BRILL

MNEMOSYNE 74 (2021) 448-477

MNEMOSYNE

A Journal
of
Classical Studies

brill.com/mnem

The Ascent of the Soul as Spiritual Exercise in Plotinus' *Enneads*

Mateusz Stróżyński

Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań

Institute of Classical Philology

monosautos@gmail.com

Received July 2019 | Accepted October 2019

Abstract

The purpose of the article is to demonstrate that the ascent of the soul as one of the fundamental spiritual exercises in Plotinus' philosophy can be approached from three perspectives: anabatic proper, aphaeretic and agnoetic. All of them are based on the hierarchical structure of knowledge and being in Plotinus' philosophy, but they differ in details. The methods are reconstructed on the basis of the analysis of selected passages from the *Enneads*.

Keywords

Plotinus – spiritual exercise – contemplation – ascent

1 Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to reconstruct a type of spiritual exercise in Plotinus' philosophy, which is most often referred to as 'ascent'. I am going to show that, in fact, in the *Enneads* there are three distinct methods involved in this exercise, which can be studied, to a certain extent, separately. Those types of exercises or methods I propose to call 'anabatic (proper)', 'aphaeretic' and 'agnoetic'.

The interest in spiritual exercises in the field of ancient philosophy is usually associated with the work of Pierre Hadot.¹ In recent decades the question of the practical dimension of ancient philosophy has attracted many scholars with various methodological approaches. It seems that Stoicism is the philosophical school which has been studied most often with regard to spiritual exercises,² but the presence of such exercises is widely acknowledged also within the Platonic tradition. Students of Plotinus have always recognized the existence of a spiritual method in the *Enneads*, which aimed at reaching inner transformation and union with the One. Classical books, like the works by René Arnou or Jean Trouillard, referred to that spiritual method, generally, as the purification of the soul.³ Spiritual exercises in Plotinus and the idea of ascent as one of the primary or *the* primary spiritual exercise in Plotinus has also been long present in scholarship.⁴ However, it has not yet been proposed to investigate this exercise as consisting of the three methods which I would like to elucidate here.

Before I proceed with the analysis, two points need to be clarified. The first is the very concept of spiritual exercise. Pierre Hadot's approach suggests a slightly anti-intellectual or rather anti-discursive attitude, which results in an impression that conceptual reasoning and other mental activities, traditionally associated with philosophy, are not really spiritual. The French scholar often tries to contrast the theoretical with the practical in philosophy, giving the greater import to the latter. This impression seems to have had some impact on the scholarship, since, for example, Brian Stock, in one of his recent books about spiritual exercises in Augustine, has suggested that the notion of the *exercitatio animi*, introduced by Henri-Iréné Marrou, sounds too intellectual, whereas Pierre Hadot's concept of spiritual exercise is much more appropriate, because it embraces also physical and emotional practices.⁵ Even though Stock does not say that what is intellectual has to be excluded from the

1 The concept of spiritual exercise was introduced by Rabbow 1954. Hadot discussed ancient spiritual practice mostly in his books published in the eighties and the nineties: 1987; 1992; 1995.

2 See esp. Foucault 2005; Nussbaum 1994; Sellars 2003.

3 Arnou 1967, 195-225; Trouillard 1955, 133-165. Among earlier studies cf. also Krakowski 1933; Moreau 1970, 173-178; Mossé-Bastide 1972, 109-112.

4 See Sells 1985, 47-65, and 1994; Dombrowski 1987, 701-712; Hadot 1987, 45-46 and 185-193; O'Meara 1993, 24 and 104; Lacrosse 1994, 97-104; Bussanich 1996, 40; Collette 2002, esp. 82-84 and 93-95; Rappe 1996, 250-274 and 2000; Stróżyński 2008, 38-69 and 142-178, and 2014; Clark 2016; Banner 2018.

5 Stock 2010, 22-26.

spiritual, but rather emphasizes the need for a broader definition of the latter, it is significant that a historian of philosophy feels the need to avoid something that sounds too intellectual, as if it were a flaw.

This aspect of Hadot's approach has been noticed and criticized by Martha Nussbaum who argued that both his and Michel Foucault's "emphasis on habits and *techniques de soi* too often obscures the dignity of reason".⁶ The same problem was also pointed out by Sellars according to whom "Hadot has, it seems, forgotten the role of λόγος".⁷ In my understanding of spiritual exercise, there is nothing unspiritual in the activities of reason and intellect, which have been essential to Western philosophy since the beginning. The contribution of Hadot and other scholars exploring the practical dimension of ancient philosophy lies, among other things, in casting a new light on other activities, involving the body, imagination, and the manipulation of attention or non-discursive forms of thinking. As will become clear, I hope, in my examination of ascent, Plotinus uses a variety of ways to achieve his goal, that is, non-discursive or intuitive contemplation of the three hypostases.

The second point that needs to be discussed briefly is the terminology that I use in distinguishing the three methods of ascent. The first method I propose to call 'anabatic', which may sound odd or redundant, since ἀνάβασις in Plotinus simply means 'ascent'.⁸ That is why I would like to call the method more strictly 'anabatic proper', but throughout the article I will, nonetheless, use a shorter form: 'anabatic'. As I am going to explain, the method of *anabasis* proper consists in a gradual movement of the self through the levels of being and knowledge, by means of becoming active at various layers of the soul. I will discuss the presentation of this method in Plot. 5.3.9 and 5.1.2.

The second method of ascent, the 'aphaeretic method', has also specific meanings both in the *Enneads* and in the earlier philosophical tradition. The most concise exposition of this kind of exercise can be also found in 5.3.9, so I will begin there. The essence of *aphaeresis*⁹ as a method of ascent is not so much becoming active at a given level of the soul, but rather separating the self from a level of the soul or distinguishing the self as the subject from those

6 Nussbaum 1994, 353.

7 Sellars 2003, 116.

8 Variants of ἀναβαίνω in this sense appear in 5.1.4.7 and 6.7.36.9. See also Pollet and Sleeman 1980, s.v. ἀναβαίνειν, ἀνάβασις. Scholars refer to the same method also by using other terms, e.g. Baladi 1970, 28 writes about "gradation ascendente".

9 Cf. *Lexicon Plotinianum*, s.v. ἀφαιρεῖν, ἀφαίρεσις, ἀφιέναι.

activities which it performs and those objects which it perceives by means of those activities.¹⁰

The process of *aphaeresis* or abstraction was treated briefly by Aristotle with regard to mathematical objects in his discussions of them in *Physics* (2.2) and *Metaphysics* (13.3).¹¹ Geometry abstracts from the sensible beings everything apart from their solidity (στερεόν), whereas arithmetic goes further by abstracting from them everything apart from their numerability. In such a way, arithmetic is more abstractive than geometry.¹² In the imperial period, *aphaeresis* began to function within the Platonic tradition as a method of knowing immaterial beings by means of abstracting from them their material and sensible features.¹³

Alcinous in the tenth chapter of his *Didaskalikos* enumerates three types of spiritual exercises leading to the noetic intuition of God. First, he mentions *aphaeresis*: 'The first way of conceiving God is by abstraction of these attributes, just as we form the conception of a point by abstraction from sensible phenomena, conceiving first a surface, then a line, and finally a point.' ('Εσται δὴ πρώτη μὲν αὐτοῦ νόησις κατὰ ἀφαίρεσιν τούτων, ὅπως καὶ σημεῖον ἐνόησαμεν κατὰ ἀφαίρεσιν ἀπὸ τοῦ αἰσθητοῦ, ἐπιφάνειαν νοήσαντες, εἶτα γραμμὴν, καὶ τελευταῖον τὸ σημεῖον, Alcin. 10.5).¹⁴ As the second type of exercise Alcinous describes analogy (ἀναλογία), giving an example of comparing the role played by the sun in physical seeing to the role played by the First Intellect in the human knowledge of the Forms. The third type of exercise is the ascent described by Plato in Diotima's speech¹⁵ with distinctive stages of bodies, souls, customs and laws (Alcinous omits here sciences, ἐπιστήμαι), leading to the 'great sea of Beauty'.¹⁶ Then he points beyond Beauty to the Good as the ultimate object of ascent 'like a light appearing and, as it were, shining out to the soul which ascends in this way' (ὥσπερ φῶς φανέν καὶ οἷον ἐκλάμψαν τῇ οὕτως ἀνιούσῃ ψυχῇ, 10.6).

10 On the relationship between *aphaeresis* and *apophasis* see Mortley 1975, 373; Sells 1985, 47-50, Carabine 1995, 119-126.

11 See Lear 1982.

12 *Met.* 13.3, 1078a9-26. Cf. Gerson 2005, 235.

13 Cf. Hadot 1987, 185-188; Baladi 1970, 28; Mortley 1975, 364-366 and 374-377; Guérard 1984, 190-191; Carabine 1995, 132-135. The *aphaeresis* as a type of ascent should be distinguished from the *aphaeresis* as a method of arriving at the concept of prime matter, devoid of qualities (see e.g. Plot. 1.8).

14 For the Greek text and translation I have used Summerell and Zimmer 2007 and Dillon 2002.

15 Pl. *Smp.* 210a-212a.

16 Pl. *Smp.* 210d, translation mine.

As we can see, both the ‘anabatic proper’ and ‘aphaeretic’ methods can be found in Alcinous, corresponding to the third and the first of his three ways to God. Plotinus also describes two subtypes of the aphaeretic exercise, which has already been termed in the scholarship the ‘subjective’ and the ‘objective’ *aphaeresis*.¹⁷ I will analyze Plot. 6.8.15–21 as an example of the second type of this method. The latter, objective *aphaeresis* is the first way which Alcinous talks about, that is, abstracting from God all that does not belong to his nature. The subjective variant of it consists in abstracting from our self whatever is alien to its nature and here Plotinus is clearly inspired by Plato’s description of the ‘exercise in dying’ in *Phaedo* (most of all, 64c and 80e) as well as the *First Alcibiades*.

