14.18-20). The same, I think, holds for the wisdom in question. At *Enn.* 3.3.6.13-17, Plotinus says that the wise and godlike are able to distinguish clearly 'Providence itself from what is according to Providence,' but that need not mean they have the whole bigger picture.

[211] Note that Plotinus here requires the agent to have attained ἀπάθεια – those who are *free* from the πάθη of the body. This, I think clarifies that we should not read too much into the more μετριοπάθεια-friendly formulation we get in the first condition.

[212] Following Gerson et al in preserving with HS[1] the last line (ὅσοι νῷ καὶ ὀρέξει τῇ κατὰ νοῦν ζῶσι) which is bracketed by HS[2].

what he means when he says that one is free from the affections of the body διὰ νοῦ.[213] Second, he confirms a point we already saw him make in *Ennead* 3.1.9, namely that the desires are voluntary, because they are formed on the basis of contemplation. Third, Plotinus calls this activity of contemplation and the premises arising from it 'truly free.'[214] This, I think, is a crucial point, because it will help us understand how it is that the sage's actions always align with the providential order, which we shall return to below. For now, it might be helpful to summarize the final formulation of the second condition for autonomy by help of an example. Suppose that Socrates is at the Piraeus. There, he sees that Fred is about to drown, and he *wishes* to save him. According to Plotinus, Socrates *wishes* to save Fred *iff* his action was motivated in the following way:

1. Socrates has the correct λογισμός (and ἐπιστήμη)[215] that saving Fred is the right thing to do. He uses premises he derived from νοῦς.
2. This correct λογισμός creates the correct desire to save Fred.[216]

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[213] Cf., *Enn.* 1.2.6.121-3, where Plotinus defines the purificatory virtues of φρόνησις and σοφία as 'the contemplation of what νοῦς contains.'

[214] A lot more could be said about how we should understand these προτάσεις. In the literature, these are sometimes taken to be a reference to the Aristotelian practical syllogism, where one premise relates to the universal and the other to the particular circumstances Cf. *NE* 1146b35-1147a10. For a defense of this view see Bene (2013) and note 242. However, it is not immediately obvious that this reading is compatible with other passages (e.g., *Enn.* 5.5.1.38-39 and 6.7.1.24). For reasons of space, I cannot go into any detail, but I do think a case can be made for taking this passage to offer an explanation for how automatic actions work. Thus, the idea is that the sage will still be acting according to practical syllogisms in the sensible world, but unlike the practically virtuous person, they will always be deriving these premises directly from νοῦς. For a discussion of automatic actions see Wilberding (2008).

[215] Plotinus first excludes ἐπιστήμη that comes about through sense-perception (*Enn.* 6.8.2.26-27) and then adds that the ἐπιστήμη in question must be correct (τῷ ὀρθῷ τὸ τῆς ἐπιστήμης, *Enn.* 6.8.3.4-5). Both λογισμός and ἐπιστήμη require knowing *why* the action is question is the right thing to do (διότι ὀρθῶς).

[216] τῷ ὀρθῷ λογισμῷ καὶ τῇ ὀρθῇ ὀρέξε (*Enn.* 6.8.2.10).

Thus, up until this point, it is truly up to Socrates to save Fred. Note, however, that the second condition contains another claim: in order to count as ἐφ' ἡμῖν, we have to be in control (κύριοι) of doing the action. Plotinus picks up on this feature in *Ennead* 6.8.6, where he returns to and further qualifies the second condition:

> How, then, did we explain (ἀνήγομεν) this [viz. τὸ ἐφ' ἡμῖν] earlier in terms of wishing (εἰς βούλησιν), in saying 'this would occur to the extent that I wish it', and also adding 'or would not occur'?[217] If, then, both the present [things] are said correctly (τά τε νῦν ὀρθῶς λέγεται) and those previous [things] (ἐκεῖνά τε) will be in harmony with these (συμφώνως ἕξει), we will say that virtue and intellect are authoritative (τὴν ἀρετὴν καὶ τὸν νοῦν κύρια εἶναι), and that one should explain what is in our power (τὸ ἐφ' ἡμῖν) and freedom (τὸ ἐλεύθερον) by these. And we will say that, since these [viz. νοῦς and virtue] are without a master (ἀδέσποτα), intellect is independent (ἐφ' αὑτοῦ), and virtue wishes (βούλεσθαι) to be independent (ἐφ' αὑτῆς εἶναι), but it is set over the soul (ἐφεστῶσαν τῇ ψυχῇ) so that it is good (ὥστε εἶναι ἀγαθήν) and, to the extent that it is free (μέχρι τούτου αὐτήν τε ἐλευθέραν), also grants freedom to the soul (καὶ τὴν ψυχὴν ἐλευθέραν παρασχέσθαι.)
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> But when necessary affections and actions (τῶν ἀναγκαίων παθημάτων τε καὶ πράξεων) befall it (προσπιπτόντων), the virtue which is set over [the soul] has not wished that these [necessary affections and actions] occur (μὴ βεβουλεῦσθαι γενέσθαι), but nevertheless even in these [situations] (ἐν τούτοις) it preserves what is up to itself (διασώσειν τὸ ἐφ' αὑτῇ) by returning to itself (εἰς αὐτὴν ἀναφέρουσαν) even here in the sensible world (καὶ ἐνταῦθα). For virtue will not obey (ἐφέψεσθαι) the circumstances (τοῖς πράγμασιν), for example saving the one who is in danger, rather, if it deems it right, it will let this person go (προϊεμένην τοῦτον), i.e., (καὶ) command [them] to let go of life (καὶ τὸ ζῆν κελεύουσαν προΐεσθαι), and possessions (χρήματα), and children (τέκνα), and their country (καὶ αὐτὴν πατρίδα), because it [viz. virtue] has as its goal its own beauty (τὸ καλὸν αὐτῆς), and not the [mere] existence of the things subordinate to it (οὐ τὸ εἶναι τῶν ὑπ' αὐτήν).
>
> (*Enn.* 6.8.6.1-18)

Recall that in the first description of the second condition, Plotinus made the point that τὸ ἐφ' ἡμῖν is tied to βουλήσις in two ways: first, that an action happens is proportionate to the degree of wishing

[217] This is a reference back to chapter 1, lines 30-33 (cited above), where we had παρὰ τοσοῦτον… παρ' ὅσον βουληθείημεν ἄν.

('to the extent that we wish it'), and, more generally, that an event could either occur or not occur, depending on the wish. Now, however, Plotinus introduces a crucial clarification – what it means to be in control of the action is that it is virtue and intellect that are in control. That is, the source of autonomy and freedom is not merely the wishing but virtue and intellect themselves – higher principles that are independent and authoritative. Here, Plotinus highlights the ontological difference between virtue and νοῦς. Νοῦς has full autonomy whereas virtue merely wishes to have it, implying that it is not on a par with νοῦς. This makes sense given that Plotinus holds that virtue is a disposition and as such belongs to souls – there is no true virtue at the level of νοῦς.[218] Thus, even the highest kind virtue, by definition, operates within composite living beings and as such can only wish to be fully autonomous. It cannot enjoy the utter undisturbedness and independence of a disembodied intellect. Nevertheless, as Plotinus emphasizes, freedom and autonomy are *metaphysically grounded* in what is fully autonomous and exists independently of any external influences. This is first and foremost νοῦς, and secondly virtue, which is itself directed to and a kind of νοῦς. It is the sage's virtue, then, that grants the soul freedom. Hence, it would be pointless to explain autonomy and freedom by invoking any events occurring in the sensible world.

