

McAnulty College and Graduate School of Liberal Arts
Duquesne University

PLOTINUS
PHIL 515-01/415-01
TTH 10:50–12:05
Fisher Hall 719
Fall 2009

Teacher

Texts

Dr. P. L. Miller

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Plotinus: Enneads, unabridged, tr. Stephen
MacKenna (Larson Publishing)
The Cambridge Companion to Plotinus, ed.
Lloyd P. Gerson

Evaluation

Important Dates

Midterm Exam.....25%
Paper.....50%
Final Exam.....25%

Midterm Exam.....11/03
Term Paper.....12/11
Comprehensive Exam.....12/14

Course Description

Plotinus is one of the most important philosophers of all times, but one of the least studied in our own. Why? This neglect is largely an accident of the way knowledge has been divided by our university curricula. The period of late antiquity in which he wrote has traditionally fallen into the cracks between classical and medieval specialties—too late for the one, too early for the other. But scholars are now giving this period its due, just as historians of philosophy are coming to recognize the power of its pre-eminent thinker. Plotinus reasoned deeply about dozens of topics, and we shall consider at least the following: God and the effort to become divine; the intellect, forms, and their intimate relationship; knowledge, selfhood, and self-knowledge; the soul, embodiment, and matter; evil, purification, and virtue; logic, being, and the transcendence of both; imagination, memory, and love; freedom and necessity; unity and difference; time and eternity; oblivion.

Besides investigating his systematic views on these topics, we shall consider also some of his unrecognized innovations: he was the first phenomenologist, putting introspective psychology at the center of his philosophy; he was the first existentialist, privileging existence over essence, desire over reason; and he was the first philosopher of the unconscious. All of these novelties happened under the rubric of his “Platonism,” ostensibly a faithful interpretation of Plato, but in reality a creative synthesis of ancient philosophical insights from Heraclitus through Marcus Aurelius. Ultimately, Plotinus sought to champion Plato against the criticisms of Aristotle and the Stoics; along the way, though, he formulated a philosophy that deserves a spot in the ring with even modern contenders. Indeed, it is the view of the professor of this course that philosophers nowadays must choose between the transcendence of Plotinus and his many successors, on the one hand, or the immanent alternative of Heraclitus, the Stoics, and their modern successors, on the other. With this contrast in mind, we shall often dwell on the contrasts between eternity and time, perfection and imperfection, being and becoming.

We shall occasionally discuss both the philosophical history that influenced him, as well as the philosophical history he influenced. Without him, after all, Augustine might have remained a Manichean; without him, more generally, Christian philosophy would be unrecognizable. After his immense medieval influence, Plotinus next enjoyed the esteem of Renaissance thinkers, particularly Ficino in Italy and Cudworth in England. Most recently, echoes of his thought can be heard in Germany: both Hegel and Heidegger are deeply in his debt for content, even when they do not acknowledge it. As for style, the closest recent analogue is Lacan, whose similarly obscure lectures attracted the intelligentsia of his metropolis for decades. Plotinus likewise drew students from throughout Roman society, lecturing to senators and women alike. These difficult lectures, collected under the numerological title *Enneads*, were occasionally mystical and poetic, but more often dense with arguments metaphysical, epistemological, and psychological. All of them survive. We shall read and discuss most, striving to appreciate and evaluate the many sides of this complex philosopher.

Course Requirements

More will be said about the paper as its due date approaches, but from the first day of class you should be hunting for a good topic, speaking with me about any that become contenders for your inquiry. For now, there are a few books about writing, style, and argumentation that you may wish to consult, whether you are writing your first philosophy paper or your hundredth, your first graduate paper or your tenth. All writers of English profit from dipping occasionally into *The Elements of Style* (Strunk & White). If you are new to philosophical writing, or wish to improve its basics, *The Rulebook for Arguments* (Weston) is very helpful. *Thinking from A to Z* (Warburton) explains the basics terms of reasoning, and there are few in the field of philosophy (whether graduate student or professor) who would not benefit from internalizing much of it. For your term papers you should consult a recent edition of *The Chicago Manual of Style*. Conformity to its guidelines will be expected of all excellent work.

