

Plotinus' Defense of the Platonic Cosmos and its Demiurge

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Abstract

*In the histories of Philosophy, Plotinus is usually portrayed as an otherworldly philosopher whose ideal was "a life taking no pleasure in the things of earth, so much so that "he seemed ashamed of being in the body." ² Yet, a careful reading of the *Enneads* and Porphyry's *Vita Plotini* reveals a different picture of this extraordinary man.³ For example, in his effort to revive Platonism and defend the Hellenic heritage in philosophy and culture, Plotinus was compelled to engage in polemics against Gnosticism which, in the circle of the philosophers, was considered to be a form of Barbarism.⁴ It is difficult for us to imagine the calm Plotinus in the role of a passionate advocate of Platonic doctrines and the Hellenic way of living in harmony with the world. Yet, that is exactly what we find in his *Against the Gnostics*.⁵*

The purpose of this study is, through a critical examination of the above treatise and other relevant evidence, to provide an answer to the following related questions: How did the Gnostics, in Plotinus' view, use or abuse Plato? Who were these Gnostic opponents of Plotinus and why did he find it necessary to write against them himself and to instruct his students to do the same? What is the bearing of Plotinus' anti-Gnostic polemics on the problem of the relationship of Greek philosophy, and Platonism in particular, to Gnosticism as a religious movement? I shall begin with the question of the identity of Plotinus' Gnostic opponents; I shall proceed with their use and abuse of Plato in Plotinus' view; and I shall conclude with some remarks pertaining to the problem of the relationship between Platonism and Gnosticism.

To understand and appreciate Plotinus' criticism of the Gnostics, it is necessary to bear in mind that the philosopher did not write against Gnosticism in general, but against a particular Gnostic group. Given Plotinus' habits of writing and arguing,⁶ it is not an easy task to identify these people on the basis of the information provided by his treatise. For Plotinus does not refer to his Gnostic opponents by name.⁷ Consider, for example:

There are many other points, or rather all the points of their doctrine, which if one investigated, one would have ample opportunity of showing the real state of the case in regard to each argument. (But we shall not continue this detailed refutation) for we feel a certain regard for some of our friends who happened upon this way of thinking before they became friends, and, though I do not know how they manage it, continue in it. Yet they

themselves do not shrink from saying what they say – either because they wish their opinions to have a plausible appearance of truth or because they think that they really are true. But we have addressed what we have said so far to our own intimate pupils, not to the Gnostics (for we could make no further progress towards convincing them), so that they may not be troubled by these latter, who do not bring forward proofs – how could they? – but make arbitrary, arrogant assertions. Another style of writing would be appropriate to repel those who have the insolence to pull to pieces what godlike men of antiquity have said nobly and in accordance with the truth.⁹

Although the identity of Plotinus' opponents is not revealed in this passage, there are some interesting points which should be noted. First, it is clear that Plotinus is more concerned with the false doctrines than those who held these tenets.¹⁰ Secondly, Plotinus reveals that he does not address the Gnostic party itself, because to do so would be a waste of time, he thinks, since their way of thinking and speaking is not philosophical. He has in mind some of his "acquaintances" who were perturbed by the tenets and audacity of this Gnostic sect which shows no respect for "the noble and true doctrines of the august teachers of antiquity."¹¹ He also reveals that, to his surprise, some of his "friends," who had fallen in with the false Gnostic doctrine before they joined his circle, could not get over it. This was good reason for his school to be alarmed about this trend.

From the information provided by the above quoted passage, it follows that there was a Gnostic sect active in Rome in the middle of the third century A. D. These Gnostics were so effective that Plotinus was compelled to write a treatise against them in order to (1) expose their false and fanciful doctrines; (2) persuade those of his friends who had been acquainted with these tenets before they joined his circle to give them up; and (3) protect some other students of his school from falling into the same Gnostic trap. The reason why the doctrines of this particular Gnostic group had such an appeal to the friends and followers of Plotinus was their curious relation to Plato. As we will see in the next section, Plotinus claimed that this audacious Gnostic sect had either plagiarized or irreverently abused and distorted Plato's doctrines.