For the third method I suggest the name ‘agnoetic’, which does not have any tradition in the literature on the subject. Probably, Plotinus either alludes here, or at least has in the back of his mind, a passage from Plato’s *Symposium*, where Socrates is described by Alcibiades as being so fascinated with beautiful boys and so overcome by ecstatic desire (ἐκπέπληκται) that he ‘is not aware of all [other] things and he does not know anything’ (ἀγνοεῖ πάντα καὶ οὐδὲν οἶδεν).¹⁸ Plotinus uses the word ἀγνοεῖν in order to describe the method in question once, in 6.9.7, and I use it to describe a way of ascending which entails not only simply moving upwards or letting go of the particular levels of the soul’s spectrum, but something more radical: emptying consciousness of all the content corresponding to those levels. This method will be discussed on the basis of Plot. 6.9.7 and 5.1.12.

2 The Self and Consciousness

Before proceeding further, I would like to clarify the meaning of two terms which seem crucial in understanding this topic, namely, the self and consciousness. There is no single term for ‘the self’ in Plotinus; he uses words such as ἡμεῖς (‘we’), αὐτός (‘he’/‘himself’), ἄνθρωπος (‘human being’) or simply ψυχή (‘the soul’) to refer to the concept of the self. What has long been emphasized in the Plotinian literature is that in the *Enneads* there exists an implicit but crucial difference between the individual soul, understood as a spectrum consisting of several levels of being and knowing (e.g. sensible, reasoning, and intellectual powers) on the one hand, and the self that is able to move up and down this spectrum.

17 Collette 2002, 143 speaks about “objective ἀφαίρεσις”. Lacrosse 1994, 102 calls this simply “negation”, which is too general a term. Cf. also Carabine 1995, 132.

18 Pl. *Smp.* 216d; translation mine.

Eric Dodds formulated this as “the vital distinction between the total personality (ψυχή) and the ego-consciousness (ἡμεῖς).”¹⁹ More recently, Pauliina Remes denoted the mobile aspect of the self as the “subject of consciousness” and the static structure of the soul as “ontological selfhood.”²⁰ Gwenaëlle Aubry also pointed to the distinction between the whole soul and the essential aspect of the self which is “the power to become” various levels of the individual soul and which “cannot be substantiated.”²¹ Those two meanings of the self have also been referred to by Richard Sorabji as “thick” and “thin” meanings of the personal pronoun ‘I.’²² Even though Plotinus does not use distinct words to talk about those two kinds of self in any systematic way, without assuming the existence of this distinction his description of the soul’s fall and purification does not make any sense. In the course of this paper, I will use the term ‘the self’ with reference to the mobile or ‘thin’ aspect of the self, indicating clearly whenever I deviate from this usage.

Pauliina Remes referred to this aspect of the self as the “subject of consciousness” or “the conscious center.”²³ Consciousness is another important concept in Plotinus and there is also no single term for it. Plotinus uses terms such as αἴσθησις, συναίσθησις, σύνεσις, παρακολούθησις and ἀντίληψις to speak about inner processes which we would call, in different contexts, awareness or consciousness. Scholars have debated the exact meanings of those terms and sometimes their opinions diverge.²⁴ Remes points out that for Plotinus the soul is always aware of her activities. In fact, he describes it in a negative phrase: ‘she is not unaware of her own activities’ (οὐκ ἀναίσθητος τῶν ἐνεργημάτων αὐτῆς, 2.9.1.35-36).²⁵ It seems to be a fundamental context for all further considerations about Plotinus’ view of consciousness: it is an essential feature of the soul (and it would be absurd to assume that higher hypostases, Intellect and the One, are deprived of this, provided, of course, that we do not attribute to them, especially to the latter, our human sort of consciousness).²⁶

19 Dodds 1960, 5.

20 Remes 2007, 13-44.

21 Aubry 2014, 310.

22 Sorabji 2006, 20-21.

23 Remes 2007, 92-124.

24 There is an article by Warren 1964, 83-97. Blumenthal 1971, 99 n. 28 who criticized his views as “inadequate and in some places misleading” devoted some space to discussing various forms of consciousness or “the power which provides knowledge of what goes on within us” (*ibid.*, 42, see also 88-99). See also Violette 1994 and Remes 2007, 92-124.

25 For the Greek text and translation I have used Armstrong 1966-1988. If translation is modified, it is always pointed out in a footnote. Here, the translation is mine.

26 Cf. the use of the word ἐγρήγορσις, ‘being awake’ with regard to the One in Plot. 6.8.16.32-36.

Remes postulates also a distinction between reflexive and reflective. Reflexivity means the reference of the conscious subject to himself and the fundamental, general consciousness of the soul is always self-reflexive, meaning that the soul is always aware of itself in an immediate way. Reflectivity, on the other hand, signifies a peculiar type of consciousness which is mediated by mental representations. Another important distinction made by Remes is into pre-reflective, reflective and “supra-conceptual intuitive states”. All of them are fundamentally reflexive, but the first group pertains to the bodily self-awareness which is non-conceptual and non-representational, the second group pertains to self-consciousness based on conceptual thinking, while the third group pertains also to non-representational and immediate, but higher, spiritual or contemplative forms of awareness, associated with the pure soul, Intellect and the One.

In a recent book, Danny Hutchinson gives a very clear interpretation of the Plotinian view of consciousness. He also offers English terms for the Greek terminology of Plotinus.²⁷ Ἀντίληψις is ‘apprehension’, that is, a mediated form of consciousness, which grasps objects by means of images or representations. Hutchinson demonstrates that in Plotinus the power of imagination is in fact much more than in Aristotle, because it is, in general, a “representational awareness” of both sensible and intelligible objects, which functions like a mirror reflecting all experiences on its surface. He renders παρακολουθήσις which is not only mediated but deeply dualistic as ‘consciousness’; this type of consciousness impedes our activities in the sense that when we read and, at the same time, think about the fact that we are reading, we cannot give full attention to the activity in question (see Plot. 1.4.10.22-32). Both συναίσθησις and σύνεσις are translated by Hutchinson as ‘awareness’, while the first is the unifying consciousness of one’s parts and activities, and the second is a non-discursive, direct intuition connected to love and beauty (e.g. the One’s self-awareness).

In the last chapter of an early treatise 5.1 Plotinus suggests that even though our soul is always aware of its activities, ‘we’ certainly are not aware of the higher functions of our own soul. It is the result of our fall and happiness is nothing else than regaining the awareness of those higher functions. Plotinus then wonders how it is possible that we can be unaware of, let us say, our intellect, even though it is our intellect and intellect is self-aware. His answer is that ‘we’ become aware (and he uses αἴσθησις in this context) of a given activity of the soul when it ‘pervades the whole soul’ (δι’ ὅλης ψυχῆς ἐλήλυθεν, 5.1.12.8). Plotinus’ solution seems to imply that even though the soul is fundamentally self-aware on higher, non-discursive levels, through the fall this self-awareness is compromised and split off in some way, so in the process of purification we

27 Hutchinson 2018, 40-44.

have to fully integrate all our activities within the unified field of our embodied awareness, which is centred, as Hutchinson argues, around the power of imagination and apprehension. In this integration the link between consciousness and the self is particularly clear: our self, our 'I' has to become not only the centre of our experience, but also a sphere containing all of our experience. When the soul returns to its true self in Intellect, it not only 'gives life' to the whole of itself, but also is 'present to itself', fully awake to all of its activities. As a result, we become, as Plotinus writes in 1.4.10, more pure, more alive and more active.

3 Being and Having

Let us now take a look at how the Plotinian concepts of the self and consciousness are embedded in his view of the fall of the soul and its purification and return to the One. I would like to comment on an important, albeit not often discussed passage from *Enneads* 4.4 in which Plotinus is describing in conceptual terms the mechanism of the fall. The passage concerns memory, but Plotinus gives here a much broader view on his concept of the fall. Plato's metaphor of a winged soul chariot falling from heaven onto earth (which we find in *Phdr.* 248a-249d) is here translated into more conceptual language:

γένοιτο γὰρ ἄν, καὶ μὴ παρακολουθοῦντα ὅτι ἔχει, ἔχειν παρ' αὐτῷ ἰσχυροτέρως ἢ εἰ εἰδείη. εἰδὼς μὲν γὰρ τάχα ἄν ὡς ἄλλο ἔχοι ἄλλος αὐτὸς ὢν, ἀγνοῶν δὲ ὅτι ἔχει κινδυνεύει εἶναι ὃ ἔχει· ὃ δὴ πάθημα μάλλον πεσεῖν ποιεῖ τὴν ψυχὴν.²⁸

For it could happen that, even when one is not conscious that one has something,²⁹ one holds it to oneself more strongly than if one knows. For perhaps if one knew, one would have it as something else, being different oneself, but if one does not know that one has it, one is liable to be what one has; and this is certainly the experience which makes the soul sink lower.

Plotinus is describing here two opposite states, one of 'being' something and the other of 'having' this.³⁰ Three terms used here to describe consciousness are παρακολουθεῖν, εἰδέναι ('to know') and ἀγνοεῖν (meaning the privation of

²⁸ Plot. 4.4.4.10-14.

²⁹ Plotinus refers here to memory.

³⁰ Recently, Raoul Mortley has devoted a chapter of his book to 'being' and 'having' in Plotinus, but he assumes a different perspective and uses a different methodology than the one used here (Mortley 2013, 79-93).

