

Mystical Experience, Metaphysics and Ritual in Plotinus

Draft 1

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1. This paper is less a formal argument towards a conclusion than a meditation on a problem that has arisen during research for my dissertation on the relation between Plotinus' mysticism and contemporaneous currents of Sethian Gnosticism. I would like to begin from the relatively noncontroversial notion that Plotinus' evocative accounts of union with the One¹ give the impression that he has had *some* kind of exceptional² experience.³ And yet, despite the substantial quantity of scholarship on Plotinian mysticism, this aspect of his thought remains deeply troublesome for interpreters. Indeed, the fundamental question, as obvious as it would seem, has rarely been asked in a sufficiently blunt manner, and it has never been satisfactorily answered: namely, how are we to understand Plotinus' mysticism *in practice*?⁴

2. The depth of the problem is evident from Pierre Hadot's admission that even after decades of rigorous and impassioned research on Plotinus' mysticism, he remains utterly bewildered about its nature.⁵ The past century has seen a proliferation of studies exploring the relation of Plotinus'

¹ In several passages throughout the *Enneads*, Plotinus tries to describe the ineffable experience of the union or coalescence with the One beyond Being and Intellect; e.g. I.6[1].7.1-19, 9.6-25; IV.8[6].1.1-11; VI.9[9].3.14-27, 4.1-30, 7.1-23, 9.24-60, 10.9-21, 11.4-25, 36-46; III.8[30].9.19-32, 10.28-35; V.8[31].11.1-19; V.5[32].4.1-12, 7.31-8.23; VI.7[38].31.5-35, 34.1-22, 35.1-45, 36.10-26; VI.8[39].15.14-23, 19.1-16; V.3[49].4.4-15, 17.16-39. In addition to Plotinus' first-hand accounts, Porphyry confirms that his teacher's ultimate aim was such a union and that on four occasions while the two men were together, the latter attained that goal in actuality; see Porphyry, *Vita Plotini* 23.7-16: Οὕτως δὲ μάλιστα τούτῳ τῶ δαιμονίῳ φωτὶ πολλάκις ἐνάγοντι ἑαυτὸν εἰς τὸν πρῶτον καὶ ἐπέκεινα θεὸν ταῖς ἐννοίαις καὶ κατὰ τὰς ἐν τῶ «Συμπόσιῳ» ὑφηγημέναις ὁδοῦς τῶ Πλάτωνι ἐφάνη ἐκεῖνος ὁ θεὸς ὁ μήτε μορφήν μήτε τινα ἰδέαν ἔχων, ὑπὲρ δὲ νοῦν καὶ πᾶν τὸ νοητὸν ἰδρυμένος. ἽΩι δὴ καὶ ἐγὼ Πορφύριος ἄπαξ λέγω πλησιάσαι καὶ ἐνωθῆναι ἔτος ἄγων ἐξηκοστὸν τε καὶ ὄγδοον. Ἐφάνη γοῦν τῶ Πλωτίνῳ σκοπὸς ἐγγύθι ναίων. Τέλος γὰρ αὐτῶ καὶ σκοπὸς ἦν τὸ ἐνωθῆναι καὶ πελάσαι τῶ ἐπὶ πᾶσι θεῶ. Ἐτυχε δὲ τετράκις που, ὅτε αὐτῶ συνήμην, τοῦ σκοποῦ τούτου ἐνεργεῖα ἀρρήτῳ [καὶ οὐ δυνάμει]. / "Thus with this daimonic light most of all, to one who very often went into himself, to the first and transcendent god— by means of thoughts, and according to the path laid down by Plato in the *Symposium*— there appeared that god who has neither shape nor form, settled above Intellect and all the intelligible. Indeed, I, Porphyry, *also* claim to have once approached and to have been united, having attained the age of sixty-eight. For Plotinus, the goal, lying nearby, appeared. For him, the end and goal was to be united, and to approach the god over all things. Four times when I was together with him, he attained that goal in unspeakable actuality and not mere potentiality."

² However dependent he was for the expression of this experience on the language of Platonism, the experience itself seems to have had no certain precedent in the prior philosophical tradition.

