Plotinus’ doctrine of the individual soul is among the most aporetic aspects of his entire system. Unable to share the immutable perfection of Intellect, the “amphibious” ψυχή is stretched tautly between its apex, which is in contact or even consubstantial with the hypostatic νοῦς, and its nadir, which is profoundly implicated (if not completely engulfed) in the sensible realm. Given the complexity of this aspect of Plotinus’ thought and the peculiar course of its development throughout his oeuvre, his earliest discussions are of particular interest. His first attempt to delineate a formal position occurs already in his second treatise, IV.7[2], *On the Immortality of the Soul*, in which he argues for the soul’s survival of bodily death by defending it against not only various materialist theories but also against precisely the kind of partitioning that he later comes to support. Although IV.7[2] has already received a considerable amount of scholarly attention, our understanding of the treatise has now been substantially advanced.

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1) As Plotinus himself subtly suggests, IV.3[27].1-4.
2) At IV.8[6].4.32 Plotinus characterizes souls as ἀµφίβιοι. As a consequence of this inherent tension, Plotinus spent the better part of his career continually revising and refining his position; in his penultimate treatise, I.1[53], he finally settled upon a bipartition of the soul into a higher, impassible portion, and a lower portion commingled with matter, locus of both sense-perception and the passions.

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by Angela Longo’s masterful French translation and commentary, the 15th published in the series first established under the direction of the late Pierre Hadot. It should be said that the series as a whole has helped in recent years to elevate the general level of intellectual-historical rigor in Plotinian studies while simultaneously making Plotinus’ thought more accessible to nonspecialists, but Longo’s commentary, founded upon her particular expertise in the Aristotelian subtext of Plotinus’ thought,4 is especially helpful for situating the treatise in the context of various inter-scholastic debates.

Longo (hereafter, “L.”) conveniently divides the treatise into four basic sections. The first section consists of a brief introduction (ch. 1) in which Plotinus (hereafter, “P.”) raises the central question of the treatise, namely, that of the survival of the individual soul, and argues (following Alexander of Aphrodisias, De anima 24.3-7) that the body is a mere ὀργανόν of the soul and is therefore dispensable once its work is complete; here P. establishes that that whatever its nature, the ψυχή is the essential human self (here following Plato, 1st Alcibiades 130c1-7), and is to the body as form is to matter (after Aristotle, De anima 412a19-21 and 414a12-14). Next comes 2.1 to 8[3].43, which L. considers the pars destruens; here P. polemicizes against rival schools that maintain either the soul’s destructibility or its dependence on the body. L. further subdivides this latter section into two parts: first 2.1-8[3].25, in which P. attempts to prove that the soul is not itself a body—here, according to L., P. is arguing with unmentioned adversaries, either atomists (possibly Epicureans) who maintain the soul to be an inchoate jumble of disparate elements, or Stoics, who, despite their belief that the soul is a superior and finer substance, still maintain that it is a kind of body—and second, 8[4].1-8[5].43, in which P. argues against those who agree upon the immateriality of the soul and yet see the latter as dependent upon an affection of the body (specifically P. has in mind both Aristotelian entelechy and Pythagorean harmony). The third section, running from 8[6].43 to 14.14—which L. sees as the complementary pars construens and the central argument of the treatise—extols the essential immateriality, independence, and divinity of the soul. Finally, the fourth section comprises a brief conclusion (ch. 15) in which P. insists upon the harmony of the doctrine he has just demonstrated with the beliefs of popular religion.

The great strength of L.’s analysis—in addition to her generally lucid writing style and judicious treatment of problems in the Greek text⁵—lies in her meticulous attention to both the Platonic background and the polemic context of P.’s arguments in what is often considered to be his most ‘scholastic’ treatise.⁶ With great skill, L. teases out the tacit positions of P.’s unnamed interlocutors, who, for the most part, turn out to be the ‘usual suspects,’ including Aristotelians, Stoics, and Epicureans.⁷ Among other particularly insightful portions of the commentary, one might note, for instance, L.’s thoughtful treatment of P.’s somewhat surprising critique of a doctrine commonly attributed to the Pythagoreans (pp. 187-195).⁸ Having refuted the notion that the soul is itself a body in

⁵ L. often provides alternate possibilities for translation, and is scrupulous about indicating whether the translation follows H-S¹ or H-S² (offering only 8 emendations of her own that differ from both editions), which is helpful in the absence of a parallel Greek text.

