EVIL AS DIRECTION IN PLOTINUS

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Abstract for
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This paper examines problems and inconsistencies in the Plotinian conception of evil. A review of all the pertinent passages in the Enneads concludes that evil is non-existent in the metaphysical realm and that the absolute evil of the moral realm is subservient to a universal order and functions to produce a harmony in accord with the intellectual realm (Nous) of which it is but an image. [Most of the difficulties are seen as eliminated by adopting an interpretive view of evil as the result of the soul's mis-directed orientation toward its own completeness in matter.]

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you shall cross the ocean of all evil
by the boat of wisdom alone

_Bhagavad-Gita_

I

In the philosophy of Plotinus the metaphysical and mysti­
cal propensities of the author combine to present many dif­
ficulties. One such problem is with the doctrine of evil. Inconsistencies are apparent in a literal transcription of
the writings of Plotinus. Matter and the soul's descent
into matter are said to be evil and at the same time good.

Some of the problems and the inconsistencies in regard
to the conception of evil in the writings of Plotinus can
be eliminated by adopting the view that, in the philosophi­
cal schema of Plotinus, evil is merely the result of the
individual soul's misdirected orientation towards its own
complete absorption in matter. Within this view it is seen
that evil does not exist in the metaphysical realm and that
the absolute evil of the moral realm (or the soul's direc­
tion towards material multiplicity) is subservient to a uni­
versal order and functions to produce a harmony in accord
with the intellectual realm (Nous) of which it is an image.

II

A brief examination of the text\(^1\) reveals the problem:

Soul is evil by being interfused with the body
(I:2.3)
Soul becomes ugly...by a fall, a descent into body
(I:6.5)
Life in the body is of itself as Evil (I:7.3)
there should be produced a Last...this will be
Evil...this Last is Matter (I:8.7)
it is quite correct to say at once that Matter is
without _quality_ and that it is evil (I:8.10)

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\(^{1}\)All references are to _Plotinus, the Enneads_, trans. by
Thus the cause, at once, of the weakness of Soul and of all its evil is Matter (I:8:14) the evil of Matter...is Primal Evil (I:8.14) Matter is the Evil (I:8.8)

These lines are among the strongest in Plotinus which appear to present an argument for absolute evil to be found in matter. Treatise I:8 is the most extreme statement for the existence of absolute evil and contains the clearest assertions for matter being evil. In other lines, however, a contradiction can be seen as matter is presented as less than evil or even part of the Good. Some lines are:

Soul is Sinless (I:1.12)
We cannot hold utterly cheap...the indeterminate (II:4.3)
Nothing is to be blamed for being inferior to the First (II:9.13)
Evil is a falling short in good...thing will always stand less than thing (III:2.5)
To the good nothing is evil (III:2.6)
Men are no doubt involuntary sinners (III:2.10)
The Necessity (of human wickedness)...exists only in the sense of universal relationship (III:2.10)
All is graded succession (III:2.11)
With the good we have the bad...in the opposition lies the merit of the design (III:2.17)
What is evil in a single soul will stand a good thing in the universal system (III:2.17)
(The existence of Matter) is enough to insure its participation in the being which...communicates the supreme Good universally (IV:8.6)
The things of this world are good (V:8.7)
No reproach can be brought against this world save only that it is not That. (V:8.8).

Thus upon a quick inspection there appears literal contradictions within the lines that are concerned with the subject of evil.

In short, the problem with Plotinus' treatment of evil is that he treats matter as source of evil, absolute evil, and primal evil while at the same time he views it as an emanation from the Good, necessary opposition forming coalescence in a universal harmony reflecting the divine, and as part of the Good.
There have been several attempts at understanding and resolving the dilemma in the Plotinian doctrine of evil. Some have served only to accentuate the dilemma while others have been more rewarding. Among the former is the notable work of B.A.G. Fuller\(^2\) in which the contradictions are not resolved and the fallacies are said to arise from a double point of view in Plotinus. Fuller sees Plotinus as having incorporated two opposing traditions in his doctrine; the naturalistic and the mystic. Plotinus inherited Epicurian mechanism with a joy in natural goods, on the one hand, and, on the other, Gnostic pessimism with a hatred of matter. To reconcile these tendencies, Fuller sees Plotinus bringing "the whole Stoic panoply into play"\(^3\) with a doctrine of the essential goodness of the world. The result is a metaphysical theory of emanation, a theory which contains two fundamental fallacies arising from a double point of view. The first is a "confusion of degrees of imperfection with kinds of perfection...that perfection can be more or less perfect."\(^4\) The second fallacy is revealed through an analogy with heat and light and is that "the outpoured world just because of its emanation must gradually dwindle in its measure of Being until it has shrunk to nothingness."\(^5\) Fuller concludes his work with the Plotinian dilemma unresolved; "Either Good is not justified or Evil is not explained."\(^6\) Fuller cannot understand how matter proceeding from the One can be evil or how the Soul's descent into matter of necessity can allow moral responsibility. In short, Fuller leaves the problem of metaphysical evil and the problem of moral evil as unresolved dilemmas arising from the double view of Plotinus as naturalistic and mystic.