Plotinus then acknowledges that even sages will have to deal with necessary affections and actions. It is easy to see why Plotinus makes a concession regarding necessary affections. After all, sages are still embodied and must take some care of their body.[219] It is less clear why Plotinus

[218] Cf., *Enn.* 1.2.3.22-25 and esp. 31: Ἡ δὲ ἀρετὴ ψυχῆς· νοῦ δὲ οὐκ ἔστιν οὐδὲ τοῦ ἐπέκεινα. This is why in *Enn.* 6.8, Plotinus uses the qualification τις when he calls virtue as 'a kind of νοῦς.'

[219] See *Enn.* 1.4.15, where Plotinus emphasizes that the sage must 'tend to and endure [what is yoked to him] as long as he is able, like a musician his lyre.' Cf., also *Enn.* 1.2.5. where Plotinus addresses the extent to which the sage can be purified and where he concedes that there are some involuntary πάθη that remain even in sages.

mentions necessary actions and what he means by such actions 'befalling' the soul. One thing we learn here is that necessary actions include actions that virtue has not wished for but that it nonetheless has to engage with. This is a somewhat puzzling claim. After all, Plotinus insists that the sage has autonomy, freedom, and acts voluntarily. But how is this possible if they have to engage in actions that are necessary? Plotinus addresses this concern by emphasizing that the sage's virtuous soul does not *obey* external circumstances. Rather, by returning to itself, it manages to preserve autonomy. How are we to understand this?

Let us begin by noting what Plotinus does not say. First, he does not say that the sage *avoids* necessary actions, and for good reasons: even for the sage, there are actions that are necessary. This makes sense if we recall that though the sage is not subject to Fate, they are subject to Providence. Thus, it is not the case that the sage *could* avoid necessary actions. Second, Plotinus also does not say that the sage *ignores* necessary actions or that they are *unaware* of external circumstances. What he says is that the soul does not *obey* circumstances. Thus, John Dillon might be right when he notes that '[o]ne feels of Plotinus that he would have gladly helped an old lady across the road – but he might very well fail to notice her at all.'[220] He is right *iff* helping the old lady across the street was *not* a necessary action. If it was, Plotinus would have helped her, and he could not have failed to notice her. Nothing in this passage suggests that the sage has their head in the clouds and that they are unaware of the goings-on that surround them. Plotinus' point is *not* that the sage avoids actions – either by ignoring them or by failing to notice external circumstances.[221] His point is rather that the sage will act in a certain way, namely in exactly the way that νοῦς and virtue dictate.

[220] Dillon (1996): 324.

[221] Note that Plotinus says the virtue *re*turns to itself (εἰς αὑτὴν ἀναφέρουσαν) – this, too, suggests that the sage does notice external circumstances and is not unaware of what is going on around him.

This becomes even more clear when Plotinus gives examples of what he means when he says that virtue does not obey circumstances. Here, our earlier example fits well: if Socrates' virtue judged that Fred should drown – perhaps because he is vicious or already sufficiently punished – Socrates would let him go. Some scholars have taken this passage as evidence for thinking that Plotinus' ethical system essentially disregards other-directed action.[222] However, I do not see how this follows from this passage. In my view, what Plotinus emphasizes here is that the sage will not blindly react to external circumstances. Socrates will not *instinctively* jump into the water to save Fred; Plotinus will not *instinctively* help the lady across the street. Sages act on νοῦς, not instinct. They turn inward, contemplate, derive action-guiding premises from νοῦς, form the correct rational desire, and act accordingly. Whether Socrates saves Fred or Plotinus helps the lady cross the street depends on what the providential τάξις prescribes. I'll return to this point below, but for now, I will simply note: if saving Fred and helping the lady are contained in the τάξις, then these actions are necessary, and Socrates and Plotinus will act accordingly. Whether they succeed depends on external circumstances. If, however, the τάξις dictates that they not help, they will refrain.[223] Given what we have learned about the τάξις in the previous chapters, we can say that in the latter case, Providence/νοῦς would command them not to help, because it would be *globally* unjust and wrong to save Fred or help the old lady. This implies something I will also discuss in more detail below, namely that Plotinus thinks of necessity, freedom, and autonomy as perfectly compatible. Thus,

[222] E.g., Dillon (1996), who describes Plotinus' ethical system as 'an uncompromisingly self-centered and otherworldly one.' (331). For a similar view see Annas (1999): 68–69; Miles (1999: 124); and Plass (1982: 253, 255).

[223] Another option would perhaps be that such actions are not at all contained in the τάξις, in which case Plotinus and Socrates might not have noticed the other people. But then they would presumably also not have wandered around the Piraeus or walked down this very street at this very moment.

freedom and autonomy persist even amidst necessary actions and affections, because the sage's soul may be informed by such events (e.g., Socrates sees that Fred is drowning, Plotinus notices the old lady) but is not determined by them. As we saw, the sage derives their action-guiding premises from νοῦς – the principle that grounds freedom and autonomy. Thus, what Plotinus has in mind when he speaks of necessary actions in this context are actions that are imposed on the sage by external circumstances.[224] This shall provide a first answer to the question of why Plotinus mentions necessary actions, and what kinds of actions he seems to have in mind. Let us now see how Plotinus concludes his discussion of the second condition. The passage continues as follows:

> The result is, we will say, that autonomy in actions (τὸ ἐν ταῖς πράξεσιν αὐτεξούσιον) and what is in our power (τὸ ἐφ' ἡμῖν) are not to be explained in terms of (ἀνάγεσθαι) acting (οὐκ εἰς τὸ πράττειν) nor in terms of what is external (οὐδ' εἰς τὴν ἔξω), but [only] in terms of the internal activity and intellection and the contemplation of virtue itself (εἰς τὴν ἐντὸς ἐνέργειαν καὶ νόησιν καὶ θεωρίαν αὐτῆς τῆς ἀρετῆς). And this virtue must be said to be a kind of intellect (νοῦν τινα), and we must not count in with it the πάθη which are enslaved and limited by the rational part of soul. For these [πάθη], Plato says, 'are akin to the body, since it is by habits and exercises' that they are set in order.[225]
>
> So it is still clearer that the immaterial (τὸ ἄυλόν) is the free (τὸ ἐλεύθερον), and it is in terms of this that ἐφ' ἡμῖν is to be explained and [it is to be explained] in terms of the wish which is authoritative (ἡ βούλησις ἡ κυρία) and up to itself (ἐφ' ἑαυτῆς). And if this were to command something concerning external things (ἐπιτάξειε πρὸς τὰ ἔξω), it would do so of necessity (ἐξ ἀνάγκης). All therefore that comes from this wish (ἐκ ταύτης) and is done because of this wish (διὰ ταύτην) is ἐφ' ἡμῖν, both in external [actions] and when it is independent (ἔξω τε καὶ ἐφ' αὑτῆς); what it wishes and enacts without hindrance (ἐνεργεῖ ἀνεμποδίστως), this is primarily (πρῶτον) what is in our power.
>
> (*Enn.* 6.8.6.19-31 Gerson et al transl. slightly modified)

[224] We could also include actions of others that sages are faced with. For example, we could say that Socrates' being charged with corruption and impiety is a necessary action, because it is predetermined by the τάξις of the universe. And just as Plotinus says, by 'returning to himself' and forming the correct wish – to not flee – Socrates preserves his autonomy.

[225] *Rep.* 7, 518d10-e2.