⁶ An opinion originally put forth by Bréhier, though L. herself however resists this designation (p. 28). Recently, P. Kalligas (op. cit. supra, p. 112) has suggested that the unusually fastidious argumentation of the treatise reflects “the relatively early position of the treatise in the author’s output” and “the insecurities attending a newfangled philosophical writer.”

⁷ L. appears most comfortable with the classical philosophical background, but her analysis occasionally betrays somewhat less familiarity with the thought of P. himself. This is suggested, for example, by her attempt to identify the νοῦς mentioned by P. at IV.7[2].10-33 with “l'intellect interne à l'âme humaine” as distinctly opposed to “l'hypostase supérieure à l'âme”; thus, on p. 220: “Je pense que, tant que la perspective est celle de l'introspection, il s'agit plutôt de l'intellect qui opère dans l'âme, bien que le texte à ce propos ne dise rien explicitement.” Such a distinction is not supported by an article L. cites (p. 220, n. 22) with respect to this idea, P. Hadot, “L’union de l’âme avec l’intellect divin dans l’expérience mystique plotinienne,” pp. 3-27 in G. Bos and G. Seel, eds., Proclus et son influence: actes du colloque de Neuchâtel, Zurich: Éditions du Grand Midi, 1985. L. is apparently unaware of P.’s conception—expressed emphatically in later treatises, e.g. at IV.8[6],8.1-4, IV.4[22],14.17-22, and IV.3[27].12.1-5, but already hinted at in 1.6[1].9—of the interiority of divinity and of the consubstantiality (or even identity) of human and divine Intellect (the doctrine of the so-called “undescended soul”). This notion has a long history in Plotinian studies; on its reception (and criticism) by later Neoplatonists see, inter alia, C. Steel, The Changing Self: a Study on the Soul in Later Neoplatonism: Iamblichus, Damascius, and Priscianus, Brussels: Paleis der Academiën, 1978, esp. 34-38. Perhaps P. Hadot expresses it best: “…tout est en nous et nous sommes en toutes choses. Notre moi s’étend de Dieu à la matière puisque nous sommes là-haut dans le temps même où nous sommes ici-bas.” (P. Hadot, Plotin ou la simplicité du regard [2nd ed.], Paris: Gallimard, 1997, p. 32.)

⁸ So intriguing is P.’s tepidity with respect to the Pythagorean tradition that L. devotes a brief appendix (pp. 245-247) to an enumeration of what amount to only five explicit references to Pythagoras throughout P.’s writings.
chapter 8[3], P. addresses the possibility that it is something belonging to the body (σώµατος δέ τι), and at 8[4] 1-9 rejects that the soul is an “attunement” or “harmony” (ἁρµονία) of the body akin to that of a stringed instrument, a theory which he attributes to a misunderstanding of the true doctrine held by the disciples of Pythagoras (οἱ ἀµφὶ Πυθαγόραν) who had originally understood this in another sense (ἐτερον τρόπον). P. does not specify what he believes the true interpretation to be, but L. suggests that P. understands the true Pythagorean doctrine of soul-as-ἁρµονία to imply only that the soul occupies a position intermediary between the sensible and intelligible realms, with ἁρµονία understood in terms of mathematical rather than physical harmony. L. notes that just such a strategy was used later by later Platonists. And yet, as L. rightly points out, this presents a considerable doxographic difficulty, since the comparison of the soul-as-ἁρµονία to a stringed instrument was commonly attributed both to Pythagoras and to early Pythagoreans such as Philolaus (e.g. Macrobius, *In somn. Scip.* I.14.19), and also occurs in an ostensibly Pythagoreanizing passage of the *Phaedo* (85e-86d). L. therefore suggests that P. has deliberately distorted the Pythagorean tradition for apologetic purposes, and is attempting to harmonize Pythagoras with Plato by treating any weak (or un-Platonic) doctrine attributed to the former as a misinterpretation by unidentified Neopythagoreans. This is but one example, but a similar degree of attention to the unspoken philosophical background may be found throughout the commentary.

