Ancient Philosophies as Ways of Life

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LECTURE I.
SOCRATES

To anyone familiar with current philosophy, it must sound quite strange that philosophy itself, as a whole, or any philosophy—a set of philosophical views, however comprehensive—could all by itself constitute, for its adherents, a total, all-consuming way of life. By "philosophy" here I mean rigorous academic philosophy, as opposed to works of advice and uplift, including ones that are often popularly spoken of as works of philosophy, or ones that are said to contain and advocate a "philosophy of life." By contrast with such more popular conceptions of philosophy, philosophy in the strict and narrow usage that I intend, both nowadays and all the way back in a continuous history to the earliest philosophers of Greek antiquity, is an enterprise of rigorously disciplined, reasoned analysis and argumentation. Moreover, in most of this history philosophers have professed, as something essential to what philosophy is, to be aiming in their work always at discovering, through disciplined philosophical reasoning, the real truth about the topics that philosophers investigate. But how could philosophy, understood that way, constitute for its adherents a whole, all-inclusive way of life? Even if knowing important philosophical truths, or thinking you do, may alter, even radically, your orientation to life, how could that knowledge, all by itself, produce and constitute for you your total way of life? How could knowing all that philosophy might teach put you in the position that, simply in and by knowing it (while, of course, bearing it constantly in mind), you would or even could, then, make your philosophical understanding and your philosophical views somehow become your total way of life? Apart from the fact that philosophy as we know it today doesn't seem even to say anything about some of the questions that arise in pretty much anyone's life, isn't there an inevitable gap between knowing, or thinking you know, how you ought to live your life, in all its aspects, or how it is best to live, and actually living your life? Yet in a thousand-year-long tradition of philosophy in antiquity, beginning with Socrates and continuing without break through Plotinus and his successor Platonists of the third to sixth centuries of the Common Era, philosophy was indeed so conceived and so studied. For these philosophers, philosophy and their varied individual philosophies were ways of life, in this very strong sense.

In this first lecture I will explain how ancient philosophies were ways of life for their adherents.[1] As we will see, they made philosophy, psychologically and morally, something much deeper than anything we might meet with in contemporary philosophy. In the second part of this lecture I will illustrate this concretely by discussing Socrates' philosophy and the Socratic way of life. In the second lecture, turning from this origin of philosophy as a way of life to its final stage, I will discuss the very different way of life provided in the revived Platonism of late antiquity.

First, then, I want to explain what, as I have come to understand it, ancient Greek philosophy, conceived as a way of life, and not just an intellectual discipline, actually amounted to, when viewed from within the ancient philosophical tradition itself. I'll be talking about the very idea that philosophy is, or can and even ought to be, a total way of life. In this I am following in the footsteps of the eminent French scholar of Plotinus and Platonism, the late Pierre Hadot, whose work along these lines burst on the English-speaking intellectual scene in the mid-1990s.[2] However, as you will see as I proceed, my understanding of ancient philosophy conceived as a way of life differs greatly, and in fact in fundamental ways, from Hadot's. I will remark briefly at the end of this first lecture on those differences. But for most of the lecture I will simply proceed to explain in my own way, and to discuss, how those ancient philosophers who presented their philosophies as ways of life understood what they were doing, and what, within their views about human nature and the psychological bases of human life, made it possible, and brought them, to conceive philosophy in that way.

1. These Tanner Lectures draw upon my book *Pursuits of Wisdom: Six Ways of Life in Ancient Philosophy from Socrates to Plotinus* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012). Earlier versions were given as Seybert Lectures at the University of Pennsylvania (October 2011). The initial texts were the first and last of the six lectures and seminars on the topic of ancient philosophies as ways of life that I gave at Oxford as John Locke Lectures in May and June 2011. This first lecture presents ideas more fully expressed and argued for in chapters 1 and 2 of *Pursuits,* but in newly written sentences and paragraphs, intended as suitable for oral presentation to a more inclusive audience. It draws also on my article "Socrates and Philosophy as a Way of Life," in *Maieusis: Essays in Ancient Philosophy in Honour of Myles Burnyeat,* edited by Dominic Scott (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 20–43.

2. See Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault,* translated by Michael Chase and edited with an introduction by A. I. Davidson (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), a rearranged and expanded translation of his *Exercises spirituels et philosophie antique,* 2nd ed. (Paris: Etudes Augustiniennes, 1987); *What Is Ancient Philosophy?,* translated by Michael Chase (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), a translation, with some corrections by Hadot, of *Qu'est-ce que la philosophie antique?* (Paris: Gallimard, 1995); and *The Present Alone Is Our Happiness: Conversations with Jeannie Carlier and Arnold I. Davidson,* translated by Marc Djaballah (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009), a translation of *La philosophie comme manière de vivre: Entretiens avec Jeannie Carlier et Arnold I. Davidson* (Paris: Éditions Albin Michel, 2001).

It is important to emphasize that, despite Hadot's claims to the contrary, not every ancient philosopher thought of philosophy in this way. But beginning, I argue, with Socrates, a long series of Greek philosophers, following Socrates' lead, did so conceive it. Plato, Aristotle, Epicurus, and his followers, Stoic philosophers from Zeno and Chrysippus onward, even the Pyrrhonian skeptics of the first century BCE to the time of Sextus Empiricus three centuries later, and late Platonists, including notably Plotinus and his successors down to the death of pagan philosophy altogether in the sixth century, all belong in this camp. (See the appendix, section I.) My focus in this first lecture is on the central unifying ideas about philosophy and about human life that this whole tradition shares, as an inheritance from Socrates. I will go into details only about Socrates, who on my account is the one who first got even the idea of making philosophy a way of life. His ideas about philosophy and its role in our lives, if they were to be well lived, defined and sustained the whole later tradition—vastly different from the Socratic way of life, though each of the ways of life defined by these later philosophies certainly were. By that means I hope to make concrete what for the first part of the lecture will be a rather abstract account.

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I begin with some further remarks about recent and contemporary philosophy—about how it relates to and compares with ancient philosophy. Nowadays, of course, philosophy is really only a subject of study; no one thinks of serious philosophy, as carried on in an academic setting, even as defining in detail, much less as somehow constituting a total way of life. In this, philosophy is just like all the other established specialties in contemporary higher education. Colleges everywhere have departments of philosophy offering undergraduate degrees in the subject, just like degrees in mathematics or engineering or French language and literature. These departments are staffed with lecturers and professors with advanced degrees, certifying their preparation as professional philosophers—as people who pursue research in the field and write articles and books of philosophy and on philosophy, just as physics lecturers do physics and write on physics, or anthropologists do and write on anthropology.

Still, even as a subject of study, philosophy is different in one way from all those others, or so I would like to suggest. This concerns ethics or moral philosophy as one part of philosophy and one component of the philosophy curriculum. In our Western tradition, since the Renaissance philosophy has been conceived as composed of three branches,

natural philosophy, metaphysical philosophy, and moral philosophy (see the appendix, section II). More common nowadays is the threesome of metaphysics, epistemology, and ethics. Of course, other contemporary specialties not easily brought under any of these principal headings are recognized, too (logic, philosophy of language, philosophy of art, and so on). Similarly, in ancient philosophy, from the time of the Stoics and Epicureans, at any rate, there was a standard threesome, too: dialectic (which included logic, philosophy of language, and epistemology), philosophy of nature ("physics," as they called it), and ethics. What stands out in all these divisions of the subject is the enduring presence of ethics, or moral philosophy, as one of the three principal components of philosophy as a whole. The presence of ethics as a branch of philosophy really does, as I would like to claim, set philosophy, even contemporary and modern philosophy, apart from what goes on in the other college and university departments.

It is true, of course, that in the ancient scheme, "ethics" or ηθική meant something rather different from what it means today. It meant, quite precisely, the philosophical study of human moral character, good and bad. The study of character had this central place, because one's character was thought of as what determines for each of us the structure of our individual lives. One's character, in turn, for the Greek philosophers, is one's particular outlook on human life, psychologically settled and effective for the way one thinks, feels, chooses, and acts; and this overall outlook on life is based on one's conception of the differing weight and worth in a human life of the enormously varied sorts of valuable things that the natural and the human world make available to us. Thus, through their character people weigh and balance everything that they see as good for human beings and in human life, insofar as those become objects of concern for them as they lead their own lives—and through their character they live and act accordingly. Contemporary moral philosophy or ethics is different, as a result of the long development of human cultures since antiquity, and correspondingly of changed bases for philosophical reflections upon our human circumstances. Changed conceptions internal to philosophy itself as to what philosophy can, and cannot, reasonably hope to accomplish have played a role as well. In general, one can say that, by contrast with ancient moral philosophy, our contemporary ethical theory (that is, what is called "normative" ethics) concerns centrally and primarily right versus wrong actions, and how to explain and, perhaps, justify assigning this or that action to one or the other of those classifications. Ancient ethics, then, starts from and focuses instead on goodness and badness of

character, good and bad ways of being a person. Certain actions follow from the sort of person you are, of course, but for the ancients actions are a secondary matter.

Nonetheless, despite these differences between modern and ancient philosophy, ethics is the one of the three members of my three divisions of philosophy into parts that is found throughout the history of philosophy since Socrates. That fact establishes the difference that I said a moment ago I wanted to claim between philosophy, as a subject of study, and any of the other areas of specialized study offered in our universities. In modern or contemporary philosophy, one might be trying to arrive at a satisfactory result concerning the bases for deciding which actions are morally right and wrong (that is, for thinking about what we all owe to one another simply by living in the world together, with one another); in the ancient, one might be thinking and learning about good human character, as grounded in correct judgments concerning what is valuable in life. In either case, moral philosophy deals with questions about how anyone ought to live. Since everyone has a life to live, this subject at least professes to concern everyone, and not in some incidental way, or in some way that can be left to others (to experts) to see to. Other subjects may and indeed do have much to teach that can have practical value. But those questions may or may not be of particular interest or concern to different individuals, given how they are placed in life. By contrast, normative moral theory takes as its subject something that necessarily concerns everyone directly. Philosophy is inherently a practical subject, at least in part, and one that engages directly with universally applicable questions of how to live and what to do or not do—whereas, it seems, none of the others has such a status of mandatory universal personal concern.

Still, ancient philosophy is distinctive in one crucial way, connected to what I said above about how modern and ancient ethics construct themselves. By and large, you could say that nowadays normative ethical theories, or normative political theories, attempt to tell us what we should do or not do, personally or politically, where questions of what we owe to one another arise—but only there. So in contemporary philosophy, argument, analysis, and theory of a highly intellectual and to a great extent abstract kind are offered as guiding us to correct practical decisions and actions, telling us about certain actions or policies as right or wrong, and on that basis as to be done or enacted, or not. However, in antiquity, beginning with Socrates, philosophy was widely pursued as the best guide to life, as I have already emphasized, as a whole (not just to

questions of right and wrong action—a severely limited, however important, part of anyone's life). But, moreover, as I will attempt to explain, philosophy was pursued as both the intellectual basis and guide and the psychologically motivating force for the best human life: in the motto of the US undergraduate honor society Phi Beta Kappa (even if ΦΒΚ never understood it in quite this way), for ancient philosophers, philosophy is itself the steersman or pilot of the best life (βίου κυβερνήτης). Over most of the one thousand years of philosophy in ancient Greece and Rome, philosophy was assiduously studied in every generation by many ancient philosophers and their students as the best way to become, and then be, good people, and to live good human lives. One was to become good not as a mere result of philosophical study, by putting into effect what philosophy tells you, but precisely in and through one's philosophical reasoning and understanding of the world, of what is valuable in life, and of what is not so valuable, one was supposed to structure one's life, moment by moment as one led it, and to keep oneself firmly motivated to live it through that understanding. One was to live one's life from, not just, as one could put it, in accordance with, one's philosophy. Your philosophy didn't just guide your life; it steered your life directly, from its implanted position in your mind and character.