For more precise information about the identity of Plotinus' Gnostic opponents, we must turn to *Vita Plotini*, Chapter 16, where Porphyry makes the following revealing statement regarding the origin of the treatise *Against the Gnostics*:

Many Christians of this period – amongst them sectaries who had abandoned the old philosophy, men of the school of Adelphius and Aquilinus – had possessed themselves of works by Alexander of Libya, by Philocomus, by Demonstratus, and by Lydus, and exhibited also revelations bearing the names of Zoroaster, Zostrianus, Nicotheus, Allogenes, Mesus, and other of that order. Thus they fooled many, themselves fooled first;

Plato, according to them, had failed to penetrate into the depth of Intellectual Being. Plotinus frequently attacked their position in the conferences and finally wrote the treatise which is headed Against the Gnostics: he left to us of the circle the task of examining what he passed over.

Accordingly, the Gnostics against whom Plotinus wrote were none other than the people around Adelphius and Aquilinus. These people, on Porphyry's testimony, were Christians¹² of a special kind, since they were sectaries or apostates from the ancient philosophy.¹³ They made ample use of the works of Alexander the Libyan, Philocomus, Demostratus, and Lydus. They also exploited certain scriptures which passed as revelations of such masters as Zoroaster, Zostrianus, Nicotheus, Allogenes, and Mesus.¹⁴ Above all they insolently claimed that "Plato had failed to penetrate into the depth of Intellectual Being." Thus, this particular group of Gnostics gave the Platonists of Plotinus' circle every reason to take them up and scrutinize their doctrines.

Had these Gnostics kept their hands off Plato's writings, and had not some of Plotinus' friends been misled by them, the philosopher would not have bothered to write against them.¹⁵ Plotinus was not interested in Gnosticism as such, Christian or non-Christian, and its fanciful manifold revelations. He became interested and wrote passionately against this particular Gnostic group which was formed around Adelphius and Aquilinus, precisely because they were perceived as apostates from the honorable ancient tradition of Platonic philosophy.¹⁶ These people dared to set up their own philosophical school (*ἰδίαν αἵρεσιν*), and to challenge Plato himself who was the great authority and the source of truth for the Platonists in Rome. To Plotinus, this was intolerable. Hence, the coming-into-being of *Ennead* 11.9. as a response to this particular Gnostic challenge.

If we consider *Ennead* 11.9. as a whole and relate it to III.8., V.5. and V.8., which seem to form a unity thematically and chronologically,¹⁷ then the intention of Plotinus in writing this particular treatise becomes evident. Certainly his set goal was to prove that the Gnostics whom he addressed were wrong not only in their doctrines and practices, but also in their attitude towards Plato. Thus, Plotinus argues against specific cosmological and ethical Gnostic doctrines which he finds inconsistent and fanciful. He also argues against certain medical and magico-religious practices which the philosopher considers barbaric and ridiculous. Above all, Plotinus judges the Gnostic attitude towards Plato, whose doctrines they misappropriated, as being arrogant and irreverent. A brief analysis of 11.9. will reveal both the arguments, which Plotinus used in his anti-Gnostic polemic, and the pathos of his argumentation which is rather unusual for the usually calm and introspective philosopher.

The descriptive title of this treatise is "Against Those Who Declare the Creator of the World, and the World Itself, to be Evil" which clearly indicates that Plotinus' main target was the Gnostic cosmology. According to this cosmology, the Maker of the universe was an inferior and ignorant Demiurge identified with the god of the Old Testament by Christian Gnostic sects.¹⁸ Vain glory was the motive of the creative activity of this retarded son of the fallen aeon *Sophia*.¹⁹ The aeons constitute the Gnostic *Pleroma* and their number is multiplied out of proportion.²⁰ The deplorable condition of the world is due to the inferiority, impotence, and idiocy of the Maker. The enormous cosmic machine, and the evil powers which control it, serves as a tool in their hands for imprisonment of the human spirit. The Gnostic goal was to liberate the pneumatic element of the alienated human soul, and to bring it back to its spiritual source.²¹ This liberation and salvation was to be effected by means of the apocalyptic sacred *gnosis*²² and certain magico-religious practices and techniques which were believed to set the Gnostics apart from all other human beings and above the Cosmos and the evil Archons who rule it. Hence, the arrogance of the Gnostics.

