

Painting and Dancing: Scales of Virtue and Inspiration in Late Ancient Platonism¹

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1. Introduction

This paper explores two related questions in late Athenian and Alexandrian Neoplatonism.² First, how can a philosopher contemplate the eternal Forms while engaging in practical agency in the world?³ Second, do the Neoplatonists provide a consistent account of the philosopher's progress through the 'stages of virtue' (βαθμοί τῶν ἀρετῶν), the conceptual structure that underpins late antique philosophical curricula and hagiography?⁴ These two questions interact, I suggest, because later Platonists appeal to the stages of virtue and divine *maniai* (βαθμοί τῶν μανίων)⁵ to explain the philosopher's ability to alternate gracefully between contemplation and embodied agency, and even to engage in both activities at the same moment. I argue that apparently contradictory evidence for the highest stages of virtue can be reconciled satisfactorily,⁶ shedding light on two models of ethical and perceptual transformation that remain consistent throughout later Neoplatonism.

¹ This draft paper develops and links several arguments I have been developing elsewhere, including Griffin 2014a, 2016; 2021; 2024a; and forthcoming b. It has benefited from feedback at several conferences and workshops, including the Buddhist-Platonist working group that resulted in a recent volume of essays (Carpenter and Harter 2024) and a meeting at the University of Toronto in celebration of Professor Harold Tarrant (Layne and Renaud forthcoming). I am grateful to participants at both events, and to many other colleagues for feedback that has significantly improved the paper, although its faults remain my own; I note in particular Amber Carpenter, P.J. Harter, Angelique Coralie Kendall, Harold Tarrant, Sonsoles Costero Quiroga, Tim Addey, John Finamore, Antonio Vargas, Greg Shaw, and Danielle Layne.

² I will occasionally use the label 'Neuplatonismus' to describe the protagonists of the study, though with awareness of its limits; see for example Gerson (2013) and Catana (2013). Much of the material discussed here originates from commentary on Plato; Ancient Platonists established identities and claimed authority as public educators, ritual specialists, or members of 'textual communities', experts recognized by a capacity to access and interpret authoritative texts (for the term see Stock 1983, with a summary of recent applications to late antiquity in Heath 2019). For textual exegesis in late Platonism more broadly, underlying this approach, see for example Hoffmann (2012), Baltussen (2008), Griffin (2023).

³ For a broad discussion of practical agency in Neoplatonism, see O'Meara (2003). I have explored this specific question in Griffin (forthcoming a), from a cross-cultural perspective in Griffin (2024a), and from the vantage point of philosophical self-transformation in Griffin (2024b). For a related question, see n. 8 below.

⁴ For primary sources on the scales of virtue and inspiration, see below, §3. For the terminology of 'rungs' or a 'scale' of virtues, see for example Olymp. *in Phaed.* 8.2. For treatments of the scale of virtues in general, see Chiaradonna (2021), Finamore (2021), Stern-Gillet (2014), Baltzly (2006), and Dillon (1983). On theurgy and the inspirations in particular, see for example Helmig and Vargas (2014) and Sheppard (1982). For the relationship between Plotinus and Porphyry's accounts of virtue, see Brisson (2006), 93-9, O'Meara (2018, 2013, 2012), and Tarrant (2007). For curricular issues discussed below, see Hoffmann (1987) and Westerink (1976), 116-18 (n. ad. Olymp. *in Phaed.* 8.2).

⁵ For 'rungs' (βαθμοί) applied to the divine madresses of *Phaedrus* 244a-245c, see Hermias *in Phaedr.* 92,5-93,28, and n. 4.

⁶ For the concern that the witnesses may be irreconcilable, see Festugière (1969); Goulet-Cazé (1982), 277-280; Westerink (1990), LXVIII-LXVIII, and (1976), n. on Ol. *in Phd.* 116-18; Saffrey and Segonds (2001), lxix-c; Hadot (1990), i.84-103, O'Meara (2003), §§1.3-6; (2006); (2012).

Ancient Platonists, like their medieval successors, often juxtapose the contemplative and active lifestyles as alternatives, with structures like the scale of virtues presented as a series of ‘steps’ or ‘rungs’ (βαθμοί) bridging these two extremes. I argue below that the ancient Platonists developed two distinct and parallel accounts of how we might employ these ladders to shuttle between contemplation and action, and why we *should* do so.⁷ In the first model that later Platonists will attribute to Porphyry (§4 below), the contemplative life alternates gracefully with its deliverances in social, practical virtue: the philosopher strives to eliminate environmental distractions in order to attend to a paradigmatic Form like Beauty or Justice, with a focused absorption of her attention (προσοχή, cf. Porph. *De Abst.* 1.41), and *then* turns to enact that paradigm in the temporal medium of her own habits and choices, like a painter glancing (ἀποβλέπειν) between her model and her canvas (the image is from Plato, *Republic* 5, 500c-501b). In the different but complementary scheme that I associate with post-Iamblichean Platonism (§4-6), wholesome worldly action is compossible with contemplation *at the very same moment*, provided that the agent is in a state of ‘inspiration’ (ἐνθουσιασμός) and operating as a receptive conduit for divine activity, like a dancer moving in flow with the music.⁸

I will later describe these as a ‘painterly’ model (§3) and ‘dancerly’ model (§4-6) of human relationship to the divine paradigm, flowing ultimately from a ‘double signature’ (διττὰ συνθήματα, Proclus *in Tim.* I 210,3-211,8) implanted in each human soul by the gods. We carry one token for remaining eternally linked with the divine ‘One to One’, that is, by a bond between the ‘One of the soul’ (ἓν τῆς ψυχῆς) and the One of our proper god; and we also carry a second token for proceeding from and reverting to the divine Intellect in a continuous, progressive cycle.⁹ The ‘reverting’ or ascending portion of this latter cycle climbs the scale of virtues, and is underwritten by Porphyry’s model of conscious attention (προσοχή) as a spotlight that attends to one object at a time, the sensible *or* the intelligible; in order to ascend, we must bring increasing focus to bear on the intelligible world, at the cost of our attention to the sensible. But the former signature, which enables a continuous and inspired link with the One of the gods, involves an alternative model of receptive attention, a mind rendered ‘empty’ or open to divine inspiration.¹⁰

⁷ Since practical life stands as an active and communal expression of shared contemplative ideals. See O’Meara (2003) for a comprehensive defense of practical philosophy in Neoplatonism, and, for example, Edwards (2000) on Neoplatonic hagiography.

⁸ I distinguish this question from a related one Olympiodorus poses at *On Phaedo* 6.3: whether one can lead an uninterrupted contemplative life while in the body. (He says that Ammonius answered that the contemplative life could be uninterrupted, but the inspired life could not be continuous). I will not focus primarily on the nature of inspiration in later Platonism here, but Tarrant (2021), Addey (2014), and Shaw (2014) are excellent introductions to the discourses of divine receptivity and ritual suitability (*epitēdeiotēs*) in this period, both in literature and practice.

⁹ See §§5-6 below. For the double signature, see for example Proclus *in Tim.* I, 201,3-211,8, and compare Hermias *in Phaedr.* 93,19-30; for tokens of virtue in the soul and the relationship to prayer and inspiration, for example Olymp. *in Phaed.* 1.4-5 and Proclus *in Tim.* I, 212,1-10.

¹⁰ For these images and the corresponding textual references, see §3-5 below. For Porphyry, I have in mind especially the models of attention in *De abst.* 1.41 and *VP* 8,7-24 (§3b below). For later Platonists, I have in mind interpretations of *Chald. Or.* fr. 1 on perception with an ‘empty mind’ (*keneos noos*), especially as it is applied to experiences of inspiration illustrated in Hermias’ model of inspiration reaching the One of the soul directly (§6 below).

I argue that this inspired signature answers to the divine madresses of music, teletic, prophecy and love, elicited from the exegetical tradition of the *Phaedrus* (Hermias *in Phaedr.* 88,15-96,24). I also identify these inspirations with Damascius' account of the highest 'hieratic virtues', 'corresponding' to the virtues in degree, but operating in a unificatory rather than ontological manner (*in Phaedr.* 1.144).¹¹ I argue for viewing the scale of virtues and the scale of divine inspirations as two *parallel ladders*. Each degree of virtue answers to a tier of inspiration, in the sense that they produce an identical inner transformation in the soul: for instance, the inspiration of the Muses and civic virtue both produce inner harmony (see §5e, below). But this parallelism coexists with a priority relationship: the inspirations ultimately *cause* their corresponding virtues. In addition, while the scale of virtues reaches just so far as the divine Intellect and the intelligible gods, inspiration – especially the crowning inspiration of Love (*Erōs*) – is uniquely able to link the One of the soul with the One of the gods, leading to inspired action without departing from a state of contemplation *at the very same time* (§5-6). Both models lead ultimately to a new vision of the world in terms of Forms or symbols, and to a moral transformation that flows from that vision: a less harmful and reactive pattern of action in the world.¹²

I begin below with broader context, exploring how various images of Socrates lend colour to the late Platonist scales of virtue (§2), and to the central role of 'likeness to God' as the goal (*telos*) of the philosophical life in later Platonism, especially as it motivates Plotinus and Porphyry (§3). The more novel elements of the argument begin with the later period, discussed in the following sections (§5-6), and I attempt to draw specific lessons in the conclusion (§7). This is a preliminary study for further work.

2. The Neoplatonic Socrates

The iconic late antique holy man or holy woman (*theios anēr; theia gunē*) turns their eyes upward, gazing at the stars – or more precisely, at the eternal Forms *beyond* the stars.¹³ This symbolism is reinscribed in Raphael's celebrated *School of Athens*: Plato wields the *Timaeus* and gestures to the heavens, while Aristotle cradles the *Ethics*, grounding their exchange (according to a popular interpretation) in the value of practical agency here on earth. The contrast that Raphael ascribes to Plato and Aristotle captures a motivating tension that I aim to explore against the background of these later Neoplatonist scales: how the Platonist's contemplation of eternal Forms is compossible with worldly action, and how the ladder of virtues develops as a bridge between the two ways of life. The

¹¹ See also Tarrant (forthcoming).

¹² As Hadot (1995: 82) puts a related point about 'spiritual exercises', to a transformation of our vision of the world and personality. For the interrelationship of moral and perceptual transformations in the sense I have in mind here, see Carpenter (2024). I argue in Griffin (2024a) for a goal of reducing harmful reactions to impressions in later Neoplatonism, with an appeal to psychological parallels in the Theravādin systematizer Buddhaghosa.

¹³ As Plato emphasizes (*Rep.* 7, 529b f.), the movements observed in astronomy are instrumental to recognizing the higher Forms, but gazing at the heavens should not be taken *literally*. On the 'late antique holy man' in general, see Brown (1971) for a seminal and often cited and criticized contribution. For a study of the social standing and civic interactions of late Neoplatonist philosophers, see Watts (2010, 2008). For a recent, comprehensive set of essays on the theme, see Fernández and Hernández de la Fuente (2023).

image's point of origin is Plato's memorable portrayal of Thales as an iconic philosopher, stargazing with such absorption that he risks tumbling into a well (*Theaetetus*174a). How can we escape the bonds of earth and witness the ideal, like Thales, without losing sight of ordinary, daily demands – without missing what lies before our feet?

To set the scene for late Platonist engagement with this puzzle, and the scales of virtue and inspiration in particular, it may be helpful to sketch a picture of how the Neoplatonists understand the exemplary philosopher of Plato's dialogues: Socrates himself. Until recently, there was relatively widespread acceptance of Bröcker's assessment that Neoplatonism amounts to a *Platonismus ohne Sokrates* – a philosophy almost defined by its lack of engagement with the civic mission and the inquiring, dialogical practices of Socrates.¹⁴ But recent studies have adopted a different posture (notably, Layne and Tarrant 2014). Ancient Platonists would have endorsed the view that any meaningful grasp on Plato's literary projects, as well as his philosophical positions, requires sensitivity to Plato's art in characterizing Socrates and appreciating his interrogative practices.

