as recollected and reflected upon, not about the experience apart from recollection and reflection (40).

There are probably others besides Plotinus who have had both experiences, that of becoming the All and that of ineffable union with the transcendent Absolute, or at least have been vividly aware of both and of the difference between them. To an outsider, ill informed about Indian thought there, seem to be fascinating possibilities of comparison here between the *Enneads* and the Upanishads: but this comparison could only be made by a scholar equally at home in both fields. In the West there seem to be startling similarities (as well as great differences) between Plotinus and the greatest of English nature mystics, Richard Jefferies. Jefferies was intensely aware of belonging to an eternal world which was a world of thought, sharply distinguished from external Nature (though it was external nature which evoked the awareness of it) and he passionately believed, on the ground of his own experience, in an existence 'higher, better and more perfect than deity', 'better than god' (i.e. the God of 19th century Christianity, which Jefferies hated) (41): we seem to be very close here to the double experience of Plotinus, for whom also the One is 'more than mind or God' (VI 9 [9] 6, 12–13), and who found contemporary theisms inadequate in the light of his own experience. But there does not seem to be anybody, at least in the West, who has reflected as deeply and carefully as Plotinus on his two experiences and the difference between them, and has made as thorough an attempt to give an account of that difference in terms of his own philosophy. Tradition and reason are, as we have seen, important for Plotinus. But they are continually employed to elucidate his experiences and to convey what can be conveyed of them to others.

It is the continual awareness of the double mystical experience which gives his writings their unique and enduring power, and makes him a much more important figure for the student of religion than seems to be generally realised by those academically concerned with this subject, at least in the English-speaking world.

(40) On the question of mystical experience and interpretation see the article by Ninian Smart cited in n. 1 p. 31.

(41) See the discussion of a number of passages from Jefferies', *The story of my Heart* in R. C. ZAEHNER, *At Sundry Times* (London 1958), pp. 79–88, which brings out very well both the similarities to and the differences from Plotinus. Jefferies is much more anthropocentric than Plotinus, and consequently his relative valuation of non-human nature and of the human body is almost the exact reverse of that of the ancient Platonists.

XVIII

The Apprehension of Divinity in the Self and Cosmos in Plotinus

This may seem an odd title for a paper which is intended to commend the philosophy of Plotinus as one which, as I believe, has some contemporary relevance. The words "apprehension of divinity in self and cosmos" are likely to displease irremediably two considerable bodies of contemporary opinion. They will of course displease that very large number of contemporary philosophers to whom a phrase like "apprehension of divinity", or any talk about "God" or "the divine" is meaningless: and those who adhere to some older traditions of Western theistic philosophy will find the language offensively "pantheistic", and, if they can be persuaded to explain this large, vague term of theological abuse further, will say that anyone who talks like this is looking for divinity in the wrong place. He has forgotten that God is the Wholly Other and that there is an unbridgeable gulf between the Creator and his creation. I have some respect for both these groups, and do not think that the arguments which they can bring against the Neoplatonic, or any similar position ought to be neglected. But I do not think that I have either the charismatic or the eristic competence to deal with them. I have not the sort of faith which would enable me, in the proper manner of prophetic theism, to shout religious opponents down with yet another version of what professes to be the Word of God: nor do I think that I am able to argue people out of what is now, especially in the case of the unbelieving philosophers, a settled traditional belief supported by revered authorities. I propose, therefore to address myself to those of our contemporaries, a large and, probably, increasing number, who do not belong to either of these groups and are not likely to find the phrase "apprehension of divinity in self and cosmos" too preposterous to be worth considering further. I have the rather faint hope that by

confining myself to positive elucidation for people assumed to be sympathetic I may be able, here and there, to say something which will make the position I am trying to explain seem less ridiculous or shocking to others.