\(^3\)Fuller, Evil in Plotinus, 329.

\(^4\)Fuller, Evil in Plotinus, 332.

\(^5\)Fuller, Evil in Plotinus, 324.

\(^6\)Fuller, Evil in Plotinus, 333.
Another such attempt is that of Emile Brehier\(^7\) in which the tension in the Plotinian view of the world as both beautiful and the "habitation of evil" is seen working itself out in the writings as a "pendulum movement" imposing dual values upon matter, the world, and the soul's descent. Brehier points out the contradictions on a metaphysical level, between matter seen as something incorporeal, potential, reflective and as primary evil and, on the moral level, between evil as "inevitable accompaniment of the cosmic harmony" and "as a sort of absolute opposed to the Good."\(^8\) The dilemmas are not resolved but a common trait is brought out in these conflicts. There is in Plotinian theory a double dynamism of procession-conversion in which matter seems to play the double role of primary evil and last hypostasis. Brehier did not pursue this view further, unfortunately, in an attempt to resolve the problem.

Others have gone further in resolving the problems by taking into account an overall view of the philosophy of Plotinus and a consideration of Plotinus' intent in his writings. A.H. Armstrong encounters a confusion of metaphysics and ethics in Plotinus\(^9\) and sees no evil in the soul's descent into matter as it is necessitated by the out flowing process of emanation. Evil is noted by Armstrong as the soul's desire to process further than is necessary\(^10\) rather than desiring to convert back toward the One. Armstrong leaves the study with the tension remaining.

William R. Inge in his work on Plotinus sees a possible solution. He too sees a double scale in Plotinus; an "existential scale" and a "value scale." Using this double view there appears no evil in Plotinian metaphysics and moral evil is in the Soul's preference of the world to the One.\(^11\) However, he observes that as Plotinus did not clearly delineate these two scales the dilemma remains.


\(^8\)Brehier, *Plotinus*, 179.


Another work which considers the aforementioned views and proceeds to resolve the problem of evil in Plotinus is that of Edward B. Costello who finds it possible "to distinguish Plotinus' ethics from his metaphysics." In so doing he notes that the contradictions on evil and the contradictions at the heart of Plotinus' metaphysics are resolved. The resolution concludes that "Matter's metaphysical function is good; matter is evil only when taken as an object for a soul's orientation." Those passages which depict matter as primary evil are seen to be rhetorical in style and ethical in nature thus enabling one who understands this to resolve the difficulties.

Taking these views into account the texts can again be examined and a consistent coherent view of the Plotinian doctrine of evil can be constructed which will resolve the old difficulties and provide a new approach to Plotinus.

There is no hesitancy here in using an interpretive approach as it seems warranted after one has read the Enneads and grasped that total view which Plotinus was exposing. In light of it alone, can the literal inconsistencies and problems within his doctrine of evil be resolved.

IV

The hypothesis to be examined in this work is that in the philosophy of Plotinus there is no metaphysical evil and that moral evil consists solely in an orientation of an individual soul toward matter. The only 'Evil' is in the soul's turning away from the One and directing itself toward the material.

The creation of the world of matter is the last act in a metaphysical emanation from the One, the Good beyond all knowledge and description. This emanative process is one of overflowing (V:2.1, V:1.6). The One, totally transcendent, total potential is a unity which flings itself outward (III:8.8), circumradiating (V:1.6) like a brilliant light from a sun (V:1.6, V:3.12). A unity

12 Edward B. Costello, "Is Plotinus Consistent on the Nature of Evil?", The International Philosophical Quarterly. 7(1967), 497.