In contrast to the specific discussions expected in your papers, the exam aims to motivate you to achieve a synoptic view of Plotinus and the scholarship we have read. At the end of each week I shall write two questions or so that capture some of our discussion thus far, posting these on Blackboard, and later editing them into an exam study guide, perhaps adding a few questions that synthesize several of these questions. The best way to prepare for the exams, then, is to ensure after each week that you have understood the questions that I write in order to capture our discussion. If you do not, you should review the readings and your notes for that week, discuss them with your classmates, and consult me by email or in office hours.

Grading Policies

As befits graduate and professional education, attendance is expected at each meeting. In light of this expectation, necessary absences should be explained, preferably with documentation. Absence will likely jeopardize performance, since the workload required by this course is steady and demanding. Since Blackboard will be an important resource for this course, please familiarize yourself with it and consult it a couple of times per week. There you will find some important announcements and all important course documents. These documents will range from this syllabus, to assignment prompts, to study guides for the exams. All the secondary readings whose photocopies appear on Blackboard will be required reading for those taking the course at the undergraduate level as well as for those taking it at the graduate level. All other secondary readings will be for those at the graduate level alone.

Work will be graded with numerical scores, a system which aspires to make grading maximally transparent. The meanings of these numerical scores are the official prescriptions of the McAnulty College and Graduate School of Liberal Arts:

93–100.....	A.....	superior
90–92.....	A-.....	excellent
88–89.....	B+.....	very good
83–87.....	B.....	good
80–82.....	B-.....	above average
78–79.....	C+.....	satisfactory
70–77.....	C.....	average
60–69.....	D.....	poor
0–59.....	F.....	failure

Since graduate students are seeking professional training, and our particular profession is extremely competitive, success in it requires excellent or superior work. It is not expected that more than a few students will be working at this level yet, but everyone should nonetheless be striving for it over the long term. It is expected that graduate students in philosophy do good work in all their courses, with excellent work in some, and a trend toward superior work in the program overall. Although *C* and *C+* have been designated ‘average’ and ‘satisfactory’ by McAnulty, consistent work at this level (or lower, needless to say) should give pause, provoking reconsideration of goals and discussion with a faculty advisor. Papers will be docked three points for each day they are late, and there will be no incompletes. Failure to submit a paper by the end of semester will entail failure of the course.

There is no way to apply universal standards to different sorts of assignments, least of all for graduate work, but since papers are paramount at this level, let us say a few words about their standards in particular, with the proviso that more will be said as their due date approaches. Work in the *A* range could, with minor revision, receive consideration—though not necessarily be published—by a peer-reviewed journal such as the *Journal of the History of Philosophy*. *B*-range work is competent for a graduate seminar but of insufficient quality to be considered for review by such a journal, for any number of reasons. *C*-range work, finally, is incompetent for a graduate seminar, even if it might be satisfactory for an upper-level undergraduate course. While I am eager to promote students who earn *A*’s in my courses, I cannot write a letter of recommendation otherwise.

Administrative Requirements

Like all forms of lying, plagiarism and cheating are grave offences. This is especially true in a university whose mission involves the pursuit of truth. Since these offences threaten the very foundation of intellectual life, they will be prosecuted to the full extent afforded by this university’s policies. The maximum penalty is expulsion. Any doubts about the natures of these offences or the punishments they will incur can be dispelled by consulting the following website:

<http://www.studentlife.duq.edu/handbooksec5.html>

Students with documented disabilities are entitled to reasonable accommodations, if needed. If you need accommodations, please contact the Office of Freshman Development and Special Student Services in 309 Duquesne Union (412-396-6657) as soon as possible. Accommodations will not be granted retrospectively.

