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MA Thesis

**“Metaphysical-Cosmological Politics,
A Plotinian City-Soul Analogy”**

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Many scholars have labeled the school of Neoplatonic thought as a philosophy without politics, as only half Platonic;¹ it is the Platonism that prioritizes the divine and the soul's ability to attain divinity itself. Neoplatonic philosophers, in fact, dedicate much of their writing to understanding the soul's ascension and the One to which the soul ought to ascend and return. Plotinus, often considered founder of this school of thought, wrote his six sets of *Enneads* from the year 250 to his death in 273. These were compiled and arranged by his student Porphyry following his death. These *Enneads* inspired a variety of later authors, some of whom engaged in more political thought; however, all hold to an ascension beyond the political realm. Plotinus regularly discourages political life and shows how his philosophy of the good life pertains relatively little to the actions of this world. Nevertheless, recent scholars have proposed that Plotinus does in fact present a unique and little studied political philosophy, one that awaits further academic inquiry.

Indeed, along with the recent scholarship, we ought to consider what a Plotinian politics may mean. Firstly, if we conclude that Plotinus has no political philosophy of his own, then we view his justification for the dismissal of politics *as* his political philosophy. In other words, a proper understanding of Plotinus may indicate a political philosophy of anti-politics. On the other hand, if we conclude that Plotinus does, in fact, have a philosophical system which incorporates the field and study of politics, then we ought to incorporate this thought into our broader understanding of Plotinus and the Neoplatonic school which relies on him. Regardless of the conclusion, the project holds merit simply in that it will enlighten our understanding of Plotinus' ultimate philosophical aim – that of divinization. If we can understand his view of the *polis* and the political function (if any) of philosophy, then we better understand the process of how the soul ultimately lives in and then leaves that *polis*. This project may secondarily work to refute the scholarship that has potentially misinterpreted and misused Plotinus. Scholars like Dominic O'Meara and Stephen Clark present powerful investigations into the possibility of a Plotinian political philosophy. When, however, accounting for Plotinus' own positions found in the *Enneads*, their interpretations, and the implications of such interpretations, become more difficult to accept.

¹ See W. Theiler, "Plotin zwischen Plato und Stoa," in *Les Sources de Plotin Fondation Hardt Entretiens sur l'Antiquite Classique*; also D. O'Meara, *Platonopolis: Platonic political philosophy in late antiquity*, 5; Svetla Slaveva-Griffin & Pauliina Remes, *The Routledge Handbook of Neoplatonism*, 471; Pauliina Remes, *Plotinus on Self: The Philosophy of the 'We.'* 214; and M. Trede and S. Said, *La Litterature Grecque D'Homere a Aristotle*, 45.

THESIS

I will survey the positions of O'Meara and Clark, showing that they are misleading for separate reasons and arrive at vague and inconclusive results. They are both right, however, in positing that a Plotinian political philosophy should be explored and that he presents a unique and untraditional understanding of political philosophy. I will expound on this, and argue for a third position, one that O'Meara and Clark do not take. Plotinus, as I will show, signals a delicate dichotomy between the material and immaterial realm; a division between the not-real, and the real, one where the true and good philosopher, i.e. the soul which aims at the True and Good, must fully leave what is not-real to attain fulfillment found in the intellect, and even higher into unity itself. Plotinus leads his followers to one side of that dichotomy so strongly, that to still engage in the material world would be to sacrifice the ascension. Political philosophy, for Plotinus, would be a flattery of the soul, engaged with opinion, and not truth. The enlightened philosopher would do better than to become a politician, and should they ever offer political advice, that advice would supercede political rationale. This third position essentially claims that Plotinian political philosophy is anti-political for the material world. As Aristotle finds Plato's *Republic* to be idealistic and impracticable,² so Plotinus would find Aristotle's *Politics* to be mundane and enslaving.³

Firstly, I will provide a working definition of political philosophy, largely relying on O'Meara and Aristotle, and establish its importance to Plotinus. I will follow this up with an analysis and subtle critique of O'Meara's *Platonopolis* and Clark's *Cities and Thrones and Powers: A Plotinian Politics*. Thirdly, I will enter into a closer look at Plotinus, initially explaining the importance of virtue and distinguishing the types of virtue that Plotinus tells us about either political or intellectual. Virtue plays a prominent role in Plotinus' ultimate project of ascension and philosophical enlightenment. Therefore, I will discuss ascension through virtue and compare it with ascension through dialectic. In order to explain ascent, Plotinus elaborates extensively on the tenets of a cosmological hierarchy stemming from the One unifying principle over all. The soul may traverse this hierarchy, moving higher or lower, however, all things in the universe are

² C.f. the first two chapters of both Aristotle's *Politics* and *Nicomachean Ethics*.

³ I will defend such an idea further on, when I discuss Plotinus' views on freedom and material necessity. In short, the material realm is enslaving if we do not ascend from it. Aristotle's *Politics* advocates only for necessary action without glimpsing the ideal.

necessarily ordered according to their worth and kind. There are, thus, determinate natural roles for humans in society. Through an examination of Plotinus on these matters, I will show that a person becomes most free when they act in accordance with the cosmological ordering of nature. I will, then, explain what freedom and duty mean for Plotinus within a political context. Practical action involves both friendship and situational necessity. Since humans are social and involved in community, their roles and freedoms are dependent upon collective activity. Moving from individual ascension to collective relationships, we will begin to see how Plotinus presents insight into the ideal city and state. I will explain how Plotinus avoids the Platonic city-soul analogy, creating a new understanding of the self. The self takes priority within the material world, as it aims at escape to the One. With this aspect, I will explain how Plotinus' political philosophy is apolitical, verging on anti-political. In conclusion, I note how hypothesizing about Plotinian states, as those which would exist for the sake of ascension, given the content of the *Enneads* and the little bit of biographical information on Plotinus, would stray into a realm of conjecture.

POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

I alluded to Aristotle's *Politics* before, and I will briefly use his *Nicomachean Ethics* to establish a working definition of ancient political philosophy. This is not meant to indicate that Plotinus would have been familiar with Aristotle, nor do I want to create a comparison between the two authors.⁴ Aristotle, however, provides a foundational viewpoint on political philosophy in the ancient world, one which O'Meara believes was commonly accepted,⁵ which I will discuss later.

Aristotle believes that a state is the highest form of community, likewise, aiming at the highest good.⁶ This highest good, he says, is found through the "mastercraft" of political science.⁷ This science focuses on civil education for the sake of rearing up particular types of individuals thereby crafting a full *polis*, which is the total composition of all of the individuals. The science, since it directs the activities of citizens, must have a knowledge of what is good for society. In fact, this good exists as a higher good than all others, affecting the whole and extending above particular

⁴ C.f. James Schall, "Plotinus and Political Philosophy." *Gregorianum* 66, no. 4 (1985): 706-707.

⁵ Dominic O'Meara, 'Political Theory' in *The Routledge Handbook of Neoplatonism*, Routledge (2014): 473.

⁶ Aristotle, *Politics*, tr. by H. Rackham, I.1,1252a1-7.

⁷ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, tr. by H. Rackham, I.ii.,1094a5.

individuals. Aristotle says even, that “to secure the good of one person only is better than nothing; but to secure the good of a nation or a state is a nobler and more divine achievement.”⁸

Aristotle, however, questions the extent to which one can pursue knowledge of an ideal good. He admits that when “having the ideal good as a pattern, we shall more easily know what things are good for us and knowing them obtain them.”⁹ Nonetheless, his *Nicomachean Ethics* project descends to say that a good citizen does not be a good man; rather the good citizen needs only to do good service to the state, which may be bad in principle. Aristotle articulates an attainable good, and even recommends that the contemplative life serve as the highest version of this. The intellectual life is within human reach,¹⁰ and, by the end of his *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle advocates that, “the life of the intellect is the best and the pleasantest life for man in as much as the intellect more than anything else is man.”¹¹ Aristotle points out that one does not need to rule to be virtuous: “Private citizens do not seem to be less but more given to doing virtuous actions than princes and potentates.”¹² A citizen, for Aristotle, does not simply become contemplative or virtuous spontaneously, rather, they require the proper education: “And it is difficult to obtain a right education in virtue from youth up without being brought up under right laws; for to live temperately and hardily is not pleasant to most men.”¹³ While I am not conducting a comparative study, the similarities between Aristotle and Plotinus may strike the reader by the end of this paper.

In any case, I present these passages from Aristotle here to show how Aristotle, as precursor to Plotinus and a respected founder of political philosophy, treats the realm of politics. He is careful to name the study of politics a *tekne* rather than a philosophy; for, it is a political art with particular best practices for particular peoples. Michael J. White believes that Aristotle’s “man as a political animal” conflates the political with every citizen.¹⁴ Generalizing these terms, Aristotle shows that the political life “is simply conduct in accordance with the virtues of character, which is undertaken for its own sake because such behavior is noble.”¹⁵ Virtuous activity, for Aristotle, is necessarily

⁸ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, I.ii.,1094b8.

⁹ Ibid. I.vi,1097a14-15.

¹⁰ C.f. Schall, 694.

¹¹ *Nicomachean Ethics*, X.vii.9,1178a4-8.

¹² Ibid. X.viii.10,1179a6-8.

¹³ Ibid. X.ix.8,1179b33-35.

¹⁴ Michael J. White, *Political Philosophy: A Historical Introduction*, New York: Oxford University Press (2012): 71.