So in antiquity philosophy in our Western tradition realized to the fullest extent all that moral philosophy's combination of theory and practice might involve. Living your philosophy in the ancient way goes beyond living your philosophy in the way that, say, Peter Singer, a utilitarian, is said to do, in following his philosophical principles and giving 25 percent of his salary to Oxfam and UNICEF to relieve poverty in the Third World. Ancient philosophies did include that kind of seriousness and conformity of one's life to one's philosophical beliefs. But beginning with Socrates, ancient philosophers made philosophy the, and the only authoritative, foundation and internal steersman for human life. For these thinkers, only reason, and what reason could discover and establish as the truth, could be an ultimately acceptable basis on which to live a human life—and, for them, philosophy is nothing more, but also nothing less, than the art or discipline that develops and perfects the human capacity of reason, insofar as that capacity is regarded as a power enabling us to reach the ultimate truth about reality, and not merely as a pragmatic tool for achieving arbitrary given objectives. No one, they argue, can lead their life in a finally satisfactory way without philosophy and the understanding that ideally, anyhow—when finally successful and "complete"—only

philosophy can provide. Philosophy, not religion, not cultural tradition, no other authority at all, has the standing needed to show and declare what sort of life is best for us, that is, what sort of life fully suits us, given our nature and our natural relationship to surrounding nature at large (including the divine nature—all the ancient philosophers agreed that there is a god). And, to speak positively, when one does possess a completely grounded philosophical understanding of the full truth about how to live, by living one's life through that understanding, and only by doing so, one achieves the finally and fully satisfactory life for a human being.

It was on this basis that philosophy itself became a way of life in the ancient sense. As we will see, Socrates made the activities of philosophizing (philosophical discussion and argument) central and indispensable ones of that best life. Thus, he championed a philosophical life in a sense of the phrase comparable to the "life" of any professional: a doctor's or physicist's or more generally a professor's life. In the ancient tradition philosophy, like philosophy today, was indeed a subject of study, with basic principles, and theories and arguments and analyses, and refutations of tempting but erroneous views, and so on—and philosophers, like doctors or physicists with theirs, could find the activities of their philosophical work deeply satisfying and could assign it a central place in their ongoing lives. But the whole body of knowledge that, when finally worked out fully, would constitute the finished result of such philosophical investigations was also not only for the ancients the best guide to living your whole life (by telling you how to live, what to do and what not to do in any circumstance, not only where modern ideas of moral right and wrong are concerned). Philosophy was the very basis in your psychology on which the best life would then be led. That philosophical understanding would permeate and shape your character and hold together all aspects of the life you would then lead from philosophy: your philosophy would be the steersman of your whole life, as I put it earlier, by being lodged deeply in your mind.

Philosophy conceived as a way of life encompassed, if not for Socrates (for reasons special to his own philosophical worldview, to which I'll come back below), then certainly for his successors, the whole subject, not only philosophy's "moral" part. All the major thinkers in this tradition regarded the subject of philosophy in all its parts, and gave good reasons for so doing, as a completely integrated, mutually connected and supporting, unified body of knowledge. The "moral" part was not something separable and could not be fully comprehended except along with the philosophy of nature (including the theory of the divine), logic, the

theory of knowledge, philosophy of language, and, above all, metaphysics, or the theory of being itself. Each of the philosophies of antiquity—Aristotelianism, Stoicism, and so forth—proposed a whole philosophical worldview, as the necessary context for understanding and fully grounding their theories about the best way of leading a human life. Each of the ancient ethical theories expresses its own particular moral outlook, on the basis of its particular philosophical worldview—different ones for each of them, in important regards. Each ancient ethical theory presents a certain conception of the place and role in human life of the whole vast array of different sorts of goods and bads, or more generally of things of positive and negative value, that our nature as human beings makes available to us. The Platonist worldview differs from the Aristotelian, and both differ from the Stoic, from the Epicurean and from the skeptic—and, accordingly, their moral outlooks differ, too. In each case the moral outlook expressed in the respective ethical theory derives in crucial ways from that overall philosophical worldview. For that reason, it is entirely appropriate to speak, as Socrates and others in this tradition did, of philosophy, as they conceive of it, and not instead only moral philosophy or ethics, as not only proposing but also constituting a way of life.

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Let me shift now to discuss specifically just Socrates and Socrates' philosophy, and the Socratic way of living. Since we are talking about philosophers and their philosophical views, we need to see what Socrates' and the others' philosophical reasons were, what their philosophical arguments were, for holding all of the underlying assumptions about philosophy and about human life that I have just summarized. I can't in the space here do much to work out in detail the arguments that led Socrates to his conclusions, but I can, I hope, give you a philosophical sketch of them. I will focus especially on Plato's *Apology,* but will rely also on others of Plato's Socratic dialogues, including especially the *Protagoras* and *Euthydemus.* Plato, of course, wrote a lot of dialogues where Socrates is a main character, including the *Republic* and *Phaedo,* which do of course have things to say about philosophy and ways of life. In speaking of Socrates, however, I am concentrating on the character Socrates, as he appears in the *Apology* and in some other philosophically closely related dialogues, and not the Socrates of the *Republic* or *Phaedo.* All the way back to antiquity, philosophers in reading Plato's work have distinguished between his so-called Socratic dialogues, ones in which he is giving us his own idealized intellectual and personal portrait of the Socrates he knew, studied with, and

admired very greatly (however much, at the same time, proposing a critical evaluation of his philosophical views), and other works in which Plato goes onward from there to develop his own philosophical theories. The *Republic* and *Phaedo* belong to that second group. In any event, I should emphasize that in speaking of Socrates as the founder of the ancient tradition of philosophy as a way of life, and in what I am now going on to say about Socrates' own philosophy, I am talking not so much about the historical Socrates, as he really lived and breathed and talked and did philosophy, as about the character Socrates in Plato's Socratic writings (and, to a lesser degree, related writings of Xenophon and others), and especially the character Socrates in the *Apology*. Maybe the real Socrates was somewhat different from this fictive one of Plato's and others' idealized devising; we do not know. We do know the Socrates of Plato's Socratic dialogues, and he is the one who presents philosophy as a way of life, constructs a philosophy of his own, and is presented as living by and from it. His ideas—this fictive Socrates'—about philosophy as a way of life were the pattern, in fact, for all the later traditions.

Plato's *Apology* is Plato's rendition of how Socrates' speech to his jury of 501 male Athenian fellow citizens might ideally have gone, when Socrates was on trial at the age of seventy on charges of having violated the Athenian law against impiety. This law was thought important to the Athenians because they thought their own city's success, and the prosperity of the Athenian people individually and as a social and political entity, depended crucially on the favor of the Olympian gods—Zeus, Hera, Athena, Apollo, and so on. Anyone who violated this law, in any large, visible, public way, was courting danger for the city and the society, and had to be stopped. (These gods might or might not take umbrage at private impiety, but they sure did if it was publicly flaunted with impunity, and so, perhaps, with general approval!) Socrates was charged with violating this law in just such a public way. The claim was that he, a prominent public figure, flagrantly did not show the Olympians the honor they demanded in return for their favor—instead, he trusted his own private "daimonion" (or "voice") that warned him from time to time against some action he might be contemplating. It was also claimed that his philosophical discussions with the young men who surrounded him as he talked philosophy all day long every day in the public spaces of the city in fact corrupted them morally—immorality is offensive to the Olympian gods, and so in publicly corrupting the young, Socrates was calling divine disfavor down on the whole city. Though this was not explicitly said, what

Socrates' accusers surely had in mind here was that Socrates encouraged his young men to think for themselves on questions of morality and value and life, and that, his accusers thought, was a corruption. They were outraged, as parents whose sons were getting uppity and demanding reasons for everything: we Athenians, they thought, under the aegis of our gods, already know, in our well-established traditions, how we ought to live; our traditions, including our religious traditions, are the correct basis for life, and we don't want our young people to start questioning them, looking for reasons why they are correct ways of living and behaving (or perhaps not). In Socrates' speech to the jury in response to these charges, we get Plato's defense of Socrates and Socrates' life as a philosopher. So we can turn to what the character Socrates says in the *Apology* about himself, to get a broad explication of Socrates' philosophy, as Plato presents it.

Socrates presents himself as having been devoted over many years to what seems to be full-time engagement in discussions with various fellow Athenians and visitors to Athens. Some of them were young men who flocked around to listen to him interrogating these other people, but some of them were adult persons with settled positions and reputations in Athenian society. These discussions were philosophical in character. They consisted of questions Socrates would ask about some matter of importance for human life, to get the discussion started: What do you think courage actually is?—the organizing question of the *Laches.* Or modesty?—the *Charmides.* Or friendship?—the *Lysis.* Or justice?—*Republic* I. Is virtue one thing or some number of separate and distinct things?—the *Protagoras.* Is oratorical skill a good thing? What even is it? What does it do?—the *Gorgias.* He would then direct further questions to the respondent about his initial answers, seeking his reasons for thinking what he thinks, and asking for a reasoned defense of those reasons.

In the *Apology,* Socrates connects this work of his as a philosopher to claims for his own self-improvement and that of everyone else involved in it. He famously maintains that one's soul, and its condition, whether good or bad, which, for reasons I will explain in a moment, he thinks is improved by such discussions, is the most important thing for anyone: that, he says, is what he has gone about the city of Athens all his life trying to convince his fellow citizens of, both old and young. This preeminence in value of the soul is the crucial claim on which Socrates' philosophy, and the Socratic way of life, is grounded. (For a summary of the main points of his philosophy, see the appendix, section III.) The preeminence of the soul's value became a foundational principle for the whole later tradition

of ethical philosophy among the ancients. For Socrates, the soul is vastly more important than any of the other valuable things for human life that one might mention: health and strength, psychological vigor, wealth, the pleasures of sex or food and drink, a good reputation, political power, good personal relationships of friendship and love, fun, and so on. Indeed, the soul is vastly so much more important that it makes each of these other goods not just pale by comparison, but become in their very value totally dependent upon it. When your soul is in its good condition, you have something of unconditional value, Socrates claims—whereas all other goods (money, pleasure, good relationships with others, power over them, whatever it might be) are only conditionally good: their value for you depends on how they are used, how they are fitted into your life. They are dependent as goods upon, and make a positive contribution to our lives only because of, what we ourselves make of them, how we regard them, how we react to having or lacking them, and what we do with them.[3]

That is because the soul is that with which we live our active lives: our assessments of value, our decisions, our desires, our choices—all these depend essentially and directly upon it. So long as the soul is in its good condition, which Socrates calls its "virtue" (whatever more precisely that may be or include—that remains to be considered), we will live well, because if we have this most important valuable thing in good condition, all other potential, or commonly agreed, values (wealth, health, good social connections, and so on, even bodily pleasure) become actually valuable for us. With a good, well-conditioned, soul we can make proper and good use of these other valuable things, and so we can live good lives—lives to which the goodness of these other goods makes a real contribution. By contrast, with a bad soul we will have bad desires, make bad choices, misvalue and misuse such other potential goods, and, as a result, we make them bad for us, and make overall a bad life for ourselves.