“Learning Outcomes”

There is a movement afoot in universities, as in primary and secondary schools, to categorize “learning outcomes,” quantify pedagogical results, and thus make education amenable to bureaucratic control (or at least the illusion thereof). However applicable this model may be to lower levels, or even to other subjects at the college level, its application to the philosophical classroom is at best absurd, and at worst pernicious. One desirable outcome of all my courses, therefore, is that students come to see “learning outcomes” in this light. Plotinus’s philosophical hero, Plato, supplied us with the first extant curriculum, and this curriculum sought an account of the form of the good. “Unless someone can give an account of the form of the good,” he wrote, “distinguishing it from everything else, and can survive all examination as if in a battle, striving to examine things not in accordance with belief, but in accordance with being; and can journey through all that with his account intact, you will say that he does not know the good itself or any other good whatsoever” (534b7–c4). In the language of “Bloom’s Taxonomy of Learning Outcomes,” which I have been advised to use, here would be the learning outcomes of Platonism:

(Level 4) *SEPARATE* one’s reason from all bodily impediments, thereby turning the eye of the soul towards the source of all being and goodness;

(Level 5) *FORMULATE* an invincible account of this source, insofar as it is accessible to thinking and speaking;

(Level 6) *CHOOSE* to return to this source, thereby becoming divine.

Syllabus

<p>08.25.09</p> <p>Introduction to Plotinus, his <i>Enneads</i>, and this Course</p> <p><i>Plotinus</i> Gerson (Gerson 1996:1–9) Gatti (Gerson 1996:10–37)</p> <p><i>Ennead</i> 4.8 (1st page) Sextus Empiricus M 7.310–12, 8.48–50</p> <p><i>Chief Explananda:</i> Ontology: Unity in Difference Epistemology: Knowledge despite Skepticism Psychology & Ethics: Self Divided from Itself</p> <p><i>Chief Premises:</i> One prior to Many Perfect prior to Imperfect</p> <p>35 pages</p>	<p>08.27.09</p> <p>“That the Intellectual Beings are not outside the Intellectual Principle (and on the Nature of the Good)” <i>Ennead</i> 5.5.1–2</p> <p>“The Knowing Hypostases (and the Transcendent)” <i>Ennead</i> 5.3.1–9</p> <p>O’Meara 1993:33–43</p> <p>21 pages</p>
<p>09.01.09</p> <p>“The Intellectual Principle, the Ideas, and the Authentic Existence” <i>Ennead</i> 5.9</p> <p>Gerson 2009:134–51</p> <p>Rappe (Gerson 1996:250–74)</p> <p>50 pages</p>	<p>09.03.09</p> <p>“On the Intellectual Beauty” <i>Ennead</i> 5.8</p> <p>“Complete Transfusion” <i>Ennead</i> 2.7</p> <p>Emilsson (Gerson 1996:217–49)</p> <p>47 pages</p>
<p>09.08.09</p> <p>Porphyry’s “On the Life of Plotinus and the Arrangement of his Work”</p> <p>Miller’s “Plotinus: Knowing Oneself” http://www.unc.edu/~plmiller/pp-phs.html#Ancient</p> <p>50 pages</p>	<p>09.10.09</p> <p>“Time and Eternity” <i>Ennead</i> 3.7</p> <p>Smith (Gerson 1996:196–216)</p> <p>45 pages</p>

<p>09.15.09</p> <p>“(The Knowing Hypostases and) the Transcendent” <i>Ennead</i> 5.3.10–17</p> <p>O’Meara 1993:44–53</p> <p>24 pages</p>	<p>09.17.09</p> <p>“(That the Intellectual Beings are not outside the Intellectual Principle and) on the Nature of the Good” <i>Ennead</i> 5.5.3–13</p> <p>“Detached Considerations” <i>Ennead</i> 3.9</p> <p>Gerson 1990:191–201</p> <p>24 pages</p>
<p>09.22.09</p> <p>“On The Good, or The One” <i>Ennead</i> 6.1</p> <p>Bussanich (Gerson 1996:38–65)</p> <p>O’Meara 1993:54–59</p> <p>43 pages</p>	<p>09.24.09</p> <p>Classes Cancelled for G-20</p>
<p>09.29.09</p> <p>“How the Multiplicity of the Ideal-Forms came into Being and on The Good” <i>Ennead</i> 6.7.1–23</p> <p>Gerson 1990:201–226</p> <p>57 pages</p>	<p>10.01.09</p> <p>“How the Multiplicity of the Ideal-Forms came into Being and on The Good” <i>Ennead</i> 6.7.24–42</p> <p>“That the Principle transcending Being has no Intellectual Act. What Being has intellection primarily and what being has it secondarily” <i>Ennead</i> 5.6</p> <p>“The Origin and Order of the Beings following on the First” <i>Ennead</i> 5.2</p> <p>“How the Secondaries rise from The First and on The One” <i>Ennead</i> 5.4</p> <p>26 pages</p>