As a genuine Platonist, Plotinus found Gnostic doctrines about the Cosmos and the Demiurge repulsive. He devoted the greatest part of his anti-Gnostic treatise to defend the goodness of the Maker of the Cosmos, the beauty of the Cosmos, and man's dignified place in the Cosmic order. For instance, with regard to the motives of creation and destruction of the Cosmos, he asks:

For whatever advantage did it think was going to result for it from making the universe? It is ridiculous to suppose that it did so in order to be honored; the people who suppose so are transferring to it what is true of the sculptors here below. Then again, If it made the world by discursive reasoning and its making was not in its nature, and its power was not a productive power, how could it have made this particular universe? And when, too, is it going to destroy it? For if it was sorry it had made it, what is it waiting for? But if it is not sorry yet, it is not likely to be, since it has got used to the universe by now and grown more kindly disposed to it with the passage of time... We cannot grant, either, that this universe had an evil origin because there are many unpleasant things in it: this is a judgement of people who rate it too highly, if they claim that it ought to be the same as the intelligible world and not only an image of it. Surely, what other fairer image of the intelligible world could there be? (11.9.4, 21–26).

Evidently, Plotinus accepted the standard Greek philosophical position that the sensible universe in its totality was timeless, in the sense that it had no beginning and no end in time.²³ It is rather the necessary outcome and the final product of a perennial creative process whose ultimate source is the One. Between the One and the sensible world, the two intermediate

hypostases are to be found, i.e., Nous and the World-Soul. In this triad, (One, Nous, Soul), the Intelligible Realm is so completely comprehended that the Gnostic addition of aeons upon aeons was considered by Plotinus as being absurd.²⁴ Since the sensible Cosmos is a reflection, a mere image of the Intelligible Cosmos, it cannot be as perfect as the model or *paradeigma*. Yet, for Plotinus, "the universe is a life organized, effective, complex, all-comprehensive, displaying an unfathomable wisdom" [*Ibid.* 8, 13–15]. How, then, can anyone deny that it is a clear image, beautifully formed, of the Intelligible Cosmos? Besides, the Gnostics contradict themselves in that they express contempt about this world, while they preach about the "new earth" which awaits them in heaven. Plotinus asks poignantly, "Why should they desire to live in the archetype of a world abhorrent to them?" [*Ibid.* 5, 26–27]. And if "the entire heavens and the stars within the heavens have had no communion with the Immortal Soul," as the Gnostics claim, how could they, at the same time, "declare deathless and divine" their own souls? [*Ibid.* 5, 2–4]. In the eyes of Plotinus, the beauty, order, and eternity of the world testify to the goodness, wisdom, and power of its maker and shows that the Gnostic attitude towards the beautiful Cosmos constituted a hubris.

In Plotinus' view, the Gnostic cosmology should be rejected not only because it is false and fanciful, but also for the reason that its effects on the character of the people, who accept it, is deleterious. In this connection, he writes:

But there is one point which we must be particularly careful not to let escape us, and that is what these arguments do to the souls of those who hear them and are persuaded by them to despise the universe and the beings in it. For there are two schools of thought about attaining the end, one which puts forward the pleasure of the body as the end, and another which chooses nobility and virtue, for whose members desire depends on God and leads back to God (as must be studied elsewhere): Epicurus, who abolishes providence, exhorts to pursue pleasure and its enjoyment, which is what is left; but this doctrine censures the lord of providence and providence itself still more crudely, and despises all the laws of this world and the virtue whose winning extends back through all time, and makes self-control here something to laugh at, that nothing noble may be seen existing here below, and abolishes self-control and the righteousness which comes to birth with men's characters and is perfected by reason and training, and altogether everything by which a man could become nobly good. So pleasure is left for them, and what concerns themselves alone, and what other men have no share in, and what is nothing but a matter of their needs – unless one of them is by nature better than these teachings of theirs: for nothing here is of value for them, but something else is, which they will go after one day (Ibid. 15, 1–20).