Yet it is this perhaps this very emphasis on the scholastic background which comprises the only aspect of L.’s approach that leaves something to be desired. Of course, replete as IV.7[2] is with careful argumentation, one cannot fault interpreters for taking it to be what it appears on its surface: that is, a conventional defense of Platonic ‘dualism’ against alternative doctrines proffered by rival philosophical schools. But one might reasonably question whether this perspective alone does sufficient justice to the historical context of the treatise both in P.’s

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9) E.g. *Timaeus* 36e6-37a1; cf. *Plot. VI*.6[34].
10) Such as Proclus (*In Tim.* II 126.13-22 Diehl), Porphyry (fr. 18o Smith = Damascius’ commentary on the *Phaedo*), and eventually Philopponus (*In De anima* 70.5 Hayduck).
11) Though the doctrine is later refuted at *Phaedo* 91c-95a. Interestingly, L. points out that the Arabic paraphrase of the Plotinian passage (*Pseudo-Theology of Aristotle* III.55)—which L. takes to reflect Porphyrian exegesis—makes no distinction between the original, ostensibly ‘true’ Pythagorean doctrine of the soul-as-ἁρµονία—whatever it may have been—and its interpretation in terms of a stringed instrument, but rather implies that all Pythagoreans agreed with the latter.
12) L. points out that P. would have found support in the venerable critiques of the doctrine of soul-as-ἁρµονία in both Plato (*Phaedo* 91c-95a) and Aristotle (*De anima* 407b27-408a18; *Eudemus* frag. 7 Ross).
own oeuvre and in the more general cultural milieu of the 3rd century Roman Empire, in which an exponentially increasing number of religio-philosophical communities outside of the traditional philosophical schools offered, in the context of practical soteriology, a bewildering variety of views on the human soul. An initial hint that this extra-academic background might be relevant to the interpretation of IV.7[2] is the occurrence of nearly identical arguments in II.9[32]—P.’s explicitly anti-Gnostic treatise—in which he complains that the Gnostics posit both a superior, divine soul and another soul composed of the elements. That certain Gnostics did indeed posit a hylic soul (and / or demoted the soul to second place in favor of an indwelling pneuma) is largely borne out by Patristic sources as well as Gnostic texts themselves. Yet L. minimizes the importance of the correspondence between IV.7[2] and II.9[33], and insists that the

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13) That such a comparison might be appropriate with respect to this Plotinian treatise is confirmed by P.’s reference at IV.7[2].8.50 to the soul-as-substance as “saved” (σωζόμενον).

14) To L.’s credit, in a brief discussion on pp. 38-49 of the Introduction she does attempt to contextualize P.’s position somewhere in the middle ground between on the one hand what she sees as the Gnostic elevation of the soul and their extreme vilification of body and cosmos (an overly simplistic characterization, in my opinion), and, on the other hand, a range of Christian views (mostly post-Plotinian) in which the body is accorded greater respect and is even sometimes thought to be resurrected. The problem with this interpretation is the fact that P.’s most acute complaint with the Gnostics is their deprecation not of the body, but of the soul. L. apparently relies on an outdated view of Gnostic “anticosmism” and “antisomatism,” on which see my “Plotinus’ Philosophical Opposition to Gnosticism and the Axiom of Continuous Hierarchy,” pp. 95-112 in J. Finamore and R. Berchman, eds. History of Platonism: Plato Redivivus, New Orleans: University Press of the South, 2005.