As a character in the drama, according to the view of the Platonist commentators, Socrates stands as an exemplar (*paradeigma*) for the reader to emulate – an ideal of the philosophical life made visible not only through his words, but also through his gestures, his manner, his actions, and his human and environmental relationships. However, there are diverse means of construing the ideal that he represents, many ways that philosophy can shine through the prism of this one character.¹⁵ Following a Platonist scheme that we will develop below, we might loosely distinguish at least *four* distinct versions of Socrates, four diffractions of the ideal philosopher in Plato:

- a) The embodied, social actor: 'gadfly' of the city and cross-examiner of those who lay claim to wisdom in dialogues like the *Apology* or *Gorgias*, or any number of 'early' Socratic dialogues (e.g. *Ap.* 30e-31b; *Xen. Mem.* 1.2.3);
- b) An ascetic practitioner, who strives to liberate the soul from the body with its desires and senses, most vividly contextualized in the dramatic atmosphere of the *Phaedo* (67c-d);¹⁶
- c) A contemplative virtuoso, absorbed in the vision of Forms or Patterns or ideas, striving for likeness to the divine, for instance in the *Symposium* (Socrates at 175b-d) or *Theaetetus* digression (173e);

¹⁴ Tarrant has also contributed significantly to a transformation in this view. Layne and Tarrant's substantial collection of essays, *The Neoplatonic Socrates*, illustrates how Neoplatonism is Socratic in diverse and subtle ways. For the classic anti-Socratic view, see Bröcker (1966) with critical summary by Beierwaltes (1995), discussed in Layne and Tarrant (2014), Introduction.

¹⁵ For a presentation of Socrates as corresponding to specific Neoplatonist hypostases, see my contribution to Layne & Tarrant (2014, previous note). For treatments of Plato's Socrates and his literary project from different vantage points, see Brickhouse and Smith (1994), Blondell (2009), and Nightingale (1995). For a recent overview of the first generation of Socratics, see Boys-Stones and Rowe (2013).

¹⁶ Zollert (2018) emphasizes how the *Phaedo's* unique dramatic frame guides its content.

- d) An inspired Socrates, drawn by his own *daimonion*, or in the *Phaedrus*, possessed by the Nymphs and the environment, and espousing the ‘divine madness’ of the Muses, of embodied ritual practices, of the Oracles, and of Love (*Phdr.* 234d, 235c-d, 241d-44a, 256b).¹⁷

These four patterns — a) an embodied, socially engaged Socrates, b) an ascetic *en route* to contemplation, c) a successful contemplative and d) an inspired conduit for divine speech and action — would later serve as templates for different steps or rungs (βαθμοί) of virtue and inspiration in later Platonism, as we will see below (§3-6). And the Neoplatonists are arguably on solid ground in discovering these portrayals of Socrates in Plato, even if some modern readers may find them either too schematic or too blurred to be applied with consistency to the dynamic, literary world of the dialogues.

Construed as exemplars for a student to emulate, these four visions of Socrates present divergent paradigms, with a sharp line falling between the lives of the practical and contemplative philosopher. Aristotle, of course, develops a similar contrast between practical virtue and contemplation, implicit in the well-known tension between his accounts of human well-being (*eudaimonia*) in the first and tenth books of the *Nicomachean Ethics*.¹⁸ How could Socrates serve as a ‘gadfly’ for his city while he stands on the porch near Agathon’s house, witnessing the patterns of a deeper eidetic reality? How could he contribute to the moral improvement of Athens’ youth while he is lost in study of the Forms, even if those forms are moral values?¹⁹ Will he be an ‘oblivious sage,’²⁰ as Julia Annas and John Dillon put it, who would certainly help someone ‘across the road, if he happened to notice them’; but, absorbed in reflection, ‘he would in practice be most unlikely to do so’?²¹ What would motivate such a philosopher to work in the agora, day after day, to improve the character of his community?

Unlike some modern interpreters, the late ancient Platonists were not ‘developmentalists’ about Plato’s writing (at least, not in any strong and conceptually motivational sense);²² they expected that Plato’s views should remain constant throughout his published works, as their methodological predecessors, the Alexandrian commentators on Homer, had sought consistency and a lack of self-contradiction from

¹⁷ Although ancient Platonist commentators like Olympiodorus also locate this imagery everywhere in Plato where a character makes an apparently inspired speech; see Olympiodorus, *in Alc.* 1, with Tarrant (2021). Syrianus’ seminar on the *Phaedrus*, recorded by Hermias, offers a particularly extended discussion of Socrates as inspired, which I will revisit later in this paper.

¹⁸ *NE* 1.7, 10.6-8.

¹⁹ On this vision of Socrates, see for example Cooper (2012), for example, 29, 38, 51-52, 61.

²⁰ See Annas (1999) 54 and especially 69, on the *Theaetetus*’ philosopher digression and related issues associated with “likeness to God.” See also Sedley (1999). For the language of the ‘oblivious sage,’ see Dillon (below).

²¹ Dillon (1983/1990), p. 100 in (1990).

²² They did, however, allow that Plato’s style of writing could change over time; for example, they did not rule out the position, entertained in the earlier commentarial tradition, that the rich and complex *Phaedrus* might be an early work of Plato (see Hermias’ commentary *On Plato’s Phaedrus* translated in Baltzly & Share 2018 and 2022 and forthcoming, discussed further below).

the author of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*.²³ The ancient commentators supposed that Plato wrote with a single, coherent philosophy in mind, although each dialogue develops that philosophy with flexibility through different characters and environment, inviting readers of varying temperaments to see the value of Plato's approach to the issues 'in the round', arriving from different ports of departure.

When the Platonists faced the prism of Socrates in Plato, then, they needed to demonstrate the *coherence* of his example, and they sought to show how we could emulate Socrates in the scope of a single philosophical life. Their solution is not biographical and developmental, but pedagogical and hermeneutical: instead of Plato the *author* changing his mind about central philosophical concepts over time, it is the *reader* who is expected to change, becoming increasingly receptive to different versions of Socrates in a defined sequence, each building on the last. Strictly speaking, in the Platonist metaphysical allegory, Socrates stands for the power of the intuitive intellect (*nous*) in each of us.²⁴ That intellect plays changing roles in our various ways of life, as in Aristotle's familiar contrast of the social and contemplative lives (e.g. *Nic. Eth.* 1.5, 1095b18-19). The Platonists emphasize the dynamic, respiratory nature of our passage between these lives: the philosopher is at one moment moving on their way 'up' from action into contemplation; at another time they return 'down' from contemplation into action; and like a painter, their gaze is fixed in turns on their paradigmatic model and their canvas. The circle is like a race-track, adapting a metaphor that Aristotle attributes (in a different methodological context) to Plato: 'Plato was right to ask... as he consistently used to do, "are we on the way *from* the first principles (*archai*) or *toward* them?"' (*Nic. Eth.* 1.4).²⁵

To master the scale of virtues, or the sequence of inspirations, as we will also find below, is to pursue the 'upward' impulse in this cycle, the ascent to first principles, as the Platonists understand them. The Platonist commentarial synthesis mapped each version of Socrates – civic, ascetic, contemplative, inspired – to a cluster of texts in the curriculum of ascent that was advanced and articulated by Iamblichus of Chalcis (c. 245-325) for every philosophical student of Plato to follow.²⁶ A student should first cultivate the civic, social virtue of Socrates as he appears in dialogues like the *Gorgias*, and then, once prepared, proceed to cultivate the ascetic discipline or 'purification' represented in the *Phaedo*. That would pave the way for contemplation of the Forms in dialogues like the *Symposium* and *Theaetetus*, and later, for inspiration, flowing from Platonic texts but also from poetic enigmatic texts positioned higher in the curriculum – for example, the Orphic texts, or the *Chaldaean Oracles*.²⁷ This sequence is idealized, and not necessarily normative; for some readers, a shift to a higher 'rung' in the curriculum might come suddenly, all at once (*ἀθρόον*).²⁸ But the resulting curricular edifice also became

²³ For the development of the Alexandrian commentary tradition, see for example Schironi (2018)'s careful study of Aristarchus of Samothrace on the *Iliad*. On the commentators' methods, see for instance Baltussen (2008), Griffin (2023), Layne and Tarrant (2014), with references.

²⁴ See Griffin (2014) for this allegory.

²⁵ On which, see for example Kraut (2006b), 88-89.

²⁶ Griffin (2014), introduction; Westerink (1962/2011), XXXVII-XL.

²⁷ These specific examples are drawn from Marinus, *Life of Proclus* §25.

²⁸ On the possibility of sequential or 'all-at-once' change of character, see Hermias *in Phaedr.* 92,5-93,28.

a superstructure for teaching philosophy in late antiquity, a ‘scale’ for organizing reading, and conceptualizing moral and perceptual progress over a life, and we turn to that structure now.

3. The Scale of Virtues in Plotinus and Porphyry

This structure is typically known as the ‘ladder’ or ‘scale’ of virtues (*scala virtutum* or βαθμοὶ ἀρετῶν: the metaphor of steps or rungs is drawn ultimately from the rising stairs of Diotima’s speech in Plato’s *Symposium*).²⁹ As noted earlier, it has been widely studied, including several excellent treatments in recent years.³⁰ Its motivating dilemma is anticipated in the ‘Middle’ Platonism of the early Roman empire, as Tarrant (2007) has shown; but its framework is normally traced to a dynamic argument by Plotinus (204/5–270 CE), articulated more schematically by his pupil and editor Porphyry of Tyre (c. 234–305 CE). The scale enjoyed a wide reception throughout the Neoplatonic tradition, in both pagan and Christian circles; and it helped to shape the scholarly curriculum of textual reading, the hagiographical biographies of teachers and masters, the terms in which philosophers defended their identities and civic engagement, and their exegesis of different sources. I begin with a brief outline of the precedent for the scale, before describing the ramified form it took in later antiquity.

(a) Likeness to God

The motivating dilemma of the scale is partially textual, rooted in an effort to bring Plato’s various comments on human virtue into alignment. At *Theaetetus* 176a-c, Socrates remarks that we should engage in a process of becoming like god (ὁμοίωσις τῷ θεῷ) so far as human nature permits, and that this ‘likeness’ amounts to ‘becoming just and holy with wisdom (φρόνησις)’, an outcome which he described as virtue (ἀρετή). This injunction to likeness to god, echoed in other dialogues, would enjoy a powerful legacy in its own right.³¹

[T1] Plato, *Tht.* 176a-b. The flight is to become like god, as far as possible: and likeness is becoming just and holy, with wisdom. (φυγὴ δὲ ὁμοίωσις θεῷ κατὰ τὸ δυνατόν: ὁμοίωσις δὲ δίκαιον καὶ ὄσιον μετὰ φρονήσεως γενέσθαι).

Here is the dilemma. In many passages, Plato paints a vivid image of a deity who is impervious to painful suffering and always wise, a constant moral and aesthetic ideal best glimpsed by careful attention to the eternal motions of the cosmos (compare also, for example, *Rep.* 6, 500c-501b, below). The sense in which such a deity could be called *virtuous* — say, ‘just’ or ‘brave’ — seems strikingly different from the

²⁹ Plato, *Tht.* 176B & *Rep.* 500C–D (likeness to God); *Rep.* 441D–443B & *Phaedo* 82A–B (‘civic’ virtues); *Phaedo* 69C (‘purificatory’ virtues); Aristotle, *EN* 2.1, 1103a14–18 and 6.13, 1144b9 (‘natural’ & ‘habituated’ virtues, & distinction from practical wisdom); Aristotle, *EN* 10.7, 1177a12–24 (‘contemplative’ virtue). Sources: Plotinus, *Enn.* 1.2; Porphyry, *Sent.* 32; Iamblichus, *On Virtues* [lost]; Macrobius, *Somn. Scip.* 1.8,5; Hierocles, *carm. aur.* 422b5–9; Marinus, *Life of Proclus* 3; Ammonius, *in Int.* 135.19–32; Philoponus *in Cat.* 141.25–142.3; Damascius *On Phaedo* 1.138–44; Olymp., *On Phaedo* 8.2–4 and *On Alc.* 172.5–12; on curriculum, Ammonius, *in Cat.* 6.9–20; Philoponus, *in Cat.* 5.34–6.2; Olymp., *Prol.* 9.14–30; Simplicius, *in Cat.* 6.6–15 and *On Epict.* 2.30–3,2.

³⁰ See introduction with nn. 4, 5 above, and on the issues discussed below, particularly Baltzly (2004: 300–301), Tarrant (2007).

³¹ On the ideal, see for example Sedley (1999), Annas (1999), Armstrong (2004), and Tarrant (2007).

sense in which a human person is ordinarily said to be ‘just’ or ‘brave’. The cardinal virtues of wisdom, justice, courage, and moderation become almost unrecognizable in such a comparison. For instance, what fears would a Platonic deity need to overcome by exercising courage? What affections or desires would require the god’s temperance?

Puzzles along these lines were advanced in Middle Platonism, for example in the *Handbook of Platonism* attributed to Alcinous.³² They were developed further by Plotinus in a focused discussion, his nineteenth treatise (*Enneads* 1.2 [19] 1), to which we will return below. If virtue for a god is so different from virtue for human beings like you and me, Plotinus asks, then how can the process of becoming *similar* to a god who is so *different* from us play an instrumental role in our progress toward virtue, as Plato seems to claim? Is the invitation to likeness at *Tht.* 176a-b – and comparable passages in the *Republic* and *Timaeus* simply impossible for a human being to satisfy, because the model we strive to emulate is alien to us?