Moreover, for Socrates, this good condition of the soul is, ultimately, entirely a matter of developing and maintaining a firm grasp and understanding of fundamental truths about human nature and, as a consequence of those, truths about the nature of what is valuable for a human being. The reason, if you possess "virtue" in your soul, you will live a good and happy life is that you will then know the true value of every possible sort of thing you might want to have, in comparison, and in relationship,

3. In this paragraph and the next, I draw on, and interpret, Socrates' claims at *Apology* 30a–b and *Euthydemus* 278e–282d.

with all other things similarly of value.[4] You will, in other words, know the truth of Socrates' own claim about the preeminent value of the soul, and about the merely conditional value of money, position, power, personal relationships, bodily pleasure, and all the rest. Since, with this knowledge, you will never value anything else more highly, or even at anywhere close to the same level as the state of your soul, you will never value at more than their true worth either "external" goods, such as possessions, social position, and the like, or "goods of the soul" other than virtue, such as a good memory or sense of humor or native friendliness or psychological vigor and self-confidence, nor yet "goods of the body," such as health, strength, bodily pleasure, physical ease, or beauty or good looks. The true worth of such potential goods is that of something to be used "virtuously," and none of them have any value apart from what accrues to them through that good use. (This is so even if, when they are present in a life and used virtuously, their own separate value—for example, that of a bodily pleasure enjoyed and in that sense "used" well—becomes an added good, increasing the overall goodness, for the one living it, in that virtuous life, above the total good in some other virtuous lives.) As Socrates once puts it in the *Apology,* "Virtue makes wealth and everything else good for human beings, both individually and publically."[5]

Accordingly, whether or not you are lucky as regards other goods, whether or not you have plenty of such traditionally highly valued "resources" for life, you will find that your soul's good condition will govern your real life, that is, your active life consisting in your choices, actions, reactions to, and evaluations of what happens to you, in such a way as to make it happy and fulfilling. Pains, and failures as regards these external and bodily goods and the various superficial goods of the soul, do not diminish the fine quality of your life at all. The value (for you) in your life is achieved solely through the actions that make it up. Those are either good or bad, and virtue guarantees that they will be good. Hence, if you are virtuous, you will live in a way that fulfills your nature and makes you happy—even if you suffer disappointments, pain, and losses of conditional goods of various kinds. Moreover, your life is not made in any way worse, or less good, by the presence in them of conditional bads: those

4. *Apology* 30b. See also *Euthydemus* 278e–282e, cited above. Translations from Plato are derived from those in *Plato: Complete Works,* edited by John M. Cooper with Douglas Hutchinson (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1997), with some changes.

5. For Socrates, knowledge, though an intellectual accomplishment, is also a psychological guarantee of right action. See page 35.

are actually bad only if present in a morally bad person's life. In a virtuous person's life, they are used correctly and properly, and so they have a positive, not a negative, actual value.

For Socrates, then, whatever else it may include or imply, virtue is wisdom. Virtue, the good condition of the soul, is this state of mind in which one firmly grasps and understands the full system of human values, in comparison and relationship with one another. With wisdom, he maintains, one will always live and act on the basis of that system of values, and so one will live completely happily and fulfilled. That implies, of course, that understanding the truth about what is good or bad for you inevitably and necessarily leads you to act in the way that is indicated in that knowledge, in whatever your current circumstances may be, with their prospects for the future and relationship to the past. With wisdom and understanding, you will always act in what is in fact the right way. Moreover, the fullness of your understanding will enable you to give good and sufficient reasons why what you do or did is in fact the right thing to do in those circumstances (given what could be known about them—even a wise person isn't clairvoyant). Knowledge—knowledge of values, that is, knowledge of what is good and what is bad for a human being, and in what way it is either good or bad—has, then, an extreme power, according to Socrates: if you have it, it will not just unwaveringly and irresistibly govern your life, but make it a good and fulfilled one, too. Socrates explains and defends this claim about wisdom's power—it is a philosophical claim about human psychology—in Plato's *Protagoras.*[6] It isn't that Socrates thinks all possibly countervailing psychological powers—powers in the soul with possible influence on your choice of which action to do, or refrain from, in any circumstance—will miraculously disappear once you become wise. He recognizes the power of pleasure and pain, or sexual and other states of passion, as possible influences even on the choices and actions of the wise person: pleasure and pain, or their prospect, or anger or fear or sexual arousal, and so on, can alter the way things appear, value-wise, to any agent, and so, in principle, also to the wise. However, Socrates argues, this "power of appearance" to mislead us about values is always weaker than the power of value-knowledge—if, that is, we really do possess this knowledge fully, and are completely wise. How so?

Here we meet a fundamental insight or assumption of Socrates, one that some subsequent philosophers, including both Plato (in other

6. See 352a ff.

dialogues than his Socratic ones) and Aristotle, will oppose (even if they accept his claim for the power of knowledge). Others, most notably the Stoics, will strenuously agree with Socrates in accepting this assumption. It belongs to human nature, Socrates thinks, that when we are grown up and in charge of our own lives, any and every action we do is done with, and from, the thought that it is the best thing (taking into account everything it occurs to you to take into account) for you to be doing then. You may be ambivalent or uncertain, to some extent, as you at first reflect on the situation (if you reflect at all), but when you act, you necessarily are committed in your thinking to the idea that this (despite whatever you see that may count against it) is the best thing to do. Quite simply, if your mind remained not made up, you would not (yet) act. This follows from the fact, which Socrates thinks belongs to human beings by their nature as rational animals, that we rational animals can act only on reasons that we accept, at the time when we act on them, as sufficient to justify the action, or at least make it the thing to do. Only the acceptance of such reasons can possibly move an animal with a rational nature to action. Our power to see and give ourselves reasons for acting is the only psychic source of motivation within us that can actually set us upon the movements that constitute or produce our actions—with their particular goals and nuanced, or merely gross and unnuanced, appreciations of what we may be doing. Thus, possessing a rational nature entails, for Socrates, acting always, in a sense, rationally. We always act "subjectively" rationally; that is, we always act for what we take to be adequate reasons. As Socrates puts it in the conclusion of his analysis in the *Protagoras,* "No one goes willingly toward the bad, or what he believes to be bad; neither is it in human nature to want to go toward what one believes to be bad, instead of to the good."[7] Many people may regret what they have done, immediately after doing it, just as they may waver and be uncertain just before acting. But everyone, in acting, does what they are then holding to be best, because otherwise, given our rational natures, we would do nothing at all (we would not even refrain from acting).

Now, from this thesis about human psychology, Socrates' claim of the power of value-knowledge follows directly. Value-knowledge gives its possessor an unfailingly complete basis for evaluating situations and circumstances as one becomes aware of them. This leads to a clear apprehension of the best thing to do under the current conditions (as one

7. *Protagoras* 358d.

understands them to be). If it is part of human nature always to do, if anything at all, what one thinks is best, such a person will always and only do what, at the precise time when they act, they think is best. And because knowledge makes those who possess it always right about what is best, they always live well, happily, and fulfilled, in the way I described above. Other people, ones not possessed of this knowledge, will very frequently be governed by the power of appearance—it is a second fundamental feature of human nature to be constantly bombarded by value-appearances, due to emotions and other feelings, including bodily sensations. Just like the wise person, they will always do what they then, at the moment of action, think is best, but the power of appearance can affect them so that, because of anger or sexual passion, or the presence or prospect of pleasure or pain in the near future, they form the temporary opinion that something would be an overall good thing to do that in fact is not. Due to the power of the appearances that such states of feeling can induce, they may even act against their considered judgment about what is best—a considered judgment that might be correct but that, when one is in thrall to the appearances, one overemotionally displaces with a judgment based on the appearances. None of this can happen to a wise person. Even the wise may still be subject to appearances that, because of angry feelings or some other emotional distortion, present the options to their consciousness differently from the way they know them to be. But their value-understanding is so complete, and in that sense so deep and strong, that these contrary appearances, and the feelings that give rise to them, cannot affect their action in any way. Knowledge—value-knowledge—will save our lives, Socrates thinks, and nothing else could reliably do so.

Here is where philosophy, and Socrates' emphasis on the value to himself and his interlocutors of his discussions, comes into the picture. Philosophy is the pursuit of wisdom; so, for Socrates, philosophical discussion, philosophical analysis concerning human nature and human values, and philosophical theory are the sole road to wisdom, and so to a fulfilled and happy human life. Now in fact, as you know, Socrates was pretty sure that neither he nor anyone he had met or heard of actually had yet succeeded in fighting their way in argument through to wisdom. One could reach, as he had done, a lot of rationally strongly supported ideas, as I've just reported, about human nature, human values, how human action is motivated through the positing of reasons in favor of the action, and so on. But you shouldn't claim to know those ideas to be true; you can be pretty convinced, for defensible and very good reasons, and you can shape

your life on the basis of them, but you can't say that holding to those ideas as true, as you do, makes you wise, and so makes your life completely and finally happy. There are always further considerations about these matters that you have not yet gone through, that you would need to assess before you could claim to have won your way through to wisdom and to final and complete happiness.

So, for Socrates, you can never stop philosophizing, you can never stop doing what he himself says in the *Apology* he did every day: toward the end of his defense, Socrates says that he will never stop his philosophical discussions, no matter what, because "it is the greatest good for a person to discuss virtue every day and those other things about which you hear me conversing and testing myself and others, for the unexamined life is not worth living for human beings."[8] If you are not wise, the next best, and crucially important, thing for the good of your soul is to devote your daily life, as much as possible, to concentrated efforts to keep on pursuing wisdom, through doing philosophy. Of course, you have other things to do too—you have to eat and drink, have sex, do a job if you have one to do, raise your children, be with your friends, and a lot of other things, too: citizenly duties, aiding others in need, seeing to what we all owe to one another. You have a rich, full life to construct for yourself. As to all those other concerns, the grasp that philosophy has given you of the whole realm of human values, even if you cannot claim to know any part of it to be true, beginning with the preeminent value of your soul and its good condition, will give you all the guidance you need. You will live from your philosophy, that is, from your philosophical understanding of values, so far as you have advanced in that understanding up to then: and (if Socrates and his life give a good indication) that knowledge will take you far beyond tradition or common sense, and lead you to adopt philosophically grounded novel moral positions, such as Socrates' when he declines to depart his prison and avoid execution, and gives elaborately expounded reasons he must decline, since justice requires not repudiating the rule of law. As a result, the closer to wisdom you get, the happier your life will be. So even if Socrates never achieved wisdom, his life, with its devotion to the preeminence of the soul in value and to the pursuit of wisdom, was a very good and very happy life.