³ One might also consider his repeated intimations that only one who has had the experience will understand; e.g. I.6[1].7.2; VI.9[9].9.46, 11.3-4; VI.5[23].7.11-17.

⁴ For example, one might wonder about the four discrete unions with the One that occurred while Plotinus was with Porphyry. Did these states follow a philosophical discussion or a lengthy period of silent meditation? Did they occur in silence? Did they occur while the two men were in the same room? Were Plotinus' eyes closed? Was his body cataleptic? And so on.

⁵ P. Hadot, *La Philosophie comme manière de vivre: entretiens avec Jeannie Carlier et Arnold I. Davidson* (Paris: Albin Michel, 2001), 134: "Mais en quoi consiste réellement l'expérience elle-même, et comment s'explique-t-elle? C'est cela le

mysticism to his metaphysics, and the scholarship has also come to an ever greater appreciation of the more philosophically rigorous aspects of Plotinus' thought. Nevertheless, there remains a deep reticence, almost anxiety, about the practical elements of Plotinian mysticism. There is, I suspect, a rather simple explanation for this anxiety.⁶ Plotinus' experience of union with the One is undoubtedly, but ambiguously, integrated with his "objective" metaphysical system, but his account of this experience at some point leaves aside objective discourse and passes into the more inscrutable realm of what would today be considered psychological phenomenology; and while we can follow the general sweep of Plotinus' discursive arguments up to a point, there is some imprecise moment when the text soars beyond our ability to follow.⁷ Here the problem is not merely that of the essential inaccessibility of *any* subjective experience; rather, it is that Plotinus appeals to certain extraordinary *kinds* of subjective experience to which we ourselves— we think— do not have access.

3. But if this is the case, perhaps the question should be rephrased. If indeed we take Plotinus seriously as a thinker, and if we are able, more or less, to follow his discursive arguments up to a point, why can we not *also*— with the tattered text of the *Enneads* as guide— simply follow his advice somewhat further, and through some more concentrated form of philosophical meditation, experience union with the One ourselves? Or more simply: who among us has attained such a union, or even attempted to do so? And if not, why not?

4. Perhaps this seems like a stupid question, but I am asking it anyway, because the answer is too often implicitly assumed to be self-evident. Aside from those who minimize the importance of Plotinus' mysticism altogether, or write it off as a metaphor for what is merely a heightened state of philosophical cogitation,⁸ the majority of scholars— those who do treat it as an essential, if enigmatic, aspect of his thought— typically think that his experience of union with the One is but one example of a broader, cross-cultural category of mysticism, a category whose contours are presumed to be more or

plus important et je suis totalement incapable de le dire. J'ai essayé, par mes travaux sur Plotin, d'apporter des éléments de réponse. Mais c'est une bien mince contribution, car le problème est gigantesque."

⁶ That is, besides the recent scholarly skepticism concerning the category of experience itself, and besides the fact that the academic discipline of philosophy is congenitally uneasy with modes of understanding that transcend discursive intellection.

⁷ In the context of the ascent to the One there are a number of discrete transition-points where Plotinus' objective language of metaphysics is suddenly supplanted by appeals to subjective (mystical) experience; thus, for example, I.6[1].9.8; VI.9[9].4.16; 9.46, 11.7, VI.5[23].7.11; V.8[31].11.1; V.5[32].7.31; VI.7[38].22.1, 31.1, 34.11; VI.8[39].15.14; V.3[49].17.28. The sudden shifts of language of these and other similar passages deserves further study in the future. Also interesting is an intimation at I.3[20].1.13-19 of a second phase of philosophical practice that transcends dialectic.

⁸ I.e., as akin to Plato's own putative metaphors for philosophical dialectic that use the language of heavenly ascent.

less obvious.⁹ Plotinus is thought to be able to experience union with the One through his possession of a rare psychophysical constitution shared by comparable mystics in other traditions but not by the ordinary scholar. In other words, some unique mystical aptitude— according to this view— allowed Plotinus himself to attain in actuality what his less-mystically-adept philosophical successors¹⁰— and also his modern interpreters— can only observe from the outside.