What I propose is that in the thought of Plotinus we do not, to begin with, apprehend divinity in two separate ways, one in our selves and one in the cosmos, but we have a single apprehension or awareness of divinity in self and cosmos taken together, and that we do not in fact leave the cosmos altogether behind until our awareness of divinity becomes so intense that we go "alone to the alone". In explaining this I hope to be able to show that the Neoplatonic way of thinking may still have some life and meaning. We cannot of course expect Plotinus, or anybody else, to do our own thinking for us, and some aspects of his thought which will be discussed in this paper will inevitably seem odd, antiquated and irrelevant to present concerns. But I believe that if we start our own reflections with a study of that thought which is sympathetic as well as critical, Plotinus may give us a lead to a better understanding of the world and may help us to adjust our attitudes and valuations in a way which may help us to deal with some of the most pressing problems of our time, and especially to do something towards closing the gap between man and non-human nature which has been steadily widening through the Christian and rationalist centuries with, as we are now beginning to see, disastrous results.

It is now high time to say something about my use of the words "apprehension" and "divinity". On "apprehension" there is nothing very helpful to be said, because I agree with Plato and many modern religious philosophers in supposing that what it means can only be learnt in practice, and by each in their own way. One can neither explain what is meant by the apprehension of God nor tell anyone else an infallible method for apprehending him. One can only recommend a serious attention to and enjoyment of the world in the hope that those who apply themselves to it, holding in check for a time the desire of power or satisfaction, may become aware of the divine presence. As for my use of "divinity", the Neoplatonic tradition which I am trying to explain, and with which on this point I

agree, makes things rather difficult for its interpreters by insisting that the first principle, the One or Good, which corresponds to what most of us who still use the word mean by "God", is absolutely unknowable and ineffable. There is of course nothing scandalous to a modern religious thinker in this insistence. At any meeting of theologians or religious philosophers in the West the unknowability of God is sure to be asserted by a variety of speakers from a variety of different points of view, and it is a commonplace of religious thought in the East. But all too many of those who make this assertion, fail to apply it sufficiently in their practice. They seem to fail to realise that if God is ineffable you can't talk about him: you can only use language which will prepare people's minds to attend to such indications as he may give of his presence. The pagan Neoplatonists, from Plotinus to Damascius, of course knew this very well and stated it with increasing clarity (even if they quite often seem to go rather too far, on their own premises, towards forming concepts or enunciating propositions about the One or making him the premise or conclusion of a discursive argument). The great masters of the Athenian School, Proclus and Damascius, do a good deal at this point to develop what is not always clear in Plotinus (though I do not myself think that they do more than bring out what is, sometimes at least, implicit in his thought). Both of them emphasise strongly that it is necessary in the end to negate one's negations (which does not mean simply restoring the original positive statements which are negated, with a decorative label, a *huper* – or *eminenter*, attached), otherwise one would be left with a sort of pseudo-definition of One as a something which was not anything, instead of a profoundly fruitful and illuminating silence. And Damascius, following a view of Iamblichus[1] which was not adopted by Proclus, insists that we must go even beyond the One to find the unknowable First. In the first pages of his great critical, and at many points liberatingly destructive, re-thinking of the vast metaphysical system which he had inherited[2], in strong opposition on many points to the too smooth, over-clarified, misleadingly coherent-looking scholastic version of it produced by Proclus, he insists that the One from which all things proceed can not only, in a way, be defined and understood in relation to the all but must in some sense be all

things which proceed from it, in however super-simplified a way[3]: and, with an agonized sense of the inadequacy of human thought and language which is impressive and refreshing to those who sometimes feel that Proclus knows much too much about the unknowable, points his readers on to that for which he has no proper name. The most important result of this extreme apophatism for our present purposes is that this unnameable and unknowable divinity is not in a relationship to everything else which can simply be defined as "transcendence"[4] Its relationship to the world, as we should expect, cannot be defined at all (even by saying that it has no relationship). Once it is clear that God for the Neoplatonists stands in this unknowable relationship to all else, anyone who is religious in a Neoplatonist way is free to see him in mind and world wherever his presence seems to be indicated. And though another side of their thought led the Neoplatonists to think (in one way or another) of his presence as mediated through a hierarchy of lesser divinities, this idea of divine hierarchy is probably incompatible with their ultimate conclusions about divinity (and leads them into many other difficulties) and can, I think, be neglected by a modern who wishes to make Neoplatonism the starting-point for his own religious thinking. The hierarchy of hypostases should, of course, be given its proper place in any historical account of Neoplatonism, and will not be ignored in what follows.