As we have seen, then, the Socratic way of life is one in which the activity of self-improvement, through philosophical study and talk, plays

8. *Apology* 37a.

a huge and central role. In this activity your soul, the thing of most importance for your life, attains, or keeps on moving toward, its own fullest perfection. But philosophy will also occupy your life when you are not sitting around reading or talking philosophy. Your philosophical understanding of values will be what forms and sustains your moral character, as you go about every aspect of your daily life. Thus, philosophy will play all three of the following roles in your life (see the appendix, section IV). First, philosophy tells you how to live—what to do, what not to do, with what thoughts, in what spirit, in every aspect of your life. Second, philosophical understanding, lodged in your mind, steers your whole life, by directly and on its own moving you to every choice and action making up your life. Third, one thing that philosophy tells you is that philosophical study (discussions and the like) is a very good thing, and should be included in your life (if you are up to it).

As I have said, Socrates set the pattern for the rest of the Greek tradition of philosophy as a way of life: all the subsequent ancient Greek philosophical ways of life fitted this three-part basic pattern. In all of them, philosophizing itself is accorded an especially high value, among all the other activities of your life; philosophy gives overall guidance to your life, what to do and not do, and in what ways to do these actions; and, most interestingly, philosophy lodged in a person's mind steers their life in all its aspects.

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To conclude, I want to say just a few words about how my account of philosophy as a way of life relates to the well-known work of Pierre Hadot. Hadot's extensive work on ancient philosophy as a way of life was translated into English in two books a decade or so ago that attracted quite a lot of enthusiastic attention not only among philosophers but even (and perhaps more) elsewhere in the humanities. One of his books was entitled, in fact, just *Philosophy as a Way of Life;* the other is called *What Is Ancient Philosophy?* Hadot's work brought the topic of philosophy as a way of life to prominence, in connection not only with the ancient philosophical tradition, which Hadot and others have linked to Michel Foucault's concerns in his last writings on "the care of the self," but with selected later philosophers, too. Reading his work gave part of my own impetus to work myself on this topic. Much of the enthusiasm for Hadot's books among English-speaking philosophers and others in humanities fields came from Hadot's interest in what he saw as ways in which the ancient philosophies resembled religions. He emphasized (to my mind

greatly overemphasized) the role in ancient philosophies as ways of life of what he called spiritual exercises: he got this term from Saint Ignatius of Loyola, the sixteenth-century Spanish founder of the Jesuit order.

According to Hadot, such things as daily examinations of conscience, carried out in a devotional spirit; imaginatively inspiring meditation, not of course, as with Saint Ignatius, on Christ's life, but on that of the founder of one's philosophical school, or other famous paragons of the school's way of life; and prayers—in short, devotional and spiritually purifying exercises of all sorts—were, according to Hadot, for the ancient philosophers, essential means of strengthening one's moral and philosophical resolve to live according to the precepts of one's philosophy. Spiritual exercises belonged, for Hadot, to the essence of ancient philosophy. Hadot wanted to say that these practices were essential, because he thought they were necessary in order for anyone actually to live their philosophy, through the needed and salutary resolve and uplift that spiritual exercises could impart. He suggested that this had always been so in the ancient philosophical tradition—even for very early philosophers like Parmenides, the logician and metaphysician who lived two generations before Socrates. (Hadot's book *What Is Ancient Philosophy?* treats ancient philosophy itself, and as a whole, as a special, so to speak, "kind" of philosophy that, unlike our or the medieval "kinds" of philosophy, was a way of life.)

However, a close study of the evidence shows that what Hadot had to say about devotional exercises absolutely did not apply for Socrates, or Plato, or Aristotle, or the classical Stoics, or even earlier Platonists of late antiquity, like Plotinus in the third century. What was crucial for philosophy (as opposed to religion) as a way of life, all the way through, is that what was to keep you going and keep you living your philosophy was nothing more than your fully developed philosophical, reasoned understanding of what you thought was the truth about human beings and their place in the world. You did not need spiritual uplift and purification, and it would indeed be a serious distraction in most of the ancient philosophical lives. It is that sort of life, one growing out of and deriving from exercises of philosophical reason, that I have emphasized in this lecture. In fact, no quasi-religious devotional practices, such as Hadot describes, had, or even could have had, anything essential to do with living a life of philosophy, given what philosophy itself, both in antiquity and, in fact, in its whole history, is: an exercise of reason. You cannot strengthen your rational grasp of truths, except quite incidentally, by

any such external spiritual self-manipulations. That strength comes only through increased rational understanding. And there is no good reason to think that Socrates or any of his nearer successors saw spiritual self-manipulation through any sort of devotional exercises as even coincidentally necessary means to such strengthening.

It is true that, as pagan philosophy declined to its death over the last centuries of its existence, Platonist philosophy, in its efforts to remain relevant in an age of spiritual crisis and discontent, borrowed from religion, both pagan and Christian, the sort of devotional exercises that Hadot speaks of, as well as religious rituals of various kinds, as ways of achieving union with the Platonist philosopher's god, the One that is beyond Being—the union that is the ultimate goal of Platonist philosophy. I will say something about that in the next lecture. But that was a crisis time in ancient culture, and Hadot was badly mistaken to take features of philosophy as a way of life at that culminating point of the tradition and read them back onto the tradition itself from the beginning. The result is a badly distorted account of what ancient philosophy was and of how, unlike most of philosophy over its long history since the end of antiquity, the ancient philosophies managed to be ways of life for their adherents.[9]

Appendix: Summary and Background Information for Lecture I

I

Socrates (d. 399 BCE)
Plato (d. 347 BCE)
Aristotle (d. 322 BCE)
Epicurus (d. 270 BCE)
Stoics (ca. 280 BCE–200 CE)
Pyrrhonian skeptics (first century BCE–200 CE)
Plotinus (d. 270 CE)
Last pagan philosophers (ca. 550 CE)

II

The three main divisions of philosophy—traditional modern, contemporary, ancient:

9. In preparing the published version of this lecture, I was greatly helped by having at my disposal written comments by Alan Code and Sarah Broadie prepared for the seminar discussion that followed its delivery. I thank them for their comments and assistance.

1. natural philosophy, metaphysical philosophy, moral philosophy
2. metaphysics, epistemology, ethics (or value theory)
3. dialectic, physics, ethics

III

Main points of Socrates' philosophy:

1. Philosophical insight and reasoning are the sole ultimate authority as to how one should live one's whole life—what one should do, what one should not do, in any circumstance, and with what thoughts and in what spirit one should do it.
2. The most important thing for anyone is their soul, and its condition, good or bad.
3. The good condition of the soul is virtue (or excellence of the soul and person, as such), and virtue is wisdom (that is, philosophical knowledge of what is good and what is bad in a human life).
4. Virtue (wisdom) makes one's life fulfilled and happy and is necessary for complete human fulfillment and happiness.
5. All (adult) human actions are fully motivated by (that is, they ultimately derive psychologically from) what the agent at the time of action thinks (at least implicitly and by assumption) is the best thing to be doing then, given the circumstances as the agent takes them to be.
6. Actually achieving wisdom appears to be so hard that pretty much no human being does ever finally achieve it.

IV

Philosophy as a way of life includes three essential roles for philosophy:

1. Philosophy tells you how to live—what to do, what not to do, with what thoughts, in what spirit.
2. Philosophical understanding, lodged in your mind, steers your whole life, by directly and on its own moving you to every choice and action making up your life.
3. One thing that philosophy tells you is that philosophical study (discussions and the like) is a very good thing, and should be included in your life (if you are up to it).

LECTURE II.
PLOTINUS

Philosophy became a way of life in the ancient tradition because of the relationship leading Greek philosophers saw between philosophy and the highest human good, or *eudaimonia*—happiness as we conventionally but inadequately translate it.[1] For them, philosophical thought and understanding, which bring to human life, as they think, a full grasp of the ultimate truth about human nature and the human good, are a necessary, and if brought to completion a sufficient, source of fulfillment and happiness for us. This applies as much to the Platonist philosophers of late antiquity, to whom we turn in this second lecture, as it does to Socrates and his earlier successors. But there is one key contrast between Platonist philosophy and all the predecessor Greek philosophies. All Greek philosophers in both the classical and the Hellenistic periods conceived philosophy, and its task in providing us with our highest good, as addressing human beings as fully committed to life in the familiar world of physical objects, with properties we come to know through the use of our natural capacities of sensation, and to our life experience deriving from our own place in this world. This is a world of personal concerns with involvements that affect our daily lives, and of social and political issues to be addressed through philosophically informed principles that define good living and lead us to a this-worldly happiness.

This is so even if, for some earlier philosophers, such a happy life would be rewarded with an even happier afterlife as a spirit, no longer as such an embodied denizen of the physical world, and even if some earlier philosophers recognized additional, and crucially important, human activities related to knowledge of a higher reality than the physical. In short, in the whole prior history of Greek philosophy, philosophy is aimed at helping us live the lives we all know we have got, in the here and now—and never mind (from the point of view of a happy human life) any supposed afterlife, lived under other than the conditions of embodiment that we know all too well. The happy life of immortality is at best a distant hope, one that may vaguely inspire weaker minds, which might need such reassurance, in order to live a decent this-worldly life. In the prior tradition,

1. In writing this lecture, I have drawn on chapter 6 of my book *Pursuits of Wisdom: Six Ways of Life in Ancient Philosophy from Socrates to Plotinus.* In preparing the published version, I was able to refer to written comments of A. A. Long and Jaclyn Maxwell, presented at the seminar after I delivered the lecture. I thank them for their comments and assistance.

such a hope is not appealed to in any way by a proper philosopher—that is, by any *actually* happy person—in shaping and pursuing their life.

In turning to Plotinus and late Platonism, we step into a different philosophical world.[2] The value and function of philosophy for these Platonists are not to enrich and deepen our this-worldly life, as they were for the classical and Hellenistic philosophers, but, much more, to disengage us, and take us away, from it, even while we are (perforce) living it. In Plotinus's theories of human nature—of the human essence—and, as a result of that, of human happiness or the human good, as we will see, *we,* the human persons that we are, who live either well or badly as embodied living beings, are not in fact essentially embodied things at all; *our* life, the life of the *persons* that we are, lies not at all in acts or experiences of the senses, or in the choices and actions that make up our daily lives in our families, with our friends, and in our societies. Our life, Plotinus thinks, lies exclusively in activities of pure intellectual thinking that we, all of us, engage in all the time, but most of us without even realizing it; *our* task is to become as self-conscious as possible of this activity, and to constantly focus our minds upon it. This is something we can do, in principle, even while, qua embodied animal, living an embodied life. If we do this, we lift our*selves* altogether out of the this-worldly world, and up to a world of pure intellectual thinking, in which our true life has, all along, been taking place—but now, if we reach the final goal of self-purification from the bodily world, our life consists in a full and active understanding of the intelligible objects of that thought, and we self-consciously and *actively* live that life. That life, for Plotinus, as we will see, is the human good and human happiness. Philosophy's task—one that only philosophy can perform—is to make us *truly* alive, and to keep us alive, in that self-consciously intellectual way.