5. Yet there are several reasons why I remain unconvinced that Plotinus' mysticism was congenial. First, along with this view come certain implicit assumptions often tacitly drawn from comparison with Christian mystics, for whom, it is believed, the mystical ecstasy is typically spontaneous or involuntary— almost convulsive— and cannot be consciously willed or induced, even if it sometimes occurs after long periods of prayer.¹¹ Whether or not this is an accurate representation of the nature of Christian mysticism generally, the subtle implication of the repeated comparison of Plotinus to this later tradition is that his experience was of a similar kind.¹² Yet this kind of paroxysmal or involuntary experience is in fact quite foreign to Plotinus. While he does occasionally suggest that the ultimate stage of union must be awaited quietly after the necessary propaedeutic exercises¹³— thus preserving

⁹ This precise sentiment is evoked by Pierre Hadot, *Plotin ou la simplicité du regard* (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1973), 159: "...l'expérience mystique est un phénomène universel et extrêmement significatif. Mais si ce phénomène n'atteint sa plénitude qu'avec le christianisme, il n'en existe pas moins d'une manière très authentique dans l'humanité tout entière, et l'expérience plotinienne en est en des exemples les plus remarquables. Si elle éveille en échos en nous, c'est qu'il y a dans la réalité humaine une possibilité latente de vie mystique."

¹⁰ J. Rist, "Mysticism and Transcendence in Later Platonism," *Hermes* 92:2 (1964), 220: "...where Plotinus is a mystic, Proclus seems to know only a theory of Mysticism."

¹¹ One might take as typical the 16th-century Spanish mystics John of the Cross and Teresa of Ávila. Referring to direct contact with God, John of the Cross writes, "A man is incapable of reaching this sublime knowledge through any comparison or imagining of his own, because it transcends what is naturally attainable... God usually grants these divine touches, which cause certain remembrances of him, when the soul is least expecting or thinking of them... Since this knowledge is imparted to the soul suddenly, without exercise of free will, a person does not have to be concerned about desiring it or not. He should simply remain humble and resigned about it, for God will do his work at the time and in the manner he wishes." [From *The Ascent of Mt. Carmel*, Book II, in *The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross*, K. Kavanaugh and O. Rodriguez, trans. (Washington, DC: Institute of Carmelite Studies, 1979), 195-6]. Or consider Teresa's insistence that mystical ecstasy is completely involuntary: "It seemed to me when I tried to resist that a great force, for which I can find no comparison, was lifting me up from beneath my feet. It came with greater violence than any other spiritual experience, and left me quite shattered. Resistance requires a great struggle, and is of little use in the end when the Lord wills otherwise, for there is no power that can resist his power." [From *The Life of Saint Teresa of Ávila by Herself*, J. M. Cohen, trans. (London: Penguin, 1957)].

¹² Here I will not get involved in the debate between the competing "perennialist" and "contextualist" interpretations of mystical experience, a debate that has arisen following Stephen Katz's initial argument that mystical experience itself, and not merely its expression, is entirely conditioned by the cultural or religious context of the mystic. I suspect this debate has actually served as a mask for a deeper (but equally fruitless) debate between theistic and nontheistic positions. The tacit assumption is that two experiences can only truly be the "same" if there really *is* a common object of the experience. But what would it mean for two different people's experience to be "the same"? What would it mean for one person's experience to be "the same" on two occasions? As with all human phenomena, there are both similarities and differences between any two experiences.

¹³ E.g. V.1[10].12.15-21; III.8[30].9.22-29; V.5[32].8.2-6.

the absolute *autarkeia* of the transcendent principle itself¹⁴— and also that it arrives suddenly, in a moment of intense erotic ecstasy, his account of the final phases of ascent suggests a deliberate control of consciousness, a meditative discipline with several discrete stages, paradoxically including both the apophatic negation of cognition and, simultaneously, the deliberate evocation of intense affective experience and extremely vivid visual imagery. The One does not just appear on its own.¹⁵