Accordingly, amorality and anomy follow directly from the Gnostic hatred of the cosmos. The additional testimony of Irenaeus confirms that certain Gnostic sects practiced the libertine doctrines which they preached in their licentious lives²⁵.

Plotinus was well aware of the vulnerability of human beings to such revolutionary and immoral teaching, especially when it is accompanied by talk like this: "You yourself are to be nobler than all else, nobler than men, nobler than even gods... You, yourself, are the child of God; those men whom you used to venerate, those beings whose worship they inherit from antiquity none of these is His children; you without lifting a hand are nobler than the very heavens" [*Ibid.* 9, 531–58]. To the Gnostic cry "Look to God" and all will be well, the philosopher replies skeptically: "'God' on the lips without a good conduct of life, is a word" [*Ibid.* 15, 39–40]. The Gnostic call for the re-evaluation of values was so radical that the West had to wait till the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries to hear it again from some extreme nihilist and existentialist movements.²⁶

It is significant that the same Gnostics, who refused to practice the traditional virtues and the traditional medical arts, sought help in magical formulas and spells to overcome their fears of the Cosmic powers and to exorcise the evil demons. With subtle irony, Plotinus comments on the irrational fears of the Gnostics:

*But they themselves most of all impair the inviolate purity of the higher powers in another way too. For when they write magic chants, intending to address them to those powers, not only to the soul but to those above it as well, what are they doing except making the powers obey the word and follow the lead of people who say spells and charms and conjurations, any one of us who is well-skilled in the art of saying precisely the right things in the right way, songs and cries and aspirated and hissing sounds and everything else which their writings say has magic power in the higher world? But even if they do not want to say this, how are the incorporeal beings affected by sounds? So by the sort of statements with which they give an appearance of majesty to their own words, they, without realizing it, take away the majesty of the higher powers. But when they say they free themselves from diseases, if they meant that they did so by temperance and orderly living, they would speak well, just as the philosophers do; but in fact they assume that the diseases are evil spirits, and claim to be able to drive them out by their word; by this claim they might make themselves more impressive in the eyes of the masses, who wonder at the powers of magicians, but would not persuade sensible people that diseases do not have their origin in strain or excess or deficiency or decay, and in general in changes which have their origin outside or inside. The cures of disease make this clear too (*Ibid.* 14. 1–20).*

If Plotinus is correct about the magical practices of his opponents, it is clear that the Gnostics believed that they could heal their bodies and fortify their souls for its struggles to overcome the evil powers of the spheres and reach its destination, the *pleroma*, that is, the Gnostic paradise. Unable to understand this morbid fear of the celestial spheres, the philosopher suspects that the Gnostics sought by these means to frighten people unaccustomed to thinking, never trained in an instructive and coherent gnosis" (*Ibid.* 13, 9–10). Plotinus here turns the tables against his opponents who appear to lack the knowledge of the nature of things, in spite of their constant and boastful talk of possessing the true and saving gnosis.²⁷ Having briefly examined those aspects of Plotinus' criticism which pertain to the Gnostic cosmology, ethics, and practices, it remains to turn our attention to Plato in order to see how he was treated by the Gnostics, in Plotinus' assessment.