¹⁵ Ibid.

found in the realm of the city, and the human function hence is to play a certain role within it. Intellectual life is higher still; however, Aristotle believes virtue and intellection are connected through a proper political structure. The health of a city shares an intimate connection with the moral health of its citizens. So, for Aristotle, a political philosophy is one which seeks the knowledge of the best ordered *polis*; it does not aim to simply instruct politicians, but instead crafts community through instruction of virtue. Plotinus, as we will see, does little to parody Aristotle in developing ideas for crafting community. Rather, we will find a separate and unique form of political philosophy within Plotinus. Nonetheless, Aristotle presents us with an ancient and accepted form of political philosophy that ought to frame our understanding.

Stephen Clark, who is writing specifically about Plotinus and who I will discuss in more detail further on, defines political philosophy as

“The attempt to examine, analyze and perhaps prioritize the many forms of social living and decision making that must always occur within a larger framework, in which particular choices have been made about the presumed nature of the world, of time, of causation, freedom and identity.”¹⁶

This definition ignores the phrasing of “political organization,” however, it becomes clear that Clark seeks an answer to the question of “how best we may hope to build Jerusalem – taking that title as emblematic of the many visions humankind has had of a divinely ordered city.”¹⁷ There is a subtle difference between the structuring of a city and the structuring of a society. Clark admits that “Plotinus himself did not write explicitly on the proper ordering of the polis, let alone of the empire or of the whole earth.”¹⁸ So, Clark’s main task is to extrapolate a Plotinian political system based upon the *Enneads*. While this sort of political philosophy relies on an understanding of the organization of society, it offers little in terms of understanding political leadership or constitutional theory, which I will discuss later. Broadening the definition of political philosophy, as Clark has done, somewhat incorporates O’Meara’s interpretation. He views political philosophy primarily as the field of knowledge engaged with *societal* living, i.e. he serves as a foundation for Clark’s later extrapolation to the *political*

O’MEARA

¹⁶ Stephen Clark, *Cities and Thrones and Powers: towards a Plotinian politics*, Brooklyn: Angelico Press (2022): 1.

¹⁷ *Ibid.* xvii.

¹⁸ *Ibid.* xvii.

Dominic O’Meara believes that the ancient schools of philosophy would have concurred generally with Aristotle in viewing politics as important, if not essential, for human flourishing. He says if the human good as the goal of Greek philosophy is divinization, then,

“This goal usually involved a collectivity. As Augustine rightly remarked, the philosophers saw human felicity as ‘social’. In this regard, if we follow the common view, Neoplatonists would have been exceptional in excluding political life from divinization.”¹⁹

O’Meara points out that Neoplatonists, starting with Plotinus, would have unusually distanced themselves from a widely accepted tenet of human life if they held no political philosophy.²⁰ He, thus, implies that Plotinus would have viewed political philosophy as important for the early development of souls, from youth to maturity. This again portrays a societal aspect of ancient political philosophy. Political philosophy does not need to account only for the ordering of a state (governance and constitutional theory) for the sake of a citizen but may also take into account the individual ordering of citizens for the sake of the state. While Aristotle holds to the former top-down approach since he sees education as taking priority, the Stoics, Christians, and middle and late Platonists held to a bottom-up approach for social and political ordering. For them,

“Everything hangs on coming to see the good, on getting a proper rational grasp on it. Then all the passions will be blotted out. There will be no weakness of the will. And one will always and only act on one’s new insight.”²¹

Therefore, with this transition from Aristotle, we can find a new definition of political philosophy where it may not be about the ordering of the *polis* but about the ordering of the soul on account of a divine highest good. This is important to note, as we will soon uncover that Plotinus discusses this strain of political philosophy – that of ordering one’s soul. Appropriate human function does not require that one has received the proper upbringing and education, but rather that they simply are drawn upwards to the Good. This sort of political philosophy does not need to ask about the best sort of regime type, constitution, or political leadership because human divinization does not rely on governance or political structuring. Aristotle, as we saw, specifies that the state ought to aim at the highest good; the difference now is that individuals, when seeking to realize the True Highest Good, may act contrary to a state. This philosophy is only political in so far as it discusses

¹⁹ Dominic O’Meara, *Platonopolis: Platonic political philosophy in late antiquity*, Oxford (2003): 199.

²⁰ Pauliina Remes challenges this view in *Plotinus on Self: The Philosophy of the ‘We,’* Cambridge University Press (2007): 215.

²¹ White, *Political Philosophy: A Historical Introduction*, 131.

how one engages with the *polis*. How the city is governed and structured may be irrelevant for such a philosophy. Essentially, then, Plotinus can engage in a political philosophy that does not need to propose a particular state structure. I will also show how Plotinus can engage in a political philosophy that does not need to propose a particular social structure.

So far, I have shown two definitions for political philosophy, however, the second definition which relies on a transcendent Good examines only human action within society and it ignores political science, which is the art dedicated to artificially ordering society. Throughout this examination we will find that Plotinus explores collective human action, however, he dismisses even this as a necessity or only as minimally beneficial for ascension to the One. Nonetheless, O'Meara and Clark believe that the structuring and governance of a city is not irrelevant, for they argue that mature Neoplatonic students and philosophers, including Plotinus, would still have viewed political philosophy as an essential foundation, a stair step to the immaterial realm.

To outline these stair steps, O'Meara, firstly, points out that the virtues are divided on a scale between the lower and higher virtues. These are also called the civic or political and the intellectual virtues. Plotinus makes this distinction clear, relying on Plato's own dichotomy of the virtues from the *Republic*. I will go into more detail further on, however, to summarize O'Meara's point, the virtues do not exist as two separate modes of being, but rather run along a scale. When someone engages in the political virtues, habituating a good life of civic action, they create space for the building of the intellectual virtues – those purely found in the soul. Virtues are used for the divinization of man, and O'Meara believes that “political virtue represents a preliminary, indispensable step: to be become gods, we must first become humans.”²²

Thus, in order to properly become one with the One – the goal of Plotinian philosophy - the philosopher ought to contain within herself all of the virtues both intellectual and civic, with the civic as the first learned and habituated from an educational system or school. More broadly, O'Meara believes that the Neoplatonists use political philosophy as preparation for transcendence. He says, “political knowledge prepares the way and is subordinate to a higher union with the divine; political knowledge, relating to the body, produces good order in our terrestrial lives, which in turn provides the condition for a return to the divine homeland.”²³ The full process of

²² O'Meara, 'Political Theory' in *The Routledge Handbook of Neoplatonism*, 477.

²³ O'Meara, *Platonopolis: Platonic political philosophy in late antiquity*, 175.

divinization actually includes the political life. O’Meara’s project elucidates how “the function of political life in the divinization of man inspired a political theory,” more apparently taken up by later Neoplatonic authors.²⁴ O’Meara relies on a belief that the ancients viewed the social life as important, and so therefore, did Plotinus also. He also associates the main Neoplatonic project, that of divinization, as necessarily dependent on civic virtues. Finally, O’Meara believes that the Neoplatonists crafted an intellectually rich theory of two realms, material and immaterial, where the material may be used to transcend to the immaterial. O’Meara says that, when in the soul-body composite, a philosopher may descend from enlightenment in order to promote political virtues and political happiness. This could happen through legislation and would be in accord with the “natural inclination of soul to communicate its goodness and knowledge in ordering material existence.”²⁵

O’Meara makes these claims broadly for Neoplatonism as a school of philosophy, addressing a variety of texts and authors. It may be the case that O’Meara accurately portrays some Neoplatonists; however, his writing on Plotinus regularly notes how later authors solidified Plotinus’ positions in new ways. Since Plotinus is generally considered the founder of the Neoplatonic school, we should expect to find within his *Enneads* the seeds of these later authors’ thoughts. As I will show, however, Plotinus may very well be departing from previous thinkers, creating a new philosophy that is individualized and ascetic, one which his followers do not necessarily hold to. Plotinus also, does not clearly show a scale of virtues, potentially even dismissing the civic virtues entirely once the intellectual virtues are acquired. Lastly, I will point out that Plotinus sees little utility in the material realm, rather exhorting his readers to avoid this worldly realm entirely. I should note that O’Meara cautiously addresses these concerns, arriving at a hesitant position for Plotinus, albeit more clear claims for the following Neoplatonists (like Olympiodorus who offers a definition for political philosophy).²⁶

CLARK

I have so far discussed O’Meara’s position; however, Stephen Clark proposes different reasons for a specifically Plotinian political philosophy. He examines Plotinus, hoping to find clues

²⁴ O’Meara, *Platonopolis: Platonic political philosophy in late antiquity*, 5.

²⁵ O’Meara, ‘Political Theory’ in *The Routledge Handbook of Neoplatonism*, 478.

²⁶ See O’Meara, ‘Political Theory’ in *The Routledge Handbook of Neoplatonism*.

to Plotinian political organization. Clark's book, *Cities and Thrones and Powers, Towards a Plotinian Politics*, argues that a Neoplatonic political philosophy would reflect the cosmological ordering of the universe. With a specific focus on Plotinus, he adds that there may even be found justification for imperial rule. Clark imagines how a Plotinian Platonopolis might have looked and outlines the goals of such a city. While guessing at the specific laws, Clark warns that even if the city were possible or explicitly proposed by Plotinus, it still would be unlikely to have been favored by Plotinus given his ultimate goal of ascension and his broader views about the interconnectedness of the cosmos. Thus, Clark ponders about Plotinus' philosophy to, rather, leave the city, pointing out that "the true cosmopolitan, in brief, lives in obedience to the wider world, acknowledging no special merit in the status, rituals, rights or duties of any local enclaves."²⁷ Clark's airy claims in his conclusion fall in line with a thoughtful and close study of Plotinus' *Enneads*; however, he leaves the reader uncertain about the nature of civic virtues and the extent of Plotinus' views on the self and our role, whether free or enslaved within a deterministic universe.