13 Costello, "Is Plotinus Consistent," 497.
transcending real being from its perfection (V:4.2), from its essence (V:1.6) radiates an outward-facing hypostasis. The hypostasis is the realm of authentic existence, of real being, of divine intellect, of the intellectual principle, of the Nous. This realm or hypostasis is limitless in its being (III:8.8), eternal in existence, a manifold unity, universal in all things. It is second only to the First, (V:4.2) the one, the Good, the wholly simplex (III:8.8), the transcendent potentiality of all existence (V:1.7). In this second hypostasis, the All is made actual (V:4.2), and the authentic existences achieve real being. This first life is an intellection in which the subject and objects are one. It is a station towards the One which establishes being and a vision toward the One which establishes the intellectual principle (V:2.1). After this there is a second outflow which is an image of the divine intellect as the intellect is represented to the One (V:2.1). The authentic existence produces from its essence a necessary outward-facing hypostasis representing it in an image (V:1.6). "The eternally achieved engenders eternally an eternal being." (V:1.6). "This active power sprung from essence is soul" (V:2.1) which arises as "the idea and act of the motionless Nous" (V:2.1). This soul is the third hypostasis. Soul is a real being (IV:7.8), indestructible, immortal and "the source of life to all else that lives" (IV:7.9). The soul exists as "seeing" with the Nous as its object. "Soul is Matter to (its determinant) the Intellectual-Principle" (III:9.5). The soul has two phases; the all-soul which is without distinction or partition and the partial or individual soul which lends its self to dimensional existence by successive entries into bodies or descents into matter (IV:1.1). "It is indivisible as dwelling entire in the total and entire in any part" (IV:2.1). "Itself devoid of all mass, it is present to all mass" (IV:2.1). "It is one and many, partial and impartial (IV:2.2). "The unit soul holds aloof, not actually falling into body; the differentiated Souls—the All-Soul, with the others-issue from the unity while still constituting...an association" (IV:3.4).

Finally, emanating from the soul is matter. The soul

"has taken a great step outward; it has the desire of elaborating order on the model of what it has seen in the Intellectual-Principle: pregnant by those Beings, and in pain to birth, it is eager to make...it strains toward the realm of sense: this primal soul in union with the Soul of the All...inevitably is turned outward, and has added
the universe to its concern:...it is not wholly and
exclusively held by body: it is still in possession
of the unembodied: and the Intellectual-Principle in
it remains immune. As a whole, it is partly in body,
partly outside: it has plunged...and entered this sphere
of tertiaries: the process has been the activity of the
Intellectual-Principle, which...operates throughout the
Soul to flood the universe with beauty and penetrate
order - immortal mind...acting through immortal soul."
(IV:7.13).

Thus, the outgoing process does not end with souls for
"every Kind must produce its next...by an ineffable
Faculty of its being, native to soul as it exists in the
Supreme...this power...must move forever outward until
the universe stands accomplished to the ultimate pos-
sibility" (IV:8.6). Thus, the emanative process from the
One acts "Producing all by an inexhaustible power giving
its gift to the universe, no part of which it can endure to
see without some share in its being" (IV:8.6). Matter is
participant in the Good as existing from its emanative process.
The loveliness of "the sense realm is an index of the noble-
ness of the Intellectual sphere (IV:8.6) in which it takes
its being by participation which in turn flows from the
One.

The emanation from the One is at the same time coin-
cident with a reunification or return to the One. There
is a descent and an ascent, as it were (Brehier's notion
of procession and conversion). As soon as the individual
soul penetrates by a "voluntary plunge" (IV:8.5) to the
sphere of matter in which it has prepared a body, it
must turn back again to the One. Beyond matter, itself
merely potential and indeterminate, there is no receptacle
for the emanative light of the One. For the soul now
linked to Matter to direct itself to this sphere, away
from the One is for the soul to descend further seeing
darkness and thus committing the only act morally evil.

This direction away from the One and toward the dark-
ness, the formless, the unmeasurable is the absolute
evil. It is a moral evil. There is no existence outside
the three hypostases and pure non-existence does not
'exist'. It cannot even stand apart from existence be-
cause there is nothing to stand. It is merely the direc-
tion of sight (the 'seeing' of the soul) away from
existence which for the soul is toward the intellect and
the One. This absolute evil, if we can call it that,
is possible only to the partial soul which, linked to
matter, can look away. The whole Soul cannot as its
sight is of the intellectual-principle of which it is an image. The intellectual-principle cannot see darkness or commit evil, as it were, because its vision is toward the One, or toward itself (a vision of the One) or toward the soul which is its own image.