The first apprehensions which we have of divinity according to Plotinus are on the level of his third hypostasis, Soul. In the great exhortation to return from self-forgetfulness and self-alienation and remember our true selves and our Father which begins the treatise *On the Three Primary Hypostases* every soul is told to remember that it made all living things and the whole world and gave life to everything[5] (in the Plotinian universe everything is alive and is in some sense thought[6]). In the further development of this in the rest of the chapter, and still more in the careful discussion of the relationship of our souls to the Soul of the All which begins the great treatise *On Difficulties About the Soul*[7], Plotinus makes clear that this does not mean that our souls are parts of or simply identical with the cosmic soul which makes the physical universe real, alive and

divinely excellent. We are of one kind with it[8] and in that sense just because we are soul can claim its divine creativity as our own. But the living unity of the Plotinian hypostasis, in which every part is the whole in so far as it thinks universally, but each in its own way, admits of considerable differences of character and rank. Plotinus never abandons his conviction, stated in the early treatise *If All Souls are One*[9], of the fundamental unity of soul: but he modifies it in the direction of acknowledging a greater diversity and degree of independence to the individuals within that unity. The World-Soul is our elder sister[10], and our attitude towards her, it seems, should combine a sense of intimate kinship with an affectionate and respectful independence and assertion of fundamental equality. We can aspire to "walk on high"[11] like her, sharing in her formation and vivifying of the whole and enjoying that ideal relationship to body which belongs to her and to the souls of the great parts of the universe, sun, moon, earth and stars. Our awareness of any sort of divinity in ourselves is an awareness of a divinity which, without abolition of differences or loss or personal identity, we share with the living thought which is all the reality of the cosmos, in whose everlasting perfection we can rediscover our own forgotten natures.

This leads Plotinus into some very curious excursions into cosmic psychology in his great treatise on the soul, the second part of which contains extensive discussions about whether the World-Soul, the heavenly bodies, and the earth have memory or perception or need them to perform their functions in the universe.[12] The details of these are not relevant here, but it is important to realise that for Plotinus, as for any ancient Stoic or Platonist, any philosophical psychology which concerned itself exclusively with the nature of the human soul would be hopelessly unsatisfactory and inadequate. (Mediaeval Christians here to some extent follow the ancients; they are interested in angelic psychology, and angels for them at least sometimes have cosmic functions, though these do not seem to occupy a very important place in angelology). Plotinus cannot consider man, as a being who perceives, remembers, thinks and acts intelligently, in isolation from the greater embodied souls which, thought they do not need memory or deliberation (any more

than man does at his highest), do act intelligently and have all the awareness of the world whose reality depends on them which is necessary to them. This may seem a mere curiosity of the antique way of thinking, hopelessly out-of-date and incompatible with our vastly extended knowledge of the universe, and particularly of the celestial regions. It would be difficult for us, imaginatively as well as intellectually, to recognise and venerate the goddess Selene in the dreary, dusty receptacle for excessively expensive junk with which we have all become so boringly familiar of late years. But if we study the treatise *On the Soul* and other documents of the ancient faith in the living organic unity of the universe of which we men are not very important parts, and study them sympathetically as well as critically, we may at least begin to feel again the need for some sense of unity with our world and not be content to stand apart from it as isolated, superior thinking beings over against a mass of brute matter in which there is no living thought originatively present, so that we can exploit it as we please in our own supposed interests without worrying about any non-existent cosmic holiness or intelligence, and even imagine that we are necessarily improving it by "humanizing" it. Even if we cannot entirely or uncritically accept Plotinus' way of asserting the unity-in-distinction of reason and nature, we may come to desire to find some satisfactory way of establishing it for and in ourselves.