15) II.9[33].5.8-24. One might similarly compare the arguments for the indissoluble nature of both soul and cosmos at II.9[33].3 and IV.7[2].12.

16) Among many other examples: according to Clement of Alexandria, Strom. I.20.114.21, Isidore, son of Basilides, posited two souls; in Exc. Theod. Clement also attributes to the Valentinians a “psychic body” (2.1.1) and a “hylic soul” (50.1.2-3). In his account of Valentinian doctrine at Refutatio VI.32.7.5, Hippolytus refers to the fiery nature of the demiurgic soul; cf. Gos. Phil. (NHC II.3) 67.2, which posits the origin of the human soul in fire and water. A hylic soul is also mentioned in both Auth. Teach. (NHC VI.3) 23.16-17 and Ap. John (NHC II.1) 18.34. The eponymous visionary of Allog. (NHC XI.1) 52.7 exits his limp soul before ascending to the transcendental realm. Zost. (NHC VIII.1) seems to posit several varieties of souls corresponding to different grades of humanity, some of which are material, (26.8-27.2); the lowest class of human being, the “mortal humans,” have dead souls and minds as well as bodies (42.20-22). On similar ideas in more mainstream Christian thought, see R. Ferwerda, “Origen’s and Augustine’s Attitude toward the Two Souls Doctrine: Its Place in Greek and Christian Philosophy,” Vigiliae Christianae 37.4 (1983), 360-378.

17) This correspondence was pointed out by R. Dufour in L. Brisson, R. Dufour, J. Laurent,
former is not directed at Christian or Gnostic interlocutors, who consequently do not figure into her subsequent analysis. In my opinion, however, the Gnostic context deserves far more attention than L. accords it, since this background is, I believe, crucial for understanding both the structure of the treatise as a whole and its position in the more general scope of P.’s oeuvre. For not only does P. tacitly attack certain Gnostic positions in the pars destruens, but in the pars construens happily avails himself of several Gnostic images and themes in support of the divinity of the soul; these Gnostic conceptions include (among others too numerous to mention here) [a] the exhortation to revert to oneself and to behold the divine within,18 [b] the image of the soul as a golden statue indwelling the human being,19 [c] the use of the term ὁµοούσιος to describe the relation

and J.-F. Pradeau, Plotin Traités 33-37, Paris: Flammarion, 2006, p. 254, nn. 80-83. L. acknowledges Dufour’s comparison but immediately dismisses it without argument in a footnote (pp. 39-40 n. 22): “Cette comparaison, autorisée par la proximité du contenu, ne devrait pas forcément impliquer que Plotin dans le traité 2 s’adresse à d’autres interlocuteurs que des païens qui soutenaient les positions que Plotin examine et réfute dans le traité 2.” L. thus appears to take the fact that the Gnostics are not explicitly mentioned in the treatise as sufficient grounds to reject the possibility that they comprise even one of its targets.