Clark sketches out the basis for a Plotinian Platonopolis in the following way. He says, "even if Rogatianus²⁸ was right to reckon the senatorial life of his time was pointless and corrupt, good government might still be possible somewhere."²⁹ This other sort of good government is one Plotinus may have idealized. Plotinus certainly engaged with the idea, when, according to Porphyry,

"He tried to make full use of their friendship [with Gallienus]: there was said to have been in Campania a city of philosophers which had fallen into ruin; this he asked them to revive, and to present the surrounding territory to the city when they had founded it. Those who settled there were to live according to the laws of Plato, and it was to be called Platonopolis; and he undertook to move there with his companions."³⁰

This project was given up for political reasons. We might wonder if the failure of his project later embittered Plotinus, causing him to turn further away from politics. Clark, however, does not find a change in Plotinus' attitude, but rather pursues an examination of what this Platonopolis would have been like. Simply, as a *polis*, it would have hopefully functioned as "a self-governing, mostly self-sufficient body centered on civic buildings such as temples, libraries and gymnasia."³¹ This

²⁷ Clark, *Cities and Thrones and Powers: towards a Plotinian politics*, 96.

²⁸ Rogatianus was a student of Plotinus who gave up political office.

²⁹ Clark, *Cities and Thrones and Powers: towards a Plotinian politics*, 97.

³⁰ Porphyry, *Vita Plotini*, translated by A. H. Armstrong, 12.3-10.

³¹ Clark, *Cities and Thrones and Powers: towards a Plotinian politics*, 103.

city would have followed the *Laws* of Plato and would have been structured in a way that most resembled and encouraged the natural ordering. Platonopolis would not aim at increasing the pleasures of all its citizens, but rather encourage the satisfaction found in accepting one's proper placement. The well-ordered city utilizes the different faculties of souls, fitting them into the multi-colored fabric of society.³²

The governors of such a city would know that they play little role in mandating what nature has already providentially ordained. Clark's chapter entitled "Platonopolis" presents a scenario for Campania, suggesting a combination of the ideal city from the *Republic*, and one where "*Nous* will be, we may hope, embodied in the conscripted council (though there may, on Roman precedent, be an imperial governor to oversee its workings). The less realistic hope encountered in Plato's writings is that the polis should be monarchical."³³ Would Plotinus have settled for a less-than-ideal city, one with a council instead of a king? The king could embody the principle of *Nous* more accurately than a council. Perhaps, however, the *polis* is already a multiplicitous environment, requiring a higher unifying principle. In Plotinus' time, this higher principle would have quickly been found in the emperor. Thus, Clark extends his analysis beyond one mere city, "for there was a larger problem for the well-ordered life than merely the life of one *polis*. You cannot manage civic affairs successfully without some knowledge of the wider world-society of men."³⁴

He asks how the empire, which is not a *polis* (remember a polis is "a self-governing, largely self-sufficient social unit, whose citizens discuss, debate and disagree, but share a language, heritage and ethical values"³⁵), might be organized appropriately within a Plotinian paradigm. *Ennead* II.9 recalls how Plotinus views the universal ordering:

"One ought to try to become as good as possible oneself, but not to think that only oneself can become perfectly good – for if one thinks this, one is not yet perfectly good. One must rather think that there are other perfectly good men, and good spirits as well, and, still more, the gods who are in this world and look to the other, and, most of all, the ruler of this universe, the most blessed soul."³⁶

The ordering of the city and political world, in order to reflect the *cosmos* and the metaphysical hierarchy of divine principles, then, should not simply place its mirror in a singular *polis*. Rather,

³² Clark, *Cities and Thrones and Powers: towards a Plotinian politics*, 105.

³³ *Ibid.* 142.

³⁴ *Ibid.* 142-143.

³⁵ *Ibid.* 143-144.

³⁶ *Ibid.* 149.

the Empire may more accurately represent a Platonist's cosmology.³⁷ Clark wrestles with this idea when he says,

“Neoplatonic cosmology reflects – or is reflected by – late Roman imperial organization. Some later Muslim Platonists might more consistently affirm the king's [emperor's] absolute and universal authority, as image and representative of the One itself, but a properly Plotinian metaphysics allows, by analogy, a more distributed and flexible authority.”³⁸

This flexible governance allows for lesser and partly autonomous authorities lying below the universal authority.³⁹ Nonetheless, whether a singular city or unified community in an empire, there must be a concentration on one individual who symbolizes the One and focuses all loyalty.⁴⁰ Clark, with little help from Plotinus proposes that this may be a philosopher king, a constitution, written as a “single agent and observer, in its devotion to what surpasses it,⁴¹ or an emperor who is “indeed a symbol of the One and acts only through his ministers.”⁴² Clark describes such a political society in detail articulating how each resident holds their own proper place, and contrasts this with an imperial society where the association of cities could share a religion all guided by the same intuition that they are “daughters of One Father.”⁴³ These cities and communities would be united by the person of the emperor and his capital city.

Clark's careful reading of Plotinus allows him to extrapolate claims about a Plotinian political philosophy. He even addresses the critique that Plotinus, while proposing a Campanian Platonopolis, actually preferred individualized ascension and disdained politics. Clark says that Plotinus' message may seem to be that “the aspirant to enlightenment should abandon all entanglements and go out into the world alone in complete obedience.”⁴⁴ But then Clark concludes that “we are to avoid confusion, not to avoid company: on the contrary, it was avoiding company that ensured our fall.”⁴⁵

³⁷ C.f. Schall, “Plotinus and Political Philosophy,” 693.

³⁸ Clark, *Cities and Thrones and Powers: towards a Plotinian politics*, 151.

³⁹ *Ibid.* 149.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.* 159.

⁴¹ *Ibid.* 156.

⁴² *Ibid.* 172.

⁴³ *Ibid.* 185.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.* 221.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.* 223.

Clark accounts for Plotinus' often assumed ascetism, ignoring the implications of his immaterialist philosophy and instead appealing to a more common sense reading where we can expect Plotinus' appreciation for community and acceptance of the importance of politics. In essence, this resembles O'Meara's generalization that the ancients, Plotinus included, would have no doubt understood, as was shown foundationally with Aristotle above, that the material realm can be used to transcend to the immaterial.

In my own argument which follows, I will address the complexities between the material world as a tool and matter as a constraint. On the one hand, Plotinus could view civic virtues and communal interaction as tools for enlightenment, on the other hand, Plotinus could have seen these as traps and constraints, never fully productive of intellectual and immaterial ascension. Indeed, According to Porphyry's biographical account of Plotinus in the *Vita Plotini*, Plotinus discouraged his followers from the political life.⁴⁶ Plotinus even discourages political life in his own works, as I will soon discuss.⁴⁷ As I examine the virtue and the contemplative life in the next few sections, I will be analyzing Plotinus' views on political life, not necessarily on political organization or political science. This will follow later on, after I have shown how Plotinus views the role of the individual in society.

ASCENSION THROUGH VIRTUE

The sort of immaterial ascension which Plotinus develops through his philosophy, and which becomes a staple of Neoplatonic thought rests on a distinct cosmological understanding of a hierarchical world descending from One primary principle of all things.⁴⁸ Indeed, the plurality of existing things in the tangible and intelligible world derives ultimately from one primary being, namely the One. The soul's aim is to unite again with that One. Plotinus holds that the soul is attached, as if by a string, to the One. It ascends along this string by living a life of virtue. Although attached to and descended from the One, the soul in the material realm is confined within the physical body. While this paper will not go into all of the details about the nature of the soul or the tenets of the One, it will be important to understand the soul's relationship with the body and the

⁴⁶ Namely, Zethus and Rogatianus in *Vit. Plot.*, 7.17-21 and 7.31-46.

⁴⁷ Quickly shown by *Ennead* I.4.14.20.

⁴⁸ Pauliina Remes in *Plotinus on Self: The Philosophy of the 'We,'* page 224, believes that Plotinus only advocates for fleeing to a higher world as a critique to the stoics for staying on the level of civic virtue, and that the Plotinian philosopher would in fact return into the 'cave.' Porphyry will later solidify a position that believes that there is a scale of virtues where the political virtues are necessary for higher ones.

material. The material body is very temporary in the context of the immortal lifetime of the soul. The soul traverses up and down the cosmological ladder through intellectual contemplation. Contemplation is habituated in the form of intellectual virtues; these necessarily lift one up in the intelligible and immaterial realm to the One. At this level in the hierarchy, there is no longer any need for civic virtues, since there is only internal activity, focusing on unity, rather than disparate social activities. Plotinus says that “intellectual activity is ours in the sense that the soul is intellectual and intellectual activity is its higher life, both when the soul operates intellectually and when intellect acts upon us. For intellect too is a part of ourselves and to it we ascend.”⁴⁹ While the civic virtues are lesser and, as I will show, unnecessary for the soul’s ascension, they are still important elements of illumination. For Plotinus describes the civic virtues in relation to the intellectual virtues as follows:

“Has the intelligible then, virtues? It is at any rate improbable that it has the virtues called “civic,” practical wisdom which has to do with discursive reason, courage which has to do with the emotions, balanced control which consists in a sort of agreement and harmony of passion and reason, justice which makes each of these parts agree in minding their own business where ruling and being ruled are concerned. Then are we not made god-like by the civic virtues, but by the greater virtues which have the same names? But if by the others, are the civic virtues no help at all to this likeness? It is unreasonable to suppose that we are not made godlike in any way by the civic virtues but that likeness comes by the greater ones – tradition certainly calls men of civic virtue godlike and we must say that somehow or other they were made like by this kind of virtue.”⁵⁰

An alternative translation of this last statement may instead pose a question. At the beginning of the block-quote, we can translate (see the footnote for the Greek): “Is it not reasonable that the virtues are called civic...” Then the last sentence as: “Or is it unreasonable to suppose that we are not made god-like by the civic virtues...” Since this question is the crux of how to interpret Plotinus’ position, it is important to note that he is not flatly stating that it is unreasonable to claim the civic virtues do not make us godlike in some way. He is merely asking if it is unreasonable. The interpretation is tricky here because, 1. it might be a question rather than a statement (if my reading is correct); 2. even if it is a statement, Plotinus qualifies it with “somehow” - meaning that the civic virtues do not sufficiently or even necessarily contribute to god-likeness - they can just help; 3. the fact that he refers to “tradition” detracts from a commitment to the claim that civic

⁴⁹ Plotinus, *Ennead*, translated by A.H. Armstrong, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, (1969) I.1.13.5-9. I will continue to use this translation notated as *Ennead* unless otherwise stated.

