

DOES GEOGRAPHY CONDITION PHILOSOPHY?

BY WAY OF AN INTRODUCTION TO THE REPORT OF THE SECOND
INTERNATIONAL SEMINAR ON NEOPLATONISM AND INDIAN THOUGHT.

(Paulos Mar Gregorios, India)

The question has been raised time and again, and supposedly discussed threadbare, as to whether there are any demonstrable oriental influences in the thought of Plotinus. As I suggested at the beginning of the New Delhi Seminar in my brief remarks from the Chair, is it not time that we had a good look at the question itself? What are the assumptions that lie behind the question as it is formulated?

Let us begin by asking ourselves what we actually mean by the term "oriental". To what geographical region does it apply? Would it apply, for example, to the ancient Roman Province or dioikesis of Oriens? If it does then the whole of the West Asian region of the Roman Empire would be meant, with the Diocesan (**Dioikesis** or Diocese means a group of Roman provinces under a Prefect or Viceroy) capital at Antioch-on-the-Orontes. In such a case the word Oriental would not include India in the scope of its meaning. But we know that even in Roman usage, the word meant everything East of the Bosphorus, or sometimes everything outside of Europe. "Oriental" is a very European word. We do well to be careful in the use of this word, particularly in view of the cultural connotations it carries. Sometimes it is parallel to calling the Germanic people "barbarians". It is basically the same spirit, of which we have examples in this volume, by which

some Indian scholars sometimes dismiss western thought too lightly, without any major effort to understand it.

Most people, when they reflect on regional philosophies, think primarily of three groups: Western (mainly Euro-American, Classical, Mediaeval, and Modern Critical) philosophies; South Asian (including Ancient Pre-Vedic, Hindu, Jain and Buddhist) philosophies; and Far Eastern, (Taoist, Confucianist and Chinese Buddhist) philosophies. Certainly there were other philosophies not included in that threefold grouping. Even if there were not, the term "Oriental" would have to include the two latter groups, i.e., everything that is not occidental philosophy would be 'oriental'!

To deny any 'oriental' influence whatsoever in Plotinus is to deny even the influence of Egypt, where Plotinus was presumably born (in Lycopolis, either the one on the Nile Delta, or in the city of that name in Upper Egypt). He was brought up there as a child and he lived there for a good number of years of his adult life; Egypt certainly cannot legitimately be considered part of the Occident. I think we have to be just as circumspect in our denials as in our affirmations, as philosophers worth our salt. Let us then be done with loose statements in this matter, and state categorically: **There is no historical or philosophical ground whatsoever for the affirmation that the thought of Plotinus is totally free from all Oriental influence.**

I presume that the blurb on the Second Edition of Plotinus (7 volumes) translated by Prof. A H Armstrong in the Loeb Classical Library¹ is not the work of Prof. Armstrong himself. In any case someone who has more authority than the present writer should advise the Harvard University Press that it will be in the interests of scholarly accuracy to delete from the front and back flap of all seven volumes of future editions or reprints the unnecessary and incorrect statement: "There is no real trace of Oriental influence on his thought".

Let us proceed further to see what we can legiti-

mately say in this matter. In order to do so, we will be on surer ground if we abandon the term 'oriental' altogether, for it was used by the westerners (Europeans) to denote whatever lay east of their continent; its meaning was vague and imprecise; since Europeans had practically no west before the 15th century, it meant, for many Europeans, just what was not part of their world. It was what was east from the European perspective; the word "oriental" also came to have, perhaps only since the colonial period, a pejorative connotation: for many Europeans, what was not European was somehow inferior.

Besides, even today, both Egypt and Syria are still included by many in the Middle East and would therefore have to be regarded as part of the region denoted by the word 'oriental'. It would be much too laborious and from the start unfruitful to try to disprove all Syrian (e.g. Nemesius) and Egyptian (Ammonius Saccas, Alexandrian culture), and Jewish (Philo) influence on Plotinus.

So what we want to talk about is the influence of specifically Indian thought on Plotinus, not any so-called 'oriental influence' on him.