As our apprehension of divinity, according to Plotinus, progresses we find that we are not only one with other and greater souls in the unity of the Third Hypostasis, but belong, with all Soul, to the greater community of the Second. We are rightful members of the intelligible cosmos which is the Divine Intellect, at once the inner reality and the transcendent exemplar of our perceptible world. A great deal has been written about Plotinus' astonishing accounts of his intelligible world, in which Platonism, Aristotelianism and Stoicism unite with his own immediate experience to give a richly imaginative and philosophically strange picture of a cosmos at once furiously active and timelessly at rest, in which an extreme and delightful variety is held together in the most perfect unity possible below the One. It is an account which brings out very

clearly two problems which are implicit in a great deal of ancient and mediaeval thought. One is the paradox involved in the phrase "eternal life". Can we eliminate all ideas of real duration, process and even change from our thought about any eternal reality as completely as the traditional theologies require if we represent that eternal reality as genuinely alive, and living a life of the utmost imaginable fullness and intensity?[13] The other is a question about a complex intuition which is completely non-discursive.[14] Can we at our highest, or even the Divine Intellect, with which we are then one, have an awareness of a reality (even if we are it) which is not only one, but discrete and diversified, with very complex internal relationships, without that awareness being in some way discursive? Is not the clear distinguishing of parts (even Plotinian parts) and the accurate observance of relationships essentially and inescapably discursive? I mention these problems not in order to solve them, which is beyond my capacity, or to suggest that the ideas of eternal life and complex non-discursive thought should be dismissed from further consideration as absurd, which is far from my intention, but to point out that they arise in this context from Plotinus' determination to get everything in the sense-world into his intelligible world. It must for him possess in a far higher degree all the values and beauties of which we are aware here below in all their splendid variety, even if they are values and beauties which seem to us, on careful reflection, to be bound up with transitoriness and passage and dispersion in space and time. This means that the relationship of the two worlds is inevitably a very intimate one, and Plotinus (though his emphasis varies) is sometimes anxious to stress this intimacy and immediacy[15]. And our own relationship with this higher or inner world is so intimate that Plotinus sometimes says that we are it.[16]

When, therefore, we reach the highest apprehension of divinity of which we are capable before the final union and have transcended our limiting particularities, we still find ourselves one with a world or community of living minds, including greater beings than ourselves[17], which is the archetype and inner reality of the world of sense-experience and lower soul-activity. We are by no means alone or isolated and

separated from the whole. At this point it will be as well to distinguish two questions which are sometimes confused: First, is the process or ascent, of discovering our true natures and strengthening our apprehension of divinity till we are ready for the final union, best carried out in isolation or co-operatively? The answer to this is not altogether simple. It has often been noticed that the theory of Plotinus differs here very considerably from that of Plato. For Plato[2] progress in philosophy required affectionate co-operation and continual dialogue. A philosophical community like the Academy was absolutely necessary, and the ideal environment for the philosopher would be a larger and more closely integrated community, the philosophical city-state. Plotinus probably did not presume to disagree with Plato on this last point, as the curious episode of Platonopolis shows[18]. But his general conception of the philosophic life is one of withdrawn solitary concentration, as the *Enneads* repeatedly make clear. Contemplation is primary, and is best pursued alone. Communication is secondary, and hinders rather than helps contemplation, though it is the philosopher's duty to impart what he has seen to others and help them to see it for themselves. His position is finely stated in a passage which sums up the teaching of the first six chapters of the treatise on contemplation: "The truly good and wise man therefore has already finished reasoning when he declares what he has in himself to another: but in relation to himself he is vision. For he is already turned to what is one, and to the quiet which is not only of things outside but in relation to himself, and all is within him"[19]. In practice, however, he by no means withdrew from the world or shunned society, till he was compelled to do so in his last illness, and his teaching at Rome was not just a matter of handing down the results of his contemplation to his disciples: there was plenty of vigorous discussion and dialogue[20] (as there must have been earlier in the group around Ammonius) and it is doubtful whether he could have done without it; there is much in the *Enneads* which suggests the stimulus of discussions within his circle. However different his theory was, in practice philosophy seems to have been for him almost as much of a social activity as it was for Plato.