γινώσκειν, 'to know', 'to recognize'). Plotinus says that if one does not know that one has something as something distinct from himself, one is that. Being something seems to mean for Plotinus the same as ἔχειν ἰσχυροτέρως, to hold on to something strongly by some kind of deep attachment, which may not be reflectively conscious (παρακολουθεῖν). He also says that the more we know that we have something, the less we are it or the less we hold on to it. It seems that he uses here all the three verbs to refer to some kind of reflective consciousness, which in Plotinus' scheme could be either a more conceptual, verbal παρακολούθησις or a more simple, but still representational ἀντίληψις.

Plotinus describes here the cause of the 'fall' or 'sinking' (πεσεῖν) of the soul, suggesting that it consists in the lack of awareness that the self is distinct from any activity at its disposal, which it 'has', but not 'is'. If there is no such awareness, the self identifies with this activity to such an extent that the self feels as if it 'is' this particular activity. The purification of the soul, that is, the movement contrary to the fall, means, in this context, that the soul regains the awareness that it—as the self—is different from any given activity whose agent it is at the moment. But this passage suggests that this movement is performed by the use of the reflective awareness; we have to actively attend to the activity we have and become representationally aware of it in order to transform it from something we are to something we have. Since παρακολούθησις is clearly presented by Plotinus as impeding even everyday activities or lowering their intensity, he cannot suggest here that the goal of the purification is the achievement of this sort of self-awareness of our activities. Rather, it seems that he uses παρακολούθησις in a broader sense of self-awareness and self-transparency, just as in 2.9.1.38–52, where he attributes this to Intellect.³¹

The purpose of spiritual exercise is therefore not to become merely reflectively aware of the soul's activities, but rather to include them into a total, integrating self-awareness which is intimately linked to imagination. It seems, however, that the reflective, conceptual awareness of certain activities is an essential part of the process, but that, in the end, the 'knowing that we have it as something else', as Plotinus puts it, becomes an experience of being fully awake to all the levels of the soul's activity, where those activities are reflected in the mirror of imagination, and thus we can be aware of them with the whole of our soul.

What I call the mobile self has an ability to become various activities across the spectrum of the soul. Plotinus suggests that becoming the lower activities of the soul, connected to the body, which is the essence of the fall of the soul, is strongly associated with mixing the self with those activities through the

³¹ See Hutchinson 2018, 134–136.

lack of awareness of those activities as distinct from the self. I would like to invoke yet another passage which links the dynamics of being and having with the self and consciousness. It seems that in ascent there is a certain bipolarity, where the poles are the object and the subject of experience. At a given level of the soul, the self grasps an object through particular activity and experiences itself as the agent of that activity. This vantage point, which is a subject with relation to an object, is what the self is and not what the self has; but when it becomes what the self has and the self identifies with a higher level of the soul, the lower level of the self is, as it were, objectified.

Plotinus describes it in a language that is closer to experience in the treatise 5.8, where he says: 'he must give his own self up to what is within and become, instead of one who sees, the one who is seen by another, shining out with such intellectual acts which come from over there' (ἤδη αὐτὸν δοῦναι εἰς τὸ εἶσω καὶ γενέσθαι ἀντὶ ὁρώντος ἤδη θέαμα ἐτέρου θεωμένου, οἷοις ἐκεῖθεν ἦκει ἐκλάμποντα τοῖς νοήμασι, 5.8.11.17-19).³² In this passage he refers to a general transition from the level of the reasoning soul to the level of the intellectual intuition, and he clearly points out that what we experience as our centre of consciousness or our self in the point of departure, must cease to be that. At first, we experience our self as being seen by some other self which is not us, but in fact, as Plotinus often emphasizes (e.g. 1.4.9), because the intellect is ours, in the end, we realize that it *is* us, as the intellect that is looking at the lower activity of the soul, which is no longer our centre, but now a part of a broader sphere of the self-aware 'I'. The intellect is the centre of awareness and identity, but the totality of our embodied experience is integrated not through *noesis*, but through apprehension in the mirror of imagination. It seems that for Plotinus to *have* something (as a technical term, defined in 4.4.4) refers to being aware of something as distinct from the self, while to *be* something refers to experiencing this as a part of the conscious centre—the self.

4 Grasping What Is Not the Self: The Anabatic Method Proper

Perhaps, the best, at the same time most concise and comprehensive, example of the anabatic exercise can be found in chapter nine of Plot. 5.3. Towards the end of the previous chapter, Plotinus introduces the idea of ascent, by saying that 'by reasonings of this kind our soul also is led back up to it [Intellect], considering itself to be an image of Intellect, as its life is a reflection and likeness of it, and when it exercises intellection, it becomes godlike and intellect-like' (διὰ

³² My translation.

δὲ τῶν τοιούτων λογισμῶν ἀνάγεσθαι καὶ τὴν ψυχὴν ἡμῶν εἰς αὐτὸ εἰκόνα θεμένην ἑαυτὴν εἶναι ἐκείνου, ὡς τὴν αὐτῆς ζωὴν ἰνδαλμα καὶ ὁμοίωμα εἶναι, καὶ ὅταν νοῇ, θεοειδῇ καὶ νοοειδῇ γίγνεσθαι, 5.3.8.46-49). This is a short résumé of the goal of exercise, namely the reaching of the level of Intellect through the rational soul, which is its image. The next chapter (which I will discuss in much more detail below) begins with a practical instruction how this is to be achieved, delineating several levels of the human being, such as the soul-trace 'forming' it, the sensible soul with both sense-perception and affective life, and the rational soul, which is active through reasoning, and finally the pure soul, which sees without reasoning and is an image of Intellect. The hierarchical structure of the soul is presented here level by level, with an assumption that the ascent has to be performed 'step by step' and no level can be skipped or bypassed.³³

Later in the same chapter, we have again reference to the levels of the soul's activity with a further instruction on how to ascend by those levels:

Εἰ δὲ τις ἀδυνατεῖ [τὴν πρώτην] τὴν τοιαύτην ψυχὴν ἔχειν καθαρῶς νοοῦσαν, δοξαστικὴν λαβέτω, εἴτα ἀπὸ ταύτης ἀναβαινέτω. Εἰ δὲ μὴδὲ τοῦτο, αἴσθησιν ἐμπλατύτερα τὰ εἶδη κομιζομένην, αἴσθησιν δὲ καὶ ἐφ' ἑαυτῆς μεθ' ὧν δύναται καὶ ἡδὴ ἐν τοῖς εἶδεσιν οὔσαν. Εἰ δὲ βούλεται τις, καταβαίνων καὶ ἐπὶ τὴν γεννώσαν ἴτω μέχρι καὶ ὧν ποιεῖ· εἴτα ἐντεῦθεν ἀναβαινέτω ἀπὸ ἐσχάτων εἰδῶν εἰς τὰ ἔσχατα ἀνάπαλιν εἶδη, μᾶλλον δὲ εἰς τὰ πρῶτα.³⁴

But if someone is unable to grasp this kind of soul which exercises pure intellection, let him take the soul which forms opinions, and then ascend from this. But if he cannot even do this, let him take sense-perception, which acquires the forms in broader extension, and sense-perception by itself with its powers which is already in the forms. But if someone wants to, let him descend to the generative soul and go right on to what it makes, and then ascend from there, from the ultimate forms to the forms which are ultimate in the opposite sense, or, rather, to the primary forms.

Here Plotinus reminds the reader, again, of the ultimate goal of this exercise, which is attaining noetic activity ('pure intellection' in Armstrong's translation), which is one level above the image of Intellect, that is, the rational or reasoning soul. At the same time, the author behaves here as a considerate and experienced teacher, aware of the fact that this exercise might be not so easy for his disciple and not always end successfully in the state of the noetic

33 Plotinus refers, of course, to Plato's dialogues, especially *R.* 515c-e, *Smp.* 211b and *Phdr.* 246a.
34 Plot. 5.3.9.28-36.

contemplation. In such a case, his advice is to 'descend in order to ascend', that is, to begin the exercise from the level of the soul, which seems more familiar to the reader. In the meantime, he introduces yet another level, which had not been mentioned in the hierarchy delineated at the beginning of the chapter, namely, the 'soul which forms opinions', the *δοξαστική* power.³⁵ It is below the purely rational thought, but is, at the same time, above the realm of sense-perception and affect.

Plotinus says that if the reader is unable to experience directly this level of the soul's activity, he can feel free to start from a lower level, the sensible, or even from the generative one (soul-trace). What can be observed in this passage is the dynamism of this exercise in terms of moving up and down the ladder of the soul. The essence of this practice seems to consist in 'grasping' (*λαβεῖν*) various activities of the soul by the self and, at the same time, enjoying a certain freedom of not being stuck at a particular level.

It is the activity of grasping that is an essential feature of the anabatic method of raising the soul from its entanglement in the sensible experience to its pure, intellectual state and above, towards the union with the One. Grasping seems to refer to the act of being aware of any given activity of the soul in such a way that the self realizes vividly that it is not this activity, but that it only has this activity at its disposal. The grasping is then the same as having as something external (in 4.4.4). Such a conscious experience of being a subject of e.g. sense-perception, desire or emotion, discursive thinking, etc., means that one can enjoy a certain distance and freedom with regard to this activity.³⁶

Plotinus also suggests that in order to achieve it we need the reflective consciousness. It is not enough to be generally aware of, let us say, the activity of our imagination in the sense that when I am daydreaming, I apprehend the images that come to mind. In order to free the self from being mixed with imagination, I have to grasp it, to consciously attend to the activity of my imagination in order to realize that I am more than that. In 5.3.9 Plotinus admits that gaining this distance is difficult, so the reader is advised to begin lower and try to grasp sense-perception first. After grasping one level, however, the reader should try to move one step higher and maintain the distance towards the higher level of activity as well.

35 Perhaps, this is a general level of discursive thought, as Cilento 1949, 42 suggests: "opinione (che comprende la ragione discorsiva, sia la *δόξα* del *Teeteto* che la *διάνοια* della *Repubblica*)".