The conclusion Plotinus draws naturally follows from his previous arguments. Autonomy cannot be explained in terms anything that involves the sensible world. Rather, because autonomy and freedom are grounded in higher metaphysical principles (virtue and νοῦς), we should explain autonomy by reference to those principles. As he puts it here: 'the internal activity and intellection and the contemplation of virtue itself.' Plotinus then qualifies something he stated previously. Recall that at the beginning of *Ennead* 6.8.6, he carefully distinguished between νοῦς and virtue, noting that the latter not fully independent. As a result, virtue only wishes to have autonomy, whereas νοῦς has full autonomy. I suggested that one reason for virtue's inferiority vis-à-vis νοῦς is that *qua* being operative in embodied souls, virtue cannot achieve full autonomy. Here Plotinus now makes this point explicit, by clarifying that the virtue he has been referring to is 'a kind of νοῦς' (νοῦν τινα).[226] By this, he means purificatory, not civic virtue. As he points out, civic virtues impose limits, resulting in μετριοπάθεια, and this kind of virtue belongs to the domain of the rational part of the soul. From this we can infer that the virtue he is interested in belongs to the undescended soul. This undescended soul is completely transcendent and has direct access to the hypostasis νοῦς. This, I think, explains why Plotinus now speaks of a wish that is authoritative (ἡ βούλησις ἡ κυρία) and independent (ἐφ' ἑαυτῆς). Recall that in the previous accounts we looked at (*Ennead* 6.8.1 and 3), Plotinus maintained that wishing is to be located in correct λόγος and correct ἐπιστήμη. Now, reasoning is certainly an activity of the rational soul. Given the distinction he draws between the rational soul in its embodiment and what is immaterial, Plotinus here seems to want to lift the starting point of the wish to the level of the undescended soul. This undescended soul is completely transcendent and as such the only real contender for being the explanans of autonomy – freedom and autonomy

[226] Cf., *Enn.* 6.8.5.34-35: Εἰ οὖν οἷον νοῦς τις ἄλλος ἐστὶν ἡ ἀρετὴ καὶ ἕξις οἷον νοωθῆναι τὴν ψυχὴν ποιοῦσα [...]

belong to νοῦς, actualized within the soul through virtue. This, I take it, is why Plotinus now calls the wish 'authoritative and independent.' Thus, over the course of three chapters, Plotinus has carefully thought through all the features the second condition needs to have.

This brings us to the final formulation of the second condition, which we can summarize as follows. Any action that comes from (ἐκ ταύτης) and through (διὰ ταύτης) the authoritative intellectual wish is truly ἐφ' ἡμῖν. As Plotinus makes clear, this includes both internal and *external* events. Thus, actions can be fully up to the sage. This is because if the sage engages in actions, they will do so not because they are led by external circumstances. As we saw, there might be situations where the sage will not save a person in danger. Rather, only if the result of the contemplation of virtue is that the drowning person should be saved will the sage do so. And, as Plotinus emphasizes, the sage will consider this merely a necessity. They do not save someone because they regard this act as a primary good, as a beautiful action representing the pinnacle of human activity. Rather, as we already saw, Plotinus explicitly states that the sage's virtuous soul has its own beauty (καλὸν) as its goal[227] and thus views necessary actions simply for what they are –necessary. If, however, virtue's verdict is that Socrates should save Fred, he will do so. Having contemplated, he will have the correct λογισμός and will then form the correct rational desire to save Fred. And if Socrates manages to save Fred in exactly the way he wishes – without being impeded (ἀνεμποδίστως), saving Fred is 'primarily' in Socrates' power. In other words, true freedom and autonomy are the unimpeded activity of the rational soul which acts on the basis of νοῦς. Thus, the sage is never *determined* by external circumstances, even if they engage in necessary actions.

[227] *Enn.* 6.8.6.1-18, cited on p. 137.

Now it is worth highlighting that no one, not even sages, possesses full knowledge or control of the external circumstances and thus of the outcome of any given action. This kind of stable wisdom belongs to the World Soul alone. Thus, it is certainly possible that the sage's actions could be impeded.[228] As Plotinus concedes in an earlier chapter of this treatise, 'everything in action, even if Reason prevails, is mixed and is not *purely* in our power.'[229] Likewise, in *Ennead* 6.8.4 Plotinus emphasizes that necessity – which comes from outside – is always a part of any given action.[230] Nonetheless, we should keep in mind that in the final version of the second condition, Plotinus explicitly includes external actions. We learn that what is primarily in the sage's power is whatever they wish and enact without being impeded 'both in external [actions] and when it is independent (ἔξω τε καὶ ἐφ' αὑτῆς). This gives us strong reasons for thinking that *actions* (and not just the psychological processes prior to the action) can be fully up to the sage. This, of course, requires that the action occurs precisely in the way the sage wishes it to occur and that they are not impeded. If Socrates wishes to save Fred, but some external circumstance (e.g., a shark circling Fred) prevent him from doing so, saving Fred was in Socrates' power.

To close, I want to highlight that Plotinus' account is notably different from the Stoics. For example, Epictetus restricts the domain of τὸ ἐφ' ἡμῖν to psychological processes prior to actions – what is external is not in our power.[231] Now Plotinus agrees that the outcome of any given action is not in the sage's power. However, one could think that it is quite rare for a sage to wish for an action that he knows will be impeded. Be that as it may, Plotinus developed a nuanced account that allows

[228] This is a claim we also find in Epictetus. See *Disc.* 4.1.68-73.

[229] *Enn.* 6.8.2.35-37: ἐπεὶ καὶ τὸ ἐν πράξει πᾶν, κἂν κρατῇ ὁ λόγος, μικτὸν καὶ οὐ καθαρὸν δύναται τὸ ἐφ' ἡμῖν ἔχειν.

[230] *Enn.* 6.8.4.9: Ἀλλὰ καὶ οἷς πρᾶξις, ἡ ἀνάγκη ἔξωθεν.

[231] Cf., *Disc.* 2.5.2.4-6: τὰ ἔξω οὐκ ἐπ' ἐμοί.

him to maintain that there are cases where the sage's *actions* are fully autonomous and free. We have now discussed two out of three conditions which Plotinus takes autonomy to require. The third condition, which we have yet to discuss, is that we act *voluntarily*.

§3 Voluntary actions

Since in *Ennead* 6.8.1, Plotinus appears to operate with the Aristotelian framework, it will be helpful to provide a brief account of how Aristotle defines voluntary actions.

Aristotle's most in-depth discussion of voluntary actions is in *Nicomachean Ethics* 3.1. There, Aristotle begins his account by stating that praise and blame pertain to voluntary actions and affections.[232] Involuntary actions, by contrast are not blame- or praiseworthy. He then goes on to say that involuntary actions either come about by force (τὰ βίᾳ) or because of ignorance (ἢ δι' ἄγνοιαν).[233] Over the course of chapter 1, Aristotle spells out what exactly he means by these two conditions. With respect to the latter, Aristotle will say that ignorance of the particular circumstances that constitute the action will make it involuntary. Regarding the former, Aristotle gives three slightly different accounts,[234] but all three basically state that an action is forced *iff* the action (i) does not originate in the agent, and (ii) the agent does not contribute anything to the action.[235] Examples of

[232] *NE* 1109b30-5; see also *MM* 1187a21.

[233] *NE* 1109b35- 1110a1.

[234] *NE* 1110a1-2, 1110b1-3, and 1110b15-17.

[235] One could think that we don't need both conditions – (i) seems to follow from (ii). However, as becomes clearer in his discussion of voluntary actions in the *EE*, Aristotle wants to exclude cases where an agent makes a contribution but where the principle of action is *external* to the agent. The example he gives in the *EE* (1224b13-15) is that of someone taking someone else's hand to strike a third person with it. Here, the second person makes a contribution to the striking of the third person, but the principle of action lies within the first person.

this include a ship that gets carried off by winds, or being carried away by people who have control over you.