In the light of this view, the lines dealing with evil in the Enneads can again be examined and a fuller understanding of evil as direction can be obtained as well as a most amazing view of 'evil' acts and punishment.

Treatise I:8 is an ethical tractate, as Costello points out, in which we find not only the most extreme statements concerning matter as evil but also the most poignant statement of Good, and, consequently of evil, as direction.

"The Good is that on which all else depends, towards which all Existence aspire as to their source and their need, while Itself is without need, sufficient to Itself, aspiring to no other, the measure and Term of all, giving out from itself the Intellectual-Principle and Existence and Soul and Life and all Intellective-Act." (I:8.2).

Thus the Good, the One is that toward which all aspires and from which all emanates. Even the intellective-act through soul, matter, is from the Good. Thus matter is of the Good although the Good is not contained by it. "All until the Good is reached is beautiful" (I:8.2). Matter is not evil in itself but only an occasion for evil as a point from which the partial soul linked to matter in the body can direct itself away from that towards which all aspires, the Good. Likewise, the soul's descent into matter is not itself evil but the occasion for evil. Its descent is the necessary fulfillment to the accomplishment of the ultimate possibility by the emanative process (IV:8.6).

Soul itself stands apart from all that can cause evil for evil "belongs only the Animate, the Couplement" (I:1.9) of soul and body as it is the source of selfish desire on the part of the partial soul of the man for the material self, the darkness, the turning away from the One. Man acts in an evil manner when he acts at the "call of the less worthy" (I:1.9) which call directs him away from the One. The soul is sinless (I:1.12) because as soul and essential soul are one and the same, they are a unity which is the image of the divine intellect and incapable of looking away from the One and its emana-
tions. It is only the partial soul of an individual joined to matter in a body that can by virtue of its descent will in accord to its material desire a further descent or, in other words, direct its vision toward the darkness, its own material nature, the non-existent, the formless, the unmeasurable. Evil is in the world, "haunting this world by necessary law" because where direction toward the One from the accomplishment in the universe of its emanative process is possible, so must direction away from the One be possible (I:2.1). But it is "the Soul's design to escape from Evil" (I:2.1) by virtue, which is to direct its sight to the One and act accordingly. "As the Soul is Evil by being interfused with the body and...to think the body's thoughts, so it would be good, it would be possessed of virtue if it threw off the body's moods and devoted itself to its own Act - the state of Intellection" (I:2.3).

The soul becomes ugly by its descent into a body, a fall (I:6.5). But it becomes beautiful by "ascending again towards the Good, the desired of every Soul" (I:6.7), by directing itself toward the One, and by virtue (I:7.3). The body itself is not ugly because "the material thing becomes beautiful by communicating in the thought that flows from the Divine" (I:6.2, cf. I:8.2, V:8.7, V:9.14). The life of the body is not itself evil but "life in the body" solely and not directed toward the One "is of itself evil" (I:7.3) when it is merely of and for itself. The soul rightly returns to the Good by aspiring toward it as its role by "not living the life of the Couplement but holding itself apart" (I:7.3). Ugliness in matter itself is due to the "Soul's inability to bring some other thing into being" (V:9.14). "Disease and vice", while not evil in themselves, "look to evil" (VI:1.10), because they dispose the soul to look away from the Good.

That the world as matter is itself good is easily seen in the text. It is held that "the loveliness of this world comes by communion in Ideal-Form" (I:6.2), that "the material thing becomes beautiful by communicating in the thought that comes from the Divine" (I:6.2), that "All until the Good is reached is beautiful" (I:8.2), that matter is not to be held "utterly cheap" (II:4.3) as it offers itself to its emanative source, that the existence of matter insures its participation in the being which communicates the Supreme Good universally - the divine intellect - of which matter is an act through the soul (IV:8.6), that "the things of this world are good (V:8.7) because the Exemplar (Nous) is what it is, and,
finally, that nothing is to be blamed for being inferior to the First (II:9.13), certainly not the Ultimates (of possibility) or matter against which there can be no reproach "save only that it is not That" (V:8.8).