Now, Indian thought is a fairly wide ocean, as anyone with even a cursory knowledge of India's vast and deep philosophical heritage should know. Summaries of Indian philosophical thought have been attempted by many competent and not so competent scholars, both Indian and foreign. Even the best among them admittedly do not do equal justice to the Carvaka, Jaina and multi-schooled Buddhist as well as several Tantric schools of Indian philosophical experience, practice and reflection. In view of this formidably wide scope of Indian thought, it would not be very precise to speak of the influence of 'Indian Thought' in general on Plotinus. If someone has a positive affirmation to make about such influence, that affirmation would gain in clarity and refutability or critical examinability, if a particular aspect of Indian thought could be specified as having influenced Plotinus.

Perhaps we should consider the appropriateness of attaching any geographical labels at all to various schools of global philosophy. Every school we know is indebted to some school outside of its geographical region, either by way of ideas and categories adapted, or in terms of a polemic that generates new ideas.

If philosophy is some form of universal truth why should geography condition it? We have all to learn to shed some of our geographical and racial parochialisms in this regard. In our time we are called upon to regard all regional philosophies as the common heritage of humanity. All of us are called upon to focus on our common human identity, and to seek new human global philosophical perspectives duly enriched by all regional philosophies.

Now we have to ask a third question as to what precisely we mean by 'influence'. If, for example, the present writer, who is an Indian by birth but trained in the West, has read two books on Chinese philosophy, would he be regarded as having been influenced by Chinese thought? If again as a student at Oxford, he participated in an intensive three-month seminar on "The Tacit Dimension of Knowing" led by the Hungarian emigre' Prof. Michael Polanyi, should he be regarded as influenced by 'Hungarian' thought? Influence is rather too vague a concept to define or measure precisely.

I presume that no one disputes the fact attested by Porphyry that Plotinus was profoundly influenced by the teachings of Ammonius Saccas, whose lectures he attended for eleven long years, after having sampled and rejected those teachers in Alexandria who were recommended to him as the best in that city. Plotinus himself may have regarded Plato and Socrates as his basic saints or gurus and guides. Porphyry tells us that the only feasts Plotinus observed were the traditional feasts of Plato and Socrates. But Ammonius was his living mentor, his preferred teacher. To affirm one is not to

deny the other. If one has to speak about 'influence', we are fully justified, by the available evidence, in stating that Ammonius exerted a strong influence on Plotinus. One may even say that the influence of Ammonius was a decisive factor in Plotinus' reinterpretation of Pythagoras, Plato, Aristotle and the Stoics.

I know that the question : "Who was Ammonius Saccas?" will probably elicit a yawn from some of you. That is also a question that has been discussed "threadbare". Even at the risk of a few yawns and frowns, let us see where we stand at the end of the threadbare discussion.

It has been suggested by one imaginative speculator that Ammonius Saccas is a latinisation or hellenisation of the Sanskrit "Muni Sakya" or Sakyamuni, which is a well known form of appellation for the Lord Buddha. If that were only demonstrable, we could have regarded Ammonius, whatever his nationality, as a Buddhist monk, who took on for himself one of the many names by which the Master was called. This was actually put forward by no less a scholar than Cardinal Danielou, in his lectures on 'The Fourth Century' at the Sorbonne fifty years ago. Unfortunately it is probably only about as true as the other proposal that Pythagoras, or in Greek Puthagoras, was a Buddhist monk and that his Greek name was simply a Buddhist monastic name he chose for himself, meaning Putha (original Pali or Prakrit which was then Sankritized as Buddha), of the marketplace, taking agoras as genitive of Greek agora (=market). Let us leave aside these entertaining speculations, and get back to the question: who was this Ammonius Saccas? What in his teaching, according to Porphyry, made Plotinus say; "this is what I was looking for!" (**touton ezetoun**)?

I am unable to answer either of these questions. What can be said has been said by H-R Schwyzer and E.R.Dodds.² and other careful scholars. Ammonius lived ca 175-243 A D, while Plotinus lived 204/5-270, both for substantial periods

in Alexandria. Ammonius was thus thirty years senior to Plotinus, who began his study of philosophy in Alexandria in 232, when he was 27.

According to Longinus, cited by Porphyry, Ammonius was the greatest linguistic and literary scholar (philologotatos) of his time, and no one had come anywhere near him in learning. Longinus himself, according to Porphyry "the most discerning critic of our time" (kritikotatos), was a fellow-student with Plotinus of Ammonius, and calls Ammonius both Platonikos and Peripatetikos ³ But Ammonius wrote nothing, and told his disciples not to put in writing anything he said.