However, Aristotle is well aware that there are more complicated cases in which both conditions are met, and where we still want to say that the actions were involuntary. The example Aristotle gives is that of a tyrant who tells you to do something bad you do not wish to do, but if you do it, your family will live, otherwise, they will die. Another example is throwing cargo overboard in a storm. Such cases Aristotle calls 'mixed' – they are not choiceworthy in their own rights, but since the action originates within the agent and they have the principle of action within them, it is still up to them to act or not to act. Such actions, Aristotle says, are mixed – though forced, they are still 'more like' voluntary actions.[236] Aristotle also excludes cases where an agent is compelled by pleasant external things, say, a tasty looking pastry – if we allowed this, Aristotle says, everything external would be forced. On Aristotle's view, in such cases the agent still has the principle of action within them and thus it is up to them (ἐπ' αὐτῷ) not to eat the pastry.[237] Likewise, Aristotle thinks that it would be 'absurd' to say that actions caused by non-rational desires (e.g., appetite or spirit) count as involuntary. For this would entail that children and animals cannot act voluntary, which Aristotle denies.[238]

We can sum up Aristotle's account of voluntary actions as follows. An action is voluntary *iff* (i) it originates in the agent (either in the agent's rational or non-rational desires), (ii) the agent contributing something to the action and (iii) the agent knows the relevant particular circumstances that constitute the action. Note that this means that on Aristotle's view, vicious

[236] *NE* 1110a11-12.

[237] Cf. *NE* 1100b9-11.

[238] *NE* 1111a25-26.

actions can be voluntary because the vicious person does not need to have knowledge about what is morally right or wrong. With this in mind, let us now return to Plotinus.

The only account of voluntary actions Plotinus gives is in *Ennead* 6.8.1. There, Plotinus first tells us that everything is voluntary that is (i) not forced (μὴ βίᾳ) and (ii) with knowledge (μετὰ τοῦ εἰδέναι).[239] However, towards the end of the chapter, Plotinus makes clear that he thinks Aristotle's knowledge requirement is insufficient – we need a third condition. Thus, according to Plotinus, an action counts as voluntary *iff* the following three conditions are met:

1. The action is not forced.
2. The agent has knowledge of the particular circumstances.
3. The agent has knowledge ὅλως.

Given that the second condition is self-explanatory, I will focus on the first and the third condition. Let us begin with the condition that is absent in Aristotle, and which Plotinus introduces at the end of *Ennead* 6.8.1:

> And, certainly, it is necessary that knowledge (τὴν εἴδησιν) relating to what is voluntary not only include particulars (οὐκ ἐν τοῖς καθέκαστα μόνον εἶναι), but also what is known ὅλως. For why is it involuntary if you do not know (ἀγνοεῖ) it is a friend [you are about to kill], but *not* involuntary if you do not know (ἀγνοεῖ) that you should not (ὅτι μὴ δεῖ) [kill]? Because you should have learned that this is so? Not knowing (τὸ μὴ εἰδέναι) that one should have learned these things is not voluntary, nor is anything voluntary that drives you away from learning them.
>
> (*Enn.* 6.8.1.39-44)

The third condition is that the agent has knowledge ὅλως. What does Plotinus mean by this? If we look at the example Plotinus gives, at least *prima facie* he does not seem to think of the kind of knowledge we encountered in his account of τὸ ἐφ' ἡμῖν – there is no talk of contemplative activity

[239] *Enn.* 6.8.1.33-34.

or νοῦς. Nor does Plotinus mention that the agent needs to know *why* the action in question is right or wrong. Rather, what Plotinus seems to have in mind are general truths such as 'killing is bad.' Thus, what the agent needs to know is *that* an action is good or bad.

Now one could think that since such general – perhaps even conventional – truths are conveyed through education, upbringing, and laws, most people will be able to meet this third condition. On this reading, Plotinus would potentially make voluntary actions available to non-sages by maintaining that voluntary actions do not require the kind of serious contemplation that acting autonomously does. However, it is not obvious that Plotinus has such a deflationary reading in mind. For one, we should bear in mind that this is still a *knowledge* requirement – true belief will not be sufficient, and Plotinian knowledge is not easy to come by. For instance, in *Ennead* 1.3.4, Plotinus makes clear that knowledge about what is good and what is not good is part of dialectics and as such, belongs to philosophers alone:

> Dialectic is concerned with what is good and not good (περὶ ἀγαθοῦ διαλέγεται καὶ περὶ μὴ ἀγαθοῦ), and whatever is to be classified under the good and whatever is to be classified under the opposite, and, clearly, about what is everlasting and what is not so. [It does this] by means of knowledge about all things, not belief (ἐπιστήμῃ περὶ πάντων, οὐ δόξῃ)
>
> (*Enn.* 1.3.4.6-9)

As this passage shows, Plotinus maintains that in order to understand what counts as good and what does not, belief is not sufficient.[240] Rather, one needs knowledge about all things. And this passage also shows that Plotinus has in mind everyday moral truths such as 'killing is bad.' After all, he lists knowledge about intelligible things as a separate point. Thus, in this treatise Plotinus insists that philosophers alone have knowledge about what is good and what is bad. Thus, it would be surprising

[240] See also *Enn.* 1.8.9.1-3: 'With what, then, do we know good and evil? First, with what do we know vice? For we know virtue with intellect itself or with wisdom (νῷ αὐτῷ καὶ φρονήσει); for it recognizes itself.'

if in *Ennead* 6.8, Plotinus were to concede for no apparent reason that non-sages can have knowledge about what is good or bad. This, of course, does not mean that non-sages cannot have correct *beliefs* about what is good or bad. However, we already saw Plotinus maintaining that this is *not* sufficient to render an action voluntary.[241]

Thus, rather than the proposed reading, I suggest Plotinus uses this third condition to restrict voluntary actions to sages alone. This would also be in line with what we already saw that in *Ennead* 3.1.9. Recall that there, Plotinus insists that non-sages do not have voluntary impulses or dispositions, because their souls are changed by external things. Accordingly, their actions are not voluntary either. Finally, I think that if we understand the third condition in the way I propose, then it would nicely supplement the knowledge requirement of τὸ ἐφ' ἡμῖν. Recall that the latter requires that the agent know *why* the action is correct or good. The knowledge requirement we get here adds that one must know *that* the action is correct. This, taken together, could constitute the action-guiding premises that the sage derives from νοῦς. After all, practical syllogism would also include universal premises.[242] Thus, I believe that even though the knowledge that is required for voluntary actions is different from the one required for autonomous and free actions, Plotinus adds this third

[241] Cf. *Enn.* 6.8.3.5-19, cited on p. 134.

[242] Cf., Bene (2013) who argue that the act of contemplation provides the sages with the premises for the practical syllogism that will guide their action. On this account, we have a major premise that identifies universal values or goal. The minor premise reflects the particular circumstances of action. The action then follows as the conclusion of this reasoning process. For a similar view, see O'Meara (2019: 118–121). This need not be in tension with the theory of automatic actions, since nothing in our passage suggests that the sage always has to deliberate about their actions.

condition in order to safeguard an epistemic standard for voluntary actions. This, then, suggests that non-sages will not satisfy this condition.[243]

The second condition is that the actions occur without force (μὴ βίᾳ). As we saw, Aristotle spells this out in terms of (i) the agent having the principle of action in themselves, and (ii) the agent contributing something to the action. However, Plotinus must interpret the μὴ βίᾳ condition differently. As we shall see in much more detail below, Plotinus holds that all human beings – including vicious ones – fulfill Aristotle's μὴ βίᾳ condition. Yet, Plotinus also insists that vicious people do not act voluntarily. This alone shows that he cannot be adopting Aristotle's understanding of μὴ βίᾳ. Another reason for this is that Plotinus does accept that having the principle of action within oneself is a crucial component of what constitutes an action. However, as we shall see, for Plotinus, this agency feature is importantly distinct from and independent of the idea of voluntariness. Nevertheless, beyond this single passage in *Ennead* 6.8.1, Plotinus is, as Ursula Coope put it, 'puzzlingly silent' on the notion of voluntary actions and how exactly they differ from actions that are ἐφ' ἡμῖν.[244] This makes it difficult to pin down precisely how Plotinus wants us to understand the μὴ βίᾳ condition. Given the context, however, I suggest that Plotinus may be using μὴ βίᾳ to refer back to the very first condition of ἐφ' ἡμῖν, namely that the agent is not enslaved to strong πάθη or external forces.