One of the things which strikes the attention of the careful reader of Plotinus' anti-gnostic treatise is his repeated and direct accusations that his opponents (1) have borrowed from Plato any doctrine in their system which is worth mentioning; (2) have misunderstood or misinterpreted other Platonic doctrines; (3) have added to those Platonic borrowing other false doctrines derived from other sources; and (4) have repudiated the honorable Platonic tradition and Plato's name in their effort to appear original and create "their own school."²⁸ The significance of these accusations for the solution of the difficult problem of the relationship of Gnosticism to Greek philosophy is great. If Plotinus is right in his criticism of the Gnostics, then it must be true that a certain Gnostic group, which was active in Rome in the middle century A. D., was familiar with Plato's writings which influenced them.²⁹

Let us begin with the first accusation. What did the Gnostics, in Plotinus' view, take from Plato? To this question Plotinus' answer is specific and reads as follows:

And what ought one to say of the other beings they introduce, their "Exiles" and "Impressions" and "Repentings"? For if they say that these are affections of the soul, when it has changed its purpose, and "Impressions" when it is contemplating, in a way, images of realities and not the realities themselves, then these are the terms of people inventing a new jargon to recommend their own school: they contrive this meretricious language as if they had no connection with the ancient Hellenic school, though the Hellenes knew all this and knew it clearly, and spoke without delusive pomposity of ascents from the cave and advancing gradually closer and closer to a truer vision. Generally speaking, some of these people's doctrines have been taken from Plato, but others, all the new ideas they have brought in to establish a philosophy of their own, are things they have found outside the truth. For the judgements too, and the rivers in Hades and the reincarnations come from Plato. And the making a plurality in the intelligible world, Being, and

*Intellect, and the Maker different from Intellect, and Soul, is taken from the words in the Timaeus.*³⁰

It is evident from this passage that these Gnostics had exploited the *Timaeus*, the *Republic* and the *Symposium*. They made use of such Platonic doctrines as the allegory of the cave, the gradual ascent of the soul, the judgment of the soul, the reincarnation, and the plurality of beings which constitute the Intelligible Realm. To this list should be added the doctrines of "an immortal Soul, an Intellectual and Intelligible Realm, the Supreme God, the Soul's need of emancipation from all intercourse with the body, the fact of separation from it, the escape from the world of process to the world of essential-being" (*Ibid.* 6, 37–41). Plotinus is right when he writes that all these doctrines are "emphatically asserted by Plato." He goes so far as to say that the Gnostics "did well to adopt them," but their manner of adopting was neither scholarly (they misinterpreted some of these doctrines), nor courteous (they were not grateful to the Greeks).

Let us next consider a few examples which indicate that the Gnostic opponents of Plotinus, in his view, misinterpreted Plato. In the *Timaeus* (39e, 7–9), Plato states the relationship between the intelligible world and the sensible world in cryptic language. Commenting on this passage Plotinus writes:

But they did not understand, and took it to mean that there is one mind which contains in it in repose all realities, and another mind different from it which contemplates them, and another which plans – but often they have soul as the maker instead of the planning mind – and they think that this is the maker according to Plato, being a long way from knowing who the maker is. And in general they falsify Plato's account of the manner of the making, and a great deal else, and degrade the great man's teachings as if they had understood the intelligible nature, but he and the other blessed philosophers had not. (Ibid. 6, 19–26)

Also, in the *Phaedrus* (246c, 13–14), Plato speaks metaphorically of the soul as "losing its wings." The Gnostic interpreted this text in such a way as to provide justification for their doctrine that the creation of this world was the result of an "error" on the part of the Soul. As Plotinus sees it, this passage can only refer to individual souls. To make it apply to the world–soul is sheer nonsense, if not blasphemy. He states:

But if they are going to assert that the soul made the world when it had, so to speak, "shed its wings," this does not happen to the Soul of the All; but if they are going to say that it made the world as the result of a moral failure, let them tell us the cause of the failure. But when did it fail? If it was from eternity, it abides in a state of failure according to their own account. If it began to fail, why did it not begin before? (Ibid. 4, 1–7)

Evidently, the Gnostics treated the human souls as fair presentments of the Soul of the universe. But to do this is, in Plotinus' eyes, like "picking potters and blacksmiths and making them warrant for discrediting a well-ordered city" [*Ibid.* 7, 5-7). In other words, Plotinus maintains that "commerce with the body is no gain to a soul" [*Ibid.* 7, 3-4), but this applies only to particular human souls, and not to the Soul of the All, as the Gnostics claim misinterpreting Plato. According to Plotinus, they are equally wrong in their effort to find support in Plato to justify their hatred for the sensible cosmos and their bodies. Using a beautiful metaphor, Plotinus says that his opponents are like people who constantly complain about the house and its architect, but they go on living in it anyway. Plotinus' view on this matter is straight forward: "As long as we have bodies we must inhabit the dwellings prepared for us by our good sister (the All Soul) in her vast power of laborless creation" [*Ibid.* 18, 14-17).