6. Second, that Plotinus' mysticism was not simply a matter of his innate psychological constitution is suggested by Porphyry's biographical anecdote about Plotinus' search for a teacher in his 28th year.¹⁶ According to Porphyry, Plotinus became despondent while making the rounds of the most respected teachers in Alexandria, until a friend eventually referred him to Ammonius Saccas, with whom he stayed. After studying under Ammonius— his virtual guru— for eleven years, and acquiring a complete mastery of philosophy, he was *still* not entirely satisfied in his quest for knowledge and set out on (an eventually abortive) expedition to the East to learn about Indian and Persian thought. Now however much this might conform to some of the conventional *topoi* of philosophical *paideia* in late antiquity,¹⁷ the account of depression and restless seeking does not sound like the story of a man who was *already* attaining regular union with the One and thus living the “life of the gods and divine and blessed men.”¹⁸ Were it the case that Plotinus had been attaining mystical union in his earlier years, we can be sure that Porphyry's hagiographic tendency would not have allowed him to neglect it. Indeed, Porphyry says nothing about when Plotinus first attained such a union, only that he did so four times during the six years that the two were together (although we do know from his early-period treatises— his ninth, but also, possibly, his first and sixth¹⁹— that Plotinus had already attained union prior to Porphyry's arrival in Rome). The union with the One was, it would seem, something Plotinus had developed over time, possibly under the tutelage of Ammonius, or possibly from other influences. Moreover, that mystical union was, at least in theory, the result of a learnable technique is suggested

¹⁴ In VI.8[39].7 Plotinus emphasizes the One's autonomy even during mystical union; he would appear to share this theological concern with Christian mystics but also, significantly, with Iamblichus's defense of theurgy. In other words, we should therefore not confuse Plotinus' (primarily theological) concern to preserve the One's autonomy with any *practical* implications about the final stages of ascent.

¹⁵ Although he sometimes gives a past tense account of what must be his own experience (e.g. VI.9[9].11.8-22), we also find recurrent uses of hortatory language (e.g. VI.9[9].7.17-23; 9.50-60; III.8[30].9.29), as well as instructions in the imperative (e.g. I.6[1].8.4; VI.9[9].7.2; V.1[10].3.1-7) and the future tense (e.g. V.5[32].733, 8.-14) in his descriptions of the final ascent, which suggests he is adjuring his readers to follow in his path. The description itself intimates a deliberate and highly structured technique, as I have tried to show in ch. 2 of my dissertation.

¹⁶ Porphyry, *Vita Plotini* 3.7-17.

¹⁷ E.g. Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho* 2; Philostratus, *Life of Apollonius* I.28; Iamblichus, *De vita pythagorica* 11-19, etc. On the conformity of this anecdote with 2nd-3rd century *topoi*, see J. Whittaker, “Plotinus at Alexandria: Scholastic Experiences in the Second and Third Centuries,” *Documenti e studi sulla tradizione filosofica medievale* 8 (1997) 159-189.

¹⁸ At VI.9[9].11.49 he describes the life of one who attains union as θεῶν καὶ ἀνθρώπων θεῶν καὶ εὐδαιμόνων βίος.

¹⁹ At I.6[1].7-9 and IV.8[6].1 union with the One is implied but not stated; the first clear account is VI.9[9].4, 7, 9-11.

by Porphyry's (possibly dubious) claim to have been able to experience union with the One on a single occasion prior to his sixty-eighth year.

7. But most importantly, the conventional comparison of Plotinus to the later traditions of Jewish, Christian, and Islamic mysticism— traditions which themselves are either directly or indirectly dependent, historically speaking, upon Plotinus himself— is itself based upon the assumption that there is no more proximate historical comparandum. Thus it is assumed that Plotinus' mysticism was a virtually unique,²⁰ almost *sui generis* phenomenon. But this, I believe, happens not to be correct. For while Plotinus' descriptions of the final stages of the ascent towards mystical union with the One are apparently unique in the academic philosophy of the time, they do have close parallels in his immediate intellectual and religious milieu.²¹ Over the course of research for my dissertation, I have come to the opinion that Plotinus' mysticism shares many features with contemporaneous currents of Sethian Gnosticism with which he was almost certainly familiar.