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[243] Perhaps a case could be made that people who have the civic virtues can act voluntarily. However, I don't see any strong reasons for thinking that it is important to Plotinus to make voluntary actions available to practically virtuous people. Plotinus' attitude towards those who live the 'all-too human life' (*Enn.* 2.9.9.9) is overall quite negative. Moreover, in *Enn.* 4.4.44, Plotinus maintains that the practically virtuous person *is* subject to sorcery – they are 'in love with what *appears* beautiful in actions.' Here and elsewhere Plotinus maintains that the life of the practically virtuous person falls quite short of that of the sage.

[244] Coope (2020): 50n36.

§4 Acting κατὰ πρόνοιαν

I want to conclude our discussion of the sage by explaining how their actions always align with (and so are not outside) of Providence, and by providing some further textual evidence for the idea that even the sage's actions are predetermined. In our discussion of *Ennead* 6.8.6, we already saw Plotinus acknowledge that even for sages there are necessary actions. This, of course, follows from his overall commitment that *all* actions are contained in the τάξις of the universe. Thus, for Plotinus true autonomy and freedom must be compatible with determinism.

Aside from the many passages in which Plotinus claims that no one can escape the divine law of the universe,[245] and that Providence reaches everything,[246] there are two passages where Plotinus is more explicit about the fact that freedom and determinism are compatible:

> For man[247] is not only what he has been made to be (Οὐ γὰρ μόνον ὃ πεποίηταί ἐστιν), but he possesses another principle which is free (ἀρχὴν ἄλλην ἐλευθέραν) although it is neither outside Providence (οὐκ ἔξω τῆς προνοίας) nor outside the λόγος of the whole universe (οὐδὲ τοῦ λόγου τοῦ ὅλου). For what is there is not separated from what is here, but the superior illuminates the inferior and the superior is perfect Providence (ἡ τελεία πρόνοια).
>
> (*Enn.* 3.3.4.6-8)

Here, we get a clear statement that the 'free principle' sages possess is still subject to Providence and the λόγος of the universe. This is exactly what we should expect him to say. For according to Plotinus, sages transcend Fate, and so their actions must align with a different, higher principle. As we learn

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[245] Cf., e.g., *Enn.* 2.3.8.1-4; 3.2.4.25-26; 3.2.13.16-17; 4.3.13.1-3; 4.3.24.8-11; 4.4.42.18.

[246] Cf., e.g., *Enn.* 3.26.21; 3.2.7.33-36; 2.3.6.20; 4.3.8.46-47.

[247] I don't think we need to understand ὁ κακὸς as the implied subject (as Gerson et al. and Armstrong do). For this would suggest that even the vicious person necessarily possesses this higher principle. But a couple of lines later (3.3.4.23-24), Plotinus explicitly states that this principle does not belong to all human beings (ἐπὶ δὲ ἀνθρώπων οὐκ ἐπὶ πάντων).

here, this principle is Providence and the λόγος of the universe, viz. the World Soul. Given that Plotinus aligns Fate with Nature, he presumably has in mind the higher part of the World Soul, an intellect which transcends the sensible world, and which contemplates the Forms in νοῦς. This, I think, is what Plotinus means when he says that the sage's free principle is not outside the λόγος of the universe.

The claim that the sage's free principle is not outside Providence can be understood in two ways. Plotinus could again have in mind the higher part of the World Soul, which functions as a form of Providence. Alternatively, he could mean the hypostasis νοῦς, which is the highest form of Providence and provides the World Soul with the blueprints for the sensible world.[248] However, given that both the higher part of the World Soul and νοῦς transcend the sensible world, perhaps not much hinges on which of these Plotinus has in mind. Either way, νοῦς will be the source from which the sage derives the 'truly free' premises, and it will also be Providence. We can interpret the 'illumination' language in roughly the same way: when the sage derives action-guiding premises from νοῦς, they contemplate the same content as the higher part of the World Soul and therefore Providence. Thus, either νοῦς (as perfect Providence) or the World Soul (as higher Providence) provides the sage with the input for their future (and predetermined) actions.

The second passage is from *Ennead* 4.8.5. In this treatise, Plotinus discusses the descents of souls into bodies, and one of his main goals is to show that those descents are both necessary and voluntary. Having just explained that souls are 'amphibious' in that of necessity, their undescended part always remains in νοῦς while their lower parts necessarily descend into the sensible world, Plotinus concludes:

[248] Cf., e.g., *Enn*. 3.2.2.; 3.2.13.18-33; 6.7.1.49-55; 6.7.10.

> So, there is no discordance between the [concepts of] sowing into the world of generation and the descent for the perfection of the universe, the judgement and the cave, *necessity and voluntariness* (ἥ τε ἀνάγκη τό τε ἑκούσιον) – *since necessity contains voluntariness* (ἐπείπερ ἔχει τὸ ἑκούσιον ἡ ἀνάγκη) – and [there is discordance between the concepts of] the entry into body as something evil. (*Enn.* 4.8.5.1-4)

Here, Plotinus presents a whole bunch of seemingly incompatible or even mutually exclusive pairs which – on his view – are perfectly compatible. The pairs that are of interest to us is that that of voluntariness and necessity. Plotinus makes clear that since he maintains that necessity *includes* the voluntary, these two notions are perfectly compatible. Note that what Plotinus says here is slightly different from what we saw in *Ennead* 6.8.6. There, Plotinus discussed a subset of necessary actions, namely ones that *befall* the soul. There, I suggested that Plotinus has in mind actions of others (for instance Fred slipping and drowning) which are in some sense imposed on the sage. Nonetheless, as we saw, such necessary actions can still be entirely autonomous and free. Here, however, Plotinus seems to have in mind the superset: *all* necessary actions, not just the ones 'befalling' the soul could technically be voluntary. This makes perfect sense given that the sage will sometimes act on νοῦς without having been prompted by external circumstances. To sum up, the compatibilism Plotinus defends allows for the sages' actions to be (per-)formed:

(1) By (ὑπὸ) the sage themselves,

(2) Freely,

(3) Autonomously,

(4) Voluntarily,

(5) κατὰ πρόνοιαν

Thus, the version of compatibilism Plotinus subscribes to makes (1) – (4) perfectly compatible with (5). This way, Plotinus can maintain that the sage's actions are predetermined and part of the

universal τάξις but also free, autonomous, and voluntary. With this in mind, let us now turn to an issue this raises for non-sages and especially vicious people, namely whether we should hold them morally responsible.

§5 Moral vs Causal Responsibility

The standard view in the literature is that Plotinus wants to – and in fact does – safeguard moral responsibility.[249] In this section, I will argue against this view by showing that Plotinus carefully distinguishes between causal and moral responsibility precisely because he rejects the idea that we should hold vicious people morally responsible. They are neither blameworthy for their character nor for the actions that spring from it.

Let us begin by looking at the passage where the distinction between moral and causal responsibility is most clearly at work. Plotinus just argued that it is ridiculous that human beings blame animals for being savage when human beings themselves become savage. This prompts the following lines of thought:

> [Objection] But if human beings are involuntarily bad (ἄκοντές εἰσι κακοὶ), i.e., they are such not voluntarily (τοιοῦτοι οὐχ ἑκόντες), then one could neither (i) blame those who do wrong (οὔτ' ἄν τις τοὺς ἀδικοῦντας αἰτιάσαιτο) (ii) nor should those who suffer (τοὺς πάσχοντας) blame them as though they suffered [these wrongdoings] because of them (ὡς δι' αὐτοὺς ταῦτα πάσχοντας).
>
> [Response to (i)] But if it is in fact also necessary that they become bad in this way (ἀνάγκη οὕτω κακοὺς γίνεσθαι) – whether this is because of the heavenly motion (εἴτε ὑπὸ τῆς φορᾶς) or because of the principle which supplies the consequences from that source (εἴτε τῆς ἀρχῆς διδούσης τὸ ἀκόλουθον ἐντεῦθεν) – then this is by Nature (φυσικῶς οὕτως).
>
> [New objection] But if it is the λόγος itself that causes [this], how would it not be wrongdoing in this way? [Addressed in 3.2.11]

[249] E.g., Remes (2007: 208) and (2019: 142-163), Eliasson (2008: 182), Gerson (2014), Nagy (2017: 128), Emilsson (2017: 349), Coope (2020: 183-200), and Noble (2022: 400).