⁵⁰ *Ennead*, I.2.1.16-27.

virtues contribute to god-likeness.⁵¹ Just a bit later, as Plotinus elaborates further on the intellectual virtues, he says,

“The civic virtues which we mentioned above, do genuinely order and render better the desires by limiting and moderating them,⁵² and putting measure into all our experience; and they abolish false opinions, by what is altogether better and by the fact of limitation, and by the exclusion of the unlimited and indefinite and the existence of the measured; and they are themselves limited and clearly defined.”⁵³

One reading of this passage might claim that this amounts to preserving a necessary and integral place for the civic virtues.⁵⁴ I would like to call attention to the fact that this statement amounts to acknowledging that the civic virtues can limit desires and thus help a person be a bit more like the next level up in the ontological hierarchy – hence why Plotinus is discussing likeness in the following sentences:

“Things which are near [the Good] participate [in it] more. Soul is nearer and more akin to it than body; so it participates more, to the point of deceiving us into imagining that it is a god, and that all divinity is comprised in this likeness. This is how those possessed of political⁵⁵ virtue are made like [gods].”⁵⁶

In the next few lines (*Ennead* I.2.3) Plotinus goes on to note how Plato wanted us to find likeness to the gods at their divine intelligible level, where the civic virtues are not at. This next level is only accessible to soul, although even here, the soul “deceives” itself and others into thinking that is as high as it needs to go to be god-like. Plotinus goes on to show, however, that this is just the

⁵¹ I provide the Greek from lines 16 to 27: Ἄρ' οὖν ἐκεῖνο ταύτας ἔχει; Ἡ οὐκ εὐλογον τὰς γε πολιτικὰς λεγομένας ἀρετὰς ἔχειν, φρόνησιν μὲν περὶ τὸ λογιζόμενον, ἀνδρίαν δὲ περὶ τὸ θυμούμενον, σωφροσύνην δὲ ἐν ὁμολογίᾳ τινὶ καὶ συμφωνίᾳ ἐπιθυμητικοῦ πρὸς λογισμόν, δικαιοσύνην δὲ τὴν 20ἐκάστου τούτων ὁμοῦ οἰκιοπραγίαν ἀρχῆς περὶ καὶ τοῦ ἀρχεσθαι. Ἄρ' οὖν οὐ κατὰ τὰς πολιτικὰς ὁμοιούμεθα, ἀλλὰ κατὰ τὰς μείζους τῶ ἀυτῶ ὀνόματι χρωμένας; Ἄλλ' εἰ κατ' ἄλλας, κατὰ τὰς πολιτικὰς ὄλως οὐ; Ἡ ἄλογον μὴδ' ὅπως οὖν ὁμοιωσθαι κατὰ ταύτας—τούτους γοῦν 25καὶ θεῖους ἡ φήμη λέγει καὶ λεκτέον ἀμηγέπη ὁμοιωσθαι—κατὰ δὲ τὰς μείζους τὴν ὁμοίωσιν εἶναι. Ἄλλ' ἐκατέρως γε συμβαίνει ἀρετὰς ἔχειν κἂν εἰ μὴ τοιαύτας.

⁵² I have slightly modified Armstrong's translation here. Armstrong asserts that civic virtues make us better, however, rather than making us better, the civic virtues only curb our desires. Therefore, it is comforting but insufficient; for, a truly philosophic soul will want to remove the desires altogether.

⁵³ *Ennead*, I.2.2.14-26.

⁵⁴ Stephen McKenna translates the section as follows: “The Civic Virtues, on which we have touched above, are a principle of order and beauty in us as long as we remain passing our life here: they ennoble us by setting bound and measure to our desires and to our entire sensibility, and dispelling false judgement – and this by sheer efficacy of the better, by the very setting of the bounds, by the fact that the measured is lifted outside of the sphere of the unmeasured and lawless.” . . . “Participation goes by nearness: the Soul nearer than the body, therefore closer akin, participates more fully and shows a godlike presence, almost cheating us into the delusion that in the Soul we see God entire. This is the way in which men of the Civic Virtues attain Likeness.” *Ennead* I.2.3 goes on to discuss Plato's view, showing how the civic virtues are insignificant.

⁵⁵ Armstrong implants the label πολιτικὰ from earlier in the passage.

⁵⁶ *Ennead*, I.2.2.14-26.

beginning of the ascent.⁵⁷ The distinction made here is important since Plotinus is preparing us to dismiss the civic virtues in exchange for the higher ones. If we consider that Plotinus does not connect the two, but prioritizes one, the higher virtues, then we realize civic virtues are not necessarily building blocks for a soul's journey. In other words, political virtue does not need to precede intellectual virtue.

The civic virtues, here translated as political, are far away from the Good, and while still aiming at it, are deceptive in that they make the soul appear to be like a god. In fact, however, the soul must be purified of the body on its journey to greater virtues which share in those of the divine. So, when we think about those historical figures who were 'god-like,' Plotinus cautions us to realize that the virtue of the gods is distinct from those virtues of worldly heroes. Civic virtues will be deceptive, to oneself and to others, if the actor does not pursue what is greater. If one categorizes civic virtues in the wrong framework or classification, they will deceive. Thus, if we think that the civic virtues are intellectual and god-like, we will fall short of ascension into the intelligible. Civic virtues are in accordance with the greater virtues, but all they essentially do is limit the appetites; they limit the bad, without removing it or transcending it.

The text "makes clear that he [Plato] postulates two kinds of virtues and does not regard the civic ones as producing likeness [to the gods]."⁵⁸ Following in Plato's stead,⁵⁹ Plotinus believes that real likeness to the gods comes when the soul no longer shares the body's experiences – "when it no longer has the same opinions but acts alone."⁶⁰ The clear distinction and separation seen now between civic and intellectual virtues should caution the reader of O'Meara. Civic virtues require community for their enactment. They are practical and active, dependent on the temporal events surrounding an agent. They are, furthermore, relative and particular, ranging in quality and requiring regular habituation. Conscious decision-making will produce civic virtues, grounded upon situational awareness. While, likewise chosen, the intellectual virtues do not require community or particular decisions, nor are they contextually dependent. As Plotinus tells us, Plato

⁵⁷ Porphyry in, *On Abstinence from Eating Meat* 2, says that wicked daemons deceive people into thinking they are gods. If Plotinus is here hinting at anything like that sort of a scenario, then the deception is quite significant - it is misleading the soul from ascending to the intellectual levels.

⁵⁸ *Ennead*, I.2.3.10.

⁵⁹ Plotinus tells us that Plato sometimes referred to virtue indiscriminately, and sometimes he determined it with the adjective "civic." I believe that it would be reasonable to assume Plotinus follows suit. Thus, when Plotinus speaks of virtue unspecified, he does not include the civic virtues, for these are lesser and not 'true' virtue.

⁶⁰ *Ennead*, I.2.3.13

sets up a dichotomy of virtues, the civic and the intellectual, where the civic are enmeshed in the confining composite of the body.⁶¹

The civic virtues regulate the passions, controlling and pacifying them, while the intellectual virtues move one's soul upwards:

“So the higher justice in the soul is its activity towards intellect, its self-control is its inward turning to intellect, its courage is its freedom from affections, according to the likeness of that to which it looks which is free from affections by nature: **this freedom** from affections in the soul comes from virtue, to prevent its sharing in the affections of its inferior companion.”⁶²

As we can see here, freedom is a new orientation to the One, made possible by a complete turning away from the carnal. Should it turn towards the carnal, the contemplative state of intellectual virtue would be lost. Intellectual orientation towards the One is an activity of the soul, that, if in the body, would portray, as a result, the civic virtues. This outcome is a potential product of intellectual virtue but is in no way necessarily actualized. When advocating for the greatness of the intellectual virtues, Plotinus says, “Whoever has the greater virtues must necessarily have the lesser ones potentially, but it is not necessary for the possessor of the lesser virtues to have the greater ones.”⁶³

Indeed, civic virtues depend upon the intellectual ones; however, the civic virtues can exist separated from this cause and mislead the body composite in their aim and purpose. Why can civic virtues not produce intellectual ones? The intellectual virtues contain the civic ones as a potentiality, as a product, not as a foundation. From the One derives goodness, descending through a long hierarchical chain down to the material realm. Matter does not produce the Good, nor does human action. Therefore, a lesser virtue could not cause a greater one, but only a greater one can inspire the lesser. The civic virtues could work as maintenance and restraint upon the body so that the intellectual virtues can arise, but certainly this does not happen by necessity. Instead, with civic virtues alone we may never actually get a glimpse of the Good - since, without further contemplation we will fall into the deception of thinking the soul (the embodied soul) is at the divine level. We will never even look towards the intellectual level, let alone the Good. We would

⁶¹ C.f. *Ennead* I.2.3; and I.2.6 for more precise definitions of the intellectual virtues; also I.2.7 for an explanation of how the intellectual virtues do not require social interaction.