Now, with this view of matter as participant in the Good, the passages which treat of it as evil, absolute evil or primary evil and give rise to the problem of evil in Plotinus and his inconsistency, can be seen as ethical in nature referring to matter as a source for evil but not evil itself. There may be literal contradiction but, if one is to understand Plotinus' writings as embodied in a framework of meaning beyond literal pre-decimation then, the dual aspects in his philosophy can be seen and the tension resolved as necessary movement from the One to the All and back again. Ascent-descent, procession-conversion, and emanation-contemplation are dyads which express this movement in the Plotinian view. The soul's turning from this movement and directing itself in matter away from it is evil. The direction away from this movement is evil. There can be no further emanation from the One after matter, for it is in matter that the last is reached, the ultimate possibility attained, and the light from the One ends in pale shadows. Matter, as such, is the only point from which sight can be turned away from the One and its reflective emanations, its receptacles of light. Therefore, matter is the occasion for evil but it is the soul's turning away that is evil and evil in a moral sense as being contrary to its essential role of aspiring toward the Good.

Now the causes for the soul's turning away or evil are not in itself. "Soul is not an Evil Kind" (I:8.4). But, as soul is in the body (which is itself not evil but a cause of evil), it "is not purely itself" and "the Soul's seeing is baulked by the passions and by the darkening that Matter brings to it...its very attention is no longer to Essence but to Process" whose source is matter which makes evil that which "merely looks toward it" (I:8.4). Thus the soul having taken the "voluntary plunge" and descended into matter has taken matter into itself, looked toward it rather than the Good, has fallen away, has become "Wholly indeterminate", and has seen darkness rather than "the light from the Good" (I:8.4). Body is "the cause of Evil" and the soul as body's matter cannot avoid the cause except by turning from matter (I:8.8). "The Soul is Evil by being interfused with the body and by coming to...think the body's thoughts" (I:2.3). Soul in the body alone is not evil but the occasion for evil. The soul is evil only by "thinking its (the body's)
thoughts" or turning toward it, seeing darkness and not the ideal-forms of the intellectual-principle from which it emanates and seeing the One beyond the divine intellect. "All such Evil...belongs only to...the Couplement" (I:1.9) of body and soul in which the partial soul acts as the "call of the less worthy" and turns its aspirations away from the One. The soul, in denying its essential aspiration toward the Good, "has taken into itself another nature, the Evil", and is "in gloom and mud", looking toward darkness, abandoning itself to that vicious realm and it dies (I:8.13) even so carrying some trace of the Good with which it can again aspire upward toward life, the existent, intellect and the One (I:8.13). "The partial Soul is illuminated by moving towards the Soul above it" but in being set upon its self it moves "towards non-Being" (III:9.3). In willing toward itself it produces a lower image of itself, a non-being, undetermined, blank darkness. "By a sort of inferior orientation, it looks downward, it shapes that lower image and flings itself joyfully thither" (III:93). The soul's commerce with the body has hindered its intellective act and filled it with pleasure, desire and pain (IV:8.2). The individual souls descend from the universal to the partial and become self-centered, weakened, full of care, and tends to the outer (IV:8.4). This evil which overtakes the individual souls "has its source in self-will, in the entry into the sphere of process, and in the primal differentiation with the desire for ownership. They conceived pleasure in this freedom and largely indulged their own motion" (V:1.1) going down the wrong path further from the Divine.

Is this evil necessary? It is said to "haunt this world by necessary law" (I:2.1). "To deny Evil a place among realities is necessarily to do away with the Good as will...and even to deny the existence of anything desirable" (I:8.15). For without the possibility of direction from the One there is no possibility for direction or aspiration to the One, the Good. Thus there is produced the ultimate possibility, matter, a last after which there is nothing (I:8.7) and from which is seen the divine intellect and the One. Evil in a sense results from the Good as an opposition. "The less deep in good, the more deep in evil" (II:4.15). "Without Evil, the All would be incomplete" (II:8.18). "Even the less good has a contributory value in the All. Perhaps there is no need for everything to be good. Contraries may cooperate" (II:3.16). "All forms of evil serve the Universe" (II:3.18). Inequalities and contraries and
"evil acts" in this world all serve a purpose. Concerning the things of this world, "the Sage demand no equality" (II:9.9). Evil is of necessity.

"The principle is that evil by definition is falling short in good...the good here is in something else...distinct from the Good, and this something else constitutes the falling short...this is why 'evil is ineradicable'; there is, first the fact that in relation to this principle of Good, thing will always stand less than thing...all things...are what they are by standing away from it" (III:2.5).