> [Response to (ii)] But [it is] 'involuntary' (τὸ ἄκοντες) because [their] error is involuntary (ἁμαρτία ἀκούσιον). This does not, however, do away with the fact that (οὐκ ἀναιρεῖ) they are the ones who themselves acted of themselves (τὸ αὐτοὺς τοὺς πράττοντας παρ'αὐτῶν εἶναι). Rather, because they themselves do the action (αὐτοὶ ποιοῦσι), for this reason they also are the ones who erred (διὰ τοῦτο καὶ αὐτοὶ ἁμαρτάνουσιν). Or else they would not have erred at all (ἢ οὐδ' ἂν ὅλως ἥμαρτον), if they themselves were not the ones doing the action (μὴ αὐτοὶ οἱ ποιοῦντες ὄντες). The necessity does not [mean that it comes] from outside (οὐκ ἔξωθεν), but that it is inevitably the case (ἀλλ' ὅτι πάντως).
>
> (*Enn*. 3.2.10.1-12)

The passage begins with two claims, both of which are based on the premise that people are involuntarily bad. If so, then first (i) we should not blame wrongdoers (τοὺς ἀδικοῦντας). The second claim is that (ii) whenever someone suffers at the hands of a wrongdoer, it would be wrong if the victim maintained that they suffered this *because of* the wrongdoer. Presumably, we can supply the same reasoning: because the wrongdoer involuntarily bad, their actions are also involuntarily and thus this person is not responsible – not even causally – for their vicious actions.

Note that these two claims are importantly different. Claim (i) says that we should not hold bad people *morally* responsible for their actions – it would be wrong to blame such people for their wrongdoing. The second claim (ii) is much stronger. Unlike (i), it also calls to remove all *causal* responsibility from the vicious person. This point is forcefully made by emphasizing that not even the victim should blame the wrongdoer for their action *as though* the victim suffered this wrongdoing 'because of' or 'through' the bad person (ὡς δι' αὐτοὺς). Let's take an example. Suppose that George pushes Fred off the dock, and Fred drowns. According to (i), we should not blame George for pushing Fred off the dock. After all, George is not vicious of himself. According to (ii), we should not even say that Fred's drowning is caused 'by' or 'through' George. Note that these two claims correspond to the distinction between moral and causal responsibility I introduced above. In what follows, I shall show that Plotinus accepts (i) but rejects (ii). That is, bad people should be

held causally but not morally responsible. Thus, let us now turn to Plotinus' response to these two claims.

I take it that Plotinus' first response addresses the concern raised in (i), i.e., that we should not blame bad people for the way they are. The details of the response are somewhat obscure, but the main point is clear enough: moral blame presupposes voluntary agency, and (as we saw above) since only sages act voluntarily, we should not blame bad people of being unjust, because their badness is not voluntary. He reinforces this point when he says that it is in fact both necessary and natural that bad people are the way they are. He then gives two examples which could be responsible for the badness of a person but where the badness would still count as natural. The first example is that the heavenly motion is the cause. We already saw in Chapter 2 how we should understand such claims.[250] The second example is somewhat obscure. The badness, Plotinus says, could also be caused by 'the principle that supplies the consequences from this source.' Here, I think Plotinus alludes to something we already saw him argue elsewhere, namely that Nature will effortlessly ensure and necessitate that the contents of the universal τάξις will unfold. And, as we saw, the τάξις contains the character traits a person chose, and these are manifest in the heavens even before they become manifest in the people themselves.[251] I take it, then, that the principle in question is Nature, the lower part of the World Soul which ensures that everything unfolds according to the universal τάξις. Given that it is *by Nature* that some people are bad, we can see why Plotinus maintains that

[250] See Chapter 2, pp. 76-77.

[251] Cf., *Enn.* 3.3.6.17-22. See also Chapter 3, pp. 120-121. Porphyry tells us that 'Plotinus would foretell how each of the children living with him would turn out' (Προεῖπε δ' ἂν καὶ τῶν συνόντων παίδων περὶ ἑκάστου οἷος ἀποβήσεται). Unsurprisingly, Porphyry also remarks that Plotinus' predictions were correct. Cf., *VP* 11.8-19.

we could not reasonably blame bad people for being the way they are[252] – higher principles have determined that this person's being bad in these ways is in fact natural.[253] Thus, we might say that Plotinus reframes what is commonly taken to be something 'blameworthy' as a *natural unfolding*. Note, however, that this does not mean that we can't say that certain people or actions are *locally* wrong or bad. As we shall see below, Plotinus does not mean to deny that there are in fact bad people who do bad things. However, judging that an action or person is bad is to be distinguished from *blaming* them. I will return to this below. For now, let us now turn to Plotinus' response to claim (ii).

Claim (ii) is that not even those who suffer at the hands of wrongdoers should blame them 'as though they suffered these wrongs because of them.' Again, I take this claim to mean that we should not even hold bad people *causally* responsible for their actions. And it is in Plotinus' response to this second claim that it becomes clear that he wants to distinguish between moral and causal responsibility. He once more affirms that bad people are bad involuntarily, but he is quick to add that this does not imply that they also lack the power of *causal agency*. As he says, 'they are the ones who themselves acted of themselves' (τὸ αὐτοὺς τοὺς πράττοντας παρ'αὐτῶν εἶναι) and 'they themselves do the action' (αὐτοὶ ποιοῦσι). This, however, is compatible both with them being involuntarily bad and with their actions being involuntary. If they were not the ones acting, Plotinus

[252] At *NE* 3.5 1114a23-25, Aristotle makes a similar point when he notes that 'while no one blames those who are ugly through nature (διὰ φύσιν αἰσχροῖς), we do blame those who are ugly through lack of training and through neglect.' Plotinus, as our passage makes clear, disagrees with the latter.

[253] This response raises the 'λόγος objection', which Plotinus will only respond to in the next chapter. The response is, unsurprisingly, that the λόγος does in fact produce such 'evils' because they are necessary for the completeness of the universe. Local evils, as we already saw in the previous chapter, are good at the global level. However, since most people lack this insight, they, 'like those unskilled in the craft of painting, find fault when the colors are not beautiful all over, whereas the craftsman has, because of his skill, assigned what is appropriate to each place.' (*Enn.* 3.2.11.9-12).

says, then they would not have made an error in the first place. Here, too, I think the point Plotinus wants to make is about *causal agency*: if a person was not the one doing the action, then they would not be the one who erred. But the fact that they did err shows that they were the ones acting. Thus, even if one acts from compulsion, error, or natural necessity, the action is still *theirs*. As Plotinus then adds, the fact that the bad person is necessarily bad does not mean that there is coercion from outside that forces them to be bad or to do a vicious act. All it shows that it is inevitably so – a point Plotinus already made in his response to claim (i).