⁶² *Ennead*, I.2.6.24-28.

⁶³ *Ennead*, I.2.7.11-13.

mistake the civic for the god-like intellectual. To glimpse the Good, furthermore, is an activity beyond the civic level. These civic virtues could be cultivated for worldly aims, in which case, the material realm succeeds in its twisting of the true reality found in the intelligible realm. This distinction about the virtues grants Plotinus an ability to say that one can be god-like without acting politically or civically, since one has altogether transcended the realm where this sort of life would be necessitated. In fact, one would do better to avoid civic virtues, if it frees them further from the body. Plotinus makes this clear when he says that the ascended man will not live a civically good life:

“He will leave that behind, and choose another, the life of the gods: for it is to them, not to good men, that we are to be made like.⁶⁴ Likeness to good men is the likeness of two pictures of the same subject to each other; but likeness to the gods is likeness to the model, a being of a different kind to ourselves.”⁶⁵

Our souls can resemble the model, while our bodies cannot. The civic virtues orient the body to what good it can see, but they will never produce, on their own, a resemblance to the other-nature of the gods. Only the philosopher ascends to the divine.

ASCENSION THROUGH DIALECTIC

For Plotinus, it is the philosopher who is able to realize intellectual virtues. In fact, arguably, Plotinus' whole theory is for the philosopher; it is for the one who is capable of engaging in intellectual virtues. While for ascension, the musician and lover, for example, must be separated from their material tasks, the philosopher on the other hand is “in no need of separation like the others.”⁶⁶ This is because, through a method of dialectic, the philosopher manages to ascertain the true reality, i.e. the form, of all things. Dialectic determines what is good or not good. It frees the soul from falsehood by determining the forms and classing these appropriately. When it arrives at a unity of classification, it keeps quiet busying itself no more.⁶⁷

Indeed, the result is not, as Plato might advocate, that the philosopher return to the cave, but rather simple, quiet, contemplation. When discerning the classes of all things in the world of intellect, the dialectician and philosopher may not have knowledge of the political and social

⁶⁴ Plotinus later says that to begin a life of philosophy and virtue, one should look to others, indicating that good men are imitating the gods.

⁶⁵ *Ennead*, I.2.7.26-31.

⁶⁶ *Ennead*, I.3.3.2.

⁶⁷ C.f. *Ennead* I.3.4.

sciences, for these involve particular experiences, however, she would know the essence of such knowledge. With knowledge of higher principles, the philosopher will act appropriately even within a political context. The philosopher might not engage in knowledge about the civic virtues, for those, “other virtues apply reasoning to particular experiences and actions, but practical wisdom is a kind of superior reasoning concerned more with the universal.”⁶⁸ Practical wisdom is determined through dialectic, and it appears here that dialectic is the means through which we might attain the intellectual virtues. We could contrast this with O’Meara who believes that civic virtues help us to attain the intellectual ones. Plotinus adds just after this,

“Can the lower virtues exist without dialectic and theoretical wisdom? Yes, but only incompletely and defectively. And can one be a wise man and a dialectician without these lower virtues? It would not happen; they must either precede or grow along with wisdom.⁶⁹ ... for in general natural virtue is imperfect both in vision and character, and the principles from which we derive them are the most important thing both in natural virtue and wisdom.”⁷⁰

This confirms my earlier suggestion that intellectual virtues are the cause of the civic ones. Civic virtues are indeed not fully attained without fruition in the intellectual, since they are derivatives.

With this in mind, we can ask to what extent is a philosopher political? The wise dialectician, Plotinus points out, would almost certainly contain the lower virtues, however, they would be subsumed by the higher, which would direct all action with perfect vision. For the city, being a plurality and existing as a composition of material needs, would struggle to become idealized into this higher form of contemplation. Dialectic, nonetheless, could make the determination.

Plotinus discusses our roles in society a bit more than simply examining our capacity for civic virtue. If our souls ascend by means of the intellectual virtues, and the civic virtues are unnecessary, and in fact, misleading for our souls if practiced in isolation, to what extent can or should the *polis* assist in such orientation? In other words, can the material realm of human organization aid in freeing our souls? Plotinus suggests that the material world of plurality exists as a distraction to the soul, and freedom may only be found through separation from matter. So, in

⁶⁸ *Ennead*, I.3.6.9-13.

⁶⁹ Plotinus does not contradict his earlier statements about civic virtue here. He is saying that civic virtue is not necessary, however, it will always appear with the intellectual virtues.

⁷⁰ *Ennead*, I.3.6.15-18; 21-26. *This confirms my earlier argument that the intellectual virtues are a cause of the civic, not the civic of the intellectual.

order to determine whether the philosopher may be political, I will first make note of Plotinus' understanding of freedom. Human souls in the body are not free. They ought to live a certain sort of life – the life aimed at what is good, at what is virtuous, at what is natural, and ultimately at what brings the soul back to the One. The human soul does not choose its body or birth location. Rather, the rational forming principle accurately and perfectly fits all souls into the world, in their proper places. Civic virtues are not freely made in such a determined world; they are only enacted out of responsibility. There is a sense of duty when the opportunity arises. This opportunity, however, is not sought out, rather, it arises through the vicissitudes of material multiplicity. Here we see the implicit connection between Plotinian freedom and responsibility, key aspects of the political life. There is an initial duty to the reality of a descended state of the soul with a preference for rediscovery of one's origins and ascent to that higher state. The turn to this purification, however, is not merely desired, it must be dutifully worked for, and all bodily distractions ought to be avoided. In this manner, true freedom ought to be sought out with extensive limitations on the body. "Plotinus not only expresses a doctrine of the foundations of human freedom but actually shows how these foundations enlist an ascetic ethics which alone can guarantee liberation."⁷¹ This liberation, found through virtue, is explicitly one that moves away from the body in philosophical detachment. If the good man, necessarily acts good when encountering a situation that demands action, he is not free in doing so. Rather, he ought to act good, as an overflow of his good disposition. There is a necessity involved with his virtuous action. The philosopher and good man, however, would prefer to partake of the intellectual virtues. Only in so doing, detaching from the body, does he become free.

If we are free in this way, being most free without bodily desire, then we can see how Plotinus pairs the pursuit of the Good with freedom. When still in the body, the soul must act as its director in order to maintain its freedom. If the soul is altered by external causes, and it blindly reacts, it is not free, however, when the impulses are directed by pure reason, then the soul and body composite is free in its own power. If passions rule instead of reason, then all acts are merely passive responses to impulses. Conversely, when reason rules and the intellectual virtues guide one's goodness, practical action will result freely and will produce passive civic virtue.⁷² Thus, we

⁷¹ Georges Leroux, "Human freedom in the thought of Plotinus" in *The Cambridge Companion to Plotinus*, Lloyd Gerson, Cambridge (2006): 309.

⁷² See *Ennead* III.1.9-10.

learn that the Plotinian philosopher does not engage in politics when pursuing freedom, however, the intellectual freedom will be apparent through an outpouring of civic virtue.

GAINING FREEDOM

Initially, as children, we cannot clearly attain freedom. We may occasionally glimpse something like it when we see those “god-like” men mentioned earlier. Plotinus reminds us:

“So that the soul must be trained, first of all to look at beautiful ways of life: then at beautiful works, not those which the arts produce, but the works of men who have a name for goodness then look at the souls of the people who produce the beautiful works.”⁷³

We can model ourselves, at the beginning stages of our journey of ascension, after other people. Plotinus relates this imitation and orientation with a metaphor of refining a statue.⁷⁴ Nonetheless, if we deceive ourselves into thinking that material models matter, we will only perceive a fake world, one filled with toys⁷⁵ for children who have not aimed at the real good. Plotinus says about warring men:

“Their battles show that all human concerns are children’s games, and tell us that deaths are nothing terrible, and that those who die in wars and battles anticipate only a little the death which comes in old age – they go away and come back quicker.” ... “Doings like these belong to a man who knows how to live only the lower and external life and is not aware that he is playing in his tears, even when they are serious tears. For only the seriously good part of a man is capable of taking serious doings seriously; the rest of man is a toy. But toys, too, are taken seriously by those who do not know how to be serious and are toys themselves.”⁷⁶

For Plotinus, political science, or even political philosophy would be a children’s game. The science is the game concerned with material functions, and the philosophy, then, would be a mere flattery or knack (as Socrates might put it). How would the seriously good man take political activity seriously? For,

“Even a bad man can save his country; and the good man’s pleasure that his country is saved will be there even if someone else saves it.” ... “To place well-being in actions is to

⁷³ *Ennead*, I.6.9.3-6. I alluded to this passage earlier. Plotinus suggests that the sensible realm can assist us. Does this indicate that the material can indeed train the immaterial soul? I doubt this, for the passage here describes a pursuit of knowledge of beauty, not arriving at it until the soul. All we learn here is that we can see beauty’s hierarchical chain through observation of the material. Just as the philosopher would not study politics, so the philosopher here would not study “beautiful works.” As an analogous example, if I teach someone how to walk, there is no guarantee they will learn to run, and maybe they will lay back down again into a crawl.

⁷⁴ See *Ennead* I.6.9.

⁷⁵ See Clark, xiv, for an alternative interpretation of this passage.