A closely related problem is intertwined with this one: if the life of contemplation (*theōria*) is the nearest that a human being can draw to the life of the gods, as Aristotle implies in *Nicomachean Ethics* 10; and if that godly, contemplative life is also designated ‘virtue’ by Plato; then what does this sort of contemplative, godlike virtue have to do with the ordinary sense of the word – for example, with the canonical cardinal virtues in the Greek tradition and in Platonism, namely wisdom (*phronēsis*), justice (*dikaioynē*), courage (*andreia*), and temperance (*sophrosynē*), as we might expect to see them exemplified in daily life?

(b) Plotinus, *Enneads* 1.2 [19]

Plotinus engages with both difficulties throughout *Enn.* 1.2 [19] (see O’Meara 2023 for a recent discussion and introduction of the treatise, with a helpful discussion of the central conceptual issues in the treatise in Kalligas 2014, *ad loc.*) Plotinus allows that divine virtue differs from human virtue in the ordinary sense. After all, on Plotinus’ view, the divine Intellect (*nous*) continuously engages in contemplation (*theōria*), the joyous act of witnessing reality as it truly is, like a spectator at the Olympic Games or the Theatre – an image inspired by the language of the gods’ witnessing of the truth in the great myth of the *Phaedrus*.³³ But human beings do not see ourselves as engaged in such a *constant* act of bearing witness to reality — perhaps our witness is sporadic at best, since we need to eat now and then, fulfil our capacity to help others in our community, engage in ordinary *polis* life, and so on (cf. Aristotle, *NE* 10.6-8).

However, for Plotinus, we really *are* an individual intellect (*nous*), an irreducibly unique point of active contemplation, perpetually surveying the entirety of the intelligible world.³⁴ And while the word ‘virtue’ names a different state in the divine and human cases, it is not *altogether* different. The equivocation is not merely accidental; there is some ‘focal meaning’ or correlated homonymy between the two. Human virtue is *derivative* of divine virtue, imitating or participating divinity in much the way that a

³² See Alcinous §28, with Annas (1999: 63-6), Dillon (1995), Baltzly (2004: 300).

³³ On the history and cultural context of *theōria*, see for example Nightingale (2005).

³⁴ See Karfik (2014), Hutchinson (2018) for similar arguments.

house's structure imitates and hence derives from its blueprint (*paradeigma*) (*Enn.* 1.2.1). This much is familiar Platonist ontology. And this relationship of the house under construction to its paradigmatic blueprint is, in Plotinus' vision, just what Plato really wants us to notice when he encourages us to 'imitate' or 'become like' the model (the god, particularly the divinity of the cosmos) in respect of virtue. The situation is like an architect instructing builders to straighten a wall by imitating the rectitude of a line in the architect's original drawing, even though the sketched line on paper is 'straight' in a different sense than the solid wall is 'straight'. (To be precise, the Platonist would say that *both* the inked line and the mudbrick in this metaphor emulate true *linearity*; but the mudbrick wall is at a further remove from the truth in this respect, along the lines of *Rep.* 10, 597-98).

Beginning from such a distinction between a paradigmatic model and its derivative expression, Plotinus generates a hierarchy of steps that span the space between these two poles, steps that can be ascended by a human being who is attempting to climb toward emulation of the divine. Plotinus' account of the stratification of virtue is arguably much more dynamic and supple than the schematic form it will take on later with Porphyry, to be discussed below.³⁵ Still, it might be helpful to use a schematic table to illustrate its earlier form here in *Enneads* 1.2 [19]. The following figure illustrates four basic steps. (I have numbered the stages 3-6 to be consistent with the fuller version of the scale found in later sources, to be discussed below in §5, which adds more steps below and above these four).

No.	Tier	Description	<i>Enn.</i> 1.2 ch.	Table 1: The Plotinian Scale Schematized by Porphyry, <i>Sent.</i> 32
6	Paradigmatic (<i>paradeigmatikē</i>)	Divine <i>Nous</i> containing Forms (Plotinus)	1.2.7	
5	Contemplative (<i>theōrētikē</i>)	Soul's reason emulating <i>Nous</i> , witnessing Forms	1.2.4	
4	Purificatory (<i>kathartikē</i>)	Soul's reason withdrawing from non-rational faculties. → <i>Apatheia</i> (impassivity).	1.2.3	
3	Civic (<i>politikē</i>)	Soul's reason harmonizing faculties: <i>logos, thumos, epithumia</i> → <i>Metriopatheia</i> (moderation).	1.2.1	

The basic polarity lies between the 'top' and 'bottom': tiers (3) and (6) in this table. It is (3) civic goodness that articulates the virtue of the human being in the ordinary sense: at this level, for instance, 'justice' consists of a harmonious and moderate attunement of the soul's embodied motivations (following *Republic* 4), expressed in fair, helpful, unselfish behaviour in society. This practice also corresponds to the 'moderation of affections' (μετριοπάθεια), or harmonious integration of healthy anger and desire, that earlier imperial commentators recognize in Aristotle, by contrast with a more austere 'unaffectedness' attributed to the Stoa.³⁶ This is a recognizably human, everyday sense of virtue: I may experience desire or anger, for instance, but I strive to temper them and accommodate the inner

³⁵ See O'Meara 2023, introduction, for a helpful contrast between *Enn.* 1.2 and the scheme in Porphyry's *Sentences*.

³⁶ Antiochus of Ascalon may be the originator of the term *metriopatheia* and certain elements of this distinction; see for example Karamanolis (2006), ch. 1, and Sedley 2012.

harmony of my whole soul (cf. *Republic* 443c-e), so that, in Aristotelian language, I have desires or grow angry in a wise and prudent way, to the right degree, at the right time, and so on (cf. *Nic. Eth.* 2.2).

By contrast, in the row marked (6) above, we encounter the paradigmatic character of the divine Intellect or *Nous* itself, the god whom we seek to emulate like a blueprint. In Plotinus' depiction, the canonical virtues simply amount to a contemplative activity: exercising knowledge (wisdom), conversion toward oneself (*sophrosynē*), doing one's own work (justice), concentrating in oneself (courage) (cp. *Enn.* 1.2.7, *Sentences* 32.4). (Plotinus himself may not characterize this paradigmatic state as a 'virtue', strictly speaking, but Porphyry will). This divine being's qualities are dramatically different from the ordinary kind of goodness envisaged as moderation of affections. It is tranquil and eternal, and never disrupted by affections. It is simply exercising the divine mode of being and seeing. But these qualities still operate successfully as blueprints for ordinary virtue: the way that *Nous* abides in itself, for example, is the blueprint for courage in an ordinary human sense.

Even following this line of thought, we must explain how ordinary civic virtue can be imitative of and *derived* from such a radically different divine nature, as a painting from its model, or a materialized wall from the corresponding line in its blueprint. This is where Plotinus introduces a staircase or pathway between these two stages, in the intermediary rows marked (4-5), to explain the flow between model and image. First, (4) human beings may draw closer to divine virtue by a process of 'purification' (*κάθαρσις*): withdrawing significantly from the bodily appetites and the perceptual scheme that keep our attention 'here', we cease to identify with those appetites and aversions. By 'separating the soul', in the cathartic, initiatory language of the *Phaedo*, we draw nearer toward the state of divinity, becoming more and more like the paradigm: now our courage, our justice, become more similar to those of the god. These purifications now amount to a discipline of attention, attending less to distracting sensory impressions and desires and aversions, and more to the contents of our eidetic vision of the ideal. It is as if the wall began to mould itself to be more like the blueprint, since in our case as living souls, this is possible: we can 'work on our statue (*agalma*)' within (see *Enn.* 1.6.9) until it is more ideal, more beautiful. The achievement of such a single-minded focus also leads to the 'affectionlessness' (*ἀπάθεια*) that imperial commentators recognized as the goal of the Stoa, in contrast to Aristotelian moderation of the affections outlined earlier.

This purification, when complete, leads us to arrive at (5) the state of continual contemplation, witnessing the true Form, 'seeing ourselves beautiful' (1.6.9). This (for Plotinus) answers to the divine core of our human state which is also, so to speak, our birthright from the start: to engage in continued contemplation just as the divine Intellect does. Indeed, in Plotinus' view, the deeper 'layers' of human consciousness are constituted by a unique divine mind that is our authentic self, a distinctive viewpoint on the intelligible world of the Forms, where we witness a polyvalent luminosity of divine individualities, each visible with complete transparency to one another without abandoning their unique character.³⁷

³⁷ See Karfik (2014) for the recognition that 'my' *nous* is individual, and Mortley 2014; see *Enn.* 6.2.20, 4.4.1, with Hutchinson 2018: 22-31 for the interpretation of this individuality as an irreducibly unique viewpoint.

Piecing together these stages (4-6), we might now narrate our potential progress on the ladder of virtues in both directions of the respiratory circle: up to the Forms, down to sensory and social engagement, and up to the Forms again. First, on the way up, (3) the cultivation of practical virtues by soul's power of reason allows (4) soul's reason to experience less disturbance, and cultivate a power of single-pointed attention, which facilitates (5) witnessing, as much as possible, (6) the ideal paradigm. Then, on the way 'down', (6) the divine nature of Intellect is (5) contemplated successfully by soul's faculty of reason, only when (4) soul's reason is fully attentive and undistracted, leading to (3) the cultivation of practical virtue in action. To reinvoke the house-building metaphor common to Plotinus and Aristotle, we begin from (6) the divine blueprint, which (5) the builder is able to contemplate, but only when (4) the builder attends fully to the plans, leading to (3) building the edifice of the house. And in our case, we are a self-building house, or a self-sculpting statue, ideally holding our eye on the divine model.

(b) Porphyry's *Sentences* and *De Abstinētia*: A 'painterly' model of ascent and descent

As we have already noted, this fluid account is subsequently systematized by Porphyry in *Sentences* 32. Porphyry schematizes each moment in the process as one of the stages in a ladder or scale of virtues, and prepares the way for them to be used, subsequently, as rungs in a formal philosophical curriculum. Notably, Porphyry formally distinguishes the 'paradigmatic' level, not only as the ground of the archetypes that are to be emulated by contemplative virtue, but as a stage of *virtue* distinct from contemplation. That this is so in Plotinus is not clear, although it is perhaps only a slight difference of terminology and temper.³⁸ In this section, I will introduce Porphyry's approach, and bring us back to its implications for our original puzzle of the 'oblivious sage' in the scale of virtues.

In Porphyry's treatise *De abstinētia*, he articulates a motivation to 'ascend' the scale of virtues and contemplate rather than becoming caught up in everyday affairs. This motivation rests in part on the philosophy of attention that Porphyry adopts in this context, and it brings us back sharply to our earlier concern about how a contemplative philosopher – their gaze fixed 'above' on eternity – might be practically involved in daily life, in the sensory, embodied, and social world. Porphyry writes:

[T2] Porphyry, *De Abstinētia* 1.41. Where there is sensation and apprehension of sensation (αἴσθησις καὶ τὰύτης ἀντίληψις), there is detachment from the intelligible (τοῦ νοητοῦ ἢ ἀπόστασις); and inasmuch as non-rationality (ἀλογίαις) is aroused, to that extent there is detachment from intellection. [...] *We pay attention not with part of ourselves but with all of ourselves* (οὐ γὰρ μέρει ἡμῶν, ἀλλ' ὅλοι τὰς προσοχὰς ποιούμεθα). (Clark, adapted, my emphasis)

According to Porphyry's underlying philosophy of attention here, 'we pay attention with the whole of ourselves', like a single spotlight that moves extremely quickly³⁹ — not unlike the leading part of the mind (ἡγεμονικόν) in Stoicism—with the result that we can only attend *either* to the sensory world *or* to the Forms, not to both at once. Porphyry draws ascetic conclusions from this assumption: if we can

³⁸ See Brisson (2006), 93-9, O'Meara (2018, 2013, 2012), and Tarrant (2007).

³⁹ Michael Chase helpfully compares Proclus's commentary on the *Timaeus*, volume 2, 306.17-18. See Ahbel-Rappe (2021) for a broad discussion of Neoplatonist "mind training," and Chase (unpublished) for exercises of attention in pagan and Christian Neoplatonism.

only attend to one thing at a time, then we should avoid activities that distract our attention and draw it toward the sensory world, because it is *better* for us to contemplate Forms. (However, he also tries to avoid an overly sharp dualism).⁴⁰ Porphyry criticizes certain unnamed ‘foreigners’ (βάρβαροι) who maintain that one *can* simultaneously concentrate on forms and sensations, and who therefore deny these ascetic conclusion (*De abst.* 1.42).⁴¹ Of course, this advice appears to sharpen the puzzle of the ‘oblivious sage’ that we noted earlier. Porphyry’s Socrates, arguably, *should* try to stand on the neighbour’s porch as often as possible in contemplation, and not bother with embodied, sensory virtue.