36 The language of freedom is not often used by Plotinus in the context of the goal of the spiritual journey. About freedom in general see Plot. 6.8. Cf. also Remes 2007, 180-185.

What makes the anabatic exercise possible is not only an inherent mobility or even fluidity of the self in Plotinus (which is the self's ability to become the agent of various activities), but also the fact that hierarchically organized layers of both macrocosmic (the hypostases) and microcosmic (the levels of the soul) reality do not have sharply delineated boundaries, but their contours are, in a way, blurred.³⁷ One level flows into another without having to overcome any barrier, because the human soul is a continuum.³⁸ Plotinus seems to have borrowed Plato's unusual term γειτόνημα, "neighbourhood" (5.1.3.6),³⁹ and to have taken it out of context to use it for his own purposes, namely, to emphasize metaphysical and epistemological continuity of the layers of the human soul. The concept of this continuity can be found in various places in the *Enneads*.⁴⁰

In Plot. 5.3.9 we therefore have a short exposition of the anabatic method, in terms of its goal, inner mechanism and possible difficulties, but also in other places Plotinus teaches this method, and he does it in a different way, namely, through something that could be called a written meditation rather than a condensed instruction. An example of this is treatise 5.1, which is in its entirety an anabatic exercise. Plotinus begins by an exhortatory address to the reader, inviting him to participate in the spiritual exercise:

ἐνθυμείσθω τοίνυν πρῶτον ἐκεῖνο πᾶσα ψυχὴ, ὡς αὐτὴ μὲν ζῶα ἐποίησε πάντα ἐμπνεύσασα αὐτοῖς ζωὴν, ἃ τε γῆ τρέφει ἃ τε θάλασσα ἃ τε ἐν ἀέρι ἃ τε ἐν οὐρανῷ ἄστρα θεῖα, αὐτὴ δὲ ἥλιον, αὐτὴ δὲ τὸν μέγαν τοῦτον οὐρανόν, καὶ αὐτὴ ἐκόσμησεν, αὐτὴ δὲ ἐν τάξει περιάγει φύσις οὐσα ἐτέρα ὧν κοσμεῖ καὶ ὧν κινεῖ καὶ ἃ ζῆν ποιεῖ καὶ τούτων ἀνάγκη εἶναι τιμιωτέραν, γιγνομένων τούτων καὶ φθειρομένων, ὅταν αὐτὰ ψυχὴ ἀπολείπῃ ἢ χορηγῇ τὸ ζῆν, αὐτὴ δὲ οὐσα αἰεὶ τῷ μὴ "ἀπολείπειν ἑαυτήν".⁴¹

Let every soul, then, first consider this, that it made all living things itself, breathing life into them, those that the earth feeds and those that are nourished by the sea, and the divine stars in the sky; it made the sun itself, and this great heaven, and adorned it itself, and drives it round itself, in orderly movement; it is of a nature other than the things which it adorns and moves and makes live; and it must necessarily be more honourable

37 Cf. Deck 1967, 29; Armstrong 1973, 17-18; Lloyd 1986, 264; Blumenthal 1996, 91.

38 On the continuity cf. Mortley 1975, 376.

39 Armstrong suggests it comes from *Laws* 705a4, where the sea is called a neighbour of the city (in his Loeb-edition, vol. 5, 18 n. 2).

40 E.g. Plot. 1.2.5.25-7, 4.3.9.27, 3.9.3.2, 6.4.15.14-5.

41 Plot. 5.1.2.110. The final quotation is Pl. *Phdr.* 245c.

than they, for they come into being or pass away when the soul leaves them or grants life to them, but soul itself exists for ever because “it does not depart from itself”.

This is no exercise for beginners. Plotinus is asking the reader to identify with the cosmic soul, which is creating and enlivening all material beings, and thus immediately disengage from the narrow, fallen view of the self entangled in sensible experience. In the context of the being/having distinction it is interesting that Plotinus points out here that it is essential for the self to identify with the cosmic soul in the sense of realizing that we are this great soul. Is the state of being the cosmic soul or identification with it by the human self a negative process, while having it as something different would be something positive? This does not seem the case. When we take a closer look at the quoted passage, we will notice that Plotinus emphasizes, on the one hand, that our self has to move as high as to realize that we are the cosmic soul which creates all things and breathes life into them, but, on the other hand, he almost immediately points out what our self is not when we realize that. Plotinus says that from the point of view of this cosmic soul we see that it is ‘a nature other than’ (φύσις οὐσα ἑτέρα) all the material objects. And it is more honourable as well (τιμιωτέρα). So what is happening at this point is that the self ascends to the level of the cosmic soul and from that vantage point it grasps all other things as external to it. It is worth noting that it is not only the lower activities of the soul which are grasped in such a way (sense-perception, affects, imagination, discursive thinking), not only the individual body, but also the whole material universe becomes something which the soul *has*, while being different from it. The metaphor of breathing life into or moving all the universe suggests that what I described as the distance towards what is external to the self is not some kind of isolation from or dismissal of the non-self. The self is actively present to or even in all material objects (this is what ‘breathing life into’ seems to mean), but it is radically distinct from all of them. Since for Plotinus the cosmic soul does not exercise discursive thinking or any other lower activity of the soul, it implies that those activities are also transcended at this level.

It is not the end of the journey, however, since only the union with the One is the ultimate end. So, in a sense, the self at this point does not yet realize that it has this cosmic activity as something different; it identifies fully with it and from that point dis-identifies from everything below that. The treatise will continue to lead the self beyond the soul towards Intellect and then to the One. But temporary identification with the cosmic soul cannot be taken as something bad in Plotinus’ philosophy. It is already a high degree of purification,

because the soul at this level transcends those faculties which are connected to the body and which bring us unhappiness, anxiety, passions, etc.

In the anabatic meditation found in 5.1 there is an element similar to the quoted passage from 5.3. Also here Plotinus, having described a relatively high level of consciousness, encourages the reader to go back for a moment to the lower faculties of the soul:

ἥσυχον δὲ αὐτῇ ἔστω μὴ μόνον τὸ περικείμενον σῶμα καὶ ὁ τοῦ σώματος κλύδων, ἀλλὰ καὶ πᾶν τὸ περιέχον· ἥσυχος μὲν γῆ, ἥσυχος δὲ θάλασσα καὶ ἀήρ καὶ αὐτὸς οὐρανὸς ἀκήμων. νοεῖτω δὲ πάντοθεν εἰς αὐτὸν ἐστῶσα ψυχὴν ἔξωθεν οἷον εἰσρέουσιν καὶ εἰσχυθεῖσιν καὶ πάντοθεν εἰσιούσιν καὶ εἰσλάμπουσιν· οἷον σκοτεινὸν νέφος ἡλίου βολαὶ φωτίσασαι λάμπειν ποιούσιν χρυσοειδῆ ὄψιν διδοῦσαι, οὕτω τοι καὶ ψυχὴ ἐλθοῦσα εἰς σῶμα οὐρανοῦ ἔδωκε μὲν ζωὴν, ἔδωκε δὲ ἀθανασίαν, ἡγίρει δὲ κείμενον.⁴²

Let not only its encompassing body and the body's raging sea be quiet, but all its environment: the earth quiet, and the sea and air quiet, and the heaven itself at peace. Into this heaven at rest let it imagine soul as if flowing in from outside, pouring in and entering it everywhere and illuminating it; as the rays of the sun light up a dark cloud, and make it shine and give it a golden look, so soul entering into the body of heaven gives it life and gives it immortality and wakes what lies inert.

Here we can find the familiar hierarchy of the soul's activity, since Plotinus first mentions the body (just as in 5.3.9), then the 'body's raging sea' (ὁ τοῦ σώματος κλύδων, cf. Pl. *Ti.* 43b), which presumably refers to the soul-trace or generative power of the soul and then the objects of sense-perception such as the earth, the sea, the air and the heavens.⁴³ The emphasis on being quiet reflects also an aspect of the sensible soul, which had already been mentioned in Plot. 5.3.9, namely, affect and desire. So we have here the basic ladder of being and knowledge. Plotinus now invites the disciple to start from the bottom and ascend step by step, grasping each activity distinctly, until the self

42 Plot. 5.1.2.14-23.

43 It is possible that Plotinus refers here to the soul-trace, forming the body, which in his view of reality is in between the body and the soul, but it is not that clear. In the *Timaeus*, from which the expression was borrowed, Plato refers to τροφή, which could support this hypothesis, but Plotinus is often unconstrained in his use of isolated phrases from Plato and adapting them to his purposes. If I am correct on this, the following reference to the earth, the sea, air, and the heavens indicates a still higher level of the soul, the sense-perception, because he mentions sensible objects.

will be able to transcend the sensible realm entirely.⁴⁴ First, the body has to be grasped, then, the 'body's raging sea', and then all the sensible objects must be equally transcended as external to the self. The visualization of the soul flowing into the perceived universe as if from the outside and illuminating it suggests, again, that the self must be radically distinct from both its own body and the sensible powers, and from all the material objects it perceives, and, at the same time, intimately, vividly present to everything.