⁷⁶ *Ennead*, III.2.15.37-40; 51-57.

locate it in something outside virtue and the soul; the activity of the soul lies in thought, and action of this kind within itself; and this is the state of well-being.”⁷⁷

This claim is crucial for correctly interpreting Plotinus’ ethical views. The “well-being in actions” here are embodied actions, while the “activity” of the next clause refers to intellectual activity. This claim cuts off embodied pursuits as irrelevant for true well-being; the philosopher might derive some “pleasure” if his country is prospering materially, but that pleasure is unnecessary for true well-being. Plotinus strongly states that, “again, greatness of soul is despising the things here: and wisdom is an intellectual activity which turns away from the things below and leads the soul to those above.”⁷⁸ The good man, would not then, according to Plotinus, make a priority of political action, for he would recognize the irrelevance of the action. Furthermore, the good man knows without fear that death is the separation of soul and body. At this he “welcomes the prospect of being alone.”⁷⁹ Plotinus proclaims the glory of ascension beyond politics, saying,

“The man who attains this is blessed in seeing that “blessed sight”, and he who fails to attain it has failed utterly. A man has not failed if he fails to win beauty of colours or bodies, or power or office or kingship even, but if he fails to win this and only this. For this he should give up the attainment of kingship and of rule over all earth and sea and sky, if only by leaving and overlooking them he can turn to That and see.”⁸⁰

We should now suspect that Plotinus is nearing not simply an apolitical position, but an anti-political one. If we find freedom through intellectual activity, and our freedom is reduced through material (and practical) activity, then with the Good as our goal, we must first achieve the freedom to pursue that goal. There is only one Good, and Plotinus succinctly confirms that we ought to avoid the distraction of many goods, relating that we should pursue only one end, not various “ends,” for well-being is found in the possession of the true good, not in a collection of goods.⁸¹ And knowing that there is only One Good, we can distance ourselves from those distractions that only appear to be good. Deciphering what is a distraction, Plotinus says that the good man does not consider kingship to be important or great, and the good man will avoid all evil or stupidity

⁷⁷ *Ennead*, I.5.10.16-18; 20-24.

⁷⁸ *Ennead*, I.6.6.11-13.

⁷⁹ *Ennead*, I.6.6.10-11.

⁸⁰ *Ennead*, I.6.7.34-40.

⁸¹ *Ennead*, C.f. I.4.6.

even with regards to his relatives.⁸² In fact, to sympathize with concerns and pains “would be a weakness in our soul”⁸³

Thus far, Plotinus has shown us that one truly gains freedom, a power to act in one’s own capacity, when they are freed from the body in ascent to the One. He tells us even about the well-being of the good man, frankly, describing an ascetic sort of life – one indifferent to the woes of the world. Gaining political prestige will be of no assistance to his well-being and may even detract from it. Certainly, Plotinus wants to share that death is more esteemed than life, and thus, when one encounters grave misfortunes, they may, yet rejoice in their suffering, for it is hastening their upward ascent. When fortunate, however, Plotinus cautions us that for some it would be better to become slaves. Political power leads to a corruption of the soul when one considers themselves and their actions great. Plotinus urges that we avoid such stupidity. He even suggests that we avoid sympathy with weakness. If someone has material pains, we should not sympathize, for we know that the virtue of the soul is of more importance; that the body is irrelevant in our fulfillment of felicity. Plotinus goes into more detail about our responsibility to the body, and we know, for example, that he discouraged Plotinus from suicide. I will not need to address this, for it suffices to show that Plotinus disdains kingship and political activity for its corruptive role in the material realm. Political activity, however, may simply be civic and social. Plotinus does not disregard the civic virtues or discourage them even though he sees them as ultimately irrelevant. To what extent, then, does he view the importance of friendship?

FRIENDSHIP

Do we have any obligation to our friends? Perhaps this would be a source for political action. Most scholars agree that Plotinus discusses friendship very little. He certainly had friends, as Porphyry tells us; however, friendship as a concept was one of unification. Two friends are one in their friendship. Friends, however, do not face each other, rather they look forward to the Good, and find unity thus, in their shared goal and destination. Intellectual pursuits will overflow to friends, offering support and encouragement, while staying fully true. There is no obligation involved, rather there is an outpouring of friendliness on account of the good man’s internal pursuits. Michael Schramm crafts a more elaborate picture of Plotinian friendship. While Plotinus

⁸² *Ennead*, I.4.7.32-48.

⁸³ *Ennead*, I.4.8.13-14.

seems to largely ignore friendship, even in his socio-political discussions, Schramm believes that he develops a new sort of friendship which relates both to the intelligible and physical cosmos.⁸⁴ Schramm calls this the *metaphysisch-kosmologische Freundschaft*. It is not surprising that a framework for Plotinian friendship would aim at the One, fitting into the cosmological hierarchy. Schramm explains that

“Friendship denotes a relationship between unity and multiplicity, parts and whole. Thus, one can primarily identify two types of metaphysical-cosmological friendship: the intelligible friendship of the ideas of the spirit with each other and of the spirit with itself and, as their image, the friendship of the parts of the sensible cosmos with each other and of the cosmos as a whole.”⁸⁵

Schramm believes that Plotinian friendship links multiplicity into unity. This link is one key to understanding how Plotinus may have engaged in a type of political philosophy. We should remember that “bodies are hindered from communion with each other by bodies, but incorporeal things are not kept apart by bodies.”⁸⁶ Thus, true friendship, which brings unity, is not one of bodily interaction, but only, rather, of spiritual, i.e. intellectual. Therefore, were Plotinus to have a political philosophy, perhaps it would not be about the way the *polis* works in the world, but instead about the way souls can be united, while still in bodies. Indeed, a united city is one more than just united in location; it is united in spirit.

For Plotinus, the unity provided by friendship need not have any relationship to a particular place or time. In other words, a philosophic soul can commune with another philosophic soul who is not in the same time or location, i.e., Plotinus’ students can commune with him through his writings even if he is no longer physically present with them. Therefore, a Plotinian understanding of friendship may not need to indicate political or social obligation. The political life is by no means necessitated by having friends, for indeed, to attain the ideal and perfect life, one of unity, even instantiates the putting away of authority and office:

⁸⁴ Michael Schramm, *Freundschaft im Neuplatonismus: Politisches Denken und Sozialphilosophie von Plotin bis Kaiser Julian*, De Gruyter (2014): 20.

⁸⁵ Schramm, *Freundschaft im Neuplatonismus: Politisches Denken und Sozialphilosophie von Plotin bis Kaiser Julian*, 26. My own translation.

⁸⁶ *Ennead*, VI.9.8.30-32.

“The man who belongs to the world may be handsome and tall and rich and the ruler of all mankind (since he is essentially of this region), and we ought not to envy him for the things like these, by which he is beguiled.”⁸⁷

The wise man, Plotinus says, will “reduce and gradually extinguish his bodily advantages by neglect and will put away authority and office.”⁸⁸ Plotinus verges on the anti-political here. If political life involves leadership, legislation, and societal problem solving, then we can see the grounds of a new social theory for Plotinus, one which lacks a political philosophy. A Plotinian social theory would view civic virtues necessitated on account of friendship which ultimately seeks unity. Political roles are discouraged since this distracts from the ultimate goal. Plotinus says, “We have often said that the perfect life, the true, real life, is in the transcendent reality, and that other lives are incomplete, traces of life, not perfect or pure and no more life than its opposite.”⁸⁹ Those who have not sought out ascension, and those who remain caring for the multiplicitous world of politics, live a trace and incomplete life.

Is there, however, a transcendent city that holds the true and real life? If there is, we cannot find it here, where there is only a trace of life. Would there, however, be an ideal and formal city that we might contemplate and one day arrive at? Plotinus likely would not consider a form of a city because a city by definition is a multiplicity; it is a collectivity of individuals and groupings of individuals; it is a whole of varied parts. Nonetheless, while there may not be a form, Plotinus does indicate that there is a heavenly realm, ruled by the One.

Plotinus and Schramm point out a connecting factor of friendship; however, there is also the collectivizing agent of substance. For we are all instilled with the capacity to reunite with the One; a capacity to gain freedom and pursue the Good. “How can one see that inconceivable beauty?”⁹⁰ Well, it may be seen with a turning away from everything of the material world:

“Let him who can, follow and come within, and leave outside the sight of his eyes and not turn back to the bodily splendours which he saw before.” ... “This would be truer advice, let us fly to our dear country.” ... “Our country from which we came is there, our Father is there. How shall we travel to it, where is our way of escape? We cannot get there on foot; for our feet only carry us everywhere in this world, from one country to another. You must not get ready a carriage, either, or a boat. Let all these things go, and

⁸⁷ We should remind ourselves about the deception of the soul we saw earlier. Even though rulers may appear to be gods, we should not envy them, for that is a mundane opinion.

⁸⁸ *Ennead*, I.4.14.19-21.

⁸⁹ *Ennead*, I.4.3.33-37.

⁹⁰ *Ennead*, I.6.8.2

do not look. Shut your eyes and change to and wake another way of seeing, **which everyone has, but few use.**"⁹¹

This heavenly country is immaterial and inhabited by the intelligible. The soul can travel there through means of intellection, but only without the body holding it down. Even in the body, one may simply close their eyes and free themselves to move upwards, however, this is an escape from bodily splendors. A metaphysical political philosophy may explain the nature of how the One governs all things in this immaterial kingdom. It would also explain the cosmological laws which mandate good order and felicity among all of the unifying soul inhabitants. This is a political philosophy of a heavenly *polis*, one that mainstream political philosophers do not consider. We ought, then, to return to how Plotinus understands human interactions in the material world.