That the idea that we should refrain from blaming people for their bad characters is important to Plotinus is shown by the fact that he once more returns to this topic in *Ennead* 3.3.3. Having just stated that the way every individual is is already included in the τάξις of the universe, he turns to the question of what the source of one's moral character is. To answer this, Plotinus says, we must investigate

> whether one should trace the cause of the quality of each person's moral character (ἀνενεγκεῖν δεῖ τοῦ ποιοῦ τοῦ ἐν τοῖς ἤθεσιν ἑκάστου τὴν αἰτίαν) (i) back to the producer (τὸν ποιήσαντα), if there is one, or (ii) to the product itself (ἢ ἐπὶ τὸ γενόμενον αὐτό), or (iii) whether one should not assign blame at all (ἢ ὅλως οὐκ αἰτιατέον), as one also doesn't in the case of the generation of plants for their not having sense-perception or in the case of the other living beings for their not having [the same faculties] as humans. For this is the same as asking 'why do human beings not have the same faculties as gods?' For why is it reasonable (εὐλόγως) in these cases that we blame (αἰτιώμεθα) neither the living beings themselves (οὔτε αὐτὰ) nor their producer (οὔτε τὸν ποιήσαντα), but [reasonable] in the case of human beings because they are not better than this (ὅτι μὴ κρεῖττον ἢ τοῦτο)? For if [the thought is] that it was possible for a human being to be more beautiful than he is (ὅτι ἐδύνατο τοῦτο κάλλιον εἶναι), and if [this could have occurred] by the person themselves (παρ' αὐτοῦ) adding something to make themselves better (προστιθέντος τι εἰς τὸ κρεῖττον), then the one who did not do so is the cause to himself (αὐτὸς αἴτιος ἑαυτῷ ὁ μὴ ποιήσας).
>
> But if [the betterment is] not from the person themselves (μὴ παρ' αὐτοῦ,) but had to be externally added from their producer (ἔδει ἔξωθεν προσεῖναι παρὰ τοῦ γεννητοῦ), then [he is being] absurd (ἄτοπος) who demands more than what was given (ὁ τὸ πλέον ἀπαιτῶν τοῦ δοθέντος), just as if he were demanding [this] also in the case of other animals or plants. For one must not ask whether [a thing is] inferior to another (εἰ ἔλαττον ἄλλου), but whether [it is] as itself self-

> sufficient (ὡς αὐτὸ αὐτάρκως), for not everything was meant to be equal (οὐ γὰρ πάντα ἴσα ἔδει). Did the producer, then, measure them out with the intention that all things should not be equal? Absolutely not (Οὐδαμῶς). But it was natural (κατὰ φύσιν) that things should be so. For the λόγος [of the universe] follows upon another soul, and this soul follows upon Intellect, and Intellect is not some one of the things here but all things (νοῦς δὲ οὐ τούτων τι ἕν, ἀλλὰ πάντα).
>
> (*Enn.* 3.3.3.4-23)

Plotinus begins by giving us three options. Either we blame the producer,[254] or we blame the product, or else, we do not assign any blame at all. I think it is clear that Plotinus opts for the third option. The argument, I take it, goes like this. First, Plotinus makes the reasonable observation that people should only be blamed for not being better than they are if they could in fact become better than they are *by themselves*. If, however, the betterment would have to be supplied externally (e.g., by the parents or the World Soul), then it would be absurd to assign blame. Now we already know from the previous chapter that Plotinus does not think that people can become better by themselves. This naturally follows from his commitment that all things, including characters and actions, are already predetermined within the universal τάξις. As we saw, the World Soul assigned everyone a role, and the script of the play has no gaps that could be filled. This, I think, is in the background here and explains why Plotinus brings in the World Soul, Soul, and Intellect: it is these higher principles are ultimately the source of one's character, and so it is absurd to blame people for being the way they are or for their bad actions. Importantly, this does not do away with the fact that there is actual wrongdoing, as Plotinus makes clear in *Ennead* 4.3.16:

> And indeed, the wrongdoing (τὸ ἄδικον) which is actually done by one person to another is wrong for the one who did it (αὐτῷ μὲν τῷ ποιήσαντι ἄδικον), and the doer is not exempt (οὐκ

[254] Perhaps a reference to the *Timaeus*. There, Timaeus argues that some bad constitutions are entirely beyond our control, because they are the result of a poor upbringing or physical ailments. Accordingly, 'it is the begetters far more than the begotten, and the nurturers far more than the nurtured, that bear the blame for all this.' (87b4-6). This, however, leaves open that the products are blameworthy to some extent.

> ἀφείθη) from responsibility (αἰτίας), but as [contained] in the order of the universe (συντεταγμένον δ' ἐν τῷ παντὶ) it is neither wrong within that [order] (οὐκ ἄδικον ἐν ἐκείνῳ), nor with respect to the victim (εἰς τὸν παθόντα), but it had to be thus (ἀλλ' οὕτως ἐχρῆν). (*Enn.* 4.3.16.17-21)

Here, Plotinus uses a line of reasoning that we already encountered in our discussion of *Ennead* 2.3., namely that even though globally speaking there are no bad things, there are local evils.[255] Here too, Plotinus reminds us to keep the global and the local viewpoints distinct. As he says, at the local level, there clearly are wrong actions and wrongdoers. As to be expected, Plotinus does not mention blame here. Rather, he emphasizes that the agent is *causally* responsible for their actions. Plotinus then contrasts this with the global perspective. As soon as we shift to this, he says, the action in question no longer counts as a wrongdoing, not even with respect to the victim. Plotinus' explanation for this is that the action belongs to the universal τάξις, and as such it is not wrong (or bad). This is exactly what we saw him argue in *Ennead* 2.3. The idea is once more that from the global viewpoint, the victim *deserves* to suffer the 'bad' action in question. Once more we have the same result: globally speaking, everything is good, but this does not preclude there being local evils. And vicious actions and are locally speaking wrong. They do not, however, warrant moral blame, neither from the local nor the global perspective. From the local perspective, assigning blame is wrong because bad people are the way they are involuntarily, and it is not in their power to become better. Therefore, they are not blameworthy. And viewed from the global perspective assigning blame is wrong simply because there the action is no longer a wrong. In fact, what is locally speaking a wrongdoing is globally speaking a just punishment.

Yet, it is important to highlight – as Plotinus does in this passage – that a strong notion of

[255] See Chapter 3, pp. 96-99.

causal agency remains in place. This allows us to evaluate agents *without blaming them.* For example, we can say that George is causally responsible for pushing Fred off the dock, and that he harmed Fred. Locally speaking, this was a wrongdoing, but an involuntary one. George does not meet the universal knowledge requirement, and we might even say he also fails meet the μὴ βίᾳ condition. Perhaps Fred insulted George earlier that day, and, enslaved to a powerful πάθος – anger, perhaps, George pushes Fred off the dock, acting on a 'blind impulse.' Even so, because George acted involuntarily, we can only judge that his action was (locally speaking) wrong. But it is here that Plotinus urges us to stop.[256]

Before I close, I want to address one concern that might arise from my reading, namely that eliminating blame and praise also eliminates the concept of punishments and rewards. Given that Plotinus emphasizes throughout the *Enneads* that the divine law is inescapable and that that justice will always be served,[257] it is crucial that my interpretation leaves room for such a cosmic code of justice. My response is that while we are typically inclined to think of moral blame as the thing that warrants punishment, it should by now be clear that Plotinus rejects this. Instead, I think that for Plotinus *causal* responsibility warrants punishment and rewards. In other words, for Plotinus, one

[256] One might object that sages could be blameworthy for any of their actions, since they act voluntarily. However, as we saw, sages always act on νοῦς and therefore *always* do what is right. We might perhaps say that they are *potentially* morally blameworthy. But since it is, in fact, metaphysically impossible for them to be *actually* morally blameworthy, this distinction does not make much sense. As a result, with respect to the sages, too, the concept of blame is superfluous. A similar line of thought applies to the notion of praise. By Plotinus' own lights, sages alone are praiseworthy. But given that they always do the right thing for the right reasons – they do what is necessary and consider it such – praise becomes superfluous. Again, since betterment is not possible, non-sages will never act voluntarily, and therefore will never be praiseworthy. This also explains the otherwise puzzling fact that Plotinus not once mentions that good people should be praised.