For eleven years Plotinus studied with Ammonius. We still need a proper exegesis of that key sentence of Porphyry's:

Kai ap' ekeines tes hemeras sunechos toe Ammonioe, paramenonta, tosauten hexin en philosophiae ktesasthai, hos kai tes para tois Persais epitedeuomenes peiran labein speusai kai tes Indois katorthoumenes.⁴

"And from that day continually staying with Ammonius, (Plotinus) acquired such a mastery of philosophy, that he became eager to gain knowledge of the teaching prevailing among the Persians, as also among the Indians."

Now, putting all that together this is what I get. Ammonius was both a great scholar and a great philosopher, well versed in Plato and Aristotle, as well as in the whole Greek tradition. Plotinus thought so highly of his teaching, in comparison with that of others available in Alexandria at that time, that he not only said the very first day: "This is what I was looking for", but also continued with Ammonius for eleven long years. If any single living teacher influenced Plotinus more than others, it was Ammonius. Ammonius, being an all round scholar, initiated Plotinus into the niceties and nuances of the teachings of Parmenides, Pythagoras, Plato,

Aristotle and the Stoics, so that the latter achieved a good grasp of philosophy in general.

So far I hope everyone agrees. Whether Ammonius was also well versed in Persian and Indian thought Porphyry does not clearly say. What he does say is that the mastery of philosophy which Ammonius imparted to Plotinus was such that it kindled in the latter a great zeal to get better acquainted with Persian and Indian thought. That zeal impelled the nearly forty year old Plotinus to join Gordian's military expedition to Persia, not because he was interested in Romans conquering Persia or India, but because his teacher had told him that he must find out more about Persian and Indian thought. Obviously Gordian's expedition was a failure, and Plotinus had to flee for his life and came and settled down in Rome.

Shall we then say that, after that initial failure, Plotinus gave up every effort to know something about Persian and Indian thought? There certainly were, already by the first century, Brahmins and Buddhists in Alexandria. Did he ever try to contact them? Was literature from India and Persia available in the Alexandrian Museon? By the time we come to the third century, Buddhists have established themselves in Alexandria, with a Vihara or place of teaching of their own. Do you have reason to think that Plotinus gave up the effort to know something of Persian and Indian thought after the Gordian expedition failed? Or did he continue to pursue that interest in Rome, where all roads met, including the ones from Alexandria, Persia and India? I leave these questions with you, and do not want to draw any specific conclusions at this point, except to point out that

- a. Ammonius Saccas taught philosophy in such a way to his student Plotinus that the latter felt it necessary to go and acquire some competence in Persian and Indian thought;
- b. If the above is true, then Ammonius Saacas had some knowledge of Persian and Indian philosophy, which he most likely imparted to Plotinus as his student.

Let us now raise a fourth point. When Armstrong, or anyone else for that matter, says for example that "There is no trace of Oriental influence on his (i.e., Plotinus') thought" his/her argument must be that, if all elements in the Enneads can be explained as originating within the Hellenistic tradition, then there is no need to hypothesize "Oriental influence". But are such scholars, including Armstrong, assuming that the Hellenistic tradition itself is uncontaminated by anything coming from East of the Bosphorus? A cursory examination would reveal that the Hellenic culture and religion were 'Oriental', in the sense of just as much Asian-African as European, through and through.

Hellenistic Religion

By Hellenism is meant that form of Greek culture which was shaped in and spread from the Eastern Mediterranean from the time of Alexander (the first Western empire-builder - ca 330 BCE) for about four centuries. When the Romans took over the Empire in the first century BCE, Hellenism went into a down-swing, till it was resurrected and reinstated as Byzantine culture in the middle of the fifth century. When Plotinus lived and wrote, Hellenism was expressed mostly in the many attempts to revive, reintegrate and revise the ancient Greek religion and thought of Parmenides and Heracleitus, Pythagoras and the other Pre-Socratics, as well as Socrates, Plato and Aristotle, the Stoics and others.

Soon after Alexander, Alexandria, the Capital of Egypt, in Africa replaced Athens as the cultural capital of Hellenism. In that process Alexandrian Hellenism had absorbed many Asian-African (Syrian, Babylonian and Egyptian as well as other) elements; it thus became more cosmopolitan in its outlook and could no longer be regarded as strictly European. Neither was Alexandrian Hellenism a secular philosophy. It was fully a religious system in which many philosophies flourished. When Ptolemy I founded the city of Alexandria, its core

was the **Mouseion**, a community of learned and gifted men, headed by a Priest of the Muses. The community had its own ceremonies and rituals, and offering of sacrifices.