Plotinus exhorts separating our true selves⁹² from body, so that we can unite to the principle of unity. We can only be unified when we separate. The body-soul composite itself is not a principle of unity, nor understood as one entity. It, as suggested by Plotinus, needs severing. A composite is a confining configuration, best escaped from. Should we, therefore, inflict division in order to then gain unity? By such an analogy, Plotinus may encourage divisive tendencies in society for the sake of a different sort of unity. For example, could we imagine a society divided between Epicureans and Neoplatonists – a two-party state? Would Plotinus think it better to go off and start a new city with the only one party of Neoplatonists, or would he like to indoctrinate the Epicureans, or would he prefer to kill the opposing party, even in some sort of civil war. Or, rather, is there a Plotinus who could see the unity of a city, despite its parties, as important and manageable with unequal parts? In the soul, there are passions, spirits, and reason. Reason may control those other parts, but they cannot be eliminated until the body is removed. So, while the body is a composite, death can be wished for, but until then, the dichotomous opposition must be pacified by a resolve of reason to direct itself towards the Good. The resolve will silence or ignore the body. So, ought a city silence or ignore those citizens who oppose the Good? Plotinus may remain quite indifferent,⁹³ and we shall not forget that in the case of a city, it is not, itself, the Good. But the soul does not

⁹¹ *Ennead*, I.6.8.4-6; 16-18; 22-28.

⁹² Many recent scholars have written on Plotinus' view of the self, however, most pertinent here may be Roaul Mortley's chapter "The self: and We too are Kings," in *Plotinus, Self, and the World*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014. Also see, Asger Ousager, *Plotinus on Selfhood, Freedom and Politics*, Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 2004.

⁹³ C.f. Plato's *Theaetetus* 173d: the philosopher does not know the way to the marketplace, the lawcourts, or the political assembly.

always simply ignore or silence the body; sometimes it ought to repress what is evil and opposed to the Good; it must run away alternatively. The philosophic soul will remove itself from the tumult of the city and turn within. It will “separate” itself - which would be different from “division.” The latter is merely the dividing of parts that once made up a single whole, in a situation where they remain at the same ontological level with each other; separation is when one part recognizes that its true identity is to belong to a different ontological level altogether.

CITY

In this case, what should the good people of a city do? Do they root out the bad, or do they run away from it, leaving it behind? Killing bad members of the city, does not mean destroying the city itself. In fact, Plotinus hints at something of this mechanism when saying,

“The cause of wrongs men do to one another might be their effort towards the Good; when they fail through their impotence to attain it, they turn against other men. But the wrongdoers pay the penalty, being corrupted in their souls by their works of wickedness and are set in a lower place; for nothing can ever escape that which is ordained in the law of the All. But order does not exist because of disorder or law because of lawlessness, as someone thinks, that these good things may exist and be manifested because of worse ones; but disorder and lawlessness exist because of order, which is imposed from outside. It is because there is order that disorder exists, and on account of the law and formative reason, just because it is reason, that there is a transgression of the law and folly.”⁹⁴

We have yet to ask how we ought to understand a city, or *polis*, in light of Plotinus. Clark believes that the city could reflect a Plotinian cosmological ordering, wherein, a king, or even an emperor, would govern as the residing principle of reason. This King may either contemplate the Good, where his ministers act as the henadic overflow of good into society, or he may suppress the bad parts of the city, as a manager of rooting out evil. Furthermore, earlier, we saw that one ought to become beautiful in order to see beauty. If the city aims at the Good, at what is beautiful, just like a soul would, then should the city become beautiful so that it may glimpse beauty? Of course, true beauty is only in the intelligible world, of which the soul is a part, and the city is not. So, the city could never become beautiful in this way, unless it were to also exist intellectually. But as I have stated above, the city likely does not exist in the world of forms. Is the city, however, more like the statue, where it ought slowly to become more refined?

⁹⁴ *Ennead*, III.2.4.20-32.

CITY SOUL ANALOGY

Here, now, however, I have begun to assume the city-soul analogy which Plato makes in his *Republic*. There has been much debate about Plato's true intentions with this analogy, perhaps the application was never to imagine a practically real city-state, but only to show the complexities and oddities of an idealized soul. Regardless, Plotinus nowhere explicitly makes a connection between soul and city, and we do not know his opinion on Plato's position, except that he had an immense respect for Platonic authority. O'Meara even notes this by saying, "in Plotinus, soul's relation to body seems somewhat loose (even if it can become disastrous) and material concerns appear to be of minor importance. What matters more is the community of souls."⁹⁵ Nonetheless, O'Meara articulates a way in which the city could still mirror the soul as an expression of intellect. He says, "a political imitation of the transcendent would then just be a particular case of the good and rational order which soul brings to the world."⁹⁶ The closest Plotinus gets to making the analogy is found in *Ennead* IV. He says,

"And in the worst kind of man there is the common gathering and his human nature is composed of everything in the manner of a bad political constitution; in the middling man it is as it is in the city in which some good can prevail as the democratic constitution is not entirely out of control; but in the better kind of man the style of life is aristocratic; his human nature is already escaping from the common gathering and giving itself over to the better sort. But in the best man, the man who separates himself, the ruling principle is one, and the order comes from this to the rest. It is as if there was a double city, one above and one composed of the lower elements set in order by the powers above."⁹⁷

These analogies suggest that the city could function like a soul, however, there is no application to an external city. Rather, there is a double city under the monarchical analogy. The lower city of pluralities is only set in order by the higher principle above. This is the closest we get to an analogy for the city and the soul, and it does little to help us craft a theoretical Plotinian city on the level of Plato's *Republic*. Could the divergence found in the lack of this city-soul analogy show Plotinus as a "Plato without politics?"

While Plotinus makes his views on the soul relatively clear, we do not have a good picture for the city (and almost no picture for a state or nation). He does, however, tell us regularly about

⁹⁵ O'Meara, 'Political Theory' in *The Routledge Handbook of Neoplatonism*, 474.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.* 476.

⁹⁷ *Ennead*, IV.4.17.26-36.

state actors. When discussing providence and the human relationship to the gods, Plotinus considers human rule, saying:

“They [the wicked] themselves have never taken any trouble to see that there should be good rulers over the rest of mankind, who would care that it should be well with them, but they are envious if anyone naturally becomes good by himself; for more people would have become good if they had made the good their leaders.”⁹⁸

Armstrong’s footnote is important here: “This may seem at first sight to contradict Plato’s teaching about the duty of the philosopher”⁹⁹ to return down to the cave and rule the city. Plato, however, says that the philosophers don’t have that duty, except for in an ideal state. Plotinus indicates that, should the Good rule, then, others would more likely become good themselves. The [Greek] word for “good” is ambiguous as to whether Plotinus means good men ruling, or the Good itself ruling. McKenna’s and Armstrong’s translation diverge here. Earlier in *Ennead* III.2.4, we saw that wicked men may do wrong on account of their impotent desire for the Good. In this passage, we see that, if the wicked had good rulers, they themselves could become good. On the other hand, “a wicked ruler might do the most lawless things; and the bad get the upper hand in wars, and what crimes they commit when they have taken prisoners!”¹⁰⁰ All of this, Providence allows. Providence and the formative principle play a substantial role in determining the outcome of one’s city and state, and yet, Plotinus insists that “men, too, are principles; at any rate, they are moved to noble actions by their own nature, and this is an independent principle.”¹⁰¹ A good man can inspire another one to become good, not simply through a civic virtue, no, but rather through a participation in the intelligible; attainable through dialectic. Plotinus notes some political careers’ capacity for intellectual virtue, saying, “rhetoric and generalship, and the arts of administration and kingship, if any of them communicate excellence in the field of action, supposing that they contemplate that intelligible excellence, they have some part for their knowledge derived from the knowledge there.”¹⁰²

⁹⁸ *Ennead*, III.2.9.15-19. Stephen McKenna translates this as, “The perverse have never made a single effort to bring good into authority, so intent are they upon securing power for themselves; they are all spite against anyone that becomes good of his own motion, though if good men were placed in authority the total of goodness would be increased.”

⁹⁹ A. H. Armstrong, *Loeb Classical Library 442*, Harvard University Press, (1967): 75.

¹⁰⁰ *Ennead*, III.2.6.14-17.

¹⁰¹ *Ennead*, III.2.10.19-21.

¹⁰² *Ennead*, V.9.11.21-25.

These political leaders engage with the intelligible, and therefore ascend towards the intellectual virtues through purification. They, furthermore, through situational necessity will showcase the civic virtues, even, thence, inspiring others to likewise pursue the Good. The word of this good man may struggle to be heard by others; however, if it gets through it will succeed. Plotinus analogizes this by describing an assembly of elders quietly considering decisions. When a mob rambunctiously complains, only a sensible speech may quiet it, or else the worse will gain mastery. Plotinus calls this the vice of the city and of man, for a man has a mob of pleasures within himself. Plotinus, however, encourages us that “whoever enslaves this mob, and runs back up to that man he once was,”¹⁰³ lives according to the higher life. We find, now, a new appearance of the city-soul analogy. In this case, there are notable differences between Plato and Plotinus. Namely, that Plotinus strictly refers to an assembly, perhaps aristocratic or timocratic, listening to the demands of the multitude. Clearly, Plotinus would not support democratic¹⁰⁴ institutions (nor does Plato). Plotinus quotes Plato, saying that “All things are around the King of all, and all are for the sake of that King,”¹⁰⁵ however, we should be wary of monarchical implications. For, Plotinus, with regards to ruling assemblies, also condones productive unity: “Assemblies of the people imitate this, and all meetings, being of people moving to a unity of thought; and each member is weak in thought but when everyone in the meeting, and the true meeting of minds, comes together into one, he generates and finds [true] thought.”¹⁰⁶ The King, encircled by all things, is the principle of unity, the One. Thus, does the governing principle of the soul, by analogy to the city, reflect a king, or a unified assembly? The king may be an embodiment of his people, i.e. of his city or state into one figure, however, he is not the same as an assembly which, weak individually, strengthens itself, collectively, through a unifying activity of contemplation.