In Plotinus' view, the Gnostics added to the doctrines, which they took from Plato, the dissonant teachings of other sources.³¹ The list of such doctrines is presented in the following passage:

For what was said by the ancients about the intelligible world is far better, and is put in a way appropriate to educated men, and it will be easily recognized by those who are not utterly deceived by the delusion that is rushing upon men that these teachings have been taken by the Gnostics later from the ancients, but have acquired some in no way appropriate additions; on the points, at any rate, on which they wish to oppose the ancient teachings they introduce all sorts of comings into being and passings away, and disapprove of this universe, and blame the soul for its association with the body, and censure the director of this universe, and identify its maker with the soul, and attribute to this universal soul the same affections as those which the souls in parts of the universe have.³²

However, it was the attitude of the Gnostics towards Plato which irritated Plotinus more than any of their novelties or misinterpretations of the Platonic doctrines. The fact that these Gnostics did not gratefully acknowledged their borrowing from Plato, in conjunction with their arrogant claim that they would improve upon Plato, was intolerable to Plotinus. At any time that he has occasion to comment on the Gnostic attitude towards Plato, Plotinus casts off his usual calmness habit and writes with pathos and excitement, as is evident from the following passage:

For these doctrines are there in Plato, and when they state them clearly in this way they do well. If they wish to disagree on these points, there is no unfair hostility in saying to them that they should not recommend their own opinions to their audience by ridiculing and insulting the Greeks but that they should show the correctness on their own merits of all the points of doctrine which are peculiar to them and differ from the views of the Greeks,

stating their real opinions courteously, as befits philosophers, and fairly on the points where they are opposed, looking to the truth and not hunting fame by censuring men who have been judged good from ancient times by men of worth and saying that they themselves are better than the Greeks (Ibid. 10, 11–15).

Echoing the views of Plotinus on this subject, Porphyry stated epigrammatically that these Gnostics "fooled many, themselves fooled first" by teaching that "Plato had failed to penetrate into the depth of Intellectual Beings" [*Vita*. 16, 7–9].

In conclusion, it would seem that it was this provocative teaching and the arrogant Gnostic attitude towards Plato that set the entire school of Plotinus on alert. To refute these audacious and insolent Gnostics, the master himself picked up his pen and instructed his most outstanding associates, Amelius and Porphyry, to do the same. But, the Platonists in Rome were not alone in their anti-gnostic polemics. Throughout the empire, many Christians, like Irenaeus, were producing their *contra haereses* at about the same time. Which of the two groups contributed the most to the final defeat of Gnosticism is difficult to tell. One thing was sure: with Gnosticism out of the way, the two groups, Christian Fathers and Platonic philosophers, would fight bitterly for the hearts and minds of the Greco-Romans. It is not an accident that Porphyry, the successor of Plotinus as Head of the School in Rome, became the champion of Hellenism against Christianity.³³

Endnotes

1. *Enneads VI*. 9.11, 50–51. This is an often-quoted passage with which Plotinus' book concludes not in the chronological order, but in Porphyry's thematic arrangement of the Plotinian treatises.
2. *Vita Plotini* 1,1–2, abbreviated as VP. Much has been made of the anecdote with which Porphyry opens the biography of Plotinus.
3. Plotinus, unlike many others of his contemporaries, did not spend his life in the desert meditating and waiting for salvation to come to him from heaven. On the contrary, the otherworldly philosopher lived his mature life in the two greatest cosmopolitan centers of culture of that time, Alexandria and Rome. He devoted his energies in studying and teaching Platonic philosophy to a group of young brilliant men who distinguished themselves as men of letters. His lectures were also attended by many educated ladies of the Greco-Roman aristocracy. His house was full of children, boys and girls, entrusted to him by their deceased parents. He took, we are told, meticulous care to manage the property of these orphans. He was a close friend and consultant of the Emperor Galienus and Salonina, his wife. Capitalizing on