Hellenism was thus not just rational philosophy. Fundamental to it was the religious perspective, integral to all genuine philosophical reflection leading to experiential knowledge of Transcendent Reality. Plotinus was no exception. This religious perspective expressed itself in three major areas, which one can discern in Socrates and Plato as well as in the Neo-platonist school as a whole:

- (a) the cult of the gods and daimons in temples and shrines dedicated to them;
- (b) the Gnostic and Mystery religions with their special revelations, initiatory rites and secret doctrines, and
- (c) the widespread magico-religious, or Tantric practices of invoking and propitiating the daemons or the Spirits to perform special tasks.

The main enemies of the three religious aspects of Hellenism were the Jews and the Christians whose influence was growing and threatening the very existence of Hellenistic religion and culture.

The point often overlooked is that all the three religious elements of Hellenism had a heavy 'oriental' aspect to them. The hellenistic culture developed by borrowing liberally from Egypt, Syria, Persia and India, but not apparently much from China. It was always a two-way process. As Greek ideas and culture spread Eastward, the rich culture of the East supplied so much of new insights, so many new ways of doing things, to the Greeks. One can only illustrate here.

Where did Alexander of Macedonia learn empire building in the first place? The Greeks had no such concepts. The Persian wars not only opened up a new world of experience and possibility to the Greeks; it stimulated their resistance to political and cultural domination by foreigners who did not speak their language or behave as was thought proper in their

culture. Scholars have been slow in recognizing the enormous role played by the Persian invasions in stimulating Greek culture to great heights of glory and creativity in art, music, literature, poetry, philosophy, politics, rhetoric, historiography, mathematics, geometry and astronomy in the period immediately following the Persian Wars. I have no reason to think otherwise than that post-Enlightenment European scholars generally exhibit a great unwillingness to acknowledge Europe's debts to Asia. They forget what is acknowledged by learned Greeks, that the Greek civilisation owes much to Babylon, Syria and Egypt.

It was the same pattern in India in the wake of the Macedonian's rape of the Indus valley. The Greeks learned much from the Indians, mainly in philosophy and metaphysics, Indians began to be influenced more by Greek art, sculpture and drama than by Greek philosophy as such, which the Indian philosophers acquired some knowledge of, but found little reason to admire profoundly.

Early Greek religion had sages and seers, but no organized hierarchical structure. It had its oracles and soothsayers, but nothing like the Prophet or the Messiah as in the semitic religions. Hellenism developed various rituals and sacrifices; Neoplatonism developed its own theurgy, but most Neoplatonists simply went along with one or other of prevailing cults: the Eleusinian mysteries, the Dionysian Cult, and the more rational Orphic Cult. Plotinus, probably supported the Orphic cult.

Plotinus was a vegetarian. Vegetarianism was part of the Orphic tradition. He went into a seance in the Iseum or Temple of Isis, and a god appeared to him and held converse with him. Unlike us Moderns, Plotinus shared the belief of his fellow Hellenists in the existence of a world of gods.

The points to be emphasized here are two:

- a. Insofar as Plotinus is a Hellenist, he is under heavy Oriental influence. This applies to his teacher Ammonius

Saccas also. This is particularly evident in Numenius the Neo-Pythagorean of Apamea (2nd century), with whom Plotinus shared many ideas. It is even more evident in the thought and practice of Plotinus' successors in the Neoplatonic tradition.

b. The attempt to make Plotinus totally independent of Oriental influences seems more of an Occidental prejudice than a scholarly proposition based on the evidence. The West cannot lay any such monopoly claims to Plotinus. He belongs to the heritage of the whole of humanity, and he is rejected mainly by dualist Christians and by devotees of the European Enlightenment's persistent superstition - the exclusive reliance on Critical Philosophy. Plotinus never belonged to the isolated Occident which in fact never existed. European culture developed historically by heavy borrowing from Babylon, India, Syria and Egypt, perhaps also from Iran and Palestine, and Plotinus drank deeply from that composite, creative, cosmopolitan culture of the Mediterranean, which today belongs to the world's common heritage.