However, Porphyry seems to tell a different story about Plotinus in his biography of his master:

[T3] Porphyry, *Life of Plotinus* 8,7-24. [Plotinus] was wholly concerned with mind (νοῦς) [...] Even if he was talking to someone, engaged in continuous conversation, he kept his train of thought. *He could take his necessary part in the conversation to the full, and at the same time keep his mind fixed* (τηρεῖν τὴν δίδανον) without a break on what he was considering (σκέψαι). When the person he had been talking to was gone... he went straight on with what came next, keeping the connection... In this way he was present both to himself and to others, and never relaxed his self-turned attention (πρὸς ἑαυτὸν προσοχή) except in sleep.

Puzzlingly, this text in the biography of Plotinus seems, at least implicitly, to conflict with Porphyry’s conclusion in *De abstinentia* (if indeed we should look for consistency between a biographical depiction and the views worked out in a philosophical treatise like the *Sententiae*). Plotinus, explains Porphyry, was *constantly* absorbed in contemplation; but he *also* did a good job of being socially helpful, and keeping up his side of conversations to the full. And it *looks* like he did this all *at the same time*.

At first, this looks like encouraging news for the puzzle that we began with; if Plotinus can do it, then perhaps Socrates could be fully attentive to contemplation of first principles even *while* he challenged sophists and encouraged young people to virtue – and so could we. It clearly is helpful to compare this kind of testimony with the view in the *De Abstinentia*; in this connection, Charles Brittain has proposed that Porphyry is describing two completely different views of attention in the two contexts, a ‘single-operation’ and ‘multiple-operation’ account.⁴² James Wilberding, on the other hand, asks whether the *Life* passage *really* shows Plotinus engaged in contemplation and action *at once*. Rather, it might bear a reading of Plotinus as *alternating* between intense contemplation and worldly virtue with remarkable grace, and drawing lessons from the former for the latter.⁴³

On Wilberding’s argument, Porphyry’s vision would not produce a philosopher who *simultaneously* engages in contemplation and action. But it *does* provide the rudiments of a plausible argument for why a philosopher should engage in contemplation compatibly with practical virtue in *alternation*. This too might temper the worry about the ‘oblivious sage’, in a different way. Focusing attention

⁴⁰ See Smith 2018: 89.

⁴¹ See Griffin (forthcoming b).

⁴² Brittain (2003).

⁴³ Wilberding (2008), 391-2.

immersively on the Form of Justice, or the Form of Beauty, helps the philosopher learn to act more justly or beautifully in practice. Then they should balance their life between the two objects of attention, contemplating sufficiently to secure a grasp of the Form, then practicing it accordingly in life. To be more precise, this philosopher would envisage contemplation as perpetually ongoing, as (on Plotinus' view) our undescended soul joins our *nous* in continually witnessing the Forms in eternity, and eternity is present in every moment of our life. But we are concerned here with the spotlight of our psychic attention, which alternates between attending to contemplation and attending to action in time.

This 'alternation' can also claim some Platonic authority, and a vivid Platonic illustration. Plato, in *Republic* VI, 500c-501b offers a picture of a painter glancing between her model and her canvas. The philosopher operates like this, turning her attention to the paradigmatic Form or cosmos as exemplar, and *then* expressing that pattern on the canvas of her character (*ēthē*) and life (cf. 'shaping one's own... character', 500d) as well as those of her community, before looking back to the model again. For the later Platonist, lines like these apply to the civic philosopher in general: 'in the manner of painters, to look to what is most true, make constant reference to it, and study it...' (484c-d); and like 'painters who use the divine model... to look often (*apoblepoiēn*) in each direction (*hekateros*), toward the natures of justice, beauty, moderation [on the one hand]... and toward those they're trying to instill in human beings, on the other' (501b). Such a practical philosopher brings the revelations of her contemplation into practice, so that she is a more just person *because* she has been contemplating justice; thus her contemplation bears fruits in action. Therefore, taking time for contemplation is not necessarily opposed to practical social good, although it may delay action in the world.

4. The later Neoplatonist scale

That 'painterly' model requires alternation, however – although strictly speaking the Intellect (*Nous*) is arguably always present in a timeless fashion, 'our' attention (*prosochē*) directed from soul to *Nous* may seem to fluctuate from one moment to the next. To make sense of the next model, in which simultaneous contemplation and practical agency are possible, I try to outline a more complex version of the scale of virtues operative among the later commentators of Athens and Alexandria. This version emerges by adding further stages beyond the 'bottom' and 'top' of the stages outlined above. First, we should take account of how Iamblichus (Porphyry's interlocutor and perhaps student in the fourth century CE) augments Porphyry's system.

According to the anonymous *Prolegomena to Platonic Philosophy* (26.23-45), Iamblichus supplemented the 'bottom' of the scale of virtues with several distinct forms of quasi-virtue that spring from nature and habit, rooted in Aristotle's remarks in *Nicomachean Ethics* 2.1 (1103a14-18) and 6.13 (1144b9) that one might possess a sort of virtue from nature (as a lion is congenitally brave), or from upbringing and socialization. As the later Platonists point out, Plato already displays tendencies to distinguish these sorts of quasi-virtue in the *Statesman* (306a-b) and *Laws* (XII 963c-e; 2, 653a-c).

Iamblichus also authored a systematic curriculum that guided the pupil in ascertaining which Platonic dialogues need to be studied at which level of virtue.⁴⁴

Iamblichus was also credited with adding new, loftier tiers of virtue, which Damascius designates the ‘priestly’ or ‘hieratic’. In doing so, he finds a powerful way to elevate and spotlight the rich repertory of late antique Neoplatonist ritual life and praxis. Intuitively, while the philosophical disciplines just outlined may lead to the contemplation (θεωρία) of divine reality, sacred ritual activity leads directly to ‘divine work’ or theurgy (θεουργία).⁴⁵ Later philosophers who comment on the development of the scale, in particular Damascius (c. 462–after 538 CE) and Olympiodorus (c. 500–after 565 CE), ascribe several elements in the more complex version of the scale to Iamblichus. (I will draw primarily here on the testimony of Damascius and Olympiodorus, and explore below how several differences in their accounts can be reconciled with one another and with Hermias and Proclus).

[T4] Damascius *On Phaedo* 1.144. [A discussion of (1) natural, (2) habitative, (3) civic, (4) purificatory, (5) contemplative virtues precedes the following.] (6) Paradigmatic virtues are those of the soul when it no longer *contemplates* the intelligence (contemplation involving separateness), but has already reached the stage of *being* by participation the intelligence that is the paradigm of all things; therefore these virtues too are called ‘paradigmatic’, inasmuch as virtues belong primarily to intelligence itself. This category is added by Iamblichus in his treatise *On Virtues*. Lastly, there are (7) the hieratic virtues, which belong to the godlike (θεοειδές) part of the soul; they correspond to all the categories mentioned above, with the difference that while the others are existential, these are unitary (ἀντιπαρήκουσαι πάσαις ταῖς εἰρημέναις οὐσιώδεσιν οὐσαις ἐνιαίαι γε ὑπάρχουσαι). This kind, too, has been outlined by Iamblichus, and discussed more explicitly by the school of Proclus. [Ed. and tran. Westerink 1977, lightly adapted; repr. PT 2009]

Damascius here, drawing on Iamblichus, emphasizes that we can indeed *be* the object of ideal emulation that is the divine mind or *nous*, the *paradeigma* in Plotinus. In doing so we reach the peak of the staircase whose rungs were civic, purificatory, and contemplative virtue. However, there is an even higher peak – one that is reached differently, and leads not to the divine *nous* only, but to the One, to its source. Below, I will turn to a further discussion of these higher ‘hieratic’ virtues. For now, we might also note that Damascius (as is well known) appears to treat them as a distinct path to the goal of Platonic practice, a different ladder, which exists alongside the earlier staircase of increasing attention to the intelligible:

[T5] Damascius *On Phaedo* 1.172. To some philosophy has primary value (προτιμῶσιν), as to Porphyry and Plotinus and a great many other philosophers; to others, hieratic practice, as to Iamblichus, Syrianus, Proclus, and the hieratic school generally. Plato, however, recognizing that strong arguments can be advanced from both sides, has united the two into one single truth by calling the philosopher a ‘Bacchus’ [...] (After Wk)

⁴⁴ See for example Westerink (1962/2011), XXXVII-XL.

⁴⁵ On theurgy in Iamblichean Neoplatonism in general, see Shaw (2014), and now (2024); for the implications for the scale discussed below, see also Helmig and Vargas (2014) and Sheppard (1982).

While two distinct paths are outlined, Damascius emphasizes that Plato's philosophy is capacious enough to integrate both. And once the Iamblichean degrees of virtue – 'hieratic', 'habitulative', and 'natural' – have been added on either side, we arrive at a more or less standard and complete picture of the late Neoplatonist scale in its full complexity, although there are several remaining wrinkles or apparent inconsistencies to address. The following table draws primarily on Damascius and Olympiodorus in the sixth century CE. The exact list of seven stages appears in Damascius' *Phaedo* commentary; the situation with Olympiodorus is a bit more complex, as we will see below.

No.	Sources	Level	Tier of <i>aretē</i>		Description		Reading	
7	Iamblichus	Beyond Philosophy	Hieratic (<i>hieratikē</i>)	Inspired (<i>enthousiastikē</i>)	Ritual praxis	Divine inspiration	<i>Orphica, Chald. Or.</i>	↑ Increasing Unity
6	Plotinus & Porphyry		Paradigmatic (<i>paradeigmatikē</i>)		<i>Nous</i> containing Forms (Plotinus) Union of soul with <i>nous</i> reaching Intelligibles (after Iamblichus)		Pl. <i>Tim., Parm.</i>	
5		Philosophy	Contemplative (<i>theōrētikē</i>)		Soul's <i>logos</i> as <i>nous</i> witnessing Forms		Pl. <i>Symp, Tht.</i>	
4			Purificatory (<i>kathartikē</i>)		Soul's <i>logos</i> withdrawing from <i>alogos</i> faculties, cultivating single-pointed attention. → <i>Apatheia</i> .		Pl. <i>Phd.</i>	
3			Civic (<i>politikē</i>)		Soul's <i>logos</i> harmonizing faculties: <i>Logos, thumos, epithumia</i> → <i>Metriopatheia</i> .		Pl. <i>Alc., Grg., Rep.</i>	
2		Iamblichus	Before Philosophy	Habitulative (<i>ēthikē</i>)		Tenuously virtuous dispositions caused by habit & upbringing.		
1		Natural (<i>phusikē</i>)			Virtuous dispositions from natural temperament (<i>krasis</i>)		Pl. <i>Legg.</i>	

To a first approximation, we might say that the lowest two tiers can belong to a person prior to philosophical education, while the middle three tiers are achieved through the practice of philosophy itself — that is, the education of reason (*logos, to logistikon*) as it cares for other faculties of the soul,

and eventually cares for itself by turning upward to its sources.⁴⁶ The highest two stages stand *above* or beyond philosophy, beyond the education of reason. We find various suggestions to this effect in Ammonius, Damascius and Olympiodorus.⁴⁷ Also, we might note slightly divergent attributions of several stages in our sources: in particular, the interpretation of the ‘philosophical’ virtues are credited to Plotinus and Porphyry (and everyone else who follows), while Iamblichus is credited with adding the final phases—for Damascius, paradigmatic and hieratic; Olympiodorus for his part credits the ‘paradigmatic’ virtues to Plotinus, and ‘hieratic’ to Iamblichus. (I will not discuss all these issues here, though I will try to suggest an integrative account below).

In the following section, I will draw on several other synoptic passages to develop this description. As a general sketch, the name of any ordinary virtue like ‘justice’ might now be predicated homonymously of the soul at every one of these levels: it may name (1) a natural virtue: an animal’s naturally arising sense of fairness, grounded in humoral temperament; (2) a habituated virtue: the care for justice arising from social upbringing and habituation, like Aristotle’s ‘natural virtue’ (*Nic. Eth.* 2.1); (3) a civic or constitutional virtue: a reliable and robust inner harmony, arising from the intentional, philosophically guided attunement of the soul’s three motivational streams (reason, emotion, and desire), following *Republic* 4, 443c-e; (4) a purificatory virtue: a kind of separation from sensory desires and aversions and states of pride and anger, drawing from the ‘purification’ of the *Phaedo*; (5) a contemplative virtue: an upward orientation, facilitated by this purification, conducing to witnessing of the Form, leading eventually to (6) a paradigmatic virtue and higher states: contact with the Form and the collapse of the ordinary distinction between experiencing subject and experienced object, a kind of ‘becoming’ of the Form itself (see Damascius, *in Phd.* 1.138-44, *Olymp. in Alc.* 172,5-12, and for Plotinian-Porphyrian parallels, Kalligas 2014: 134), leading to becoming one’s true self: as Olympiodorus puts it, ‘it is possible to know oneself theologically (θεολογικῶς), when a person knows himself according to his own Idea (τὴν ἰδέαν τὴν ἑαυτοῦ)’ (from *in Alc.* 172,5-12). These form a Platonic series; the higher stages stand as causes of the lower stages, in the sense that a paradigmatic model ‘causes’ its imitations.⁴⁸ Pragmatically, the climb from each degree to the next, from civic virtue forwards, involves a higher degree of attention directed toward the Intelligible. (7) The seventh, highest tier of virtue in this scheme is approached rather differently, as I argue below.