8. Although it is not the point of this paper to defend my entire thesis, for the present purpose I will simply state the three fundamental points of my dissertation:

[1] Plotinus' final ascent towards union with the One involves a progressive "interiorization" or reversion of consciousness towards the "center-point" of the self, which is, in effect, a hypernoetic and even hyperontic aspect of the supreme principle that abides "within" the concentrically-envisioned human subject. At the penultimate moment of the ascent, just prior to the ultimate union, the aspirant first apprehends his or her transcendental self, and then comes to complete identity with it. It is at this moment of self-apprehension that the mystical subject transcends the delimitation of Being and Intellect. However, the transcendental self is still not quite identical with the One, and itself must paradoxically be dissolved or annihilated to attain the ultimate union.

[2] The self-apprehension— I call this an "autophany"— at the penultimate moment of mystical ascent *deliberately* recapitulates the first eternal moments of ontogenesis, in which the

²⁰ Despite the numerous vague echoes of Platonic language and *topoi*, e.g. Plato, *Republic* 7.517a-c; *Phaedrus*, 246d-248b; *Phaedo* 107d-111c; *Symposium* 210a-211c; *7th Letter* 341b-d; Numenius, fr. 2 des Places; Alcinous, *Didaskalikos* 165 Hermann; Maximus of Tyre, *Oration* 11.10-11, etc.

²¹ Elsewhere I have suggested that Plotinus' conception of mystical union itself was broadly derived from ritual techniques designed to conjoin the soul of the practitioner with a deity; see Z. Mazur, "Unio Magica, Part I: On the Magical Origins of Plotinus' Mysticism," *Dionysius* 21 (2003) 23-52; *idem*, "Unio Magica, Part II: Plotinus, Theurgy, and the Question of Ritual," *Dionysius* 22 (2004) 29-56.

prenoetic efflux from the One reverts to its source— its former self— to acquire delimitation and independent subsistence as hypostatic Being–Intellect. In fact, Plotinus considers these two moments of self-apprehension— the one mystical, the other primordial— to be virtually identical. Indeed, the mystical recapitulation is only possible because of the consubstantiality and inherent kinship of the transcendental self and the prenoetic efflux.

[3] A very similar schema is prominent, and in some ways more explicit, in the Coptic versions of the Platonizing Sethian ascent tractates *Allogenes* and *Zostrianos*, whose Greek antecedents were known to have been read and critiqued in Plotinus’ circle, as well as in related treatises such as *Marsanes* and also some Valentinian literature. The Sethian tractates describe an ascent through the complex metaphysical armature mediating between the cosmos and the unknowable, transcendent deity. As in Plotinus, the Sethian aspirant undertakes a mystical self-reversion and experiences a moment of self-apprehension during the final stages of the ascent; this is explicitly described as a residual, indwelling imprint of the reflexive self-manifestation of the transcendent deity during the first eternal moment of ontogenesis. Despite their different approaches and much-discussed philosophical disagreements, the resemblance between Plotinus’ mysticism and these (chronologically prior) Gnostic comparanda are too robust to be coincidental, and suggest that Plotinus was, if not simply dependent on the Sethians, then at least in very close dialogue with them.

9. I have discussed this in more detail elsewhere and will make the full case in my dissertation,²² but here I will provide just one brief example of what I mean, involving the most striking feature of Plotinus’ mystical passages: the transfiguring moment of autophany at the penultimate moment of ascent. In his first treatise, at I.6[1].9.16-25, we find the following description: “If you have become this, and see it, and, you, pure, ‘come together’ with yourself... only true light, not measured by magnitude nor circumscribed into diminution by shape nor, conversely, expanded into magnitude by unboundedness, but everywhere unmeasurable because greater than all measure and better than all quantity... this alone is the eye that sees the great Beauty.”²³ Similarly, in his 9th treatise, at

²² I have elaborated on this in a paper entitled “Mystical Self-Reversion in Platonizing Sethian Gnosticism and Plotinus,” presented at a conference on Plotinus’ mysticism and Gnosticism at the Université Laval in Québec this past March; this paper, and a dissertation prospectus, are available for download from my home page, <http://home.uchicago.edu/~ajmazur/>.

