Course description

Plotinus’ fourth Ennead consists almost entirely of a three part treatise On Difficulties about the Soul. There are many reasons for inquiring about the soul, Plotinus says right at the beginning of this treatise, and one of them is that we should obey the Delphic command and know ourselves. Not long before Plotinus, Alexander of Aphrodisias had introduced his treatise On the Soul in a similar way. We ought to know ourselves, Alexander said, but to know ourselves is to know that in virtue of which we are ourselves, and this is the soul; thus, he concluded, we ought to know our soul. Plotinus and Alexander reached very different conclusions about the nature and the capacities of our soul, but both of them examined it in order to gain a better understanding of who we are and of what we ought to do with our lives. In this seminar we will read the first two parts of Plotinus’ treatise On Difficulties about the Soul, namely Enn. 4.3 and Enn. 4.4, followed by one of his latest treatises, Enn. 1.1: What is the Living Being, and what is the Human Being? In Enn. 1.1 Plotinus explains why, in his view, a human being is something more than the subject of pleasure, pain, emotions, and perceptions. He suggests that a human being is more than this because it is not merely a living being, but is what rules over a living being by engaging in thought. At first sight this view might seem all too familiar. Plotinus, you might think, simply distinguishes our rational capacities from our non-rational ones and invites us to think of ourselves as rational beings just as Aristotle did before him. But is this really Plotinus’ view? It is with this question in mind that we will approach Enn. 4.3 and Enn. 4.4. By reading these two treatises we will discover how Plotinus interprets Plato’s account of the soul and its parts, and to what extent his views on memory, representation, desire, perception, and, in general, the rational/non-rational divide differ from those of Aristotle.

Primary readings

We will use Armstrong’s translation of the Enneads for the Loeb Classical Library. The Loeb Plotinus is in seven volumes, but for the purposes of this seminar you will need to purchase only the following two volumes (they can be easily found online):


Recommended readings

It will be useful to have the following books at hand (I can make copies):

J. M. Cooper and D. S. Hutchinson (eds.), Plato, Complete Works, Hackett 1997


Assessment

The final grade will be mostly based on your final paper (20-30 pages), which should examine a topic related to the material discussed in class. However, participation in class discussion will count towards your final grade. To facilitate discussion, a couple of volunteers per week (starting from week 2) will prepare a handout (max. 2 pages) for the readings. All background readings are required; they are labeled “background” to signal that we will examine them only to the extent to which they might contribute to our understanding of the primary readings. “Relevant texts” are texts you might want to read for your final paper; I might occasionally assign some of them.

Tentative schedule

**Week 1:** Introduction. The living being, the human being, and the soul
- *Enn.* 1.1.1-2; *Enn.* 4.3.1

**Week 2:** The soul
- *Enn.* 4.3.9-12; 18-19
- Background: Plato, *Timaeus*, 27b-41b; 41b-44c (relevant texts: *Enn.* 4.1; *Enn.* 4.8; *Enn.* 4.9)

**Week 3:** The soul
- *Enn.* 4.3.20-24

**Week 4:** Perception and memory
- *Enn.* 4.3.25-29
- Background: Aristotle, *De memoria*, 1; Plato, *Philebus*, 33c-34c

**Week 5:** Memory and representation
- *Enn.* 4.3.30-4.4.1; *Enn.* 4.4.8
- Aristotle, *De anima*, 3.3, 427b 27-429a 9; Aristotle, *De insomniis* especially 3 (relevant texts: *Enn.* 1.4.10; *Enn.* 5.3.3-4)

**Week 6:** Nature, pleasure and pain
- *Enn.* 4.4.11-14, 17; *Enn.* 4.4.18-19
- Background: *Enn.* 4.7.6-7 (but focus only on 7); Plato, *Timaeus*, 61c-64b (quick look at 64b-69b)

**Week 7:** Perception
- *Enn.* 4.4.22 (from line 5)-23; *Enn.* 4.4.24-26
- Background: *Enn.* 4.7.6
Week 8: Desire
  - *Enn.* 4.4.20, 21, 22.1-5, 27, 28
  - Background: Plato, *Timaeus*, 72d through the end of the dialogue; Plato, *Philebus*, 31c-33c; 34c-36c

Week 9: What we should strive for; back to *Enn.* 1.1
  - *Enn.* 4.4.43-45; *Enn.* 1.1

Week 10: *Enn.* 1.1

Week 11: *Enn.* 1.1

Week 12: *Enn.* 1.1

Editions of the Greek text
P. Henry and H.-R. Schwyzer (eds.), *Plotini opera*, Oxford University Press (OCT) 1964-82, 3 Vols. (*editio minor H-S²*; this is the standard edition; remember the *addenda et corrigenda* at the end of vol. 3)


Some other translations
There is a new English translation of the *Enneads* you might wish to consult (without Greek text):
L. Gerson (ed.), *Plotinus, The Enneads*, Cambridge University Press 2018
L. Brisson and J.-F. Pradeau (eds.), *Plotin. Traité*, Paris, multiple volumes; the treatise are in chronological order.

P. Kalligas (ed.), *Plôtinou Enneades*. Vivliothékê A. Manousê. Kentron Ekdoseôs Ellês Ellênôn Syngrapheôn, Athênaï, 5 Vols. (to date). One volume for each *Ennead*, thus *Enneas Protê, Enneas Deutera, Enneas Tritê, Enneas Tetartê, Enneas Pemptê* (original Greek Text, modern Greek translation and commentary with synopses; the commentary on the first three Enneads is available in English, see secondary literature below).

Some other useful texts
M. Bergeron and R. Dufour (eds.), *Alexandre d'Aphrodise, De l' Âme*, Vrin 2008 (reliable French translation with commentary and facing Greek text)
A. P. Fotinis, *The “De Anima” of Alexander of Aphrodisias*, University Press of America 1979 (Not very well reviewed, but the only English translation of the whole treatise)
Some secondary literature


— *Plotinus on Intellect*, Oxford University Press 2007

— *Plotinus*, Routledge 2017


King, R., *Aristotle and Plotinus on Memory*, De Gruyter 2009


O’Meara, D. J., “Plotinus on How Soul Acts on Body”, in Id. (ed.), *Platonic Investigations*, Catholic University of America Press 1985, pp. 247-262


Smith, A., “Unconsciousness and Quasiconsciousness in Plotinus”, *Phronesis* 23 (1978), pp. 292-301


—“Memory in Plotinus”, *The Classical Quarterly* 15 (1965), pp. 252-260