5. Challenges and a new version of the scale

Our surviving sources for the complete scale are, primarily, the last generation of Platonists including and roughly contemporary with Damascius and Olympiodorus, particularly in their treatments of the *Phaedo* and Damascius’ *Life of Isidore* or *Philosophical History*, alongside Marinus’ implicit account in the *Life of Proclus*. (Proclus, arguably, is depicted as possessing the totality of these virtues in good order). There are several excellent studies of how the scale of virtues organizes these hagiographical

⁴⁶ For the role of reason in the beginning of philosophy, see for instance Simplicius *in Cat.* 5,9–6,9; cf. 14,5–20; for self-cultivation, see Proclus *in Alc.* 1,3–7.

⁴⁷ See Griffin (2021) and earlier (2016: introduction; 2014: introduction) for my earlier reconstructions of the scale.

⁴⁸ That is, ‘justice’ has no synonymous definition across these cases, but they are a ‘p-series’ where the higher kinds of justice are emulated or imaged by the lower, and this emulation causes the lower stages. See Lloyd 1990: ch. 3 for this language.

narratives.⁴⁹ I have drawn on excerpts from these biographies previously (above), to which we may now add the following two passages:

[T6] Olympiodorus, *On Phaedo* 8.2. ... Let us enumerate the degrees of virtues. They are five ... [(1) natural, (2) habitative, (3) civic, (4) purificatory, (5) contemplative]. Plotinus holds that there is (6) another degree [...] that of the paradigms. [...] our soul is at first illuminated by *nous*... then becomes in a way identical with the source of the illumination and acts unifically according to the paradigmatic virtues (ἐνοειδῶς ἐνεργεῖ κατὰ τὰς παραδειγματικάς, 8.2.18-19) [rather than ‘in union with the One’ with Westerink]. The object of philosophy is to make us νοῦς, that of theurgy to unite us with the intelligible principles and conform our activity to the paradigms.

[T7] Marinus, *Life of Proclus* 3. First, let us divide the virtues into their kinds, [1] the natural, [2] the ethical and [3] the political, and again those which transcend these, [4] the purificatory, [5] the contemplative, and [6] those that are called theurgic, while as to [7] those that are higher even than these we shall keep silence.

All of the texts that we have surveyed derive from different stages of late Platonism, ranging over nearly a century, and spanning both Athenian and Alexandrian teaching and social milieux. Still, several features make it an appealing project to seek a consistent scheme underlying these reports, if at all possible: the systematicity of late Platonism, the comprehensive role of this particular scale as a key to pedagogy and curricular structure, the commentators’ own methodological interest in harmony among their sources, and the allusive and compressed nature of each testimony. If there is a scheme consistent with each of the witnesses, it likely took its mature shape in the school of Syrianus and Proclus in the middle of the 5th century CE, as Damascius implies.

But here we encounter a difficulty. At the highest two or three levels, the steps described in all of these witnesses diverge. Father André-Jean Festugière, followed by Saffrey and Segonds and Westerink, argued that their accounts are in fact irreconcilable.⁵⁰ Here is one core difficulty. Damascius [T4] articulates seven stages, with the ‘paradigmatic’ virtues situated just below the ‘hieratic’. But Marinus [T7] apparently excludes paradigmatic virtues, and talks about a stage ‘above’ the hieratic, which he designates ‘theurgic’. Olympiodorus, for his part [T6], names only *six* stages in his *Phaedo* commentary.

There are many reasons why these witnesses might disagree, or why the scheme might be altered to suit different pedagogical or social milieux, or why they might employ different terminology. One proposal is that some late Platonists, including Ammonius and Olympiodorus, faced sharper pressure from Christian authorities to attenuate and elide the importance of non-Christian ritual in their classrooms, and for this reason said and wrote little publicly about the ‘top’ of the scales, which involved ritual life: in particular, Olympiodorus’ omissions in the *Phaedo* lectures could be explained along these

⁴⁹ See O’Meara (2006), Blumenthal (1983).

⁵⁰ See Festugière 1969; Goulet-Cazé 1982, 277–280; Westerink 1990, LXVIII–LXVIII, and 1976, n. on Ol. in Phd. 116–18; Saffrey and Segonds 2001, lxxix–c; Hadot 1990, i.84–103, O’Meara 2003, §§1.3–6; 2006; 2012.

lines, particularly considering his own publicly funded chair in Christian Alexandria, and the *mores* of his mostly Christian classroom and colleagues.⁵¹

However, I will argue that we can resolve the apparent inconsistencies differently, without invoking (or denying) the social pressures that the Alexandrian philosophers might have faced. This solution involves two additional witnesses who, I think, ‘fill in the gaps’: first, Hermias’ notes from Syrianus’ seminar on Plato’s *Phaedrus* (a text which is already often cited in connection with inspiration and theurgy in general); and second, Olympiodorus’ lectures on the *Alcibiades*. Both have been translated into English relatively recently.⁵²

I try to develop this argument as follows. (a) First, I appeal to a passage of Olympiodorus on the *Alcibiades* to show that he deals with the two ‘highest’ tiers of virtue consistently with Damascius’ *Phaedo* commentary, and the variation is mainly terminological. (b) Second, I turn to Hermias’ notes on the *Phaedrus* to show how Damascius’ ‘hieratic’ virtues should be construed as more or less identical with ‘inspirations’ in Hermias and Olympiodorus’ strict sense, that is, divine illuminations directly touching the One of the soul. (c) Third, I return to Olympiodorus’ account of the virtues in his *Phaedo* lectures in the light of Proclus’ *Cratylus* commentary, in order to map paradigmatic virtue to theurgy in a broad sense, and explain both as access to the *intelligible* gods, still subordinated to inspiration of the One of the soul in Hermias’ strictest sense. (d) Fourth, I note the positive role of embodiment across inspired virtues, understood along these lines. (e) Finally, I discuss a sense in which *each degree* of virtue is paralleled by a *corresponding degree* of inspiration, in the sense that each causes a corresponding effect in the soul, although the scale of inspirations retains priority. In short, I argue that both scales ultimately bring the soul into direct contact with the divine, through different practices: inspiration in the strict sense should be understood as working directly on the One of the soul to bring the whole unified soul into contact with the gods, by way of a practice of receptivity to divine illumination, exemplified in states like divine *mania* and prayer; but the ‘lower’ scale of virtues should be understood as a discipline of focused attention turning from sense-perception to Forms, gradually assimilating the rational soul to *Nous*.

(a) Olympiodorus elsewhere includes two tiers of ‘highest’ virtue

A passage from Olympiodorus’ discussion of the *Alcibiades*, where he employs the scaffolding of the scale of virtues to resolve an exegetical problem about self-knowledge, demonstrates that Olympiodorus includes a counterpart to Damascius’ highest tier of virtues and does not elide them. Olympiodorus treats them consistently under the alternative name of ‘inspiration’ (*enthousiasmos*), rather than ‘hieratic’ virtue (while the ‘paradigmatic’ stratum is treated under the name of ‘theological’ virtue):

⁵¹ Damascius suggests that Ammonius managed to arrive at some sort of ‘agreement’ with ‘the overseer of the prevailing doctrine’, perhaps meaning Peter Mongus; see Athanassiadi (1999) ad loc., Westerink (1990), 327. Sorabji (2005) has proposed that Ammonius agreed not to promote pagan ritual or “theurgy” in public. See van Den Berg (2004) and Blank (2010), 659–60 for further discussion of this proposal.

⁵² In the *Ancient Commentators* series: Hermias by Dirk Baltzly and Michael Share (vol. 1: 2018; vol. 2: 2022; vol. 3: forthcoming) and by the present author (2014; 2016).

[T8] Olympiodorus, *On Alcibiades* 172, 5–12. ‘[S]elf-knowledge’ is said in many ways (πολλαχῶς ἐστὶ γινῶναι ἑαυτὸν): it is possible (ο) to know oneself with respect to one’s external [possessions]; and of course it is possible (1) to know oneself with respect to one’s body; [note: (2) *habitulative virtue excluded here, but included in the Phaedo commentary*]; and it is possible (3) to know oneself as a civic or social person (πολιτικῶς), when one knows oneself in the tripartition of one’s soul [as reason, spirited-emotion, and appetite in harmony]; and it is possible (4) to know oneself as a purificatory person (καθαρτικῶς), when one knows oneself in the act of liberation from the affections (πάθη); and (5) it is possible to know oneself as a contemplative person (θεωρητικῶς), when a person contemplates himself as liberated (ἀπολελυμένον ἑαυτὸν); (6) it is possible to know oneself theologically (θεολογικῶς), when a person knows himself according to his own Idea (τὴν ἰδέαν τὴν ἑαυτοῦ); and (7) it is possible to know oneself in an inspired sense (ἐνθουσιαστικῶς), when a person knows oneself according to unity (κατὰ τὸ ἓν) and, thus bonded to his proper god, acts with inspiration (συναπτόμενος τῷ οἰκείῳ θεῷ ἐνθουσιᾷ). [Cp. *On Alc.* 20,4-13: choose the walk of life ‘according to essence’, ‘natural’, bonded with one’s god]. (Tr. adapted from Griffin 2016)

This passage is particularly helpful and complete, in spite of the omission of a correspondent to ‘habitulative’ self-knowledge.⁵³ It makes clear, I think, that – at least in the years when Olympiodorus delivered the lectures from which these notes derive – he was facing no (socially or philosophically motivated) objection to endorsing *both* of the sixth and seventh tier distinguished by Damascius. In addition, like Damascius, he distinguishes these tiers from one another; theological or paradigmatic self-knowledge involves coming to recognize one’s own paradigmatic Idea, while inspired self-knowledge involves the One (of the soul) and acting from a bond with one’s natural deity. I have argued along these lines in earlier work.⁵⁴ Olympiodorus’ designation of the highest virtues as ‘enthusiastic’ or ‘inspired’ is a terminological variation from Damascius, but not unprecedented or without purpose: it is mirrored by Hermias in what appears to be a clear parallel to Damascius’ explanation of this virtue’s psychological structure (below), implying that this terminology is not particularly unusual, but may be guided by context. ‘Inspiration’ is often invoked in connection with the stratification of modes of knowing (e.g. Proclus *in Tim.* I, 283,1-11; III, 104,31-105,8), of self-knowledge, and in connection with the inspirational scheme of the *Phaedrus*,⁵⁵ whereas ‘hieratic’ language suits Damascius’ purpose and handling of the initiatory milieu of the *Phaedo* particularly clearly.

(b) Correspondences in Hermias identify Damascius’ hieratic virtues with proper inspirations acting on the ‘One of the soul’

Hermias’ notes on the *Phaedrus*, based on a seminar offered by Syrianus and attended by Proclus,⁵⁶ offers a complementary analysis of the highest stage of Damascius’ and Olympiodorus’ scale. This is a familiar source text for related discussions; Anne Sheppard argued that Hermias’ notes provide

⁵³ Olympiodorus *On Phaedo* 8.3 makes clear that he does countenance a form of knowledge corresponding to habitulative virtue, and the omission in the *Alcibiades* context does not seem significant to the argument here.

⁵⁴ Including Griffin 2014, 2016, 2021.

⁵⁵ On which see Tarrant (2021 and forthcoming).

⁵⁶ See Baltzly and Share (2018), and Finamore, Maneola, and Wear (2020).

evidence for a ‘higher’, non-ritual, and internalized form of theurgy, and some have followed her with more detailed arguments for distinct forms of theurgy: roughly speaking, mystical union on the one hand, white magic on the other hand, and a practice of ritual purification in between. Helmig and Vargas, in a series of recent articles, have argued expertly for the unity of theurgy as a single kind, not as merely loosely linked families of practices.⁵⁷ This is a rich discussion in its own right; here, I hope to contribute by drawing on Hermias to demonstrate that Damascius and Olympiodorus offer a more consistent picture of the upper tiers of virtue than it may initially appear, and that we may use all three writers – Hermias, Damascius, and Olympiodorus – to illustrate a consistent scheme across the Athenian and Alexandrian schools between the 5th-6th centuries.