It is in this context that many of the participants felt that it was a waste of time to discuss the question about "Oriental" influence on Plotinus. We found it much more useful to examine the affinities and differences between mainstream Indian thought and Plotinus.

Plotinus and Indian Thought- Some Primary Divergences and Affinities

1. **The Soul:** We became aware that the primary area in which to explore the question of Affinity/Divergence between the Plotinian Category structure and that of Indian thought in general was the conceptualisation of the Psuche or the Soul rather than that of the One which after all is strictly non-conceptualisable in both traditions.

The Plotinian Soul (**psyche**) is basically Aristotelian-Platonist, and does not easily fit into the categories in which Indian thought conceived the parallel expression **jivatma**. The First Ennead, in Porphyry's arrangement, begins with a discussion of the Soul. It is basically Form or **eidos**. It gives form to body but does not receive anything from the body. It is a simple, non-composite substance, as also the jivatma is in India. Soul and soulness do not exist independently. To be Soul is to exhibit soulness. To psuche is identical with to psuche einai. The soul cannot thus be described in terms of its composite qualities, since it is simple. The 'procession' or coming forth or origin of the

psuche is from The One, through the Nous, born into the world of multiplicity, located in the Universe generated by the World-soul. This World-soul or Soul of All is also generated by the Nous, as is the human Soul, but the latter is not derived from the World-soul. It must make the return journey, the **epistrophe**, back to the nous and through the nous to the One (hen). Nothing like this procession-recession is conceived in the Indian tradition as far as I know. Pralaya-Vilaya or expansion-contraction, yes, but not pro-odos-epitophe, or emanation- return or procession-recession.

The soul of Plotinus is sui generis. It is both indivisible and divisible, or meristos-ameristos, unlike anything else. Indian thought offers no parallel to this conception of the soul or Jivatma being sui generis or divisible-indivisible.

Nor would it be easy to find something like the Soul as one of the Three Principles of Plotinus in the Indian Tradition. For the Indian tradition the jivatma cannot be a distinct hypostasis at all. For Plotinus, it is just three,

no less, no more: the One, the Nous and the Psuche. In Ennead II:9 **Against The Gnostics**, Plotinus attacks the Gnostic multiplicity of principles, and insists that the principles have to be three, no more no less. One does not find such a three-fold Principle - One, Nous and Psuche - in the Indian tradition.

There are, however, affinities between the Plotinian psuche and the Indian concept of the jivatma. The psuche does not suffer; pathe or suffering belongs strictly to the body. Here Plotinus is more Aristotelian than Platonist, yet somewhat original. He makes the distinction between the higher and lower souls. But how can he make that kind of distinction within the psuche which is simple? In order to make the distinction, Plotinus conceives, to this end, a new entity called "the living being" or to zoion. It is this entity that is composite, constituted of soul and body. The first Ennead is about this composite entity, the living being, rather than about the soul as such.

When we come to the later neo-Platonists, we see a slightly more complex pattern of this soul descended into the world of matter, which is no longer the simple **psuche**, but a

composite entity of which the **psuche** is one part. The soul as it descends from the hypercosmic realm acquires its own vehicle, the **ochema**. According to Iamblichus, the **ochema** is created by the **demiurgos**. But the **ochema** is not the physical body; it has a divine origin; it is not something to be cast away. In fact, in Iamblichus at least, the **ochema** is indestructible and therefore eternal.

This certainly is not the place for an extended discussion of the concept of **ochema**; but we note that what theurgy does in Iamblichus is to purify the **ochema** of the soul, permitting its union with a particular god allocated to it. Then the light of the god shines upon the soul in its **ochema** and begins the process of the soul's elevation to the gods. **Ochema** has a parallel in the Indian concept of **sukshma sarira** or ethereal body. In both cultures 'out of body travel' occurs through the **ochema** or sukshmasarira. This non-material body is the vehicle of the soul also for experience in the material world. A comparative study of **ochema** and sukshma-sarira is likely to show great affinities as well as some differences.