²³ I.6[1].9.16-25: Εἰ γέγονας τοῦτο καὶ εἶδες αὐτὸ καὶ σαυτῶ καθαρὸς συνεγένου οὐδὲν ἔχων ἐμπόδιον πρὸς τὸ εἶς οὕτω γενέσθαι οὐδὲ σὺν αὐτῶ ἄλλο τι ἐντὸς μεμιγμένον ἔχων, ἀλλ’ ὅλος αὐτὸς φῶς ἀληθινὸν μόνον, οὐ μεγέθει μεμετρημένον οὐδὲ σχήματι εἰς ἐλάττωσιν περιγραφὴν οὐδ’ αὖ εἰς μέγεθος δι’ ἀπειρίας αὐξηθέν, ἀλλ’ ἀμέτρητον πανταχοῦ, ὡς ἂν μείζον παντὸς μέτρου καὶ παντὸς κρείσσον ποσοῦ· εἰ τοῦτο γενόμενον σαυτὸν ἴδοις, ὄψις ἤδη

VI.9[9].9.56-60, the autophany of the divinized self coincides with a vision of the One: “Here, at this point, one can see both him and oneself as it is right to see: the self glorified, full of intelligible light— but rather itself pure light— weightless, floating, having become— but rather, being— a god.”²⁴ At V.8[31].11.1-19, the mystical aspirant “presents himself to himself and looks at a beautified image of himself,”²⁵ and at V.5[32].8.9-13, at the point at which the aspirant has already been assimilated to the Intellect, “as if having been filled with strength, he sees first of all himself having become more beautiful and glistening, as he is close to him.”²⁶ Now in the Platonizing Sethian ascent treatises one may find an analogous scheme of mystical self-reversion and self-apprehension. In a lacunose passage of *Zostrianos* 11.9-14, there is a suggestion of a transformative illumination from within the soul: “...when souls receive light from the light within them and by the model that comes into being within them, without passion...”²⁷ or similarly, in theoretical form, at 44.1-22: “[The type of person] that can be saved is the one that reverts to itself and its *Nous*, and finds each one of them... it again parts from them all and withdraws back up into itself alone, for it can become divine by withdrawing into God.”²⁸ This motif is clearer in *Allogenes*; where (at 52.9-13) the eponymous visionary reports “I turned to myself and saw the light that surrounded me and the Good that was in me and I became divine.”²⁹ *Allogenes* later ascends through the triad of hypostases comprising the so-called Triple Powered One³⁰ that mediates between the Barbelo Aeon (something like the Plotinian *Nous*) and the transcendental first principle, the Unknowable One; this is described as a threefold sequence of reflexive withdrawals or *anachorêseis* into himself, which ensues at each stage in a sudden apprehension of the respective indwelling member of the triad.³¹ At the penultimate phase of the ascent, *Allogenes* declares the

γενόμενος θαρσήσας περί σαυτῶ καὶ ἐνταῦθα ἤδη ἀναβεβηκῶς μηκέτι τοῦ δεικνύντος δεηθεὶς ἀτενίσσας ἴδε· οὗτος γὰρ μόνος ὁ ὀφθαλμὸς τὸ μέγα κάλλος βλέπει.

²⁴ VI.9[9].9.56-60: Ὅραν δὴ ἔστιν ἐνταῦθα κάκεινον καὶ ἑαυτὸν ὡς ὄραν θέμις· ἑαυτὸν μὲν ἠγλαϊσμένον, φωτὸς πλήρη νοητοῦ, μᾶλλον δὲ φῶς αὐτὸ καθαρὸν, ἀβαρῆ, κοῦφον, θεὸν γενόμενον, μᾶλλον δὲ ὄντα...

²⁵ V.8[31].11.1-19: ἑαυτὸν προφέρει καὶ εἰκόνα αὐτοῦ καλλωπισθεῖσαν βλέπει.

²⁶ V.5[32].8.9-13: ἐστήξεται μὲν γὰρ ὁ νοῦς πρὸς τὴν θεάν εἰς οὐδὲν ἄλλο ἢ πρὸς τὸ καλὸν βλέπων, ἐκεῖ ἑαυτὸν πᾶς τρέπων καὶ διδούς, στᾶς δὲ καὶ οἷον πληρωθεὶς μένους εἶδε μὲν τὰ πρῶτα καλλίω γενόμενον ἑαυτὸν καὶ ἐπιστίλβοντα, ὡς ἐγγὺς ὄντος αὐτοῦ. In later treatises, Plotinus typically describes the subject of the autophany as the soul who catches a sudden glimpse of the transcendent principle within itself. Thus at VI.7[38].31.8-9: Εἶδε δὲ οἷον πληγεῖσα καὶ ἐν αὐτῇ ἔχουσα τι αὐτοῦ συνήσθετο / “[the soul] saw— stricken, as it were— and was conscious of having something of it in herself...” or at VI.7[38].34.8-14: ἰδοῦσα δὲ ἐν αὐτῇ ἐξαίφνης φανέντα / the soul sees the One “appearing suddenly in herself...”