In Damascius’ discussion of the virtues cited earlier (in *On Phaedo* 1.144, T4), we encounter the ‘godlike’ (*theoeidos*) part of the soul, the possessor of Damascius’ ‘hieratic’ virtues, which are ‘unitary’ (*heniaios*) in nature, and ‘correspond’ in some way to the lower (mostly Plotinian and Porphyrian) scale of virtues attributed to the soul. Now Hermias describes this same highest element of us, the ‘One of the Soul’ that is most ‘godlike’ and ‘unified’ in the human person (88,17-31), and which functions to unite all our faculties, as a kind of ‘flower’ of the entire soul.⁵⁸ Hermias stresses that this henadic core is just that aspect of us which receives ‘inspiration’ (*enthousiasmos*), in the most *proper* sense, leading to our loftiest virtue and facilitating our ascent:

[T9] Hermias *On Phaedrus* 89,14-19. So the inspiration that is primarily and properly speaking and truly from gods occurs in connection with this one of the soul that is above discursive thought and above the intellect in it [sc. in the soul]—a one that is at other times [sc. in the absence of inspiration] like someone who is exhausted and asleep [cf. Plotinus *Enn.* 1.4.9-10]. But when this one is illuminated, the whole of life—the intellect, discursive thought, the irrational [part of the soul] (*ἀλογία*)—is illuminated and a reflection (*ἰνδαλμα*) of the inspiration is granted all the way [down] to the body itself. (trans. Baltzly-Share, adapted)

This passage provides clearer evidence that the virtues which Damascius labels ‘hieratic’, so accenting their centrality in ritual, answer to the ‘inspired’ or ‘enthusiastic’ modes of divine *mania* in the commentarial tradition on the *Phaedrus* – expressed outwardly in inspiration in music and dance, in ritual purification, oracular or possessed prophecy, and love. These are, of course, the ‘divine madnesses’ of *Phaedr.* 244a and following, with which Hermias is chiefly concerned here.⁵⁹ In *both* Damascius *and* Hermias, these are precisely the virtues of the godlike ‘One of the soul’. ‘Inspiration’ in the strict sense is the same as ‘hieratic virtue’, then, in the sense that both produce a soul-unifying effect by working on the One of the soul, then lead this unity into contact with the One of the gods.

At the same time, ritual practice or ‘teletic’ is – at least according to Syrianus-Hermias – only *one* species of inspired virtue, namely the second of the *Phaedrus*’ four. What makes ritual practice

⁵⁷ Helmig and Vargas (2014), and see also Helmig and Vargas (unpublished).

⁵⁸ On the One of the soul, see for example Chlup (2012: 163-68), Smith (1974: 121). The One of the soul includes all features of our soul’s life (Proclus, *in Parm.* 957-58, quoted below). I am grateful to Antonio Vargas for pointing out this passage to me.

⁵⁹ See again Sheppard (1982).

particularly instrumental in ascent is its function in achieving inspiration. Crucially, the merely *technically proficient* practice of ritual as such, if *uninspired*, belongs to a lower level of virtue (on this point, compare Hermias 104,19-29). Hermias also famously records a question from Proclus to Syrianus in the seminar on the *Phaedrus*, inquiring why telestic is not given more importance in the scale of inspirations, with Syrianus' answer focusing on the nature of the analogy between inward and outward dimensions of inspiration; in short, Syrianus replies that one may consistently privilege ritual in one dimension and love in the other, without diminishing either, and yet love retains its fundamental privilege as the ground of all the inspirations.⁶⁰

For our purposes, this evidence facilitates the consistent translation of terms and the production of a coherent image of the scale's form in the sources of the later fifth and sixth centuries: Damascius, emphasizing the capacity of inspired ritual to act on the One of the soul, prefers the term 'hieratic' (although there are other modes of technically proficient ritual that would *not* count as the highest virtue); and Hermias and Olympiodorus, holding in mind the *inspired* character of this highest activity, use the term 'enthusiastic' or 'inspired' (although again, there are also *lower* kinds of inspiration that touch Intellect or soul or body alone). In other words, the choice of words, 'hieratic' or 'inspired', picks out different features of the same state of affairs that they are interested in. But both terms, 'hieratic' and 'inspired', when applied to the highest kind of virtue, should be understood as referencing one state: *any inspiration flowing from the gods which directly touches the One of the Soul*. This faculty, as Proclus also explains, is responsible for the unification of all our experience and agency:

[T9b] Proclus *On Parmenides* 957-58. For again we find the faculty of desire (*epithymia*) striving after one set of things, and the faculty of spiritedness (*thymos*) pursuing others, and rational choice directing itself towards others, but there is also one single life-principle which moves the soul towards all of these things, by virtue of which we say 'I desire' and 'I am angry' and 'I make such and such a choice'; for that life-principle directs itself to those objects along with the faculties mentioned and it lives with all of them, being a power which directs an impulse towards every object of impulse. And indeed prior to both these faculties is the unitary principle of the soul, which often says, for instance, 'I perceive such and such' and 'I am calculating' and 'I desire such and such and such' and 'I wish such and such', and which is conscious of all these activities and works along with them; otherwise we would not have known all these activities, nor would we be able to say in what way they differed, if there were not one single unitary thing in us which knew all these, which is over and above the common sense-faculty and prior to opinion and prior to desire and prior to will, and which knows all the deliberations of those faculties and which has gathered together into itself partlessly all their impulses, saying in the case of each 'it is I who am doing this, and I who am acting'.⁶¹ (Tr. Morrow-Dillon)

(c) Olympiodorus' paradigmatic virtue is theurgy, but inspiration of the One of the Soul is higher

I think a close reading of additional passages in Proclus and Olympiodorus can buttress this harmonizing interpretation, and lend more colour to the underlying framework. First, we can resituate Olympiodorus' treatment of what Damascius calls 'paradigmatic' virtue more clearly now. In the

⁶⁰ *In Phaedr.* 96,24-25.

⁶¹ I am very grateful to Antonio Vargas for bringing this passage to my attention.

Phaedo lectures, cited above (*On Phaedo* 8.2, T6), it is true that Olympiodorus does not speak of hieratic or inspired virtue at all, as he does in the *Alcibiades* commentary. (This might result from some external pressure at the time of the *Phaedo* lectures, but as we noted earlier, it does not *have to*:⁶² it could arise from different philosophical or pedagogical reasons, like a general preference *not* to speak of inspiration, as Marinus articulates above (T7); or because it is excluded from the curricular scope of the *Phaedo* and does not need to be invoked here for completeness, as it does in the context of the *Alcibiades* passage that retails all forms of self-knowledge; or because in a strict sense discussed below, inspiration is strictly speaking not a ‘virtue’).

However, Olympiodorus in the same text clearly equates *paradigmatic virtue* with the practice of ‘theurgy’, and explains that theurgy, construed as paradigmatic virtue, enables a bond with the Intellect itself (*Nous*) and with the intelligible gods. And a different source makes clear that theurgy in this sense reaches to the ‘intelligible gods’, but *not* all the way to the One. This source is our surviving reports about Proclus’ *Cratylus* commentary:

[T9b] Proclus, *On Cratylus* §113, 65,20-26. And proceeding even higher than this [supercelestial region], they have been able to reveal the limit of the intelligible gods only by name and indicate the beings beyond, since they are ineffable and incomprehensible, by analogy alone. This is because even at the intelligible level itself of the gods only this God who encompasses the paternal order is said by wise men to be nameable, and **theurgy ascends all the way to this order.**

Comparing this remark by Proclus with Olympiodorus, they appear to use this language in a consistent way: ‘paradigmatic virtue’ should be equated with the practices designated ‘theurgy’; both describe an ascent to unity with *Nous* (as Olympiodorus explains at *in Phd.* 8.2) and so to the *intelligible* level of reality; *and* there is *also* a higher tier beyond this, namely, the inspiration received from the gods directly by the One of the soul, which can strictly speaking be called by a different name than theurgy or paradigmatic virtue. It is also consistent with Damascius’ account; and it also explains why Marinus says we must ‘keep silence’ about a practice beyond theurgy; what he means, evidently, is these highest virtues elsewhere designated inspired. (It also has the virtue of consistency, I think, with Olympiodorus’ account about self-knowledge in the *Alcibiades* lectures above (172,5-12, T8), where ‘theological’ self-knowledge involves knowing one’s own Idea among the Ideas in *Nous*; but this invites further discussion in the future).

(d) Inspirations and embodied experience

Hermias’ account of divine inspiration has several important features that are relevant to complete our explanation of the scale as a whole. In its strictest sense, Hermias explains that divine inspiration applies only to the One of the Soul (above), at once the core of the person and the unifying element that is most inclusive of the whole,⁶³ corresponding to the highest principle of the cosmos, the One. In this sense, as I see it, *any* inspiration that comes directly to the One of the Soul should be considered as

⁶² See above, n. 51.

⁶³ Though for alternative views of the centre of the ‘authentic self’ in later Neoplatonism, see Riggs (2015).

belonging to the highest tier of the scale of virtues and its counterparts, like the scale of forms of self-knowledge outlined by Olympiodorus above (T8).

But inspiration also cascades through the entire person ‘below’ or ‘within’ the capacious boundaries of the One of the soul — in the Proclean scheme, this includes our being and mind, then our reasoning soul, then our unreasoning soul, then our bodies—allowing our body or feelings or mind to be inspired *directly* (for example, when we are divinely ‘inspired’ with a significant insight, or anger or joy). I believe this is clear from Hermias *On Phaedrus* 89,14-19 (T9), also cited above. That a body can be directly inspired by the gods without mediation seems clear, not only from this passage, but also from Proclus (for example, *in Tim.* I 211,4-8, where the signatures of affinity implanted in bodies without soul facilitates their movement in direct response to the gods). Thus, as Hermias points out, it can be valuable and beneficial to respect and heed our body’s motivations if and when they flow from divine inspiration; this allows the Platonist following Iamblichus to celebrate embodied experience.

(e) Correspondences between the scale of virtues and the scale of inspirations

This brings us to a final step. Let us revisit Damascius’ comments on the *Phaedo* above (1.144, T4). While Damascius’ version of the total scale locates inspired virtue at the top or peak – where, as in Hermias, it answers to the One of the soul, the ‘most divine part’ of the person – Damascius also explains that *every* virtue is somehow represented within this peak stage, in a way that ‘corresponds’ (ἀντιπαρήκουσαι) to each of the other virtues listed below. I think it is crucial to note that Damascius uses the plural, implying that each and *every* virtue on the level of Intellect or Being has a counterpart in what he designates the ‘hieratic’ scale.

Hermias also provides context for what Damascius intends to describe by this compressed account of a ‘correspondence’. Hermias shows that the four modes of inspiration of the *Phaedrus* (while not exhaustive of all inspiration, 91,23 ff.) form an interlocking sequence of rising stairs in their own right. This sequence ‘corresponds’ to the scale of virtues, I would argue, in the sense that each inspiration answers *in its function upon the soul* to each of the degrees of virtue. For instance, the madness of the Muses elicits ‘harmony’ among the soul’s functions (Herm. 93,32), which is also the function that Damascius (*in Phd.* 1.140) and Olympiodorus (*in Phd.* 8.2-4) attribute to ‘civic virtue’ in the tripartite soul. The madness of Dionysus, according to Hermias’ account, makes the functions of the soul into a ‘whole’, a greater degree of unity than harmony alone, while conducing to our ‘purification’. The madness of Apollo makes a ‘unity’ of the soul’s functions and leads it ‘upward’, analogously to ‘contemplative virtue’. Finally, the madness of Love leads the unified soul to the intelligible, and attaches the One of the soul to the One of the gods (e.g., 94,30-95,2), just as ‘paradigmatic virtue’ leads the soul to the intelligible gods. (See also T10 below, which briefly summarizes Hermias’ account in 88,15-96,24 of the inner effect of each mode of inspiration, alongside their outward manifestation).

Therefore, we find in the hierarchy of inspirations and the scale of virtues two parallel ladders – ‘parallel’ in at least a provisional sense, because one has a kind of causal priority over the other, as we

find below.⁶⁴ Each ladder climbs through sequential stages of increasing unity, culminating in the production of an erotically grounded link between the unified soul and the unity of the gods. In the case of the scale of virtues, the subject of this sequential ascent is the *logos* (reason) in the soul, or rational soul (*logikē psychē*), which ascends to a degree of unity that yields self-identification with *nous*. (1) First comes reason's harmonization of the faculties of the tripartite soul (civic virtue, Damasc. *On Phaed.* 1.140); (2) next is, its withdrawal of attention to itself (purificatory virtue, 1.141), a practice Damascius identifies with the inspiration of the 'Bacchus' and 'Dionysus' (1.171); (3) third is its ascent to contemplate its noetic source (contemplative virtue, 1.142); and (4) fourth is its identification with that noetic source (paradigmatic virtue, 1.143), reaching a state of complete union with the intelligible origin, divine *nous*.