But Plotinus' discussion of the soul in Ennead

IV:2 (Armstrong's IV:1) is one of the most sophisticated such discussions in literature. The Soul is not a body, not a harmony of non-corporeal natures, not an entelechy as Aristotle conceives it to be; it belongs definitely to the intelligible world, which in the Platonic tradition, is the home of abiding Reality; it shares in the Divine (tes noetes phuseos, kai tes Theias Moiras, Armstrong IV:1:9-12). There is no attempt to say that the Psuche is identical with the One as in the Indian tradition. Plotinus divides Reality into two classes: one group, the sensible world, is composed of the aistheta, merista kai skedasta, the sensibles, the divisibles, and the perishables. The soul does not belong to this class. But neither does it belong to the other class - the oudame merismon dechomene, ameros kai ameristos, or in no way divisible even conceptually, partless and unpartible, unextended (adiastatos), without spatial location in anything else.

The Plotinian Soul does not belong to either of these classes, but belongs to a third class of its own - the divisible-indivisible (he d'homou meriste te kai ameristos phusis, hen de psuchen einai phamen). This is of course an aspect of the Platonic tradition, where according to Timaeus 35 A1-14, the Artificer of the Universe "mixed a third form from both, from the indivisible which is always in the same state, and that which becomes divisible in the sphere of bodies". The Plotinian soul is an intermediary, a frontier being, between the intelligible world and the sensible world. Here of course Plotinus is not speaking of the individual human soul as such, but about the single unique entity called the Soul, in which the All-Soul and the Human Soul participate. A parallel conception to this cannot easily be located anywhere in the Indian tradition, as far as I know.

The body, whether it be the human body or other bodies in the Universe, come into being just as the Soul, so to speak, goes out of itself to take or form a body, according to Plotinus. Without the All-Soul, the Universe as such has no existence. Existence is what the Soul gives to the body. (Armstrong, IV:3:9). Clearly, Plotinus' conception of the soul is partly original, but its roots are strictly in the Platonic tradition, and seems to have no parallel in Indian thought.

II

General Discussion

In the course of the discussion in the seminar, some other interesting points came up. Here we can only pick up a few highlights of what was indeed a very rich discussion.

1. From the beginning of our discussion it became obvious that it was difficult to define the scope and limits of what is called Indian thought. We have to include Vedic, pre-Vedic, and Avedic thought, the thought of Brahmanas and Sramanas, the Jain tradition which claims to be both avedic and pre-Vedic, the Buddhist tradition which is certainly Avedic, the great Bhakti tradition in its many different forms, Islamic, Sufi and Sikh thought, recent western liberal and western Marxist thought, as well as Christian and Zoroas-

trian thought, all of which flourished on Indian soil and have not only made rich contributions to Indian culture and thought, but also form an integral part of every Indian's heritage. We are certainly unable to do justice to the vast ocean of Indian thought as it has developed through millennia.

When we try to compare Plotinus or other Neoplatonists with Indian thought, it would therefore be wiser to indicate the particular school of Indian thought one has in mind, rather than Indian thought in general.

2. The question came up also about Neoplatonism being both religion and philosophy. In fact classical thought in India as well as in the Mediterranean region, made no distinction between religion and philosophy. Nor did it make religion a compartment of life, as the civilisation of the European Enlightenment often does. In fact the Critical Philosophy of the European Enlightenment writes off any philosophy with the taint of religion as not philosophy at all, since it is dependent on revelation and not exclusively on human reason. For us Easterners, and I think, for many thinking

people elsewhere, this appears to be a persistent and pernicious western superstition, without either scientific or philosophical basis.

We must therefore boldly reject this superstition and take into account the whole religious-philosophical matrix of the Eastern Mediterranean (north, east and south of the sea), when examining the thought of Plotinus and later Neoplatonists. The thought-world of Parmenides and Heracleitus, of Pythagoras, Socrates, Plato and Aristotle, of the Skeptics and the Stoics, the Epicureans and to a certain extent the Cynics, was always religious and philosophical at the same time. So was that of Plotinus; any non-religious interpretation of Plotinus would be off the mark.

3. The Asian-African (not to use the expression Oriental) thought-world of Alexandria in the third century was one which had fully assimilated the Greek tradition, but was in the process of reformulating it in many different schools, e.g. in Christian (Clement and Origen), Gnostic (the Nag Hammadi documents), neo-Pythagorean (the Therapeutes),

Middle Platonist-Aristotelian (Ammonius Saccas, Numenius), and Stoic-materialist frameworks and categories. Plotinus was not only aware of these schools, but often wrote to question and correct some of the views expressed in these schools. But none of the thinkers of this age made the distinction that some moderns make between Oriental and Occidental. Neither was any of the schools exclusively Oriental or Occidental. The same applies to Plotinus. Plotinus heavily influenced many later systems of perceiving reality, especially Jewish, Muslim and Christian medieval and post-medieval philosophy. All these three traditions are Asian or "Oriental" in origin.