The self is not narrowed or diminished by distinguishing itself from all those things, but it is enlarged and expanded: 'when you look at it without its accretions and take it in its purified state, you will find that very same honourable things which [we said] was soul, more honourable than everything which is body' (ὁμοειδὴς δὲ καὶ ἡ ἡμετέρα, καὶ ὅταν ἄνευ τῶν προσελθόντων σκοπῆς λαβῶν κεκαθαρμένην, εὐρήσεις τὸ αὐτὸ τίμιον, ὃ ἦν ψυχὴ, καὶ τιμιώτερον παντὸς τοῦ ὃ ἂν σωματικὸν ᾖ, 5.1.2.44-48). What Plotinus is describing here is the next step of his ascent. Previously, the self was looking at all the material objects and grasping the powers which apprehend them and by this it discerned itself from that. Now Plotinus encourages the reader to attend to the very activity that was the vantage point from which he was able to distinguish himself from the material realm; in other words: to see the activity of the pure soul, honourable as it is, as something we *have* and not *are*. So there is a need to distance the self now from the cosmic soul, which encompasses and illuminates the whole universe in order to move higher, to the level of Intellect:

Οὕτω δὴ τιμίου καὶ θείου ὄντος χρήματος τῆς ψυχῆς, πιστεύσας ἤδη τῷ τοιούτῳ θεὸν μετιέναι, μετὰ τοιαύτης αἰτίας ἀνάβαινε πρὸς ἐκεῖνον· πάντως που οὐ πόρρω βαλεῖς· οὐδὲ πολλὰ τὰ μεταξύ. λάμβανε τοῖνον τὸ τοῦ θεοῦ τούτου θειότερον τὸ ψυχῆς πρὸς τὸ ἄνω γειτόνημα, μεθ' ὃ καὶ ἄφ' οὗ ἡ ψυχὴ.⁴⁵

Since the soul is so honourable and divine a thing, be sure already that you can attain God by reason of its being of this kind, and with this as your motive ascend to him: in all certainty you will not look far; and the stages between are not many. Grasp then the soul's upper neighbour, more divine than this divine thing, after which and from which the soul comes.

44 Strictly speaking, the material universe is not a separate hypostasis but a reflection of the creative power of the Soul-hypostasis.

45 Plot. 5.1.3.1-7.

The stages to God (the One) are not many, says Plotinus, because, in fact, the self must only move up to the level of Intellect and from then attain to the One. Here he uses the same word that I suggested was an important, technical term in the anabatic exercise, that is, λαβεῖν, 'to grasp'. In the next step the self has to grasp the 'upper neighbour', that is, Intellect. The self then sees the totality of the intelligible being just as it formerly was seeing the totality of the sensible reality: 'let him ascend to its archetypal and truer reality and there see them all intelligible and eternal in it, in its own understanding and life ...' (ἐπὶ τὸ ἀρχέτυπον αὐτοῦ καὶ τὸ ἀληθινώτερον ἀναβάς κάκει πάντα ἰδέτω νοητὰ καὶ παρ' αὐτῷ αἰδία ἐν οἰκείᾳ συνέσει καὶ ζωῇ ..., 5.1.4.6-8).

And as at the sensible level the self first had to become aware of all the universe from the point of view of the cosmic soul and discern itself from this universe, now it has to become aware of all the intelligible Forms from the point of view of what Plotinus calls 'pure Intellect' and only then to turn attention to this pure Intellect in itself: 'see pure Intellect presiding over them, and immense wisdom, and the true life of Kronos, a god who is fullness and intellect' (καὶ τούτων τὸν ἀκήρατον νοῦν προστάτην, καὶ σοφίαν ἀμήχανον, καὶ τὸν ὡς ἀληθῶς ἐπὶ Κρόνου βίον θεοῦ κόρου καὶ νοῦ ὄντος, 5.1.4.8-11).⁴⁶ When this is realized, Plotinus moves to the final step which is to transcend Intellect and enter the union with the One. It seems that at this point he abandons his method of grasping particular activities of the soul along with objects apprehended by those activities in order to experience them as something the self has but not is. The self at the level of Intellect is a peculiar self, because it has become the totality of what is, it is all, it does not have anything beyond itself, so any distinction between the self and the non-self tends to almost disappear. As Plotinus puts it in 5.8: 'For there is no longer one thing outside and another outside which is looking at it, but the keen sighted one has what is seen within ... one must transport what one sees into oneself, and look at it as one and look at it as oneself' (οὐ γὰρ ἔτι τὸ μὲν ἔξω, τὸ δ' αὖ τὸ θεώμενον ἔξω, ἀλλ' ἔχει τὸ ὁξέως ὁρῶν ἐν αὐτῷ τὸ ὁρώμενον ... ἀλλὰ χρὴ εἰς αὐτὸν ἤδη μεταφέρειν καὶ βλέπειν ὡς ἐν καὶ βλέπειν ὡς αὐτόν, 5.8.10.36-38 and 40-42). The noetic identity of the subject and the object in the act of knowledge does not mean, however, that there is no difference between the two. There is still the thinker and the content of his intuitive thought; although they are united, some degree of 'otherness' remains.

In various places Plotinus insists on the necessity of transcending even the noetic self with its subtle otherness between the subject and the object of awareness, because there is no otherness in the One. In 5.1 he says that, first,

46 The word play θεοῦ κόρου ... ὄντος is untranslatable. Intellect-Kronos is at the same time 'son' and 'fullness' of the One-Ouranos.

the One is the source of Intellect, so there is a possibility of taking, as it were, one step back from Intellect in order to grasp it as something we have and not are. But the difficulty is that Plotinus does not think that the One is our deepest self, it is rather our individual intellect which is our highest and deepest 'I'. So from the point of view of the hierarchical structure of the soul realizing that it is the intellect in us, which is the core self which has all other activities but is not them, is the end of the anabatic process.

It may also seem that Plotinus abandons the method of grasping, if not ascent itself, when he encourages the reader not to move up by grasping, but, quite unexpectedly, to pray, invoking the One as God, 'not in spoken words, but stretching ourselves out with our soul into prayer to him, able in this way to pray alone to him alone' (ὧδε οὖν λεγέσθω θεὸν αὐτὸν ἐπικαλεσαμένοις οὐ λόγῳ γεγωνῶ, ἀλλὰ τῇ ψυχῇ ἐκτεínaσιν ἑαυτοὺς εἰς εὐχὴν πρὸς ἐκεῖνον, εὐχέσθαι τοῦτον τὸν τρόπον δυναμένους μόνους πρὸς μόνον, 5.1.6.9-12). This is one of the few moments in the *Enneads* where Plotinus speaks about prayer.⁴⁷ It stands in an interesting contrast with a rather methodic ascent conducted throughout the whole of treatise 5.1. But in the two last chapters of the treatise, the language of the self and consciousness are used again. Plotinus says that the One can be contemplated (θεωρεῖσθαι) within ourselves by means of 'receiving him as another self' (δέχεσθαι οἷον ἄλλον αὐτόν, 5.1.11.11). Again, the passivity and receptivity of this phrase is in contrast with a rather active description of the lower stages of ascent, but this passivity is a crucial element of the final step, as Plotinus famously emphasizes in his metaphor of waiting for the rising of the sun (5.5.8.5-6). In the same treatise 5.5 Plotinus instructs not to try to grasp (λαβεῖν) the One in the same way as all other beings, because then it will certainly escape us, but to grasp the One in a particular way by 'looking at him as a whole' (ὅλον βλέπε).

This suggests that the One cannot be grasped as something external to the self, but only through the union with it, through experiencing it as 'another self'. It is curiously consistent with the process of making the actual self of our experience an object of awareness of a higher self, as described in 5.8.11. The crucial difference is that in the final union the One is experienced as if it were

47 Bréhier 1928, 215 described prayer in Plotinus as "une concentration intérieure de l'âme" and Rist 1967, 212 as "meditation and reflection on the One by a soul which is not distracted by the multiplicity of things". See also the more recent article by Wakoff 2015, who speaks about the "awakening from the outer preoccupations" and "turning towards what is always present" (74-75). Plotinus discusses briefly what might be called 'petitionary prayer' in 4.4.40-44. In terms of spiritual exercise, he mentions prayer only two times—in the passage discussed here and in 5.8.9, where, at the climax of a visualization exercise, he instructs the reader who wants to experience the divine Intellect, to pray for it to come.

our deepest self, while in fact it is our intellect which is, ontologically speaking, the core and centre of our consciousness and identity. At the point of the final union the One is being clearly experienced as the self and not as something outside the self or something distinct from the self. The favourite Plotinian geometrical metaphor for the 'receiving the One as another self', given in 5.1.11, is the coming back of the radius to the centre of the circle.

5 Taking Away What Is Not the Self: The Aphaeretic Method

In the previous section I proposed to look at the anabatic exercise through the lens of the grasping aspect, that is, focusing attention on various activities of the soul and the objects apprehended through those activities. By doing this, the self, which unconsciously identified with and clung to the things external to it, is able to disentangle itself by establishing itself as distinct from them. But the exercise of ascent seems to have another important aspect which is often described by Plotinus by the use of the words ἀφαιρεῖν and ἀφιέναι, meaning 'to subtract', 'to take away', 'to let go of' or 'to abandon'. In 5.3.9.1-9 Plotinus writes:

Ψυχὴν οὖν, ὡς ἔοικε, καὶ τὸ ψυχῆς θειότατον κατιδεῖν δεῖ τὸν μέλλοντα νοῦν εἴσεσθαι ὃ τι ἐστί. Γένοιτο δ' ἂν τοῦτο ἴσως καὶ ταύτῃ, εἰ ἀφέλοις πρῶτον τὸ σῶμα ἀπὸ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου καὶ δηλονότι σαυτοῦ, εἴτα καὶ τὴν πλάττουσαν τοῦτο ψυχὴν καὶ τὴν αἰσθησιν δὲ εὖ μάλα, ἐπιθυμίας δὲ καὶ θυμοῦς καὶ τὰς ἄλλας τὰς τοιαύτας φλυαρίας, ὡς πρὸς τὸν θνητὸν νεοῦσας καὶ πάνυ. Τὸ δὲ λοιπὸν αὐτῆς τοῦτό ἐστιν, ὃ εἰκόνα ἔφαμεν νοῦ σφῆζουσάν τι φῶς ἐκείνου ...⁴⁸

It is probable, then, that he who intends to know what Intellect really is must know soul, and the most divine part of soul. This could happen also in this way, if you first of all separated the body from man (and, obviously, from yourself), and then the soul which forms it and, very thoroughly, sense-perception and desires and passions and all the rest of such fooleries, since they incline so very much towards the mortal. What remains of soul is this which we said was an image of Intellect preserving something of its light ...