18) IV.7[2].10.30-37: Σκόπει δὴ ἀφελών, µᾶλλον δὲ ὁ ἀφελὼν ἑαυτὸν ἰδέτω καὶ πιστεύσει ἀθάνατος εἶναι, ὅταν ἑαυτὸν θεάσηται καὶ ἐν τῷ νοητῷ καὶ ἐν τῷ καθαρῷ γεγενηµένῳ. Ὄψεται γὰρ γεγέννηθαι τὸν ὅσιον αὐτὸν τοῖς νοητοῖς τοῖς νοικυτοῖς τούς τούτους, ἀλλὰ ἀδιδὼς τὸν ἀδιδὼν κατανοοῦντα, πάντα τὰ ἐν τῷ νοικῷ, κάσμαν καὶ αὐτὸν νοικόν καὶ φωτεινὸν γεγενηµένον, ἀληθείᾳ καταλαµµένον τῇ παρὰ τοῦ ἁγασθοῦ, μὲ πάντα ἐπιλάµµεπε τοῖς νοικοῖς ἀλῆθεσιν. The imagery of contemplative introversion and the sudden self-apprehension at the penultimate phase of mystical ascent to the supreme principle that can be found throughout P.’s corpus—e.g., I.6[1].9-15; IV.8[6].11-11; VI.9[9].9-60, 11.35-45; V.8[31].11-19; V.5[32].7-9.23—is originally a Gnostic theme, one which may be found in the Platonicizing Sethian tractates closest to P.’s own thought—Zost. (NHc VIII,1) 5-11-13; II.9-14; 44.1-22; 45-9.46.6 and Allog. (NHc XI,3) 52.6-13; 56.15-20; 59.9-61.22—in earlier Sethian literature—Ap. John (BG 8502,2) 59.20-60.7 [= (NHc I,1) 23.4-11] and Gos. Eg. (NHc III,2) 66.22-67.10—and in a wide variety of other Gnostic and Hermetic texts, which include Acts of John. 95-96 Bonnet; Gos. Phil. (NHc II,3) 30.28-35; Apoc. Jas. (NHc I,2) 12.16; Dial. Sav. (NHc III,5) 132.15-16; Cologne Mani Codex 23.10-15; the Hymn of the Pearl in the Acts of Thom. 76-78 Bevan; Acta Andreal 38.9-18; the Hermetic Disc. 8-9 (NHc VI,6) 57-28-58.17, 59.26-28, 60.32-61.1 (cf. CH XIII.4,1-2, 13,1); and in the Syriac fragments of Zosimos of Panopolis, Book XII, On Electrum, Berthelot pp. 262-263.

19) IV.7[2].10.45-52. As L. is aware (p. 223), the image of one’s divine soul as a golden statue may owe something to Plato—specifically, the passage of the Symposium (216d-e) in which Alcibiades compares Socrates to a grotesque statue of a Silenus containing within itself golden statues of the gods. Yet the Valentinians already compared the inner core of the spiritual elect to gold which does not lose its value even when covered in mud; thus Irenaeus
between the highest part of the human being and the transcendent deity; and [d] the account of the soul’s descent into embodiment as a result of its failure to apprehend the superior principles and its consequent experience of passion.

Indeed, so pervasive are the allusions to Gnostic imagery in the second half of IV.7[2] that one might reasonably suspect that the essential philosophical problematic of the treatise—both the defense of the soul against those who demote and / or partition it (in the first part of the treatise), and also the argument promoting the soul’s essential divinity (in the latter part of the treatise)—can only be fully understood against the backdrop of the various Gnostic anthropologies that describe the human being as an uneasy composite of both a vastly inferior, quasi-material soul that is subject to the passions, and also a fragment of the divine intellect or spirit that can eventually ascend to reintegrate with its transcendent source.

If I may be permitted here to reveal my own ‘prejudice’ on the matter, so to speak, I should mention that in my own work I have attempted to account for several apparently Gnostic elements in P.’s thought with the conjecture that he

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Adv. Haer. I.6.2. One might also compare the frequent Gnostic image of salvation obtained through the mediation of an ἐίκων of the transcendent deity that abides deep within the human being; thus—inter alia—among the Platonizing Sethians, Allog. (NHC X1,3) 60.14-37; Zost. (NHC VIII,1) 44.1-22; among the Valentinians, Clem. Alex. Exc. Theod. 4.86; cf. also Valentinus fr. C Layton [= fr. 1 Völker] apud Clem. Alex. Strom. II.8.36.2-1.4; and among the Peratae, Hippolytus Refutatio V.17.8.1-10.5.


21) At IV.7[2].13.1-20, P.’s remarkable description of a portion of the soul that strives to imitate the Intellect but fails to maintain a purely dispassionate noetic life and falls away from it on account of desire (ὄρεξις) appears to be a slightly more optimistic paraphrase of the Valentinian account of the similar fall of Sophia through her failed attempt to apprehend the unknowable Father (Irenaeus Adv. Haer. I.1.2.13-33).