[257] See note 245.

is not punished (cosmically) because one is morally blameworthy. The punishment is based on *causal* responsibility. Recall that Plotinus does not deny that – locally speaking – there are genuinely bad people and bad actions. And since bad actions are done *by the agent themselves*, they can be held causally responsible for their actions. This also fits nicely with the kinds of punishments Plotinus discuses. For example, at one point, Plotinus endorses the *lex talionis* principle, according to which individuals suffer the same punishment that they made other people suffer. He gives the example of men who committed acts of matricide or rape, and who are reborn as women, condemned to endure the very violations they once inflicted.[258]

One nice corollary of this view is that this even applies to animals. For animals also suffer punishment (or reward) insofar as they too get reincarnated as some other animal. And if the principle on the basis of which punishment (and reward) is assigned to them is not moral but *causal* responsibility, it would be more consistent for Plotinus to treat animals the same way as humans (except, of course, sages). As we saw, Plotinus thinks it is 'ridiculous' to blame animals for being savage. Thus, since Plotinus denies that betterment is possible, blaming people is effectively useless in the Plotinian universe. However, that agents are still causally responsible for their actions allows Plotinus to maintain that the World Soul and its universal τάξις, always already assigned all appropriate punishments. Removing the concept of moral blame from a world in which most people cannot (and should not) make moral judgments and instead entrusting a divine omniscient principle to enforce the cosmic code of justice does not seem to be a bad solution.

[258] *Enn.* 3.2.13.1-17.

§Conclusion

I argued that Plotinus carefully distinguishes between moral and causal responsibility precisely because he aims to eliminate moral responsibility. If I am right, then Plotinus' position stands out, most notably from that of the Stoics.[259] As I showed, Plotinus holds that all agents are *causally* responsible for their actions. But since bad people are involuntarily bad and act involuntarily, and since it is not in their power to be (or become) better, blame is never appropriate. I also showed that this view does not eliminate the possibility of there being bad actions or bad people, nor does it remove the concepts of reward and punishment. Moral responsibility, then, has no role to play in a world that is always already the best possible one.

[259] On this, see Bobzien (1998): 276-301.

Conclusion

In this dissertation, I argued that Plotinus is a compatibilist in a quite specific sense. He maintains that sages can and do act freely, autonomously, and voluntarily, despite the fact that their actions are predetermined by Providence. Moreover, I showed that for him, determinism is perfectly compatible with agency. Thus, the fact that agents (including non-sages) act of themselves (παρ' αὑτῶν) is compatible with the idea that their impulses and actions are predetermined by Fate. I also argued that – contrary to the standard view in the literature – Plotinus does not uphold a notion of moral responsibility. Instead, he insists that we can only hold people *causally* responsible. Moral blame is never appropriate because people are not voluntarily bad.

In Chapter 1, I argued that Plotinus' criticism of what he takes to be the Stoic view targets very specific points. Nothing in this early treatise suggests that he rejects universal causal determinism. Rather, he takes issue with the idea of World Soul Primacy (WSP). Here, I showed that he criticizes two different versions of WSP. On the first version, the World Soul is the sole, ultimate, all-pervading cause from which everything derives and which also moves everything. Plotinus' criticism is that this view undermines the very thing it aims to establish, namely, a causal chain or a mutual interweaving of causes, and Fate (understood simply as the causal chain and interweaving of causes). His nuanced contention is that in a picture where the World Soul is the only cause and mover, and the entity that pervades everything, there is no room for any meaningful agent-patient distinction. Rather, everything would simply be one. This, in turn, eliminates the possibility of causal chains (and thus of Fate), because the World Soul would be both the only agent and the only patient.

In the second version of WSP, Plotinus introduces a plurality of causes – the seminal λόγοι. He attacks this version from a different angle, showing that even if we allow for a plurality of causes,

WSP remains problematic. This is because the seminal λόγοι, being part of a single causal chain beginning in the World Soul, leave no conceptual room for voluntariness, autonomy, or agency: every impulse and representation would depend on a preceding cause ultimately rooted in the World Soul. I argued that Plotinus rejects this view because already in this early treatise, he wants to maintain that sages can and do act voluntarily and autonomously. His preliminary solution in *Ennead* 3.1 is to introduce the individual soul (understood as purified Reason) as an additional principle (ἀρχή) alongside the World Soul.

In Chapter 2, I turn to Plotinus' criticism of the astral determinists. I showed that Plotinus rejects 'hard astrology,' which holds that the stars cause everything. Instead, he subscribes to 'soft astrology,' where the stars do not cause everything but do *signify everything*. Plotinus raises several objections to hard astrology, both regarding the scope of astral causation and the manner in which it operates. Regarding the latter point, he argues that the stars do not cause events in the sensible world intentionally, voluntarily, or as a result of emotional states.

I then discuss Plotinus' own position, which is firmly grounded in his metaphysics, especially in the so-called 'doctrine of double activity.' The stars' primary, internal activity is contemplation, which has nothing to do with the sensible world. Their external activity, through which they contribute to our world, is a necessary and automatic byproduct of their internal activity. As such, Plotinus maintains, it is accidental (κατὰ συμβεβηκός) and lacks προαίρεσις. The stars' causal contributions thus occur only through their composite nature and affect only other composites.

This brings us to the scope of their influence. Here, Plotinus argues that the stars affect bodies and mixtures by imparting qualities like heat or cold, and they also contribute certain features to the soul-body composite. However, Plotinus makes clear that the stars can never effect *substantial* changes, i.e., changes that would alter a λόγος. In the domain of external circumstances, Plotinus emphasizes that the stars act only as contributing factors (συνεργά), emphasizing that genuine agency plays the major role. Finally, Plotinus maintains that the true self lies beyond the reach of the stars' causation.

In Chapter 3, I discuss the deterministic implications of Plotinus' commitment to soft astrology. As noted, Plotinus holds that the stars signify everything, which presupposes that the future is closed. I begin by explaining how, on his view, such signification is possible. Plotinus' answer rests on the fact that all events in the sensible world – including human choices and actions – are embedded within the universe's fixed τάξις. This unchanging order allows the World Soul to govern the cosmos effortlessly and without intervention. Such non-intervention is possible precisely because the World Soul possesses complete foreknowledge; Nature, accordingly, produce and unfolds executing a divine plan. This presents a challenge to a view common in the secondary literature, namely that Plotinus adopts the Middle Platonist idea of 'conditional Fate,' in which only the consequent of an action is fated, not the antecedent. On this reading, Plotinus preserves the idea that alternative courses of action are possible, and it also presupposes that the World Soul *reacts* to sensible events. Against this interpretation, I show that Plotinus is committed to a strong determinism and that his is not interested in defending such a libertarian reading that would make the World Soul's life laborious.

In Chapter 4, I examine the kind of compatibilism Plotinus endorses. I return to the figure of the Plotinian sage and show—especially with reference to Ennead 6.8—that Plotinus further develops the idea, introduced in Chapter 1, that sages can and do act freely, autonomously, and voluntarily. I show how, for Plotinus, this is compatible with their actions – including necessary ones – being predetermined by and aligned with Providence.

In the final section, I challenge a widespread view in the literature: that Plotinus aims to safeguard moral responsibility. Against this, I show that he insists moral blame is never appropriate because people are never voluntarily bad. However, I also show that Plotinus preserves a notion of causal responsibility. Even if people are involuntarily bad, they still have the source of action within themselves and thus act *of themselves*. This, too, Plotinus maintains, is compatible with determinism. In other words, agency and causal responsibility are retained even though all actions are predetermined by higher principles. Finally, I show that Plotinus' universe is constructed in such a way that it does not require a notion of moral responsibility: 'Perfect Providence' has already determined that the world always was, is, and will be the best possible one.

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