In this passage Plotinus is not so much encouraging the reader to grasp the hierarchical levels of the soul as to separate the self from them. As I have pointed out in the previous section, the grasping in itself contains an element

⁴⁸ Plot. 5.3.9.1-9.

of dis-identifying with the things which the self was mixed with. But in this passage this negative aspect of taking away what is not the pure self is central. This aspect could be called 'aphaeretic'. In this variant of the exercise the practitioner tries to realize that the self is not the same as the body, then, that it is not the same as the soul-trace, the sensible powers, the reasoning power etc.⁴⁹

It seems that, as Collette and Carabine point out,⁵⁰ we should distinguish within this method two variants: a subjective and an objective one. It seems that the first one is described in the already discussed passage (Plot. 5.3.9.1-9), where it is the self that needs to be purified of all accretions. In other words, the practitioner has to realize that his 'I' is ultimately completely alone, in the sense that it is not anything particular, delineated or possessing form of any kind. If the subjective *aphaeresis* means gradual stripping of the self of all the activities that are at its disposal and all the objects that it apprehends through them, the objective version of this exercise is focused not so much on the self as on the One. Of course, Plotinus believes that the One is ultimately experienced as 'another self', so at the final stage of the journey the difference between the core human self and the One as the centre of everything is no longer perceived. But in several places Plotinus proposes this alternative way towards the union with the One, where we should focus on separating everything from the One rather than from ourselves.

For instance, in 6.9 Plotinus says: 'But the cause of all things is none of them. So we must not even call this One good, the good which he gives, but the Good in another way beyond all goods' (τὸ δὲ πάντων αἴτιον οὐδὲν ἐστὶν ἐκείνων. οὐ τοίνυν οὐδὲ ἀγαθὸν λεκτέον τοῦτο, ὃ παρέχει, ἀλλὰ ἄλλως τὰγαθὸν ὑπὲρ τὰ ἄλλα ἀγαθὰ, 6.9.6.56-57). An example of a more complex objective *aphaeresis* is the last part of the treatise 6.8. Towards the end, in chapter fifteen, after describing the One as love loving its own beauty, in a poetic and almost hymnic way, Plotinus gives specific instructions as to the way of experiencing the One. The principle of this exercise is that the One is absolutely 'alone' (μόνος). The One is said to be 'alone and clear of all things' and then Plotinus changes the register towards more subjective and experience-close language:

εἴ ποτε καὶ αὐτοὶ ἐν αὐτοῖς ἐνίδοιμέν τινα φύσιν τοιαύτην οὐδὲν ἔχουσιν τῶν ἄλλων, ὅσα συνήρηται ἡμῖν, καθὰ πάσχειν ὃ τί περ ἂν συμβῇ [καὶ] κατὰ τύχην ὑπάρχει ... εἰς ὃ δὴ ἀναβάντες καὶ γενόμενοι τοῦτο μόνον, τὰ δ' ἄλλα ἀφέντες, τί ἂν εἴποιμεν αὐτὸ ἢ ὅτι πλέον ἢ ἐλεύθεροι, καὶ πλέον ἢ αὐτεξούσιοι;⁵¹

49 It is, as Rappe 1996, 258 put it, "a process of gradual detachment from the objects of consciousness".

50 See Collette 2002, 143. Earlier: Carabine 1995, 132.

51 Plot. 6.8.15.15-17 and 21-24.

if we ever see in ourselves a nature of this kind which has nothing of the other things which are attached to us by which we have to experience whatever happens by chance ... when we ascend to this and become this alone and let the rest go, what can we say of it except that we are more than free and more than independent?

He emphasizes that the goal is not only to discuss the nature of the One by means of philosophical concepts and arguments, but to see it internally. But the object of this seeing must be purified or stripped of all the other things. Interestingly, the subjective and objective versions of the aphaeretic exercise apparently cannot be completely separated from each other, because the deepest self is always experienced as the deepest centre of all existence, when the One becomes 'another self'. So for a moment Plotinus switches to subjective language, when he says that in the ascent we have to let go of all the things that are 'attached to us', which is the basic mechanism of the aphaeretic method in its subjective mode.

The result of separating every activity and every object from the self is, Plotinus writes, 'becoming this alone' and the experience of ultimate freedom and independence, which are fundamental characteristics of the One in this treatise. We can also see here that the aphaeretic method is in fact a part of ascent in general, because it is performed by the hierarchical movement up the spectrum of the soul. In the passage quoted above (6.8.15) Plotinus talks about ascending (εἰς ὃ δὴ ἀναβάντες) to the One. Interestingly, here again Plotinus uses the same strategy which I pointed out in 5.3.9 and 5.1.1-2, namely, descending in order to ascend. In 6.8.15, after pointing to the ultimate goal of the exercise, Plotinus is descending to the very bottom of the metaphysical ladder. He is summarizing the whole spectrum, from the 'soulless' things, through irrational life, the soul and Intellect (both of which are referred to as being a *logos*, the rational principle of the world), up to the One which is above Intellect.

Chapters sixteen and seventeen are mostly speculative discussions of the nature of the One in its relation to Intellect; they especially aim at pointing out the transcendence of the One as 'waking and hyper-intellection' (ἐγρήγορσις καὶ ὑπερνόησις), existing above substance, being, intellect, reason and life, even though all of it comes from it and, in a way, it is those (6.8.16.32-36). At this point, Plotinus gives practical instructions on how to see the One internally:

αὐτὸς ἄρα αὐτῷ ὃ ἐστι πρὸς αὐτὸν καὶ εἰς αὐτόν, ἵνα μηδὲ ταύτη πρὸς τὸ ἕξω ἢ πρὸς ἄλλον, ἀλλὰ πρὸς αὐτὸν πάς. Καὶ σὺ ζητῶν μηδὲν ἕξω ζήτει αὐτοῦ, ἀλλ' εἶσω πάντα τὰ μετ' αὐτόν· αὐτὸν δὲ ἕα.⁵²

52 Plot. 6.8.17-18.2.

He himself therefore is by himself what he is, related and directed to himself, that he may not in this way either be related to the outside or to something else, but altogether self-related. And you when you seek, seek nothing outside him, but seek within all things which come after him; but leave him himself alone.

The reader is asked to separate everything from the One, which may lead to the attempt to imagine the One as being somehow outside the whole reality that is known. Plotinus is emphasizing that it is as much outside as inside, pointing out that the seeking must take place within the existing reality, not in some imaginary other world. He says that the One is not outside, but it is the ultimate outside, because all things are within it. At the same time, the One is the ultimate inside as the source out of which everything else proceeds. The end of the treatise repeats the apophatic effort to enter the union with the One, when Plotinus says that all things

μετουσία γάρ τινι αὐτοῦ ἐστί, καὶ εἰς τοῦτο ἢ ἀναγωγὴ πάντων. αὐτὸς δὲ ἤδη παρ' αὐτοῦ οὔτε συνοχής οὔτε μετουσίας δεόμενος, ἀλλὰ πάντα ἑαυτῷ, μᾶλλον δὲ οὐδὲν οὐδὲ τῶν πάντων δεόμενος εἰς αὐτόν· ἀλλ' ὅταν αὐτόν εἴπῃς ἢ ἐννοήθῃς, τὰ ἄλλα πάντα ἄφες. ἀφελῶν πάντα, καταλιπὼν δὲ μόνον αὐτόν, μὴ τί προσθῇς ζητεῖ, ἀλλὰ μὴ τί πω οὐκ ἀφήρηκας ἀπ' αὐτοῦ ἐν γνώμῃ τῇ σῇ. ἔστι γάρ τιнос ἀφάψασθαι καὶ σέ, περὶ οὗ οὐκέτι ἄλλο κείμενον μόνον τοῦτο ἀληθεῖα ἐλεύθερον, ὅτι μὴδὲ δουλεῖόν ἐστιν ἑαυτῷ, ἀλλὰ μόνον αὐτὸ καὶ ὄντως αὐτό, εἴ γε τῶν ἄλλων ἕκαστον αὐτὸ καὶ ἄλλο.⁵³

exist by some kind of participation in him, and it is so to this that their origin is to be traced. But he himself has no longer any need from himself of holding together or participation, but is all things by and in himself—but rather none of them, and he does not need all things to be himself; but when you speak or think of him, put away all the other things. When you have put away all things and left only himself, do not try to find what you can add, but only if there is something you have not yet taken away from him in your mind. For even you can grasp something about which it is not possible any more to say or apprehend anything else; but it is something which has its place high above everything, this which alone is free in truth, because it is not enslaved to itself, but is only itself and really itself, while every other thing is itself and something else.

53 Plot. 6.8.21.21-33.

The paradoxical statement that the One is all things and none of them lies at the foundation of the objective *aphaeresis*, because the One's immanence, the fact that it is, at the same time, the centre of everything and the infinite sphere within which all other things exist, ensures the reader that the process of subtracting or letting go of everything will not lead into some kind of meaningless void, but into the One. This time Plotinus does not emphasize the subjective side of the experience (namely, that if we take away everything, we end up also with *our* core self), but rather the objective side, namely, that the One is the source and ground of being. But the mechanism of separating or subtracting is the same in both types of the aphaeretic method.