4. Plotinus specially targeted three contending forces in Alexandria and the Roman Empire: Stoic Materialism, Gnostic speculation, and Christian soteriology. There was already much tension in the culture among three approaches to salvation: Theoria, Theurgia and Ta Mysteria. Plotinus definitely emphasized **theoria** or a vision attained by training the mind. **Theourgia** on the other hand emphasized acts of worshipping God or a god, rather than mental-intellectual contemplation, through which **katharsis** (spiritual purification),

ellampsis (inner illumination) and Henosis (becoming one with the Divine) were to be achieved. Many who could not scale the ascents of mental discipline, preferred this way of theurgia in later as well as even in classical Neoplatonist practice. (Porphyry himself, Iamblichus, Proclus and so on.)

Plotinus did not wholly approve the growing practice of theurgy in his tradition. As far as the use of theurgy is concerned, Plotinus seems to be an exception in the Neoplatonic tradition as a whole which was heavily theurgic through and through. Plotinus emphasized **theoria** or mental contemplation, while the Alexandrian tradition as a whole tended to put more faith in **theurgia** and **ta mysteria**; even the Gnostics, who seemed to put more emphasis on a secret **gnosis** and thus to be more intellectually oriented, practised some form of theurgy or ritual.

5. It is specifically in relation to **theurgia** that there seems to be a major gap between Plotinus and his successors, most of whom were Asians who put more emphasis on acts of worship than on mental or intellectual exercises. Both Porphyry and Iamblichus made **theurgia** central. Plotinus

probably practised some form of **theurgia** but refused to give it central emphasis, looking upon **theurgia** with a measure of disdain, as good only for the mentally incompetent.

Prof. Berchman's paper on "Rationality and Ritual in Iamblichus and Proclus", along with his bibliography, is very significant in this connection. Ritual has its own rationality, different from scientific rationality. Theurgy establishes contact with reality at a level different from that of scientific rationality, effects a different entry into the intelligible world and achieves communion with the divine; this is more obvious in his successors than in Plotinus himself.

6. Since Prof. Berchman could not attend the seminar, his paper was not discussed in detail. But when we speak of affinities between neoplatonism and Indian thought, this aspect of Theurgy and its relation to the Tantric and the Vedic-Sacrificial or Purvamimamsa traditions in India should not be overlooked. What the west pejoratively calls 'magic', as Prof. Berchman clearly shows, is a highly rational way of operating upon reality. In India both the Tantric tradition

and the Purvamimamsa tradition are basically theurgic in nature. This means that in seeking for affinities between Neoplatonism and Indian Thought, Theurgy-Tantrism should receive a fuller treatment than it hitherto has.

7. We sought to compare Plotinus' One (**to hen**) with the Indian concept of **ekamadvitiyam**. In both traditions, the limits of the conceptual are recognized. The conceptual cannot by any means lead us to the One of Plotinus, or to the ekam of the Hindus. In this most Indian traditions would agree with Plotinus that the conceptual cannot attain to the Transcendent Divine, and that the One has to be known in a way other than the conceptual. In Sankara Vedanta, we call it **paravidya** or the knowledge that transcends. Modern critical philosophy has no such category, and this seems to be its basic weakness.

8. Both traditions recognize the key epistemological role of self-purification in attaining to the knowledge of the Divine. While the Plotinian tradition refers to this need of **katharsis**, the Indian tradition goes to great lengths in working out and prescribing the physical and mental exercises

which make one capable of receiving the grace of divine illumination and unity. Not only in the Yoga System of Patanjali, but also in the Bhagavadgita, these systems of nidhidhyasa are described at length. It would be a useful study to compare the purificatory disciplines in various Indian schools with the Greek disciplines of self-purification.

9. It was suggested that the comparative roles of eros and bhakti in the ascent of the soul to the divine would be worth careful study. Equally important would be a comparative study of the role of worship, or Indian **aradhana** and Greek theourgia (related to the concepts of eusebeia and theosebeia) in self-purification.