"Since the higher exists, there must be the lower as well" (III:3.7). "Evil belongs to the sequence of things. It comes from Necessity. It originates in ourselves" (IV:3.5). "The Necessity (held to underlie human wickedness)...exists only in the sense of a universal relationship" (III:2.10). Evil is direction away from the One and its light, its emanations, its outflowing. All things of this world are in "graded succession" as the Reason Principle "cannot desire all to be good" (III:2.11). "The Cosmos is partitioned...according to grades of place" (III:3.5). Yet, as even "contraries coalesce" (III:3.6), there is a universal harmony in which the world is patterned with tones, shades, and contraries. Even "Evil in the single soul will stand a good thing in the universal system" (III:2.17).

Concerning actions and their relation to good and evil, Plotinus is clear in that "the good does not derive from the act itself but from the inner disposition which prompts the noble conduct: "the wise and good man in his very action harvests the good not by what he does but by what he is" (I:5.10). Thus, if the soul's direction is toward the Good, the man is good and so are his actions. If, however, the soul's direction is toward itself, away from the One, the same action would be evil and so too the man. But the soul's expression need not be in action alone but, more properly, it is seen in its direction as it contemplates. It is in wisdom and contemplation also that it finds Goodness and happiness. Thus all acts are within a universal harmony and "what is evil in a single soul will stand a good thing in the universal system" (III:2.17).

There is in the writings of Plotinus a particularly rich analogical view through which one may understand
the spectacle of the material cosmos, the place of human life and the function of moral evil. It is that of a play. The intellectual-principle is the author of the artistic work, being inspired by its vision of the One. The Nous acts as reason-principle through the soul to achieve the completeness of the emanative process in the ultimates which are indeterminate, shades of being. Now, as the divine intellect by its intellection has life, it conveys it to the soul in which the reason-principles in imitation of the intellectual principles aim the reflective life of the soul at pattern reflective of that in the Nous, with pitches, tones, shades and contraries (III:2.16). The material cosmos is the setting for the play and the animates, or men, are the actors.

All their actions serve a function in the overall plot or universal harmony. Actions are not good or evil in themselves but dependent upon the orientation of the individual soul's aspiration for their moral value (I:5.10). There is the good with the bad displaying the merits of the design in the opposition as a dancer's steps are good and bad guided by one artistic plan (III:2.17). Souls varying in worth occupy positions of unequal grade resulting from their separateness (III:2.17-18). "Every man has his place" and "all is just and good in the Universe in which every actor is set in his own quite appropriate place, though it be to utter Darkness" (III: 2.17). "What is Evil in the single soul will stand a good thing in the universal system" (III:2.17).

In this view "devouring of kind by kind is necessary as the means to the transmutation of living things which could not keep form forever even though no other killed them" (III:2.15) and in so doing a service is performed for others (III:2.15) in the total harmony (III:2.17). "It comes to no more than the murder of one of the personages in a play...The actor...was not really killed...but changes his costume...It is much better so than if they had never existed...Death is nothing terrible, that to die in a war or in a fight is but to...go away earlier and come back the sooner...Murder, death in all its guises...all must be to us just such a spectacle as the changing scenes of a play" (III:2.15). This is all done by men attached to the lower life, men at play. "Those incapable of thinking gravely read gravity into frivolities which correspond to their own frivolous nature" (III:2.15). The unthoughtful "cry and whimper where there is nothing amiss" (III: 2.15). The reason-principle allots to each soul its
fortune under a reason in the universal harmony which is its drama. "The Reason-Principle entire is one... broken into unequal parts" (III:2.17). Hence, from unequal localities in the universe comes the inequality of souls finding their places therein.

"The Soul, entering this drama of the Universe, making itself a part of the Play, bringing to its acting its personal excellence or defect, sit in a definite place at the entry and accepting from the author its entire role - superimposed on its own character and conduct - just so, it receives in the end its punishment and reward" (III:2.17).

Evil is the result of the soul's directed aspiration (character) away from the One as it performs its role.