this imperial friendship, the philosopher made plans to build an entire city for men dedicated to philosophy. The city was to be named *Platonopolis* in honor of Plato, whose philosophy was successfully revived by Plotinus and became known as the new Platonism. See *VP* especially chapters 3,4,9, and 12, for information provided in this paragraph.

4. Another form was, of course, Christianity to which Porphyry refers as the *barbaron tolmemma*. See Eusebius *Eccl. History*, VI. 19.

5. This is *Ennead* II. 9, in Porphyry's arrangement who provided also the abbreviated title. If we accept the view of Professors R. Harder, H.C. Puech, A. H. Armstrong, R. Wallis, and others, the *Ennead* 11.9 is part of a larger group which includes III.8, V.5, and V.8, then Plotinus wrote more than one treatise on Gnosticism. On this, see R. Harder, "Eine neue Schrift Plotins," *Hermes*, LXXI (1936): 5–8; H.C. Puech, "Plotin et les Gnostiques," *Entretiens Hardt* 5 (Geneva, 1960) pp. 161–90; A. H. Armstrong, "Gnosis and Greek Philosophy," *Gnosis*, Festschrift fur H. Jonas, B. Aland et al. ed. (Gottingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1978), pp. 87–124; R.T. Wallis, *Neoplatonism* (New York: Scribner's Sons, 1972), p. 45.

6. As described by Porphyry sympathetically in *VP*, 8.

7. The alternate title of the treatise *Against the Gnostics or Against Those Declaring the Creator of the World and the World Itself to be Evil*, is due to Porphyry the editor of the *Enneads*, *VP A*, 16–18.

8. This statement about the dilemma of having to choose between truth and friendship brings to mind the similar passage from the *Nicomachean Ethics* 1096a 12–17, which was the origin to the famous precept in its Latin form "*amicus Plato sed magis amica Veritas.*"

9. Armstrong's translation in the LOEB (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1979), which will be followed throughout.

10. In so doing, Plotinus follows an established Hellenic tradition in philosophical argumentation and debate.

11. Plato is the philosopher whom Plotinus has in mind here, as the many references to him in this treatise, clearly indicate.

12. The opinions of the scholars are divided as to whether these Gnostics were Christian or pagan. On this, see H. C. Puech, *op cit*. I tend to agree with Professor Puech that the Gnostics, to whom Porphyry refers and against whom Plotinus wrote, were Christians with the reservations which I have expressed in "Plotinus' Anti-Gnostic *Polemic and Porphyry, Against the Christians, in Neoplatonism and Gnosticism*, R. Wallis, and J. Brezman, eds. (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1992).

13. Professor J. Igal, "The Gnostics and 'the Ancient Philosophy' in Porphyry and Plotinus," in *Neoplatonism and Early Christian Thought* (London: Vaviorum Publications Ltd., 1981), pp. 138–49, argues strongly but incorrectly, in my view, for the proposal of identifying "ancient philosophy" with Zoroastrianism. Now, if the Gnostics, against whom the Platonists wrote, were not apostates from Platonism, Plotinus would not have bothered to write about them. Besides, as Porphyry has shown, they used forgeries, passing as the works of oriental masters, not to preach Zoroastrianism, but to set up their own school in disrespect for Plato whom they (or at least some friends of Plotinus associated with them) had abandoned.

14. Some of these revelations, have been published in *The Naq Hammadi Library*, J. M. Robinson, ed., (San Francisco: Harper and Row Publishers, 1978), especially pp. 368–94, and 443–53.

15. It is surprising that Professor Igal, in his scholarly paper which was cited above has failed to see this very important point.