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Before turning to discuss Plotinus's theories of the human person and human happiness, which I have just adumbrated, we need to take into account what I will present as three separate aspects of the intellectual context in which Plotinus did his philosophical work. The topics around which I will organize my discussion later, in the second half of the lecture, are also three in number: Plotinus's theories of (1) the human person, (2) the human good, and (3) the character and role of the human virtues

2. Plotinus's works are most readily available (Greek text with facing English translation) in A. H. Armstrong, *Plotinus,* 7 vols. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, Loeb Classical Library, 1966–88).

in enabling us to attain our natural good (these are listed in the appendix, section III). As for the intellectual context into which Plotinus's views must be placed, I need to say something, first, about how Plotinus and his fellow Platonists conceived their relationship to Plato's own writings. Second, and, I'm afraid, at considerable length, I need to place Plotinus's work on these topics in moral philosophy within the wider context of his Platonist metaphysics and worldview. This metaphysical worldview provides the crucial and commanding perspective from which Plotinus considers all the questions of moral philosophy that we will be investigating. Finally, and briefly, I need to point out one pervasive feature of the spiritual context within which both the revived pagan Platonist philosophizing of later antiquity that we will be discussing and the development of Christian thought during the same period of time proceeded—what has been called a widespread spiritual crisis. In the appendix, section II, I've listed these three introductory topics, to which I now turn.

In fact, during the first three centuries of the Common Era, pagan philosophy itself became simply a "Platonist" endeavor and way of life. Many philosophers already in the first century before and the first century after the millennium began to react very negatively to the materialist, or corporealist, philosophical perspectives of the major Hellenistic philosophies and philosophical ways of life, those of Stoicism and Epicureanism, according to which human souls and all the rest of reality were bodily entities. The spiritual context I just mentioned has a lot to do with this dissatisfaction; I'll say something about that shortly. Many philosophers were strongly attracted to ideas about the human soul (that is, about human nature), and about what they regarded as the true world itself (a true reality conceived as standing behind and above things as they appear to us through our sensory engagement with physical objects), that made us, and reality itself, fundamentally spiritual entities, not bodily at all. For these philosophers, such spiritualist ideas found their most powerful and persuasive presentation in Plato's dialogues—hence the classification of their philosophical movement as Platonism. But they actually claimed to trace these ideas back ultimately to Pythagoras and the Pythagoreans of southern Italy in the sixth century BCE—indeed, further back, to a primordial, rather mystical, "wisdom," supposedly available to some unnamable most ancient thinkers, long shrouded in the mists of prehistory.

Because of these primordial thinkers' nearness, in those earliest days of the world, to the gods, Platonists thought, the task of philosophy

ought properly to be one of recovering this ancient knowledge, through reading authoritative texts and through creative philosophical thinking of one's own on the basis of them. On this widely shared account, fanciful though it was and based on little or no evidence, the primordial wisdom was handed down to, or rather recovered in historical times by, thinkers such as Pythagoras and Parmenides, and then, at last, dressed up in the proper philosophical format of argument and analysis, through the philosophical genius of Plato. Late Platonists, therefore, thought of true philosophy as grounded in a primordial wisdom discovered by the most ancient Greeks, and recovered for humankind in more recent times by Pythagoras (who, however, left no writings), and formulated by Plato in his dialogues, though incompletely and often in superficially misleading ways. Their own work consisted, as they themselves thought of it, in continuing this task of recovery by explaining, interpreting, and arguing for the doctrines of this alleged Greek wisdom, while defending it from objections, and updating it for their own times, by drawing upon more recent philosophy (especially, in Plotinus's case, Aristotle and the Stoics) where post-Platonic thinking seemed compatible and helpful. And in order to do that, they constantly took themselves to Plato's writings as the repository, if one that has to be interpreted in the right ways, of suggestions to follow up in their own work of independent theory construction.

The crucial point of this ancient wisdom was the recognition that all of what we ordinarily take for real—the physical world as a whole, all its contents, including our own bodies—are misleading derivations from a higher realm of *true* being. We ourselves—our souls, the seats of our consciousness—are immaterial spirits, allied in their nature to this immaterial true being, this *real* reality. The study and knowledge of true being (including the knowledge of our own souls as spiritual allies of the true being) become the foundation of all proper philosophy. By the middle of the third century CE, when Plotinus wrote, and continuing thereafter until Greek philosophy's effective end, by the end of the sixth century, pagan philosophy, considered as an independent source of authoritative ideas about the world and about human life, just meant a commitment to this Platonist philosophy—in one form or another, with varying details. It consisted in putting ourselves in touch intellectually with true being, and, as we will see, in living wholly *for* our own "return" to our origin, as intellects and consciousnesses, in that being, upon death.

The late Platonist version of the primordial wisdom starts from an appropriation of the fundamental distinction, so sharply drawn in Plato's

best-known works, between Forms and the physical world, the latter being derived from, and through and through characterized by, its relation of "participation," at different places within it and at different times, in these Platonic Forms or Ideas. The physical world, and everything in it, is perceptible, at least in principle; the Forms constitute a realm that is not perceptible at all, but rather one that is entirely "intelligible," as they put it: not our senses, but only our powers of intellect bring us knowledge of the existence and individual natures or essences of these Forms.

The philosophical principle at the basis of Platonism, early and late, which leads to this distinction between Forms and the (so-called) sensible realm, is the claim that the natures or essences of all *natural* physical objects, and of all the *natural* properties (including mathematical ones) of any object, are not located in the world of nature at all—that is, in the world that we humans, and other animals, have cognitive access to, initially, only through the use of our senses. There are, in the physical world, things and properties that *have* these natures, and we can examine and learn about those things and properties—about how they behave, how they may be connected and related to one another—by observation with our senses, and experience and study, using our memories and making projections from the past to the future, and so on. But, Platonists claim, the natures *themselves* are not there, to be learned about by any use, however extensive and effective, of our senses and memories and powers of generalization and of effective projection to the future, from data we might collect about things or properties having those natures. We can find out all kinds of things about dogs, individually or as a group, or about the color red, in that sort of "empirical" way. But we cannot find out in such ways what it is to *be* a dog (what the dog's nature or essence is), or what the color red *is* in its essence or nature. Those natures are, as one may say, "instantiated" in the natural world, but *they* are not there, in themselves. Nonetheless, it is an undeniable fact that human beings, apparently alone among the animals, do possess the concept or idea of the nature of something. So humans can become engaged in investigating the whole issue of the natures of the things that we can observe in the sensible world to which we seem to belong. For Platonists, the impulse that leads to and makes philosophy possible is precisely the impulse to wonder *what* the nature of something is, or indeed in general to wonder about what *a* nature could possibly be. This is a puzzle for us, given that all we are apparently ever cognitively confronted with are only things or properties *instantiating* a nature.

For Platonists, following Plato's own usage, these natures are what we traditionally refer to as Forms (with a capital letter)—Platonic Forms. The crucial feature of a Form is that in order to be the nature of something (say, the nature of humankind)—that is, in order to be what it is to *be* human—it must itself be human in a complete and perfect way. The Platonists think that the essence of humanity can only (as it must) be the principle for organizing and otherwise disposing some physical materials into a physical human being, and for sustaining them in that status, if it really and fully *is* human itself. It is not another human *being,* maybe a "super" one, wonderfully powerful, and so on. But it has to, and can only, provide and sustain that organization for a human being by *being* what it is providing—human. That means that the Form must itself be human, in a special and perfect or complete way of being human, quite different from the way any physical human being is human. It is essentially, in its very nature, human, and being human is *all* that it is. Physical human beings are material objects, made of physical substances of various sorts disposed and organized, held together, and made to function, in certain ways by the presence to these materials of this Form. Physical human beings are a lot else besides human: they have many properties and characteristics, some related to their humanity (such as their shapes and sizes and their possession of certain organs and other physical parts), others not, or not so much so (for example, chemical and other physical properties belonging to the materials making them up). Furthermore, the underlying materials that make up a human being are not *essentially* human. These materials are not, even taken together as a whole, and structured in such a way as to make up a human being, human in their natures: in their natures, they remain the particular specific materials, or complex of materials, that they are (and even such natures belong to them only contingently). Any physical thing is only *contingently* whatever it is. By contrast, the Form is not a material being at all, and it has no other sort of "substrate" characterized by the term *human.* Each Form is what it is *essentially,* and is solely that one thing: human, or red, or tall, or beautiful, or ugly, and so forth, depending on the particular Form that might be in question. No physical thing is anything at all essentially.

Each Form is therefore a being, in the strictest and strongest sense: it *is,* in its nature and essentially, something in particular. One Form *is* human, another *is* canine, another *is* beautiful, another *is* double, yet others *are* respectively tall or short, heavy or light, round or square, red or green or blue, and so on. No physical thing or property *is* anything at all, in this

strong, strict, and proper sense of *being* something. Each predicate we employ in speaking truly of any natural object is something that belongs to it not by or in the nature of that object; each term we predicate instead merely indicates some nature, some Form, that the object only "instantiates." Collectively, then, we can say that the Forms, in being the natures of the natural objects and of their natural properties, are also the only true, strict, and proper beings that exist. Taken together, they constitute "that which *is*." The physical world, by contrast, and everything in it, is no being at all; the physical world instantiates myriad beings, but to instantiate something is not at all to *be* that thing—indeed, it precludes it. The physical world, without any doubt, *exists,* and by all means it is not nothing, but it would be a mistake to consider it as a collection of beings, of things that fully *are* any of the things we may (correctly) describe them as.

What then are these physical things, if not *beings*? For the Platonists, they are metaphysical reflections, or shadows, cast on, and into, the matter from which the physical world is formed.

I return to that shortly. Two important points about beings, these Forms, must first be noted. First, we can see from their effects in the physical world that taken altogether, as a whole, the set of beings constitutes a well-integrated, intimately closely bound together, unified system of entities. The physical world is a marvelously well-ordered thing, with all its parts and all their distinctive properties working together in such a way as to maintain and sustain a single ongoing and recurrent "life" over the days, years, and centuries of its essentially temporal existence. This makes it clear that the beings, too, on which this world depends through the process I have called instantiation and participation are a unified, well-ordered, integrated set of entities. Each of the natures of the different Forms—what the different ones of them are in their natures—is linked to each of the other natures in such a way as to constitute a single system. One might perfectly reasonably think of the task of grasping the natures of things (say, the nature of a dog, or the nature of red color), as a one-by-one process. But ultimately one will not succeed in *fully* grasping any single Form except by grasping closely related ones as well (the natures of other animals, the natures of other colors), in their relationship to it, and ultimately by grasping *all* the rest as a unified whole system. One must see each Form in the context of the whole system of Forms of which it is just one part, in order finally and fully to understand any given Form.