The punishment that awaits the soul which turns away is indeed an unusual affair but one completely consistent with the Plotinian system and this view of the world as a play. As the Plotinian simile of the play is similar to one in Hindu thought as given in the Bhagavad Gita, so is his view of death and punishment similar to it and particularly to its development in Northern Buddhism as witnessed in the Tibetan Book of the Dead. 14

The six principal passages which deal with the punishment and rebirth of the soul makes the doctrine extremely clear. They are 1:8.13, III:2.8, III:3.4, III:4.3, IV:3.8 and IV:8.5. From them it is seen that there is a two-fold flaw in the soul's evil orientation. The first is its motive for descent, its audacity, and the second is in the evil it does. "The first is punished by what the Soul has suffered by its descent," and for the second it receives "the lesser penalty...to enter into body after body - and soon to return - by judgment according to desert" (IV:8.5). Thus, the soul by its vision of the

14"Indeed this Plotinian view of evil as direction while extremely similar to the Hindu view cannot be directly traced to Oriental influences although there is speculation that there are "connections between the doctrine of Plotinus and the religious thought of India." (Brehier, 120) Lacking any historical evidence on which to base any argument attempting to make this connection, none will be made.
darkness and its turning from the Good "has taken to itself another nature, the Evil, and as far as Soul can die it is dead. And the death is twofold...to drench itself in Matter and when it has left the body, to lie in the other world until, somehow, it stirs again and lifts its sight from the mud" (I:8.13). It remains in the world of matter, indeterminate, darkness, body after body until it turns toward the One again and ascends from the mud to the light above.

The evildoers (the individual Souls in bodies) also have their punishment: First, they pay...In the disaster to their human quality 15: and next there is paid up for them the due of their kind; living ill here, they will not get off by death; on every precedent through all the line there waits its sequent, reasonable and natural worse to the bad, better to the good" (III:2.8).

So the soul which turns away from the One, takes matter into itself and suffers a loss of intellection in human nature thus unable to see the divine and suffers through rebirth into another body whose position is determined in the universal system, the play, by its previous character, its previous role. "The quality now manifested may be probably referred to the conduct of a former life;...previous actions have made the reason-principle now governing within us inferior in radiance to that which ruled before" (III:3.4). The different degrees in soul "might be induced also by the bodies with which the Soul has to do, and, even more, by the character and mental operations carried over from the conduct of the previous lives" (IV:3.8). Finally, "the spirit of the previous life pays the penalty: the evil-liver loses grade because during his life the active principle of his being (direction) took a tilt towards the brute by force of affinity (within Matter)" (III:4.3). This view of rebirth is in accord with the view of individual life as character in a play who may die but the actor portraying him returns in another costume in another role as the soul returns in another body to take up another place in the universal system in which it may again turn toward the One and away from matter. The play goes on serving the divine intellect, its author, paying tribute in its

15i.e., loss of sight of the Divine Intellect, the ideal-forms in contemplation.
shadowy reflection of the ideal-forms to the One, its inspiration. There is no evil in this drama, only the perfection of absolute possibility. All acts serve the universal harmony and what might be termed the moral evil of the soul is its turning from the One, its true object of aspiration, which results in a dual punishment which fulfills yet another place in that universal system in which the "evil" soul reborn can again turn to the One. The procession and conversion are carried on eternally, all from the Good and to the Good.

It is hoped that this work has successfully demonstrated that the doctrine of evil in the philosophy of Plotinus is one dealing with direction alone. There is not demonstrably any absolute evil other than a direction away from the One, and arising from the necessary possibility of orientation at that. Such is a synthesis, the result of a dialectic process in which the thesis of absolute evil opposes itself to its antithesis of no evil at all.

The reluctance of certain commentators to interpret the passages dealing with evil in light of either the entire Plotinian philosophical system or at least in light of both his metaphysics and ethics resulted in their inability to resolve tensions, double values, dilemmas and inconsistencies. This work has presented an unreserved interpretive approach, the correctness of which it is hoped is amply demonstrated.

The view of evil being a question of direction has been presented as an attempt to resolve the difficulties with this doctrine in Plotinus' philosophy. One may still insist that there are literal inconsistencies in Plotinus and that there is still the dilemma dealing with the essential nature of matter and further that all that has been done is that the problems have been covered over or cast aside by an interpretive system. However, in view of the texts it appears that the directional view is the proper one with which to understand the doctrine of evil. From this vantage point, as it were, rather than covering over the dilemma of evil or simply moving it away one can see how evil fits into the Plotinian notion of the hypostases and the world without contradiction or inconsistency and without detracting from the notion of the Good.

The dual aspects of matter and the dual potential of
the soul's direction remain as a tension\textsuperscript{16}, but for one who has crossed over, they are problematical no longer; they present no dilemma.

\textsuperscript{16} A partial sequential listing of lines on evil in the Enneads.

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