IDEAL STATE

We may still be mistaken to believe that Plotinus would have imagined an ideal state. For, the human exists as a body-soul composite, while the city resembles a reason-ignorance composite. The soul may ascend towards intellectual virtue, but only by ignoring the body or even separating from it. The civic virtues restrain the body, while the intellectual virtues move the soul beyond. A

¹⁰³ *Ennead*, VI.4.15.36.

¹⁰⁴ Despite his belief in the equality of intellective ability, we do not have an equality of worth – thus, a Plotinian understanding of equality does not indicate democratic values.

¹⁰⁵ *Ennead*, VI.7.42.9-11.

¹⁰⁶ *Ennead*, VI.5.10.18-22.

reason-ignorance compound can ignore and restrain the multitude; however, it can never separate itself from it, nor even hope to. We could imagine that material cities could imitate a form of the true and good community of souls, however, is it possible to imagine a city of only intellectual virtues? Can a city transcend to the level of the gods? And would a city of gods have their own divine civic virtues? Plotinus' Platonopolis dream would have been a city of philosophers. I suppose if a city is all philosophic, then you might have a Plotinian ideal city, for it would be comprised of contemplation, and fully oriented to the Good, and fully free. As for his city, it could also be that the fact that his Platonopolis idea was thwarted by courtiers at Gallienus' court is proof that constructing an ideal city is an impossibility.

Without such an ideal, the next best option would be to have a leader, or assembly, who can silence evil and ignorance within the populace. But in this city, no one would have autonomy, and "natural organization" would be deemed by political authority. The leadership would necessarily be enslaved to controlling and pacifying the populace, while the populace would be led astray constantly whenever it failed to follow its leadership. If a king embodied the Good, and his ministers carried out good policies as an overflow of the king's intellectualizing, then the populace would be able to see the tangible ideal, becoming better themselves. Nonetheless, if the king were distracted and brought into the material realm by his administrative responsibilities, he would, according to Plotinus, be incentivized to relinquish his rule for his own soul's sake. Plotinus, as we have seen above, regularly encourages the philosopher and the intellectually virtuous to "run away" from the material realm, even and especially from political office. To pursue the Good is, thus, to become ascetic and reject the distractions of the world. Political office would certainly impose an immense amount of material distraction, inviting leadership to play with "toys" rather than real tools.

Plotinus tells us that there are three kinds of men,¹⁰⁷ the last of whom are a "kind of god-like men who by their greater power and the sharpness of their eyes as if by a special keensightedness see the glory above and are raised to it."¹⁰⁸ This man could reach the higher region. He is a philosopher and lover of beauty beyond bodily beauty. When he has ascended "he ceases

¹⁰⁷ The first man believes only in sensible things. The second man rises slightly higher than these; however, "they are brought down, with the name of virtue, to practical actions and choices of the things below from which they tried to raise themselves at first." *Enn* V.9.1.13-16.

¹⁰⁸ *Ennead*, V.9.1.16-18.

from his travail, but not before.”¹⁰⁹ This third type of enlightened man does not return to the cave like Plato’s philosopher, rather, once illumined, he stops and rests. And when this man is still encased in the body-soul composite, he cannot rest indefinitely, for his soul returns to the body upon waking from its vision, however,

“Considering himself set in order and beautiful by these virtues he will again be lightened and come through virtue to intellect and wisdom and through wisdom to that Good. This is the life of gods and of godlike blessed men, deliverance from the things of this world, a life which takes no delight in the things of this world, escape in solitude to the solitary.”¹¹⁰

We know from the discussion earlier on civic virtue, that Plotinus believes them to be valuable and yet, still, mundane. The third, god-like man, does not ascend through the civic virtues, nor would he return into the city to use them. He has left all of the fluff behind him, and would only, by necessity use practical action, but even this would not be his desire. Therefore, with the fruition of the Plotinian exhortation and manifesto found in this last man, we can imagine that Plotinus would have little need or interest to engage in political philosophy. When we ask what his political philosophy is, we have faltered into misinterpretation. This examination is essential for determining the tenets of his philosophy, and ultimately, we learn the strength of Plotinus’ commitment to metaphysics.¹¹¹

PLOTINIAN POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

An ideal *polis* in political philosophy for Plotinus would not stray into a new field of philosophy,¹¹² rather it would tie in nicely with his cosmology and metaphysics. Contemporary scholars and Aristotle, however, would likely find it very strange to call it political philosophy. For a Plotinian political philosophy, has no *polis* except the One, which is by definition an anti-polis,¹¹³ since a city is a multiplicity, not one. We are truly citizens of the immaterial realm, where our soul longs to return. Our political activity would be contemplation; laws would be anti-body; relationships and assemblies would become one in thought, strengthened by each other, oriented

¹⁰⁹ *Ennead*, V.9.2.9-10.

¹¹⁰ *Ennead*, VI.9.11.43-51.

¹¹¹ See Pauliina Remes, *Plotinus on Self: The Philosophy of the ‘We,’* 186-7 where she talks about how Plotinus sees self-realization only as an internal process.

¹¹² Remes, 236-8, discusses different roles for the Plotinian sage arguing that the sage is not political by traditional understandings.

¹¹³ When distinguishing political philosophy here, we have to be careful to allow that the One can be an anti-polis, and yet still be political. This is because from it derives the political, and to it the political seeks to return, albeit without success.

to the Good; lastly, all interaction with those still enslaved by worldly passions would be totally avoided; for we would be completely free – and to engage with a slave would be to hinder our own freedom. Plotinus does not want the philosopher to be misled even by the civic virtues, for the higher ought to be achieved, and these are totally different in appearance and activity than the former.

The Plotinian lifestyle is not so simple as living an ascetic life. Indeed, Plotinus encourages people to imitate good men, reflecting on the heroes of old. He also recognizes that good rulers will instill some goodness into the ruled. Therefore, again by necessity, the philosopher may engage with politics, albeit never by choice. When doing so, Plotinus leaves little said, except that they should leave office since it prevents them from true intellectual virtue – which it need not do, for even generals and administrators partake of the intelligible in their own skills. The Plotinian man does not have a responsibility to his city or state and does not need to be concerned with its maintenance except by necessity; and as an actor within the city, he should engage with civic virtue, the kind that results as an outpouring of his intellectual virtue. Despite this, he would not identify himself as an actor within the city. Such identification would already be forgetting his true identity as a soul whose origin lies in the intelligible realm.

Plotinus was a teacher, and considering he wrote his *Enneads*, he likely believed that he could influence others to learn about and then pursue the Good. Was his teaching an outpouring of his intellectual life? He, inspired by his visions, more than likely felt compelled to share his philosophy and the results of his contemplation. Plotinus, aimed at intellectual unity with his students, just as the assembly collectively forms one mind.¹¹⁴ As a teacher, he also was a leader, an embodied intellectual leader, caring for the intellectual growth of his students. He requested land for his Platonopolis. Plotinus, surely, had a vision for crafting the material world around him; for managing it in a way that might free the souls trapped in bodies. Souls could find freedom in their pursuit of the Good, alone or together, but not necessarily in a temporal or locational sense. Plotinus fostered an intellectual community which continued long after him. This Neoplatonic school is not political, nor worldly, yet it benefited from political security. A secure *polis* allows for the pursuit of that freedom which seeks the Good. Thus, while the true philosopher can ignore politics since well-being has nothing to do with material configuration of body or society, there is

¹¹⁴ See my section earlier on friendship.

the possibility that politics would still play a tangential role in the philosopher's life. Likely, he sees politics as a necessity that may be managed through the enlightening education of philosophy, ideally dismissed, but a temporary constraint similar to the body. With the body comes passionate pains and pleasures; and with the material realm comes political society, constantly led astray by the plurality it manages. In both, Plotinus calls for a separation of the philosophic soul - not by ending one's life or leaving the city physically, but by dedicating one's intellectual focus to the unchanging world of forms, truth, and unity.

CONCLUSION

When Plotinus ignores theories of political governance, he indicates to his readers that political science is a flattery to the body, and political virtue is simply a way to manage that body. Political philosophy is an appeasement to our fallen selves, a type of knowledge only existing in the material realm and for its sake. When Plotinus places the civic virtues in the material realm, he conjugates a derivative of the good life. He explains it out of necessity but views these civic virtues as tangential thereby allowing Plotinus to also largely ignore theories of social organization. O'Meara and Clark rely on a scale of virtues within Plotinus for their explanations of how political philosophy is an important aspect within Plotinus' philosophy. Without this key aspect, however, I have pointed out that Plotinus does not see the civic virtues as an essential aspect of his philosophical framework. As we saw in *Ennead* I.2.2&3, Plotinus defines Plato's dichotomization of the virtues by showing that the civic virtues are a deceptive resemblance to the divine enmeshed inescapably within the body. The intellective virtues, on the other hand, attain a likeness to the gods, at the level of the intelligible wherein civic virtues have no role.

I have shown how Plotinus' philosophy is anti-political in the sense that he would discourage political activity and dismiss political science. We may hypothesize about cities and states that would aid in ascension; however, Plotinus never indicates such a possibility aside from Platonopolis, and I believe that such an organization would be no more than monastic style community. Plotinus leaves no room for constitutional theory, except in so far as his metaphysics lays the basis for the only possible constitution – the cosmos. The city-soul analogy, only roughly hinted at by Plotinus, furthermore, shows how intellectual virtues are practicable only in the immaterial realm and not applicable to political theory. A metaphysical-cosmological Plotinian political philosophy therefore dissuades us from the political life of the material realm, granting

us access to the real good life blissfully residing with the One. It does, however, remain a political philosophy in so far as the metaphysical ascent of the soul will produce virtuous political activity when contextually necessary within the body. Thus, Plotinus envisions a derivative political life cultivated by engagement with the intelligible realm.

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