²⁷ *Zostrianos* (NHC VIII,1) 11.9-14: *eshôpe de eushaji ouoein nqi nipsuchê ebol hitn pouoein etshoop nhêtou mn pitupos ete shafshôpe nhêtou n oumêêshe nsop hn oumntatji mkah.*

²⁸ *Zost.* 44.1-4: *pirôme de ete shaunahmef pe pê etkôte nsôf mn pefnous ay nfgine m puoa poua mmoou; 17-22: eshôp efshanouôsh palin on eie fpôrj ncbol n naï têrou. auô ntôf nfr anachôrîn erof mauaaf paï gar shafshôpe n noute afr anachôrîn e pnoute.*

²⁹ *Allogenes* (NHC XI,3) 52.9-13: *auô aeikott eroei ouaat aeinau epiouoein etkôte eroei mn piagathon ethnêt aeirnoute.*

³⁰ Mentality (or Blessedness), Vitality, and Existence, and Existence, foreshadowing, perhaps, the Being-Life-Mind triad that is implicit in Plotinus and formalized in later Platonism.

³¹ *Allog.* 59.9-61.22.

preliminary vision of the transcendent deity within himself: “I knew the One who exists within me and the Triple Powered One and the manifestation of his unboundedness.”³² This threefold ascent culminates with an ultimate apprehension of the Unknowable One by means of a “first manifestation”: this is the term used elsewhere in Sethian literature to describe the primordial *self*-manifestation of the transcendent first principle.³³ There is certainly much more that could be said about these parallels,³⁴ but the specific point I am trying to make here is that the most vivid aspect of Plotinus’ mystical ascent—the apprehension of a transcendental aspect of the self which is identified with the primordial self-apprehension of the first principle—was not unique to Plotinus, but was also shared by the Sethians: sectaries with whose writings he was intimate, and with whom personally he maintained close,³⁵ but strained, relations [see Appendix I].

10. In what follows I would like to explore the ramifications of this thesis for the central question of what we mean by “mystical experience” in the case of Plotinus. For if I am correct, Plotinian mysticism can no longer be understood as a *sui generis* phenomenon or as a matter of a unique constitution. Nor can it merely be understood as an extension of metaphysics into the realm of individual psychology. Rather, we must understand Plotinus’ mysticism to be firmly embedded in a broader religio-philosophical context, that of contemporaneous Sethian Gnosticism. And this, of course, substantially complicates the question of supposedly subjective mystical experience. For one may well wonder how Plotinus’ subjective accounts of the final stages of ascent really differ in essential kind from those of the presumably mythical, eponymous Sethian visionaries such as Zostrianos and Allogenes. Does this not call the authenticity of Plotinus’ mystical experience into question?

11. Ultimately I think not; we must take Plotinus’ accounts of his experience to be genuine. But we may ask yet again: what in fact was he doing? I would suggest that the Sethian context may itself

³² *Allog.* 61.5-7: *aiecouôn pê etshoop nhêt mn pishmtqom mn piouônê ebol mte pi atshôp erof etntaf.*

³³ I made a detailed case for this in a paper presented at the Nag Hammadi and Gnosticism section of the SBL in Boston last november, “Self-Manifestation and ‘Primary Revelation’ in the Platonizing Sethian Ascent Treatises and Plotinian Mysticism,” which is also available on my home page, <http://home.uchicago.edu/~ajmazur/>.