Turning to the scale of inspirations in Hermias, again, comparable stages narrate the ascent of the entire soul by acting on the One of the soul (not only its reasoning faculty alone), until by this ascent the *entire* soul, all her powers, becomes unified and connected to the intelligible gods by the action of *Erōs*. (1) First comes the Muses' *harmonization* of the powers of the soul (94,1), including but not limited to the tripartition of *logos*, *thumos*, and *epithumia* (cp. 88,17-31); (2) second comes Dionysus' inspiration to telestic activity (94,9), which makes a *whole* of the soul and brings its faculties to completion in intellectual activity (93,34-94,7); (3) third is Apollo's inspiration, which leads the whole being of the soul back up to its *One* (94,10-11); and (4) fourth comes the inspiration of Love, which leads this One of the Soul back to the One in the gods, and to intelligible beauty (94,12-13; cf. 94,30).

[T10] **Hermias' Inspirations** (summarizing *On Phaedrus* 88,15-96,24)

Scale of Inspirations 'Hieratic' Virtue	Inward activity	Outward activity	Scale of Virtues
Inspiration of Erōs [Leads One of Soul back to gods and intelligible beauty, Herm. 94,12-14, 94,30]	Fusing unity with a god's	Love	Paradigmatic virtue [Leads up to intelligible gods, Olymp. 8.2, and union with <i>nous</i>]
Mantic inspiration of Apollo [Leads whole soul back 'up' to One, Herm. 94,11]	Bringing psychē to unity	Prophetic activity	Contemplative virtue [Leads reason 'upward' to contemplation, Dmsc. 1.142]
Telestic inspiration of Dionysus [Makes whole of soul, 93,34-94,7 purifying pollution, 96,10]	Making a whole of psychē	Ritual activity	Purificatory virtue [Withdrawal, Dmsc. 1.141, purification]

⁶⁴ My proposal here could be compared to the parallel between divine chains and ontological ladders (Chlup 2012: 133; Smith 1974: 126-7; Butler 2003: 392-4), as Antonio Vargas kindly points out to me. In the present case, I believe, the ontological scale of virtues is ultimately causally grounded in the scale of inspirations, so they are not strictly separate. See further below.

			inspired by Bacchus, 171]
Inspiration of the Muses [Harmonizes whole soul's functions, Herm. 93,32]	Harmonizing psychē	Music, rhythm	Constitutional virtue [Harmonizes tripartite soul, Ol. & Damsc. 1.140.]

It is worth reiterating several points of correspondence between these two pairs of four rungs, the first of which works on rational soul and culminates in access to Nous and the Intelligible, the other on the One of the soul. (1) First, the Muses' inspiration performs precisely same function as civic virtue, producing a 'harmony' or 'attunement' of our inner motivational and perceptual plurality; of course, the speech of the Muses in the *Republic* is also associated with constitutional or civic virtue (*politeia*). (2) Second, Dionysus is named as the architect of purificatory virtue in Damascius (1.171), and as the cause of telestic inspiration in Hermias (passim, and above). (3) Third, Apollo gathers all the parts of the soul and leads them 'up' into unity (Herm. 94,11), just as contemplative virtue turns reason 'upward' (Dam. 1.142). (4) Fourth, the madness of Love leads the soul 'up' to intelligible beauty and the gods (94,13-14), just as paradigmatic virtue or theurgical activity leads up to the intelligible gods (Olymp. *in Phaed.* 8.2 [T6] and Proclus *On Cratylus* §113 [T9b]).

So far, I think, each degree in the two scales corresponds to a degree in the other, in terms of their interior function in the soul.⁶⁵ The lower scale answers to the first three 'Socrateses' identified earlier – civic, purificatory, and theoretic – and recounts a gradual turning of the rational soul from its function overseeing the lower functions of the soul, until its attention shifts away from the senses and social life, toward a purified concentration on Forms, facilitating the 'painterly' alternation outlined earlier. By contrast, the scale of inspirations is illustrated with vivid *outward* activities that correspond to each inward transformation: music, ritual, prophecy, and a philosophical form of interpersonal love. This will be significant in the following section.

As we have noted above, Damascius asserts that the hieratic virtues 'correspond' (ἀντιπαρήκουσαι) to the canonical scale of virtues, yet the canonical virtues operate on the level of being (οὐσιώδεις), while the hieratic virtues are in some sense 'unificatory' (ἐνιαίαι) (*On Phaed.* 1.144, T4). I think the parallel just outlined offers one appealing explanation for his language: the scale of virtues works on Intellect in the soul, that is, on *being*, while the scale of inspirations works on the One of the soul. Damascius proceeds to explain that 'philosophy', the former scale, is prioritized by Plotinus and Porphyry, while 'hieratic' ascent, the latter, is prioritized by Iamblichus and Proclus, among others. However, he stresses that *both* ladders qualify as genuinely Platonic means of ascent, because the Platonic philosopher is a 'Bacchus' (1.172, T5). In saying this, Damascius stresses that both ladders, with their respective historical provenance within the development of Platonism, are endorsed by Plato as valid means for elevation; and he highlights Dionysus' pivotal role in both, apt to the Neoplatonic interpretation of the *Phaedo*,

⁶⁵ I am grateful to Antonio Vargas for criticism and suggestions that have improved this general argument, although it is still a work in progress.

where philosophy is presented as an initiation into Dionysian mysteries, and he countenances, in principle, both Porphyrian and Iamblichian modes of ascent.

At the same time, tracing these close functional parallels between the two scales should not obscure their differences and their priority. For both Damascius and Hermias, the scale of inspirations or the hieratic route is the ‘highest’ path, acting upon the One of the soul and culminating in inspiration by Love, which (as Hermias underscores) grounds all other modes of inspiration by linking the soul to the gods (92,27-28; 94,30-95,2; 182,11-13). This priority emerges in at least two directions: cause and result. First, the inspirations play a party in *causing* the states of soul that constitute virtue: as we have noticed, for example, Dionysian inspiration plays a part in *causing* the soul’s purification, the Muses *cause* inner harmony, and Love *causes* paradigmatic union. Second, the madness of Love ultimately leads to a higher destination than paradigmatic virtue, if Hermias means his words precisely when he reports that Love leads the One of the soul to the One of the gods (95,12-14), that is, even to the proper henads. This point is echoed by Proclus: souls ultimately ‘are again embraced by the gods and the most primary henads’ (*in Tim.* I 210,3-211,8). In fact, the scale of virtues is subsumed in the peak of inspiration, that state in which ‘bonded to [our] proper god, [we] act with inspiration’ (συναπτόμενος τῷ οἰκείῳ θεῷ ἐνθουσιᾷ, Olymp. *On Alc.* 172,5-12, T8).

Indeed, Proclus describes this relationship more precisely in his extended discussion of the function of prayer, where he explores prayer’s contribution to our ascent to be ‘embraced in the light’ of divine possession (*in Tim.* I, 209,26-212,10). Comparably to Hermias’ description of the inspiration of Love, Proclus explains that prayer to the gods involves the unification of our soul (210,27-211,8), and proceeds to bring the One of our soul into direct ‘touch’ with the One of the gods (211,8-212,1). He explains that ‘double signatures’ (*ditta sunthēmata*) implanted by the gods permit our soul to function in two ways at once: first, to *remain* always linked with the divine ‘according to the One’; and second, simultaneously to *proceed and revert* ‘according to *Nous*’ (210,27-211,8).⁶⁶ These twin signatures echo, I take it, Damascius’ account of the parallel scales in *Phaed.* 1.144: one signature is ‘unitary’ and allows us to remain through the One of the soul, in every instant potentially receptive to inspiration from the gods, like all beings; the second is ‘ontological’ and allows us to proceed and revert more intentionally according to *Nous*, through focused attention that ultimately leads us to recognize the Forms and Signatures in all reality.⁶⁷ But in both cases the degrees of virtue are not climbed *without* divine

⁶⁶ Proclus explains that the gods have implanted ‘double signatures’ (*ditta sunthēmata*) in each of us, allowing us to remain connected with the gods, on the one hand, while proceeding and reverting, on the other (I, 201,3-211,8). Special souls, like that of the Sibyl, gain understanding (*gnōsis*) by an innate capacity for the ‘light’ of such divine possession, which is inspired (*enthousiastikos*) and so, surpasses all other modes of knowledge (III, 160,1-13). The Address of the Demiurge in the *Timaeus* embodies such ‘inspiration’, shining out with noeric insights (ἐνθουσιαστικὸς... διαλάμπων ταῖς νοεραῖς ἐπιβολαῖς, III 199,30-31; cf. 104,32-105,8). Human beings have an intuitive drive to pay heed to such inspiration in others (160,17-21).

⁶⁷ ‘But those [beings] which proceed forth must also return, imitating the manifestation of the gods and their reversion to the cause, so that they too are ordered in accordance with the perfective triad, and are again embraced by the gods and the most primary henads... making this kind of circle which both begins from the gods and ends with them. **All things, therefore, both remain in and revert to the gods, receiving this ability from them and obtaining in their very being a double signature (διττὰ συνθήματα), the one in order to remain there, the other so that what proceeds forth can return....**

inspiration, for ‘it is through prayer that the ascent is completed, and it is with prayer that the crown of virtue is attained’ (I 212,1-10). Similarly, Olympiodorus argues that the degrees of virtues (contemplative, purificatory, civic, and habituating) depend upon ‘tokens’ (*sumbola*) implanted in the soul by the gods (*in Phaed.* 1.4-5), just as inspiration ultimately depends on the One of the soul.

Thus, I suggest, one of Proclus’ twin signatures, that which allows us to ‘remain’ with the gods, bonded as One to One, ultimately underlies our ability to act from inspiration, while the second signature facilitates our proceeding and returning from Intellect (*nous*), with the scale of virtues mapping the ‘returning’ phase of this movement. As we will see below, the first signature corresponds to an ‘all-at-once’ capacity to act without departing from our primary inspiration from the gods, while the second corresponds to an alternation between attention to the intelligible and attention to the sensible; again, I will offer the metaphor of dance for the first, and painting for the second.

6. Application: Simultaneous Contemplation and Action, or a ‘dancerly’ model

In this section, we turn to the ‘dancerly’ model of inspiration. I have appealed above to Olympiodorus’ articulation of a common later Platonist view (*in Alc.* 172,5–12) that one *acts with inspiration* in any walk of life, when bonded with one’s proper god.⁶⁸ What does ascent upon these rungs of inspiration *feel* like and *look* like, in terms of such practical agency and attention? This question ultimately brings us back to the inquiry sketched at the outset of the paper: how can the philosopher *simultaneously* contemplate and act? The answer is that contemplation that flows from inspiration proves to be fully compatible with action in the world; in contrast to the alternating model of the ‘painter’, this image (I suggest below) is more comparable to a dancer who moves in flow with the rhythm of the music.

We can identify in Hermias an explicit argument to this effect, that the inspired philosopher can act in practice in the world without leaving behind contemplation. Socrates is presented as an exemplar in this passage, because he does not cease contemplating even while he helps Phaedrus in practical life (by talking with him). Hermias explains that Socrates’ activity is similar to the unbroken activity of the gods, contemplating and acting in the world, and that it is rare but (as demonstrated by Socrates) not impossible for a human being to emulate the gods in so doing:

[T11] Hermias, *On Phaedrus* 77,20-78,7. [77,20-25] [T]he gods for their part conduct their own secondary and tertiary activities *while remaining in their own primary activities and not departing from them*. But *if* a person, while projecting (*προβάλλων*) a secondary or tertiary activity from within himself, abandons (*ἀφίσταται*) his primary [activity], or even forgets about it, then he errs (*ἀμαρτάνει*).... [78,4-7] **For Socrates, the ascent (*ἀνοδος*) to his own first principles, i.e. to contemplation, is very easy and**

These [signatures] the Demiurge too had much earlier effectuated in the case of the souls, giving them signatures so that they could both remain and revert, **on the one hand establishing them in accordance with the One, on the other hand graciously bestowing on them the [ability to] revert in accordance with Intellect**.... Prayer attracts the beneficence of the gods towards itself. It unifies those who pray with the gods who are being prayed to. It also links the Intellect of the gods with the formulations of those who pray’ (Proclus *in Tim.* I 210,3-211,8).