16. Throughout his treatise (11.9), Plotinus mentions only Greek philosophy, and Plato especially, as dishonored by the apostate Gnostics whose doctrines had attracted some of his acquaintances.

17. For more information on this, see note 5 above.

18. To the Maker of the world the Gnostics applied the name *Demiourgos* and *Kosmokrator* (Ruler of the World), according to Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses*, compiled by J.T. Nielsen, (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1977), p. 15. Irenaeus' book is a mine of information about the various Gnostic sects. The information given in this paragraph has mainly been taken from his text.

19. Which is identified with the World-Soul in 11.9.10, 19–33.

20. The Valentinians, for instance, counted thirty aeons. *Irenaeus, op. cit.*, p.2.

21. For the Gnostics, men are divided into three categories, pneumatic, psychic, and hylic, depending on which of the three elements is predominant in their composition, fire, air, or water. Irenaeus, *op. cit.* p. 13.

22. On the meaning of this term, which gave the Gnostics their appellation, see H. Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion*, second edition, revised (Boston: Bacon Press, 1963), pp. 34–37.

Consider Plotinus' statement on this matter: "That this world has neither beginning nor end but exists forever as long as the Supreme stand is certainly no novel teaching." 11.9.7, 1–2; and compare it with Heraclitus (Fr. 30): "This world order did none of the gods or men make, but it always was and is and shall be: an everlasting fire, kindling in measures and going out in measures"

24. The first three chapters of 11.9. are devoted to establishing the thesis that there can be no more and no less than the three hypostases, "Ἐν Νουῶ, Ψυχῇ."
25. Irenaeus, *op. cit.*, pp. 29–30.
26. H. Jonas, *Ibid*, especially the epilogue, pp. 320–40, where he states his reasons for finding Gnostic influence on Heidegger.
27. Gnosis is the term which Plotinus uses here to make his irony more biting.
28. "Ἰδίαν αἰρεσιν" in 11.9.6, 5–6; also *Vita*, 16, 16–17.
29. If so, then A. H. Armstrong's thesis which denies such influence must be wrong. Professor Armstrong presented this thesis in the article cited above (note No. 5). For a more detailed criticism of this thesis, I refer to my paper cited above, note 12.
30. *Timaeus* 39e, 7–9. See also, Rivaud, A. *Timee. Critias* (Paris, 1925); Cornford, F.M. *Plato's Cosmology* (London, 1937); Hager, F.P. *Der Geist und das Eine* (Bern–Stuttgart, 1970); Lesky, A. *Kosmos* (Vienna, 1963); Puhvel, J. "The Origins of Greek Kosmos and Latin Mundus" *AJP* (1976): 154ff; and Taran, L. "The Creation Myth in Plato's *Timaeus*" in *Essays in Ancient Greek Philosophy*, J. Anton and G. Kustas, eds., (Albany, NY: SUNY, 1971).
31. These additions may account for the misinterpretations of Plato, because they are contradictory. Significantly, *Ennead VI.1* is devoted to the criticism of Aristotelianism and Stoicism, on which see my "The Plotinian Reduction of Aristotle's Categories" *Ancient Philosophy* VII (1988): 146–162; reprinted in *Aristotle's Ontology*, A. Preus and J. Anton, eds., (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1992); and my "Plotinus on the Stoic Set of Categories" *Journal of Neoplatonic Studies*, to be reprinted also in *Neoplatonism and Indian Philosophy*, P. Gregorios, ea., (forthcoming).
32. (*Ibid*. 6, 55–62). In the light of this and similar passages, it is amazing that a scholar of Professor Katz's caliber could make the following statement: "To see Plotinus as in some sense a Gnostic *manque* is to discover an important aspect of his many-faceted philosophy." "Plotinus and the Gnostics," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 15 (1954), pp. 289–98. If this statement were true, it would make nonsense of both Plotinus' and Porphyry's anti-gnostic writings.
33. See on this my "Porphyry's Criticism of Christianity and the Problem of Augustine's Platonism." *Dionysius XIII* (1989): 51–71.