<p>10.06.09</p> <p>“Is there an Ideal Archetype of Particular Beings?” <i>Ennead 5.7</i></p> <p>Corrigan (Gerson 1996:105–29)</p> <p>Gerson 1994:72–78</p> <p>30 pages</p>	<p>10.08.09</p> <p>“The Animate and the Man” <i>Ennead 1.1</i></p> <p>“The Soul’s Descent into Body” <i>Ennead 4.8</i></p> <p>Gerson 1994:127–55</p> <p>44 pages</p>
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<p>10.13.09</p> <p>“The Immortality of the Soul” <i>Ennead 4.7</i></p> <p>“Perception and Memory” <i>Ennead 4.6</i></p> <p>“On the Kinds of Being: First Treatise” <i>Ennead 6.1.25–30</i></p> <p>O’Meara 1993:12–21</p> <p>35 pages</p>	<p>10.15.09</p> <p>“Problems of the Soul (I)” <i>Ennead 4.3.1–17</i></p> <p>Blumenthal (Gerson 1996:82–104)</p> <p>38 pages</p>
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<p>10.20.09</p> <p>“Problems of the Soul (I)” <i>Ennead 4.3.18–32</i></p> <p>Clark (Gerson 1996:275–92)</p> <p>30 pages</p>	<p>10.22.09</p> <p>“The Three Initial Hypostases” <i>Ennead 5.1</i></p> <p>O’Meara (Gerson 1996:66–81)</p> <p>O’Meara 1993:60–68</p> <p>34 pages</p>
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<p>10.27.09</p> <p>“On the Integral Omnipresence of the Authentic Existent (I) & (II)” <i>Enneads 6.4–5</i></p> <p>O’Meara 1993: 22–32</p> <p>35 pages</p>	<p>10.29.09</p> <p>Class Cancelled for SPEP</p>
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<p>11.03.09</p> <p>Midterm Exam</p>	<p>11.05.09</p> <p>“Happiness” <i>Ennead 1.4</i></p> <p>O’Meara 1993:100–10</p> <p>22 pages</p>
<p>11.10.09</p> <p>“Dialectic” <i>Ennead 1.3</i></p> <p>“The Virtues” <i>Ennead 1.2</i></p> <p>Dillon (Gerson 1996:315–36)</p> <p>31 pages</p>	<p>11.12.09</p> <p>“Beauty” <i>Ennead 1.6</i></p> <p>“Love” <i>Ennead 3.5</i></p> <p>O’Meara 1993:88–99</p> <p>31 pages</p>
<p>11.17.09</p> <p>“The Nature and Source of Evil” <i>Ennead 1.8</i></p> <p>“Matter” <i>Ennead 2.4</i></p> <p>O’Meara 1993:79–87</p> <p>35 pages</p>	<p>11.19.09</p> <p>“Against the Gnostics; or Against Those that Affirm the Creator of the Cosmos and the Cosmos Itself to be Evil.” <i>Ennead 2.9</i></p> <p>O’Brien (Gerson 1996:171–96)</p> <p>44 pages</p>
<p>11.23.09 (Monday with Thursday schedule)</p> <p>“Fate” <i>Ennead 3.1</i></p> <p>Leroux (Gerson 1996:292–314)</p> <p>29 pages</p>	<p>11.26.09</p> <p>Thanksgiving</p>

<p>12.01.09</p> <p>“On Free Will and the Will of the One” <i>Ennead</i> 6.8</p> <p>O’Meara 1993:68–69 Gerson 1994:155–63</p> <p>28 pages</p>	<p>12.03.09</p> <p>“The Reasoned Dismissal” <i>Ennead</i> 1.9</p> <p>Rist (Gerson 1996:386–415)</p> <p>O’Meara 1993:111–19</p> <p>28 pages</p>
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Term Paper Due: Friday, 12.11.09, high noon

Comprehensive Final Exam: Monday, 12.14.09, 1:30–3:30pm