⁶⁸ cf. Ol. *in Alc.* 20,4-13, with Proclus *On Tim.* vol. I, 210,3-211,8, Pr. *On Rep.* II 72,7-18, and Pr. *In Alc.* 73, the latter two references emphasizing that a person can possess one ideal Daimōn if one is true to one’s divine purpose. (I am grateful to Antonio Vargas for this connection).

smooth. In the first place, *he didn't abandon his primary activity when projecting the secondary one* (πρῶτον μὲν γὰρ οὐδὲ τὴν δευτέραν ἐνέργειαν προβάλλων ἀφίστατο τῆς πρώτης)... (following Baltzly-Share, my emphasis)

Hermias implies this underlying picture of descending 'layers' of consciousness in the human being, withdrawing from higher and more noetic faculties toward discursive reason and sensation. Against this background, Socrates' feat involves maintaining the 'higher' faculties of contemplation in action, while simultaneously engaging in action through the 'lower' faculties.

[T12] **Hermias *On Phaedrus* 93,19-30.** Originally and at first the soul was united with the gods and that 'one' of its was joined to (συνῆπτο) the gods. Then, withdrawing from that divine union, it descended to intellect (νοῦς) and no longer possessed [all] there is (τὰ ὄντα) in a unified manner and in one but gazed upon it and saw it by means of simple strikes (ἀπλάις ἐπιβολαίς)⁶⁹ and, as it were, direct contacts [on the part] of its mind (θίξεσι τοῦ νοῦ). Then, withdrawing from intellect too and descending to reasoning and discursive thought (διάνοια), it no longer gazed upon it by means of simple apprehensions either, but by moving syllogistically and step by step and one thing after another from premisses to conclusions. Then, departing too from pure reasoning and the psychic mode (ιδιώματος), it descended into generation and was infected with great irrationality and confusion. It must, then, return once more to its own origins and go back once more to the place whence it descended. And in this ascent and restoration these four types of madness assist it. (following Baltzly-Share)

The first stages of this 'descent' are also paralleled in each inspired creative act, like Plato's production of the *Timaeus*' account of nature: first, an 'all at once' grasp of the object of knowledge is reached through inspiration (*enthousiastikē epibolē*); then an 'unrolling' into *logoi* occurs (Proclus, *in Tim.* III, 104,31-105,8); again, a divinely inspired philosopher states the conclusion of their view up front, because they 'see the whole together, all at once (*antikrus... to holon... athrōos... homou*)' before they descend into argumentation (I, 283,1-11).

The task accomplished by Socrates—acting and helping Phaedrus without abandoning contemplation—seems very challenging. It initially appears restricted to the gods (in T11 above, much as in Aristotle's *Nic. Eth.* 10). Ammonius, reportedly, stressed that one could remain contemplative while eating or engaging in everyday life simply by not attending too much to the everyday (Olympiodorus *On Phaedo* 6.3). But Socrates' way of achieving 'likeness to God' here also seems different. Hermias' solution is that Socrates *opens himself to inspiration* in the right way. He wants to help Phaedrus, so he opens himself to Dionysian inspiration in particular. This is a matter of suitable *receptivity*, not concentration or control:

[T13] **Hermias *On Phaedrus* 58,19-59,25.** [F]or ways of life of ours that are appropriate and of a particular kind, appropriate irradiations and inspirations are granted us from the gods, and we are familiarized (οἰκειούμεθα) to different gods at different times according to the nature of our life... **So, since the present life of Socrates is purificatory (καθαρτική) and elevating** (for he wishes to save the young man and remove him from [the spell of] the beauty in [the realm of] generation, or external

⁶⁹ This language is shared by Plotinus and the Epicureans for a holistic, 'all-at-once' apprehension; see Cornea 2016, and on the Epicurean roots, Tsouna (forthcoming). See also Harrington 2005.

beauty, and since the Nymphs and Dionysus are overseers of generation, **on that account he declares that he is inspired by the Nymphs, or Nymph-possessed** (νυμφόληπτος)... as if he had offered up his life to the gods that oversee generation and was receiving inspiration from that source... because... **he is susceptible to the reception of more complete and divine illuminations** (εἰς τὴν τῶν τελειότερων καὶ θεῶν ἐλλάμψεων ὑποδοχὴν). **Perceptions and mental representations** (φαντασίαι) **are suppressed when more perfect [forces] are working on them....** [Socrates said he is talking in dithyrambs because of Dionysus, and] Dionysus... creates the enmattered forms for a second time and prepares all generation to go forth. (following Baltzly-Share) [Purificatory virtue arises from his inspiration from Dionysus; note with Olymp. *On Phaedo* 4.3 that the purificatory sees sense-objects and Forms].

In this way, Socrates achieves purificatory virtue *by relying on the inspiration of Dionysus*, without having to apply narrow attention on one thing—so it is Hermias' inspired Socrates who doesn't have to focus on just one thing at a time. Unlike Porphyry's position in the *De abstinentia*, he can at once attend to the sensible and the intelligible.

Circling back to an earlier question, just what it *like* to act in this way? Plotinus himself offers a framework that is useful, and anticipates Hermias' talk of 'simple strikes' (*epibolai*) and 'direct contact' (in **T12** above): ordinarily, we apprehend sensory and mental objects by 'representing' them to ourselves (ἀντίληψις, φαντασία).⁷⁰ But noetic experience or direct apprehension of Forms is not like that; intellection can occur without any representation, and therefore the sage can contemplate even while asleep (e.g. *Enn.* 1.4.10). Proclus uses similar language of *inspired* strikes (*epibolai*) in the *Timaeus* commentary (I, 283,1-11; III, 104,31-105,8). Similarly, in the later Platonist interpretation of the *Chaldaean Oracles* (fr. 1), inspired awareness feels like extending an 'empty mind' (κενὸς νόος) toward one's object:

[**T13b**] *Chaldaean Oracles* fr. 1. There exists a certain Intelligible which you must perceive by the flower of mind (*anthos nou*).... With the flame of mind completely extended which measures all things, *except* that intelligible. You must not perceive it intently, but keeping the pure eye of your soul turned away, you should extend an empty mind (*keneos noos*) toward the Intelligible to comprehend it... (Tr. Majercik 1990)

This is arguably the kind of attention underlying inspired contemplation and action: in a brief brush-stroke, we could emphasize that it involves a direct rather than mediated, representational encounter with its object; and it is receptive, rather than delimiting its object by a concept. As Olympiodorus points out, there is a *natural* quality about this kind of receptivity to divine inspiration (*in Alc.* 20,4-13). In such a state of receptivity, Socrates can help Phaedrus while in contemplation. Of course, this has an element of contemplative absorption. At the same time, since inspiration cascades through the whole person, we can move and speak and work from this position without abandoning contemplation: this is the model of action that underlies the activity of Oracles,⁷¹ especially extraordinary figures like the Sibyl (Pr. *in Tim.* III, 160,2), but it also grounds — as Hermias makes clear — the activity of a musician or dancer who is lost in the music, the ritual practitioner when they are fully invested in their actions, the prophet when they speak, and the lover when they act from love, without effort or tension (on the

⁷⁰ See Hutchinson (2018), e.g. 94, on the role of representation in Plotinus' consciousness vocabulary.

⁷¹ See Addey (2014).

outward expressions, compare again Herm. 93-96). It is like a state of ‘flow’, in the modern psychological sense.⁷²

So here we find a distinct model of contemplation *in* action. Picking up the earlier artistic metaphor, I am again tempted to describe this as a ‘dancerly’ model of openness, to complement the ‘painterly’ model sketched above for Porphyry. Where Porphyry’s picture involves alternation between model and canvas, the dancerly model of the Athenian and Alexandrian Neoplatonists involves moving *with* the music of inspiration. The dancer moves according to their inspiration without needing to ‘alternate’ between a model and a canvas. Here too, drawing from the *Phaedrus* and its celebrations of divine madness in the arts, philosophy, and love, the Platonists can identify Platonic authority. This vision is also found in later Platonist hagiography and literature. It is the virtue of the Pythia, Oracle at Delphi, and the Sybil; it is the virtue of Asclepiogeneia, the theurgist who taught Proclus, and of Proclus himself; it is the virtue of Oracles and Prophets.⁷³ And while this model does undergird the later Platonist justification of ritual activity in a socially important way, I would emphasize that it is not solely about ritual. In fact, Hermias stresses that ritual can be performed in a purely technically correct way, just as poetry can be technically excellent, but not yet fully *inspired*; while still efficacious, like anything else, ritual is only at the peak of the scale if it is performed with receptivity to *inspiration*, even to divine possession. What matters is *how* the action is performed, and in particular, whether it is done from a place of openness to divine inspiration, especially inspiration of the One of the soul.

7. Conclusion

Let me close with several implications. The later Neoplatonist philosopher can follow two paths of moral progress: the path of increasing single-pointed concentration on Forms, *alternating* between this contemplation and action (the ‘painterly’ model, which I have associated with Porphyry, at least as construed by some later Platonists); or a path of increasing receptivity to inspiration, *simultaneous* with action (the ‘dancerly’ model, associated with Iamblichus, Hermias, and later writers). I mean to apply the metaphors of painting and dancing loosely: the painterly imagery derives from *Republic* 6, 501b, while the dancerly imagery flows most naturally from depictions of Dionysus as dancer (Damascius *in Phaed.* 1.171-2), and the philosopher as Dionysian, in Hermias, Damascius, and Olympiodorus.

The first path is treated under the title of ‘rungs of virtue’, while the second is variously invoked under the name of divine madneses, inspirations, and hieratic virtues, accenting different aspects of the experience it describes. But I have tried to accent here the role that both paths play in our worldly actions and experiences. I would stress that both paths involve not only a moral transformation, but also a perceptual transformation,⁷⁴ a novel orientation toward our impressions of the world: on the one

⁷² See Csikszentmihalyi (1990).

⁷³ It is worth noting that in addition to furnishing the Platonists with a model for richly embodied virtue, many of these exemplars for this model of virtue are women, furnishing a positive model of excellence that, though still mediated through men, is no longer as androcentric; this theme in the late Platonist tradition has been discussed in detail recently by Addey (2018), Danielle A. Layne (2019) and (2020) as well as several others, e.g. in Schultz and Wilberding (2022).

⁷⁴ For this concept in Greek and Buddhist philosophy, see Carpenter (forthcoming).

hand, toward seeing forms or patterns everywhere, *in* everything; on the other, toward seeing symbols and tokens everywhere, toward a more symbolically charged experience of the world.⁷⁵ In both transformations, we can expect our conditioned reactions to impressions to change.⁷⁶ Between the two, the model of inspiration is consistently prioritized, although both paths are acceptable.

In a classic article on the rise and function of the ‘holy man’ in late antiquity (primarily in Syria), Peter Brown once argued that the novel Christian holy figure in this period could not be ‘depersonalized’ in the way that the pre-Christian Mediterranean Oracles had been—he could not ‘lose his mind’ in quite the way that they did.⁷⁷ This *kind* of divine madness or *mania* is just what the Neoplatonists we have read here are concerned to defend, and it is integral to their unification of contemplative absorption with action. Not surprisingly, they also defend precisely the models of pagan, Oracular institutions that performed such work of ‘possession’—in fact, it was an attack on such an institution, the Temple of Isis and its priestess, that elicited a strong defense from the Neoplatonist professors in Alexandria and sparked the Paralius riots with the Christian community.⁷⁸ But the Neoplatonists also show us that this inspiration does not involve a loss of self, but rather a recognition of a *truer* self, who one really was all along: as Plotinus says, the vision of the god appears to be ‘one with oneself’ (6.9.10,19-21), and as Olympiodorus and Hermias put it, we are most naturally *ourselves* when we follow our god (Olymp. *On Alcibiades* 20,4-13; 63,11-64,1), bound with love as One to One (Herm. *On Phaedr.* 94,30-95,2), and act accordingly from inspiration.⁷⁹

⁷⁵ I have in mind here a similar image of symbolic vision in late antique Christian authors, particularly in Evagrius, and several authors collected in the *Philokalia*; for example, Maximus the Confessor, *First Century on Love* 92 II, p. 63. I hope to explore this contrast in more detail in a separate paper.

⁷⁶ I argue for this in slightly more detail in Griffin (2024a), where I want to develop a case that in some Buddhist and Platonist texts, reduced negative reactivity to stimuli is a positive outcome of philosophical and meditative practice.

⁷⁷ Brown (1971), e.g. 93.

⁷⁸ Watts (2010).

⁷⁹ Proclus emphasizes that the gods and the cosmos are part of the self in a *relative* sense, contrasting Plotinus and Theodore’s simpler view (*in Tim.* V,231; 245-6). On the idea that reflection led by ‘another’ is sometimes better than one’s own thinking, with interesting modern parallels, see Coope (2019).

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