The second point concerns what the Platonists call the exclusively "intelligible" character of Forms. Physical objects and their properties, as

possessed by them, can be seen or heard, or otherwise taken note of, and investigated, through the use of the senses. But their natures, as I explained, are not found in the physical world at all. These natures must be grasped, investigated, and learned about solely through intellectual means, not at all by sensory ones. One must approach them through pure thought, starting from what we see or hear, but attempting to grasp essences and natures, considered as principles of organization (that is, intellectual structures *for* ordering, each in specific ways, the "sensible" or perceptible materials that the world provides). Since these natures are essentially "intelligible," and in no way "sensible," we can say that they exist in and for the understanding, that is, in and for being grasped intellectually. The Forms retain their inherent connection to being understood, even if none of us has ever grasped, or is currently grasping them, in thought. As such, as "intelligible," they must, in existing, also *be* understood. They are not merely capable of being understood; their essence is to *be* understood, to be grasped intellectually through pure thought. Hence, Platonists think, we must conceive this organized system of beings, the Forms, as, in their very natures, constant objects of thought; they are the contents of an intellect whose whole existence is, reciprocally, to be thinking them and *understanding* them in a full and total grasp of their individual and systematically connected natures. If there exist Forms, then that is the same thing as for there to exist an Intellect, a universal Intellect, or Intellect of or in the universe, which is, and is nothing but, the timeless act of thinking and fully understanding all the Forms.

We have now arrived at one of the three "Substances" (or, in technical Platonist terms, three "hypostases") that make up true reality, the reality ultimately lying behind and responsible for the physical world. (I list these Substances in the appendix, section II.2.) The universal Intellect, this entity whose whole nature it is to actively grasp the whole system of Forms, in its full and explicitly laid out, orderly intellectual interconnection and multiplicity, is one of the three basic realities that make up Plotinus's and the other late Platonists' metaphysical system. What I have already said about Forms leads us quickly and easily to a second of these Substances: the "first" or "highest" or ultimate Substance, or first god. (For Platonists, all eternal things are gods; Intellect, too, is a god, but not the *first* one, since it metaphysically depends on the One.) This is the source of the reality of Intellect (and so of the existence of the physical world itself, too, since that, in turn, derives wholly from Intellect or Forms, as we have seen). I have emphasized the essential unity of the whole set of beings or Forms,

in that they constitute a single fully interconnected system of separate beings, each of them a distinct and different single nature from the others. In fact, this set of beings is what we could call a unity *in* plurality. That is, it is a unified set of many distinct things: it is a unitary thing, but the many distinct Forms within this unit are themselves a definite, fully determinate number of unitary entities. Thus, each of these "units" in the set is, in a different way, a unity on its own. Each nature or Form is one unified thing: the canine nature, the nature of the color red, the nature of beauty, and so on across the vast whole set of Forms are each a single coherent whole nature. Even if when we humans grasp a nature, we grasp it in some articulated set of ideas (say, in traditional terms, by thinking of the human as the featherless, biped animal), this does not mean that human nature itself is divided into separate and assembled parts; our thought just expresses the singleness and unity of human nature in an articulated way, which enables us to relate it to and distinguish it from other similar natures, seeing them all as distinct parts of the whole set of Forms.

In these two ways, unity is essential to being. *Each* being is in a strong way a unity—each is a single nature, one unit in the overall set of Forms—and this whole set of beings is strongly a unity (a unity in plurality, in this case), too. In being "units" and a unit, in these ways, the Forms are exhibiting a feature of them that is essential to their status as beings. Beings, just as such, are unities, and, just as such, they are altogether a systematic unity in plurality. But, Plotinus thinks, that beings are of this character must depend on something beyond them (that is, beyond their mere *being*), in fact on something whose very nature (if one could speak of it as having a nature), and the whole of whose nature, *is* to be one, to be unitary, unified. Just as the physical dogs depend upon the canine nature, which, unlike them, is in its essence canine, so the Forms depend for their unity on an entity that is one, in a complete and final way, and nothing but one: it is the paradigm of unity, it is what it *is* to be one, being one and unified just *is* the whole of it. The being of the Forms, therefore, implies the existence of a further Substance, the One, as Plotinus sometimes calls it (but often, because of its ultimate character, he does not name it at all, but just points to it as "the highest" or "the first"). The One is the ultimate reality in the Platonist metaphysical system: it is responsible for the possibility of beings (since they are, and have to be, unified in the ways I have indicated), and for the particular ways that these different beings differ from one another. Indeed, in some way that is "beyond" any kind of causation, the One brings Intellect and the Forms into existence. As an absolute,

self-contained, and totally independent, eternal reality, something, so to speak, real to its very core, actively "turning in" to itself just on its own, as the essential unity that it is, it is so "overfull" of reality that it "overflows" and therein "generates" being, and beings.

The One and Intellect, then, are two of the three basic Substances in Plotinus's metaphysical system. In Intellect, Forms are thought not only in a timeless way but entirely in themselves, with no thought of their role as the natures *of* physical things. They are thought as a single unified set of ordered, mutually interrelated, intellectual structures. However, of course, Forms are ordered structures *for* organizing matter; this is something, as we could loosely say, essential to them. What, however, explains this further step in the functioning of Forms—that they are natures of things in the physical world? This function does not derive from Intellect, which as I have said just thinks and grasps them as systematically interrelated intelligible structures. It belongs, for Platonists, to Soul (with a capital *S*). Soul is a third single unified, eternal, intelligible Substance, in addition to the One and Intellect. It possesses a full understanding of the whole system of Forms, as Intellect does too, but we find in Soul a fully articulated understanding of each and of all of them, *as* the specific nature it is *in relationship to* the physical world. Soul, no less than Intellect, consists in an act of understanding, an act of thought; however, its way of thinking Forms, as a whole system, is a way in which they are grasped, specifically and precisely, *as* principles for organizing the physical, material world into a maximally well-ordered system of its own. Unlike Intellect, Soul thinks Forms as instantiable and for instantiation—for being participated in in the material, physical world. Thus, whereas Intellect thinks Forms in a way that sees them as mathematical structures, making up a mathematically unified system, Soul thinks them concretely, as Red, or Dog, for example: that is, in terms of a linguistically elaborated definition of what it is to *be* red or a dog. Moreover, in doing that, and because it does so, Soul moves to create the physical world, and to shape, organize, and direct everything in it. It does this by casting those metaphysical shadows or reflections of relevant Forms, which I mentioned, onto and into the cosmic matter, and by overseeing the coming and going of these reflections—the coming and going that constitute all the physically existent things, with all their natural properties, and all the events making up the history of the world. For Platonists, it belongs to the very nature of Soul, as such, to move itself toward creation: this is part of what it *is* to be soul.

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Here, finally, we reach the essential point of connection from this metaphysical background to our ethical concerns, to which I now turn for the rest of the lecture.

This single Substance, Soul, functions at two principal levels, in performing its tasks of creation and management of the physical world (altogether, in fact, it functions at five—I'll come back to that). First, as World-soul, Soul creates with their individual natures, and manages the movements of, everything belonging to the world of nature, insofar as it does so belong—natural stuffs, natural objects, including plants and animals. Second, however, we need to observe that individual human souls make decisions, form practical attitudes, engage in acts of evaluation and decision. Individual human souls (not the World-soul) are the ultimate sources of all the voluntary acts of each one of us. For Platonists, it is Soul *in each of us,* then, that functions in this second way. In short, while the World-soul takes care of the needs of the rest of the natural world, all on its own, the individual soul of each of *us* takes care, well or badly, of our own individual needs, as naturally embodied rational animals, by moving us from place to place in all the richly varied ways we may do that. And, of course, since the essential activity of all Soul is the intellectual grasp of Forms, our human souls also give us the higher capacity to think intellectually about Forms.

Before turning to details of Plotinus's theory of the human person and human happiness, in which our ethical concerns come to the fore, I need to take up briefly the question I mentioned at the outset, concerning the spiritual context in which both pagan Platonist philosophizing and Christian thought came into existence, as Christianity transformed itself from a local religious movement among uneducated Hebrews into a movement offering personal salvation for educated people across the Roman Empire. Pierre Hadot describes this period well, as one beset by what he calls a "psychological phenomenon" widespread among intellectuals of all stripes, characterized by a "spiritual tension, an anxiety," even a "nervous depression."[3] At its root was a deep unease over our place, as rational, thinking consciousnesses, within the physical world, a fearful sense of not really belonging, of living somehow in an alien place, where we suffer simply by being there. In philosophical terms, what lay behind this was a momentous shift in people's conception of their own *selves,*

3. See his "La fin du paganisme," in *Études de philosophie ancienne,* by Pierre Hadot (Paris: Belles Lettres, 1998), 341–74.

and this new conception is still with many of us today (regrettably so, as it seems to me). People began to feel or think that what they most fundamentally and intimately *are* is not even, as, for example, it was for the Stoics, a mind, which can of course be comfortably conceived as part of nature. That is how the Stoics, and Aristotle too, conceived it. No: these late ancient people began to think of themselves as *pure consciousnesses,* each one an "I" of pure rational self-awareness, floating above physical reality, no part of the natural world at all—as mind and consciousness were for all previous Greek philosophers. Understandably, then, they could feel the deepest anxiety over what our inevitable involvement in physical reality, and subjection somehow to physical events in our conscious states, can mean about not only our identities, but our very lives—and, especially, our deaths. The result was an intense search for relief from these self-induced anxieties. One way was the way of pagan, rational, Platonist philosophy (Saint Augustine, around the year 400, notoriously tried that). But Augustine, and increasingly many others, felt they needed a more personal savior than the Platonist One, to be the ground of all being, with a nature cognate to one's own pure nonworldly self-consciousness, in which one could engulf oneself, and find salvation from these anxieties by withdrawing from the "alien" physical world.

This new, anxious conception of human identity underlies, and deeply affects, one of Plotinus's most brilliant philosophical innovations, his theory of what a human person actually *is:* namely, a pure intellect. Plotinus faces severe difficulties in adapting his account of Soul—as we have seen, an eternal substance whose only activity is pure intellectual thought, with eternal Forms for its content or objects—so that it can accommodate the various phenomena, universally recognized in the Greek philosophical tradition, of individual human consciousnesses. Like other living things, including all types of plants and all nonrational animals, World-soul, as we have seen, makes the material stuffs human bodies are made of, in their various combinations, mixtures, and distributions in constituting a human body. (For this, and what follows in my discussion below, see the appendix, section IV.) It is also responsible for the shaping of all our bodily organs and their distribution across our bodies, as well as for the occurrence over time, through the functioning of some of those organs, of such automatic life functions as nutrition, breathing, heartbeat, heat maintenance, growth, and the maintenance of the equilibriums of physical health. World-soul does, indeed, do all these things through thoughts it thinks—eternally—in relation to all the places, over time, where human

beings are located. In doing so, it applies a vast array of Forms at those places and times: these Forms are the natures of all the relevant types of material stuffs and objects required for life at that automatic level.