The second, quite different question is: does one discover oneself in the course of the philosophic ascent as an isolated individual, progressing towards a solitary perfection, or as part of a larger whole? The answer to this has already been given. One discovers oneself as part of the largest possible whole, and a part which in a sense is that whole. The boundaries of the self are those of the intelligible cosmos. (This is of course one reason why Plotinus in theory felt less need for a philosophic community; it could add nothing to the All within him). One might almost say that for Plotinus the *corpus mysticum* is the universe and the company of heaven includes the whole inner reality of the world. And no genuine Neoplatonist philosopher can be satisfied to think of himself as a member of any smaller or more exclusive community. Here the thought of Plotinus is in accord with, and the study of his writings may reinforce, some of the best tendencies in the religious thought of our time which are leading more and more to the rejection of the exclusive ways of thinking of the past which separated man from man or man from nature. I am inclined to think that Neoplatonic Paganism and its derivatives have always in our intellectual history been working against the tendencies derived from other sources which have led to the drawing of sharp lines and the making of exclusive divisions between man and non-human life, or Church and world, and so on; in our own time this Neoplatonic pressure against exclusiveness is being powerfully reinforced in various ways, notably by influences coming from India. It is in this inner, intelligible, totality of being that the soul must ascend to its solitary union with the One, and it must make every effort to dwell in it consciously until the moment of union comes. In all the great mystical passages of the *Enneads* it is from the world of Intellect that the ascent is made. We are drawn to enter and unite ourselves with that world by the impulse to union with the Good which comes from the Good, and Intellect only attracts us by the light playing upon it from the Good, without which it is altogether uninteresting[21] (though elsewhere Plotinus seems to think that the beauty of Intellect desired by itself can distract us from the Good[22]). It is for the sake of the Good, and under the impulse of the Good, that the whole enterprise of intellectual ascent and

expansion is undertaken. But it is characteristic of the mysticism of Plotinus that there is no short cut, no way in which the isolated individual soul can jump straight into the divine embrace. We must become the All in order to be one with the One. And it is important to notice how we leave the intelligible world for the final union and what happens when we do. In the long passage near the end of his treatise *How the Multitude of the Forms came into Being and on the Good* in which he makes his greatest effort to relate his experience[23], he explains that our union is a perfect assimilation to the eternal union which the Intellect which is the intelligible world enjoys with the Good in the "loving", "mad", "drunken" state which timelessly co-exists with its "thinking" state. We are "carried out of ourselves by the very surge of the wave of Intellect"[24]. If we are to speak of "ecstacy", a term of which Plotinus is not fond, it is an ecstacy of the whole intelligible cosmos by which we are carried out of ourselves who have become the cosmos. It is only when we forget our selves and are no longer aware of our own existence that we forget the Intelligible All: this is obvious when we realise that for Plotinus the self which can rise to the union in which it forgets itself has already become the All. The over-quoted "flight of the alone to the alone" which ends the last treatise of the last *Ennead*[25] (perhaps over-quoted because it is so very easy to find) is misleading if it induces us to think that there is any stage in the ascent of the soul according to Plotinus when it stands isolated, apart from the whole, aware only of itself and God. The "Cut away everything"[26] which ends another great mystical passage gives a more accurate impression: everything must be discarded, including any sort of self-awareness, all at once at that last moment, but only at that last moment. It has often been remarked that the mysticism of Plotinus is totally non-ecclesiastical and non-sacramental, and in that sense non-communitarian. But it is not the mysticism of a solitary saint who seeks God in conscious separation from the worlds of sense and intellect and finds him, apparently, without any participation in an universal movement of return. According to Plotinus we seek God by enlarging ourselves to unity with all that he brings into being and find him and leave all else for him only after and because of that enlargement. We are unlikely

to be able to follow him altogether uncritically at this, any more than at any other, point in his thought. But if we study what he says about the way to the Good which he followed to the end, those of us who are religiously inclined, and perhaps some who are not so, may find that he has a good deal to teach us.