22) Throughout his entire career, P.’s deep ambivalence about the soul hints at his own struggle with this Gnostic background; one might consider, for instance, certain passages in late treatises, such as III.7[45].11.19-33, in which P. imputes a restless and self-dissipating power to the cosmic soul, or II.3[52].17, in which P. describes the lowest extremity of the soul—the individual soul responsible for bodies—in terms of its unoriginality, imperfection, and even self-loathing.
himself came of age, philosophically speaking, in an Alexandrian Gnostic milieu, and only later, upon his arrival in Rome, turned against his former Gnostic associates, concealed his true background from his students, and adopted a new Platonic identity, purified of any overt reference to the Gnostic conceptions which nevertheless left a profound if unspoken imprint on his thought. If this is correct, then IV.7₂ may be understood as P.’s own early attempt at self-definition *vis-à-vis* the Gnostics, in which he employs the Gnostics’ own imagery in order to refute the various un-Platonic philosophical doctrines of the sort they had adopted. And that he does so not in the rhetorical mode of the indignant apostate (of the sort we find later in II.9[33]) but in that of academic philosophy is to be explained by the fact that in his earliest writings he is trying above all else to establish a new identity as an academic philosopher, and wishes to engage with the ideas of his erstwhile Gnostic colleagues uniquely in terms of classical philosophical discourse. Furthermore, this perspective might also reveal P.’s motivation for writing IV.7₂ in the first place (a question that L. does not broach). We may note that this treatise, a defense of the immortality and even divinity of the soul, is situated between treatises arguing for the divine origin of Beauty (I.6₁) and of Fate (III.1₃), both of which were also understood pessimistically by the Gnostics and consequently defended yet again by P. in II.9[33]. From this a unified intention behind this early triad of treatises emerges into view. Taken as an ensemble, they comprise a defense of various aspects of the traditional Greek philosophical notion of divinity against Gnostic deprecation. It thus appears that Plotinus was motivated to begin his philosophical oeuvre by the desire to redefine himself over against his Gnostic roots, as a defender not merely of Plato but Hellenic culture itself.

But this is my own opinion; that such considerations do not enter into L.’s analysis does not, of course, discredit her excellent book, which will undoubtedly remain useful for many years to come. This particular instance of neglect of the Gnostic context merely reflects a traditional tendency of Plotinian scholarship, which has remained (for the most part) content to treat Gnostic evidence itself very superficially, and more generally to ignore those aspects of P.’s intellectual and spiritual background which do not fall into the category of the history of

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24) We know that various Gnostic systems blended Aristotelian and Stoic philosophy with Platonic as well as biblical thought. See, for example, T. Onuki, *Gnosis und Stoa: eine Untersuchung zum Apokryphon des Johannes* [Novum Testamentum et Orbis Antiquus 9], Freiburg: Universitätsverlag, 1989.

25) Unconscionable in light of the fact that the *unique autobiographical datum concerning any of his own associates that P. provides anywhere in his writings* (!) is a reference
philosophy *stricto sensu*. In my view, this narrowly internalist attitude has impoverished our understanding of P. himself. Fortunately there are some recent signs the consensus is changing, and it is my hope that future commentaries on P. will take the fertile Gnostic substrate of his thought into account.

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\[\text{(at II.9[33].10.1-5) to his Gnostic “friends” (φίλοι) with whom he has come to disagree and yet for whom he still has an abiding respect (αἰδὼς).}\]

\[\text{26) A resurgence of interest in Plotinus’ engagement with the Gnostics is suggested by the recent occurrence of several international colloquia on the topic, such as those organized by Jean-Marc Narbonne and Paul-Hubert Poirier at the Université Laval (Québec) in 2009 and 2010, and also, most recently, in Paris in December 2011, one organized by Philippe Hoffmann, Jean-François Balaudé, Luciana Soares Santoprete, and Anna Van den Kerchove, devoted to Plotinus’ debate with the Gnostics in treatises apart from those of the so-called }\text{Großschrift.}\]