Human beings, however, as I said above, seem to have what we can conveniently speak of as individual souls, in which their individual consciousnesses reside. For Platonists, this way of conceiving ourselves expresses a fact about how Soul itself, the eternal single substance, operates within our bodies, over and above the ways already mentioned that World-soul operates in forming our bodies and organs and animating them with those automatic functions I have just spoken of. Soul in itself, that eternal pure intellect whose single activity is thinking, in a certain way, of Forms—not qua *World*-soul—gives us these additional sorts of direction and management that things of our nature require. However, the individual consciousness that Soul gives us is quite complex. It operates at three levels. At the first level, we have perceptions, nonrational desires, and emotions. At the second, we have the power of reasoned thought and decision making about events in the physical world, and about their significance for our physical life. And at the third, we have the power to think about Forms, and grasp their natures and relationships in constituting the whole system of Forms—that is, we have the very power that Soul itself *is.* In constituting us as the particular sort of animal that we are, then, the Substance, Soul provides us with all three of these sets of powers.

First, then, how does it manage to give us the first two sets of powers, those listed in the appendix, sections IV.3 and IV.4? Problems immediately arise at the first of these levels, but they extend equally through the second.

The human soul, like all soul, is necessarily a purely intellectual entity. How can a purely intellectual thing possess and function with perceptions and nonrational desires, and with elaborated trains of thought that seek and give reasons for a particular person's doing or not doing specific things in specific observed circumstances? The nub of the problem, as Plotinus sees it, is that all the functions of perception and desire, shared with animals, as well as those special ones to do with human (as one could say) empirical reasoning, are in a certain essential way shared with the body. When we perceive, we use our bodily organs; when we are hungry or our foot gets stepped on, we experience something, for experiencing which some corresponding bodily affection is (at least normally) required. Indeed, in some crucial sense the bodily affection is part of the

overall conscious state or act of perception or feeling. When we are angry, to draw on a famous analysis of Aristotle in his *de Anima,* there is blood boiling around the area where the heart is located, and in no mere coincidental way; when we remember something, we are attending to traces in our minds from previous bodily experiences; when we think out concrete plans for action, we have in some way to visualize or otherwise represent in our minds what we are to do. In all these cases, the conscious experience is linked with bodily states and events, in such a way that, following Aristotle (on whom Plotinus bases this part of his theory), we need to think of these activities of consciousness as ones that, in some way, are "common" to body and soul—they are not wholly "soul phenomena" at all. But how can a purely intellectual thing, something essentially self-contained, and occupied in its thoughts wholly with nonbodily entities, Forms, share any of its operations with anything bodily? It is one thing to suppose that the substance Soul, by thinking thoughts of Forms, can (as World-soul) creatively cause (from the outside, so to speak) physical objects, sustain them in existence, and cause their varied movements. But the states and activities here concerned are ones where consciousness is itself mutually affected through its interactions with the body, as consciousness engages in movements of perception, feeling, and action. When we feel a pain in our foot, some state of the body is what we are feeling, what we are conscious of, and indeed that state of the body is what *gives* us this feeling. Correspondingly for the other cases. How, then, can we make sense of the human soul as being so linked to the human body that some of its operations are ones that have a physical, bodily side to them?

Plotinus's ingenious solution is to suppose that in animating human beings (as well as other animals), Soul provides a special sort of "illumination" in their bodies. (For this and what follows, see the appendix, section V.) Soul casts a certain "image" of itself (another metaphor) into the bodies of these living things. It is this image or illumination in the body that, taken together with the body, constitutes it as a "living being" (in Greek, a *zōon*). This image *is* animal consciousness (including perceptual and desiring and emotional consciousness). The living being itself, constituted by this consciousness in that body, possesses the powers of sensation, memory, physical desire, and emotional reaction, all of which have both bodily and conscious components, and it does so because of the soul-*image* animating and "illuminating" it, and so making it conscious in just these specific ways. The point we need to notice is that Plotinus, by attributing the powers of sense perception and sensory memory, bodily

desire, and emotion to this soul-image, can avoid having to think of Soul itself as directly providing or grounding these activities, ones that are so evidently alien, and contrary, to its own purely intellectual nature. Soul itself, and therefore all particular souls, being purely spiritual, thinking, "intelligible" entities (as Platonists say), could not possibly be "affected" by anything bodily, as this soul-image, however, can be and is affected, when it activates all these powers. It is not difficult to conceive of an *image* of Soul, just because as an "image" it is darker and more obscure, and somewhat deformed, as something mingled with the body that it animates in precisely the ways required. We can suppose (even if we do not fully understand it) that this image can make us, and other animals, conscious with *these* sorts of bodily consciousness. Its soul-image is the basis for a human being's engaging in these particular forms of conscious experience.

The Substance, Soul, or equivalently *our* soul, creates this image of itself when it "comes down," as Platonists say (yet another metaphor), into a human body, in order to animate it. We, like other animals, need to have powers of individual consciousness, in order to observe our particular surroundings and obtain food, avoid danger and harm, and interact in the social ways with members of the same species or other species that are natural to the animal kind to which we belong. This has to include desires for certain sorts of food and other nourishment, and emotional responses to perceived dangers or prospects of harm, as well as emotions and desires to give us interests in, and to motivate us to engage in, our various natural activities of social life. Each animal has to have its own complete system of such forms of consciousness, and Soul provides us with an appropriate *human* soul-image, which gives us the forms of consciousness we need in order to grow up properly, reproduce and thrive and flourish, according to our own physical nature as the kind of animal we are. Each animal has charge of very significant parts of its own life through its use of its powers of embodied consciousness, which therefore must be a fully integrated, developing, and sustained system for its whole life span. Thus, we can say generally that the forms of consciousness belonging to the soul-image of any given animal are bestowed upon it for the sake of its taking care of itself, and adequately providing for its physical life, and for seeing to it that, so far as outer circumstances make possible, it thrives, reproduces, raises offspring so that they too will be able to thrive, and so that it lives a naturally effective whole physical life. The soul-image, both in human beings and in other, nonrational, animals, focuses *exclusively,* then, on the

single individual animal in which it is lodged, enabling and directing that animal to be concerned for itself and its physical life.

This soul-image simply is, in nonrational animals, their soul, their consciousness. In human beings, this animal consciousness is certainly part of what a human soul encompasses. But, because we are rational animals, in receiving our soul-image we must also acquire the further powers that I mentioned above, of empirical inference and ordinary reasoning about what to do, and why, in particular empirical circumstances: we have to notice things, draw inferences, think about what is good for us, or bad, and plan out courses of action. Thus, we have powers of rational thought too; we conceptualize, seek and give reasons through which to understand what we are affected by perceptually and through which to shape our feelings and desires. Plotinus seems not entirely clear, or perhaps even quite consistent, about these additional powers and their operation. Since they clearly do depend upon our being conscious of, and making reference in our thoughts to, physical entities as such, they must be, somehow, aspects of the soul-image given by Soul to human beings as part of their nature—they involve embodied, jointly conscious and bodily, events. On the other hand, Plotinus seems to say that even reasonings about particular matters of fact are, in some way or aspect, activities of what he calls the "higher" soul, the third level of human consciousness I distinguished above. That is because, according to Plotinus, even such reasonings come "from" the Forms, or rather from our implicit awareness of them—an awareness that, in itself, is totally a matter of abstract, purely intellectual thinking. We have to be thinking implicitly of various specific Forms in order to classify the physical things being thought about under their natural kinds, and so, in fact, to *think* about them at all, even in a merely empirical way. So, for Plotinus, what I have been calling empirical thinking, whether practical or more or less theoretical, and all other discursive thought, derives from a power of consciousness that is a hybrid, involving both the soul-image and the higher soul or pure intellect.

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So, finally, given these complexities of the human soul, what should we say the human person—"ourselves," as Plotinus puts it—actually is?[4] Where in all this complexity are *we*—the consciousness that *we* are, the

4. In my discussion, just above, of the Plotinian "soul-image" and in discussing in what follows Plotinus's theory of the human person and his theories of the virtues and human happiness, I draw especially on three of the "ethical" treatises that Porphyry, Plotinus's posthumous editor, collected in Plotinus's *Enneads* I (I 1, I 2, and I 4).

"I" of pure self-awareness that he and his contemporaries anxiously postulated? As I have already said, for Plotinus the living being that, in some sense or way I am, consists in a certain soul-*image* embedded in a certain human body. *I* cannot be *that.* This, what Plotinus calls my "lower" soul, cannot be me; I cannot be an image of my soul, brought into being by my soul when it came into my body. I must be my *soul.* The image of my soul, the seat of my bodily feelings and of my body-related nonrational desires, as well as of perceptions and merely empirical reasoning, is something I *have,* something "attached" to me, as Plotinus says once; but it is not me. In my *self*-consciousness—my consciousness of my consciousness, when I am conscious of objects of embodied experience or objects of pure thought—I am aware of myself, of my soul, as something higher, indeed (since, as a Platonist, I know that souls are spiritual, eternal beings) as something purely intellectual. *I* am exclusively my "higher" soul, as Plotinus often refers to it. I am my intellect. That, Plotinus insists, is what I am conscious of in my *self*-consciousness. The person I am is my intellect; the living being that belongs to me, to this person, is not me.

The question we face, then, is what should this recognition mean for us in thinking of our lives, and of how to lead them? It follows from Plotinus's analysis that, strictly speaking, *our* life can only be the life—the activity—of the highest aspect of our minds; that is, our life, to the extent that we do really *live,* to the extent that *we* are alive, must consist in activities of abstract theoretical thinking about Forms, and in nothing else. However, we—our intellects—do have an embodied life under our care, too, a life that we also in some way live. It is *our* soul-image that, taken with the living human body that it animates, constitutes the living being that in some sense or way each of us is, as well. So we need to consider how to go about relating our*selves*—our intellects—to that life. We are always, while awake and even to some extent sometimes while asleep, active with our senses and with their effects in memory: those activities and experiences plainly do belong to the same unified total consciousness. We are also filled with feelings of pleasure and pain and, depending on the particular characters of our soul-images, all kinds of emotional reaction and response to what we perceive and desire. Those states of consciousness plainly do belong to our single consciousness, the one that we have because of our souls, including its image in our bodies.

For Plotinus, the crucial point in working out correct ideas about how to live our embodied life is that, at least to a significant extent, it is up to *us*—to our intellects—what to give attention to, or else to ignore and

consciously look away from. In giving itself to us, Soul makes us, that is, our intellects, in charge of our lives. We exercise this leadership through the capacity, essential to an individual human intellect, lodged in a certain body at a certain place, to direct our intellectual attention—our consciousness—explicitly and self-consciously, as Plotinus picturesquely puts it, "upward" toward Forms and/or "downward" toward the life of the soul-image and the body. To turn *upward* is to attend to and exercise our powers as pure intellects, with concentration, and without in doing so attending to anything involving, or having to do essentially with, bodies—with our own, or ones surrounding us. We can do this, Plotinus emphasizes, even if and while one may still be *aware* of one's body and what is going on in it, as well as of other bodies around us. To turn downward is to attend to, and focus upon, the life of daily activities, experiences, and concerns, the life we possess insofar as we are embodied things. This orientation of our attention, of the *focus* of our consciousness, is something for *us,* our individual intellects, to determine. It is in that power of focus that our essential freedom as agents resides, on Plotinus's view.