NOTES

1. See Damascius, *Dubitationes et Solutiones* I. 86. 3 ff. Ruelle.
2. *Dubitationes et Solutiones de Primis Principiis, in Platonis Parmenidem* (sometimes cited as *De Principiis*) only available at present in the unsatisfactory edition of Ruelle (Paris 1889 repr. Amsterdam 1966).
3. Cp. Enneads V 2 (11) 1. 1 *τὸ ἓν πάντα καὶ οὐδὲ ἕν* cp. ch. 2. 24 *πάντα δὲ ταῦτα ἐκεῖνος καὶ οὐκ ἐκεῖνος* in both places what immediately follows should be taken into account, but neither here nor elsewhere in the *Enneads* does Plotinus really resolve this paradox.
4. *Dubitationes et Solutiones* P. 15, 13-19 Ruelle.
5. V 1 (10) 2.
6. Cp. III 8 (30) 7.
7. IV 3 (27) 1-8.
8. *ὁμοειδὴς δὲ καὶ ἡμέτερα* V1, 2, 44.
9. IV 9 (8).
10. IV 3 (27) 6, 13: II 9 (33) 18, 16.
11. IV 8 (6) 2, 21: IV 3 (27) 7, 17: V 8 (31) 7, 34: cp. Plato *Phaedrus* 246c 1-2.
12. IV 4 (28) 6-11 (memory); 22-27 (perceptions): ch. 22, on the psychology of the earth, is particularly remarkable.
13. CP. My *Eternity, Life and Movement in Plotinus' Accounts* of Nous (with the discussion) in *Le Néoplatonisme*, Éditions du Centre Nationale de Recherche Scientifique Paris 1971 pp. 67-76.
14. A good account of what the ancients meant by non-discursive thinking is to be found in A. C. Lloyd's

Non-Discursive Thought - An Enigma of Greek Philosophy in *Proc. of the Aristotelian Society* 1970, pp. 261-274.
15. See especially IV 8 (6) 6, 23-28 and V 8 (31) 7, 12-16.
16. III 4 (15) 3, 22: cp. IV 7 (2) 10, 34-36.
17. cp. VI 4 (22) 14, 16ff. VI 5 (23) 12.
18. Porphyry, *Life of Plotinus* ch. 12.
19. III 8 (30) 6, 37-40: my own translation from *Plotinus* III (Loeb Classical Library) p. 381.
20. *Life* chs. 3, 13.
21. VI 7 (38) 22.
22. V 5 (32) 12.
23. VI 7 (38) 34-36.
24. l.c. 35, 24-27 and 36, 17-18.
25. VI 9 (9) 11. 50-51.
26. Ἄφελε πάντα V 3 (49) 17, 38.

XIX

BEAUTY AND THE DISCOVERY OF DIVINITY IN THE THOUGHT OF PLOTINUS

Plotinus would probably have been much surprised to discover that he had an 'aesthetic' – or even that, for moderns, 'aesthetic' is a distinguishable and respectable part of philosophy. He thought much about the beauty of art and nature, and an intense feeling for beauty is apparent in his thought at every level. But for him the apprehension of beauties in the world of sense was a beginning of the journey to the interior during which the soul discovers its own divinity and the source from which it comes, and the perception of the deeper beauties which make the beauties of sense is part of that journey: you can no more separate aesthetic from religion in Plotinus than you can separate religion from philosophy. In this paper, therefore, I propose to explore his thought about beauty entirely in the context of the soul's discovery of divinity, in the hope that this may enable us to understand both better.

The first stage in the soul's journey to the interior is its discovery of its unity with all Soul, and, in the totality of Soul, with the great soul which made the world of sense. If we consider his thought about the beauties of this world of sense in the context of this discovery, we shall at once become aware of the intricacies of the relationship between the Second and the Third Hypostasis and the outer world of space and time which both make, and may arrive at some interesting discoveries about the relationship of the human artist to his work. It is always the belief of Plotinus that we too can "walk on high and direct the whole cosmos", as Plato says of Soul[1]. We can share the ideal relationship to body which belongs to the Soul of the All and the great divine souls of sun, moon, stars and earth. This is a relationship of free detached creativity, in which soul gives everything to body and takes nothing from body, and is present to the material world without experiencing the hindrance or disturbance which a self-isolating fuss about the needs of our particular bodies brings with it. In the great meditation by which we are to realise our unity with universal soul, which occupies the second chapter of the treatise *On The Three Primary Hypostases*[2] the beauty of the world of