As I pointed out earlier, the subjective and objective modes of the aphaeretic exercise are merely different ways of approaching the same experience, sometimes combined in the course of the same meditation. When we are 'only ourselves and really ourselves', having taken away every activity of the soul and every object of activity, we are, in fact, becoming the One as our 'another self'. The aphaeretic paths to the ultimate self of the individual and to the One as the 'another self' of everything, culminate in one vision, as Plotinus explains at the end of 6.9:

τὴν ἐναντίαν δὲ δραμοῦσα ἤξει οὐκ εἰς ἄλλο, ἀλλ' εἰς αὐτήν, καὶ οὕτως οὐκ ἐν ἄλλῳ οὐσα (οὐκ) ἐν οὐδενί ἐστιν, ἀλλ' ἐν αὐτῇ· τὸ δὲ ἐν αὐτῇ μόνῃ καὶ οὐκ ἐν τῷ ὄντι ἐν ἐκείνῳ· γίνεται γὰρ καὶ αὐτός τις οὐκ οὐσία, ἀλλ' ἐπέκεινα οὐσίας ταύτης, ἣ προσομιλεῖ.⁵⁴

But if it [the soul] runs the opposite way, it will arrive, not at something else but at itself, and in this way since it is not in something else it will not be in nothing, but in itself; but when it is in itself alone and not in being, it is in that [the One]; for one becomes, not substance, but 'beyond substance' by this converse.

6 Losing the Awareness of What Is Not the Self: The Agnoetic Method

It seems that there is also a third aspect or variant of ascent which can be found in the *Enneads*. In 6.9 Plotinus writes:

Πάντων τῶν ἔξω ἀφεμένην δεῖ ἐπιστραφῆναι πρὸς τὸ εἶσω πάντη, μὴ πρὸς τι τῶν ἔξω κεκλίσθαι, ἀλλὰ ἀγνοήσαντα τὰ πάντα καὶ πρὸ τοῦ μὲν τῇ αἰσθήσει,

54 Plot. 6.9.11.38-43.

τότε δὲ καὶ τοῖς εἰδεσιν, ἀγνοήσαντα δὲ καὶ αὐτὸν ἐν τῇ θεᾷ ἐκείνου γενέσθαι, καὶ κείνῳ συγγενόμενον καὶ ἱκανῶς οἶον ὁμιλήσαντα ἤκειν ἀγγέλλοντα, εἰ δύναιτο, καὶ ἄλλῃ τὴν ἐκεῖ συνουσίαν.⁵⁵

The soul must let go of all outward things and turn altogether to what is within, and not be inclined to any outward things, but losing the awareness of all things (as it did formerly in sense-perception, but then in the realm of Forms) and even losing the awareness of itself, come to be in contemplation of that One, and having been in its company and had, so to put it, sufficient converse with it, come and announce, if it could, also to another that transcendent union.

At the beginning it looks like a typical aphaeretic exercise and Plotinus uses one of the technical terms for the process of dis-identification (ἀφιέναι). There is also a movement through hierarchical levels, which we find in all types of ascent. At first, the self is advised to let go of the external, sensible things, which sounds quite like taking away of the body and the senses in 5.3.9. But Plotinus introduces here the word ἀγνοεῖν which can have different meanings: ‘not to perceive’, ‘not to recognize’ or ‘not to know/understand’, ‘to be ignorant of’. In Greek literature, in some contexts, this word means that someone sees something but not quite recognizes it, as in Hom. *Od.* 20.15, where there is an image of a dog that does not recognize its master. But it can also mean not to know that something exists or not see it at all, as the use of this word in Pl. *Smp.* 216d suggests.

Plotinus wants to convey here the fact that the soul, moved by an erotic desire for the One, does not only turn its attention away from all things, but that it, as a result, loses any awareness of their existence. This loss of awareness is a result of the narrowing of the focus, so to speak, just as in the case of Socrates’ erotic passion. In 6.9.7.1-2 Plotinus instructs the reader to ‘become indefinite in [his] thought’ (ἀοριστεῖς τῇ γνώμῃ), because it is not possible to think (νοεῖν) anything else, when some particular thing occupies our consciousness. In another treatise, Plotinus points out to a similar indefinite or formless internal state, when he talks about immeasurable desire of the One which is without any form or shape:

Καὶ μὴν, ὅτου ἂν ποθεινοῦ ὄντος μήτε σχῆμα μήτε μορφήν ἔχους λαβεῖν, ποθεινότατον καὶ ἐρασμιώτατον ἂν εἴη, καὶ ὁ ἔρως ἂν ἄμετρος εἴη. οὐ γὰρ ὥρισταί

55 Plot. 6.9.7.17-23. Armstrong’s translation modified.

ἐνταῦθα ὁ ἔρω, ὅτι μηδὲ τὸ ἐρώμενον, ἀλλ' ἄπειρος ἂν εἴη ὁ τοῦτου ἔρω, ὥστε καὶ τὸ κάλλος αὐτοῦ ἄλλον τρόπον καὶ κάλλος ὑπὲρ κάλλος.⁵⁶

Truly, when you cannot grasp the form or shape of what is longed for, it would be most longed for and most lovable, and love for it would be immeasurable. For love is not limited here, because neither is the beloved, but the love of this would be unbounded; so his beauty is of another kind and beauty above beauty.

Such a language is not used by Plotinus in 6.9.7, although we can associate this formless receptivity of awareness, which is suggested here, with love and desire to be completely open to the One. In 6.7.35 Plotinus claims that it is only 'Intellect in love' (νοῦς ἐρώων) which is able to have a 'direct awareness and reception' (ἐπιβολῇ καὶ παραδοχῇ) of the One, by virtue of relinquishing noetic activity and becoming simplified (ἀπλωθείς). This is compared by Plotinus to becoming drunk to the point of 'losing our mind' (ἄφρων γένηται). We may suppose that in 6.9.7 Plotinus is talking about a similar process. Any object of our attention is compared by him to a seal making an impression in wax, and any such impression in our consciousness prevents us from receiving the impression of the One. We have to make our self indefinite, like matter, in order to be able to receive it. It is in this context that the instruction to lose the awareness of all things is given to the reader. Only in the later treatise 6.7 this act of making the self indefinite and open to the One is described as an act of love and drunkenness.

But in the agnoetic variant of ascent it seems that the self has to become not only drunk, but, as it were, drunk to the point of complete oblivion. Plotinus speaks here not only about becoming aware that the self is not the body, not the sense-perceptions and so on, but about something more radical, namely about eliminating all definite objects from awareness in order to make it empty, devoid of any qualities whatsoever (ἄποιον) and thus able to receive the presence of the One, which seems here to exclude all other objects of awareness.⁵⁷ We must be aware only of the One without 'adding anything to what is being thought' (δεῖ μηδὲν προσάπτειν τῷ νοουμένῳ, 6.9.7.7-8). It is the One which is the nectar we have to fill ourselves with by losing awareness of everything else.

56 Plot. 6.7.32.24-30.

57 Many scholars, e.g. Armstrong 1967, 46, point out that in the ultimate experience of the One other objects are not merely irrelevant, but disappear from consciousness altogether. Such a contemplative state was also described by Forman 1990, 21 as "wakeful, contentless consciousness".

But this exercise retains both the hierarchical structure of ascent and the gradual movement of purifying the self as the core centre of consciousness. The process of emptying consciousness of all qualities and objects has to be done first in the realm of sense-perception and only then in the realm of the Forms. Plotinus mentions also the last step, in between the Forms and the One, namely losing the awareness of the self, the 'I' distinct from any other object. When this core sense of the individual self is gone, what remains is the One as 'another self'. The movement of the exercise is also consistent with ascent in general: turning attention towards an object within awareness and conscious dis-identification with that object as something external to the pure 'I'. But in this agnoetic variant of ascent something more is going on, since it is not only about realizing the distinction between the self and everything else, but it is about eliminating this 'everything else' from conscious experience. If we take into account the metaphor of having and being, we might say that the self does not only cease to be all the external things with which it was identified; it also ceases, temporarily, to have them as well.

Another example of this variant can be found at the very end of Plot. 5.1. There Plotinus speaks metaphorically:

ὥσπερ εἴ τις ἀκοῦσαι ἀναμένων ἦν ἐθέλει φωνήν, τῶν ἄλλων φωνῶν ἀποστάς τὸ οὖς ἐγείροι πρὸς τὸ ἄμεινον τῶν ἀκουστών, ὅποτε ἐκεῖνο προσέλθοι, οὕτω τοι καὶ ἐνταῦθα δεῖ τὰς μὲν αἰσθητὰς ἀκούσεις ἀφέντα, εἰ μὴ καθόσον ἀνάγκη, τὴν τῆς ψυχῆς εἰς τὸ ἀντιλαμβάνεσθαι δύναμιν φυλάττειν καθαρὰν καὶ ἔτοιμον ἀκοῦειν φθόγγων τῶν ἄνω.⁵⁸

It is as if someone was expecting to hear a voice which he wanted to hear and withdrew from other sounds and roused his power of hearing to catch what, when it comes, is the best of all sounds which can be heard; so here also we must let perceptible sounds go (if there is no need to listen to them) and keep the soul's power of apprehension pure and ready to hear the voices from on high.

The agnoetic mechanism here is expressed by an image of 'withdrawing' (ἀπο-στήναι) from objects in order to become aware of the One. Again, we can see that the basic hierarchy of ascent is retained: first, the sensible 'sounds' are eliminated, then the noetic 'sounds', that is, Forms, until the One is all that is heard, so to speak, by the ear of the soul. When we are in a noisy room and try to focus on the voice of a friend talking to us, we have to make an effort to focus

⁵⁸ Plot. 5.1.12.15-21. Armstrong's translation, slightly modified.

our attention to the exclusion of every other sound. Sometimes the attention can be intense to the point that we are almost deaf to the background noise, at least for some periods of time. In the agnoetic variant of ascent, we have to learn to become deaf not only to the sounds, but to all objects which are not the One.