Now in fact, so long as we are alive at all, even as individual pure intellects, we cannot fail to be conscious of what is "below," and it would be quite unreasonable, if not entirely impossible, to attempt either to be actually unaware of what goes on down there or, as a general policy, simply to distract oneself and hold one's attention resolutely away from it, in favor of looking exclusively upward, toward Forms. The two alternatives—keeping our attention directed upward, and directing it downward—cannot be treated as mutually exclusive. Even if we follow Plotinus and accept that our true selves are our intellects, we must somehow combine an interest in what is above with *some* interest in what is below in our lives, so long as we are alive at all. No doubt, one can on some occasions and for some periods of time distract oneself, and train oneself so that for those times one hardly even notices what is below, as one concentrates one's attention upward. Plotinus definitely does recommend doing that, on occasions, since it is exclusively in those activities of explicit and devoted, fully absorbed abstract thinking that our true good lies, on his view. (I'll turn to that shortly.) But, in our lives as a whole, we must divide our attention, whether at different times or even simultaneously; we must be attentive to and concerned for what is below—not just be *conscious* of it—as well as for the above.

The principal question of ethics, for Plotinus, concerns the basis on which, and the spirit in which, one ought to effect this division. What

reasons are there, lying in one's own nature and in the nature of reality, that could validly determine how one should combine holding one's attention, as a regular practice, below, with also, as a regular practice, turning it and holding it above? This question concerns one's basic, constantly maintained, practical assumptions, one's worked-out thoughts, convictions, and attitudes, about the *values* for oneself—namely, for an individual intellect—*in* such concerns. What basic outlook ought one to adopt, in governing one's use of one's intellect's natural power to focus and pay attention either upward or downward or both, in the course of one's life? What should one *care* about in the exercise of one's lower powers of consciousness? How should one relate those cares to the consummate and final value that one places in the exercise of one's higher power, when it is being exercised to perfection?

In asking these questions we are asking about the Plotinian and Platonist conception of the human virtues, since in the whole of ancient philosophy it is by possessing and exercising the human virtues in one's life that one lives well, and so lives happily. Since Plotinus holds that what *we* are is only one of our soul capacities, our intellects, for him whatever conditions of our souls can count as virtues, and so as enablers of happiness, must stem from a firm and fundamental awareness of our selves as our intellects exclusively. We are no other element in our consciousness; the rest of our consciousness belongs to us, and in that sense is ours, but it is not us. Hence, for Plotinus, human virtue, overall, must be a complex thing, including both specific conditions that structure the direct uses of our intellects in addressing and attending to its specific task of knowing Forms and ones belonging to the lower consciousness, governing its relations to the physical world and to our physical lives. (For ease of reference I list these virtuous conditions in the appendix, section VI.) The first are virtues that concern our activities "above," as we actively attend to and exercise our higher capacities, once we have turned our concentrated attention upward and have begun to recover or make self-conscious to ourselves the full natures of the different Forms—what it is to be a human being, what it is for something to be red, what equality and difference, in their essential natures, are, and so on. The second set of virtues (number 3 in the appendix's list) concerns our activities as we look *down* into the physical world, and relate to our life "below." So Plotinus works out a theory of the human virtues overall that includes, first, an account of the virtuous conditions our intellects need to be in in order to make our intellectual lives—our activities of knowing Forms—perfectly successful

and complete (he describes these as "intellectual" virtues: number 1 in the appendix, section VI), and then an account of the virtues of our lower consciousnesses, as we experience, react to, and make our choices concerning our physical and social environments. These virtues are needed for us to make that life, too—those activities of feeling, desiring, empirical thinking, practical action—as good a life as possible. Plotinus calls these the "political" or "civic" virtues. But he thinks we must recognize a third level of virtues as well: ones that belong to the intellect, just as the first ones do too, but concern the conditions in the intellect that are needed so as to enable us to draw ourselves away—keep our attention when turned below away—from *too* active involvement in and zestful concern for the life "below." We all begin life with such a zestful interest in our bodily experiences and our social satisfactions, and it is extremely hard for any human being not to make this zestful concern central to their life. We need special virtues enabling us to keep, and to focus, our attention, with increasing strength and effectiveness, upon what is "above." These Plotinus calls the "purifying" virtues. By purifying our intellects from the wrong sort of attention when looking downward, it strengthens them in our efforts to look upward, thus enabling us to acquire the "intellectual virtues," as described above.

The key point in the theory of virtue at all three levels, for Plotinus, is that because of what *we* are, our calling is to a life above. The essential and sole activity of the virtue of the human person, as such, is this actively contemplative, full grasp and understanding of intelligible reality. A Platonist's real and sole unqualified interest, therefore—the sole source of satisfaction and fulfillment in life—is in looking away from, and infinitely far above, the physical life below. It lies in a deeply enthralled love of theoretical thinking and knowing, and (equivalently, as we have seen) a love of the true reality of Forms with which that knowing brings us fully into touch. So far as the life below goes, the correct attitude, for Plotinus, is to regard oneself as a caretaker appointed to oversee the life of the individual rational animal that one is—in doing one's own part, alongside the World-soul, in creating and sustaining the life of the physical world. If one lives correctly, one sees that one's living being gets the foods and other physical care it needs; one sees that it relates to other human animals in morally and socially proper ways. But one does these things always from the emotional distance required, for Platonists, by one's true identity as an intellect. To identify oneself in any way or degree with the

lower consciousness, and take a direct and zestful interest in its states, or in objects of pursuit for physical and social life, so far from showing a virtuous disposition of mind, as Aristotle thought it did, is incompatible with the full recognition of one's true identity. If, whether by our action or not, our physical and social life flourishes, the "goods" of our bodies and of our soul-image so attained are not the source of, and must not be regarded as, bringing us any intrinsic, unqualified satisfaction. The lower consciousness and what it undergoes or accomplishes do matter to us, insofar as they are *ours* (though that part of our consciousness is not us). But they are imposed on, or joined to, us, and in that way they are given to us solely to take care of, to offer our leadership over—so long as we are alive (that life too is imposed upon us). True virtue involves accepting and understanding this relationship between ourselves and everything else—bodily and spiritual—that is in this external way ours.

Accordingly, human happiness, or εηäáéïïíßá, simply and solely *is* this activity of perfected, active contemplation and grasp of the Forms. Or, equivalently, it is a fully achieved condition of self-willed, and self-accomplished, actual identification with universal Intellect, the Substance from which one's individual soul ontologically proceeded. The happiness *in* the happy human life, as Plotinus describes it at length in his treatise *On Happiness* (I 4), is that activity of contemplation, carried out without cease, even while asleep, *once* you have acquired the ready ability to engage with full concentration in that activity. You acquire that ability through the force of your mind's focus, and concentration, over many years of effort, upon your higher soul and its activities of intellectual thinking, and with the help of your "purifying" virtues in detaching yourself fully and permanently from any residual tendency to think or feel any personal interest in your body, or in its life of feeling, emotion, desire, and practical action. The happy life as a whole that the virtuous and happy person lives, of course, at the same time that they are always contemplating and are constantly "returned" to the Intellect from which they derived, does contain other activities of a virtuous sort, both in the constant exercise of the "purifying" virtues, in keeping one's mind strong and able to focus, and also in one's ongoing life of practical activities, as one sees to one's duties with respect to one's bodily and social life. But there is no happiness for you *in* these other virtuous activities.

I have no time to say more about these three sets of virtues, or their activities, or to go into the further details about the happy person's way of life,

with which the treatise *On Happiness* is replete. The crucial point to note is that, for Plotinus and other late Platonists, the happiness of the happy life consists solely in the intellectual activity I have described, through that activity's presence in it. The practical life of daily and social engagement with the physical and human world with which the happy person will be surrounded, until he or she dies and returns permanently to be united to the universal Intellect, is the expression *only* of secondary virtues that, in one way or another, enable one to engage in that activity. Happiness thus simply *is,* for Plotinus, philosophical thinking and knowing about Forms, at its highest level. For a human being, Philosophy itself, as the search for wisdom, is the only way up to reality, and thereby to true life itself.

APPENDIX: SUMMARY AND BACKGROUND INFORMATION FOR LECTURE II

I

Historical and Literary Background

Plotinus: b. 205 CE; studies philosophy at Alexandria 232– (age twenty-seven); begins to write treatises 253 or 254 (age forty-nine), while living and teaching at Rome; d. 270 (age sixty-six), at Rome.

Porphyry comes to work with him in 263 (Plotinus age fifty-nine), receives from him twenty-one old treatises and, as they were composed, the new ones (thirty-three in number, in Porphyry's edition).

Porphyry edits and publishes Plotinus's work in the format of fifty-four treatises, with Porphyry's titles, arranged in six sets of nine treatises (equaling six *enneads,* or groups of nine), ca. 301–305.

II

Introduction

1. Late Platonists on Pythagoras, Plato, and the "ancient wisdom"
2. The three eternal, purely "intelligible" Substances ("hypostases"):
   The First = The Highest = The One = The Good
   Intellect
   Soul
3. The Spiritual Crisis: Platonism and Christianity

III

Principal topics of the lecture: Plotinus's theories of

1. the human person
2. the human good (*eudaimonia,* happiness)
3. the character and role of the human virtues in enabling us to attain our good

IV

Five levels at which Soul works in creating, sustaining in existence, and directing the life activities of living things:

1. As World-soul, Soul makes the material stuffs of which living beings are made.
2. As World-soul, Soul
   a. makes and distributes living beings' organs across their bodies,
   b. causes automatic life functions (breathing, metabolism, growth, heat maintenance, equilibriums of health, and so forth).
3. As the individual animal's soul (consciousness), Soul causes perception, feelings of pain and pleasure, emotions, and nonrational desires.
4. In human beings (only), as individual soul (consciousness), Soul makes possible empirical reasoning about physical objects and events, as well as choices, decisions, and voluntary actions.
5. In human beings (only), as individual soul, Soul makes pure intellectual thinking about Forms possible.

V

The Living Being (*zōon*) versus the Human Person (*anthrōpos*) (see *Enneads* I 1, "What Is the Living Being, and What Is the Human Person?")

1. The living human being = the compound thing formed by a given human body and the "image" (*eidōlon*) of the individual soul of that human being.
2. The human person (*anthrōpos*) = the intellect that that individual soul *is.*

VI

Three sets of human virtues (see *Enneads* I 2, "On Virtues")

1. *Intellectual virtues* (belonging to *the individual intellect* of the person in question; exercised in acts of thinking-and-understanding Forms)
2. *Purifying virtues* (belonging to *the individual intellect,* exercised in acts of concentration and attention in which one looks "upward" to Forms, and away from the physical world below, even while remaining conscious of it)
3. *Civic virtues* (belonging to *the image of the individual soul/intellect,* exercised in attending in a decent way to the life of the body and the living being's personal and social life)