10. Both traditions acknowledge that the One is beyond all predicates. If the Good (to Agathon), the True (to Alethinon) and the beautiful (to Kalon) are not predicates of the One, what are they? According to Plotinus, the Good is only another name for the One, but in no way a predicate⁵. If Brahman is Sat-chid-ananda, how are sad, chid and ananda or Truth, Consciousness and Bliss related to the predicateless

and partless Brahman? The Indian answer would be the same as the Plotinian, namely that these are merely different conceptual formulations of the same reality.

11. We came to the conclusion that there were substantial divergences between the Indian tradition and the Neoplatonic tradition in the question of what constitutes True or Transcendental knowledge. In India paravidya or Transcendental knowledge demands overcoming the distinction among knower, known and knowledge, or **jnata**, **jneya**, and **jnana**. In the western tradition however the distinction between subject and object seems to be regarded as essential for all knowledge. Is this true? What then would be the western understanding of the logic of the infinite wherein all distinctions ought to vanish and all things ought to merge into each other as a single entity?

12. Our discussion on the relation between the One and the nous-psuche needs to be pursued further. The notion of emanation, if taken literally, would locate the One in time and space, which would make it finite. Emanation(**pro-odos**) can at best be taken only metaphorically, to denote the relation between the One and the Nous-Psuche. Obviously the One is not

located in one point in space. It is both infinite, omnipresent and invisible. Would the procession or pro-odos of the kosmos noetos or the Nous be comparable to the Indian Samkhya concept of the vyakta or manifest universe as coming forth from the Unmanifest (avyakta)? Neither the concept of pro-odos nor that of **epistrophe** or return, seem compatible with the Indian tradition as a whole. In the Sankhya, the relation between the manifest and the Unmanifest is not spelt out so clearly. What is recognized in both traditions is that the Manifest world of our daily experience has come forth from an Unmanifest Reality, upon which it is contingent. But the Plotinian concept of emanation finds no precise parallel in Indian thought. In Plotinus himself the concept of emanation is not philosophically clear, for emanation is undoubtedly a spatial concept, which cannot be applied to the One who transcends space. The analogies which Plotinus gives, like a light-source emanating light or a fragrant substance emanating fragrance, imply a source in space from which the emanation spreads around to the contiguous space. In the case of the One, the source is not in space; the concept of emanation does not help the understanding in relation to the One and the Many.

13. We had an extended discussion on the relation of any proposition to truth. Certainly propositions are not the only form in which human beings can linguistically express themselves. We agreed that propositions do not grasp the truth fully; this is so in Plotinus and in Indian thought. We saw that language can be used metaphorically as well as poetically, to supplement and clarify propositional expressions of truth. But do metaphors and poetry get anywhere closer to reality than propositions? Perhaps metaphors and propositions have their significance in their power to evoke inner experience in a way propositions seldom can. The perception of ultimate reality however always eludes the linguistic medium in every form. This applies also to concepts like emanation,

when used as a description of the relation between the three principles of One, Nous and Psyche. Emanation is a metaphor; it can illuminate us only analogically or metaphorically, not propositionally.

14. Finally, both in Neoplatonism and in Indian thought, the metaphysics is not functionally as important as the praxis of a discipline or nidhidhyasa which leads to enlightenment. The metaphysics both prepares for and conditions the experience; metaphysics arises out of experience as an attempt to conceptualise it. We thought it would be healthy to keep this in mind in all serious philosophical discussion. Critical philosophy's major weakness is this over-emphasis on the conceptual and the propositional, and the under-emphasis on the discipline or katharsis.

We concluded that the only option open to us was to begin planning for another Seminar or conference, in India, with wider participation, on The Neoplatonist and Indian Traditions (not just thought, but including spiritual disciplines, particularly the Yogic and Tantric traditions), in the near future.

1. Cambridge, Massachusetts, Harvard University Press, 1989, front and back flaps.
2. See E R Dodds, Numenius and Ammonius, Entretiens Hardt V, See also Schweitzer, Plotinus Intro cols 477-81.
3. Armstrong, Plotinus. Vol. I. pp Greek text, 56, 58, Eng. 57, 59.
4. Armstrong, vol I, Gk p. 8 Eng p.9
5. See Enneads II:ix:1 in "Against the Gnostics"