A part of this exercise can also be noticed in the treatise on beauty (1.6). There Plotinus speaks metaphorically about looking in similar terms. The journey towards the One requires 'leaving outside the sight of his eyes' (ἐξω καταλιπὼν ὅψιν ὁμμάτων, 1.6.8.5) and the reader is instructed: 'let all these things go, and do not look. Shut your eyes, and change to and wake another way of seeing, which everyone has but few use' (ταῦτα πάντα ἀφεῖναι δεῖ καὶ μὴ βλέπειν, ἀλλ' οἷον μύσαντα ὅψιν ἄλλην ἀλλάξασθαι καὶ ἀνεγείραι, ἣν ἔχει μὲν πᾶς, χρώνται δὲ ὀλίγοι, 1.6.8.25-27). In these passages, Plotinus emphasizes the first steps of ascent, that is, losing the awareness of sensible objects, but the context of the whole treatise makes it obvious that further purification is required in the noetic realm as well in order to become the pure self which can see the One as the highest beauty. The pure self is described here as pure seeing: 'you have become sight' (ὅψις ἤδη γενόμενος, 1.6.9.22). It is pure, because it does not allow any 'mixture of anything else' (οὐδὲ σὺν αὐτῷ ἄλλο τι ἐντὸς μεμιγμένον ἔχων, 1.6.9.19), but the self is at this point wholly and only the true light (ὅλος αὐτὸς φῶς ἀληθινὸν μόνον, 1.6.9.18). In the agnoetic variant, as it seems, this happens with the exclusion of any other thing from the pure self.

7 Conclusion

I have proposed looking at the Plotinian ascent from three distinct, but intertwined, perspectives. A context for this was Plotinus' metaphor of 'being' and 'having' various levels of the soul, where the fall consists of *being* the levels connected to the body rather than *having* them, and the purification is the effort to recognize that we have them at our disposal, but we are not them. The dynamics of being and having remains also at the higher levels of ascent, when the self moves through the pure soul and Intellect in order to reach the One.

The first aspect of ascent, the anabatic method proper, consists of the act of internal grasping (λαβεῖν) of a particular level of the soul's activity in order to distance the self from it, in order to have it rather than be it. Already this variant of the exercise contains in itself an aspect of separating or purifying the self from whatever is not the self, but this latter aspect is the pivot of the second aspect of ascent, namely, the aphaeretic method. Here also the self ascends through ever higher levels of being and knowledge, but does this not so much by grasping as

by letting go of, taking away or dis-identifying from those levels. This exercise has two dimensions or versions: the subjective and the objective one. The subjective variant of the aphaeretic method is focused on separating the individual self from everything that is accompanying it, while the objective one is concentrated on separating the One itself from all other objects of consciousness. Both approaches can be used alternately or simultaneously during a given meditation and their goal is ultimately the same, as Plotinus points out in 6.9.11.

The last variant of ascent, the agnoetic one, consists in making consciousness completely indefinite, without qualities or objects to perceive, in order to be able to receive the presence of the One. It retains both the fundamental movement through the levels of the soul and the separating activity which is in the forefront of the aphaeretic method, but the result of this radical form of meditation is the elimination of everything from the self. Not only does the self cease to be what it is not, it also ceases to have anything in its awareness. The sole object of awareness is the One.

Bibliography

- Armstrong, A.H., ed. (1966-1988). *Plotinus, Enneads*. (7 vols). Cambridge, MA/London.
- Armstrong, A.H. (1967). *The Architecture of the Intelligible Universe in the Philosophy of Plotinus. An Analytical and Historical Study*. Cambridge.
- Armstrong, A.H. (1973). Elements in the Thought of Plotinus at Variance with Classical Intellectualism. *JHS* 93, pp. 13-22.
- Arnou, R. (1967). *Le désir de Dieu dans la philosophie de Plotin*. Rome.
- Aubry, G. (2014). Metaphysics of Soul and Self in Plotinus. In: P. Remes and S. Slaveva-Griffin, eds., *The Routledge Handbook of Neoplatonism*, London, pp. 310-322.
- Baladi, N. (1970). *La pensée de Plotin*. Paris.
- Banner, N. (2018). *Philosophic Silence and the 'One' in Plotinus*. Cambridge.
- Blumenthal, H.J. (1971). *Plotinus' Psychology*. The Hague.
- Blumenthal, H.J. (1996). On Soul and Intellect. In: L.P. Gerson, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Plotinus*, Cambridge, pp. 82-104.
- Bréhier, E. (1928). *La philosophie de Plotin*. Paris.
- Bussanich, J. (1996). Plotinus's Metaphysics of the One. In: L.P. Gerson, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Plotinus*, Cambridge, pp. 38-65.
- Carabine, D. (1995). *The Unknown God. Negative Theology in the Platonic Tradition, Plato to Eriugena*. Louvain.
- Cilento, V. (1949). *Plotino, Enneadi, Vol. 3.2: Commentario critico di Enn. V e VI*. Bari.
- Clark, R.L.S. (2016). *Plotinus. Myth, Metaphor, and Philosophical Practice*. Chicago.
- Collette, B. (2002). *Dialectique et hénologie chez Plotin*. Paris.

- Deck, J.N. (1967). *Nature, Contemplation, and the One. A Study in the Philosophy of Plotinus*. Toronto.
- Dillon, J., ed. (2002). *Alcinous, The Handbook of Platonism*. Oxford.
- Dodds, E.R. (1960). Tradition and Personal Achievement in the Philosophy of Plotinus. *JRS* 50, 1, pp. 1-7.
- Dombrowski, D.A. (1987). Asceticism as Athletic Training in Plotinus. *ANRW* 2.36.1, pp. 701-712.
- Forman, R.K.C. (1990). *The Problem of Pure Consciousness. Mysticism and Philosophy*. New York.
- Foucault, M. (2005). *The Hermeneutics of the Subject. Lectures at the Collège de France, 1981-1982*. New York.
- Gerson, L.P. (2005). *Aristotle and Other Platonists*. Ithaca.
- Guérard, C. (1984). La théologie négative dans l'apophatisme grec. *RSPH* 68, pp. 183-200.
- Hadot, P. (1987). *Exercices spirituels et philosophie antique*. Paris.
- Hadot, P. (1992). *La citadelle intérieure. Introduction aux Pensées de Marc Aurèle*. Paris.
- Hadot, P. (1995). *Que'est-ce que la philosophie antique?* Paris.
- Hutchinson, D.M. (2018). *Plotinus on Consciousness*. Cambridge.
- Krakowski, E. (1933). *Plotin et le paganisme religieux*. Paris.
- Lacrosse, J. (1994). *L'amour chez Plotin. Érôs hénologique, érôs noétique, érôs psychique*. Brussels.
- Lear, J. (1982). Aristotle's Philosophy of Mathematics. *PhR* 91.2, pp. 161-192.
- Lloyd, A.C. (1986). Non-propositional Thought in Plotinus. *Phronesis* 31.3, pp. 258-265.
- Moreau, J. (1970). *Plotin ou la gloire de la philosophie antique*. Paris.
- Mortley, R. (1975). Negative Theology and Abstraction in Plotinus. *AJPh* 96, pp. 363-377.
- Mortley, R. (2013). *Plotinus, Self, and the World*. Cambridge.
- Mossé-Bastide, R.-M. (1972). *La pensée philosophique de Plotin*. Paris.
- Nussbaum, M.C. (1994). *The Therapy of Desire. Theory and Practice in Hellenistic Ethics*. Princeton.
- O'Meara, D.J. (1993). *Plotinus. An Introduction to the Enneads*. Oxford.
- Pollet, G., and Sleeman, J.H. (1980). *Lexicon plotinianum*. Leiden.
- Rabbow, P. (1954). *Seelenführung. Methodik der Exerzitien in der Antike*. Munich.
- Rappe, S. (1996). Self-knowledge and Subjectivity in the Enneads. In: L.P. Gerson, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Plotinus*, Cambridge, pp. 250-274.
- Rappe, S. (2000). *Reading Neoplatonism. Non-discursive Thinking in the Texts of Plotinus, Proclus, and Damascius*. Cambridge.
- Remes, P. (2007). *Plotinus on the Self. The Philosophy of the "We"*. Cambridge.
- Rist, J.M. (1967). *Plotinus. The Road to Reality*. Cambridge.
- Sellars, J. (2003). *The Art of Living. The Stoics on the Nature and Function of Philosophy*. Burlington.
- Sells, M. (1985). Apophasis in Plotinus. A Critical Approach. *HTHR* 78.1-2, pp. 47-65.

- Sells, M. (1994). *Mystical Languages of Unsayings*. Chicago.
- Sorabji, R. (2006). *Self: Ancient and Modern Insights About Individuality, Life, and Death*. Chicago.
- Stock, B. (2010). *Augustine's Inner Dialogue. The Philosophical Soliloquy in Late Antiquity*. Cambridge.
- Stróżyński, M. (2008). *Mystical Experience and Philosophical Discourse in Plotinus*. Poznań.
- Stróżyński, M. (2014). The Aporetic Method in Plotinus' *Enneads*. *Symbolae Philologorum Posnaniensium Graecae et Latinae* 24.1, pp. 17-31.
- Summerell, O., and Zimmer, T., eds. (2007). *Alkinoos, Didaskalikos. Lehrbuch der Grundsätze Platons*. Berlin.
- Trouillard, J. (1955). *La purification plotinienne*. Paris.
- Violette, R. (1994). Les formes de la conscience chez Plotin. *REG* 107.1, pp. 222-237.
- Wakoff, M. (2015). Awaiting the Sun. A Plotinian Form of Contemplative Prayer. In: J.M. Dillon and A. Timotin, eds., *Platonic Theories of Prayer*, Leiden, pp. 73-87.
- Warren, E.W. (1964). Consciousness in Plotinus. *Phronesis* 9.2, pp. 83-97.