³⁴ And many other examples of self-apprehension at a critical moment of ascent may be found in both Sethian and other subsets of Gnostic literature; thus, for example, the *Untitled Text from the Codex Bruce* §11: “And their looking into their faces was the gnosis in relation to themselves. And their journey to themselves was their turning inwards once again.” [from V. MacDermot and C. Schmidt, *The Books of Jeu and the Untitled Text in the Bruce Codex* (Leiden: Brill, 1978)]; or, in the Hermetic *Discourse on the 8th and 9th* (NHC VI,6), at 58.8 and 60.32-61.1, the initiate declares almost formulaically, “I see myself!” Ultimately this motif must somehow derive from the Middle Platonic interpretation of the Delphic maxim “know yourself” based on, among other sources, Plato’s *1st Alcibiades*.

³⁵ Plotinus calls the Gnostics on the periphery of his circle his *philoî* at II.9[33].10.4-5, and he expresses a desire not to insult them.

provide a clue as to the nature of Plotinus' own practice. For the Platonizing Sethian ascent treatises appear to evoke, in the language of apocalyptic literature, what is in fact a ritual with discrete stages and prescribed actions or utterances that could be re-enacted by the sectaries themselves.³⁶ The exact practices comprising these rituals remain enigmatic— whether or not there was an external component remains controversial— but John Turner has plausibly suggested that these tractates describe a kind of ritual in which the aspirant identifies with successive ontological strata by means of increasingly demanding (inward) acts of contemplation.³⁷ This is suggested by references to the attainment of the successive levels as types of “knowing,”³⁸ and to the ultimate moment of apprehension of the transcendent deity in visionary— if often apophatic— terms;³⁹ thus in *Allogenes*, this final phase occurs by means of a “first thought,” a “first manifestation,” a “luminous thought” or by means of the “eye of manifestation,”⁴⁰ all suggestive of phantasmic visualization, while in *Zostrianos* the ultimate apprehension is described in terms of vision, audition, and “the thought which now exists in silence and within the First Thought.”⁴¹ As I have already suggested, these extraordinary forms of mystical apperception are simultaneously identified with the ontogenetic self-apprehension of the transcendent deity; but that they are phrased in terms of cognition, however exceptional, suggests that in practice they were ritually re-enacted in what we might call the aspirant's faculty of imagination.

³⁶ The Platonizing Sethian ascent treatises are framed as the spatial ascent of a mythical visionary through various heavenly and aeonic realms, but they are also replete with the language of typical ritual acts such as baptism, anointing, and prayer.

³⁷ J. Turner has discussed this most comprehensively in “Ritual in Gnosticism,” 83-139 in *Gnosticism and Later Platonism: Themes, Figures Texts*, J. Turner and R. Majercik, eds. (Atlanta: SBL, 2000), esp. 128-137; on the origins of Sethian visionary praxis in earlier Jewish ritual, see *idem*, “To See the Light: a Gnostic Appropriation of Jewish Priestly Practice and Sapiential and Apocalyptic Visionary Lore,” 63-113 in R. Berchman, ed. *Mediators of the Divine: Horizons of Prophecy, Divination, Dreams, and Theurgy in Mediterranean Antiquity* (U of South Florida, 1998). The theme of vision is of course widespread in Gnostic literature outside of Sethianism; see, *inter alia*, G. Casadio, “Patterns of Vision in some Gnostic Tractates from Nag Hammadi,” 395-401 in M. Rassart-Debergh and J. Ries, *Actes du IVe Congrès Copte, vol. 2* (Louvain-la-Neuve: Université Catholique de Louvain, 1992).

³⁸ E.g., *Zost.* 22.8-10: *eshôpe de efsbaneime erof mn naï têrou pimoou m prôtophanês pe.* / “When one knows it and all these, he is the first-manifesting water”; 23.15-17: *eshôpe ersha oua eime e naï affôkm e pijiôkm n kls* / “...when one understands these things, one has been baptized in the baptism of Kalyptos”; etc.

³⁹ That this might be performed “inwardly,” however, does not mean that it is not a kind of ritual, if the latter is understood as a series of repeatable, deliberate, prescribed acts, performed over a discrete period of time. In the case of *Allogenes*, for example, that the ascent was meant to be understood as a strictly prescribed series of ritual acts is confirmed by the fact that at 59.9-60.12 the eponymous visionary is instructed on the precise phases of the ascent through the Triple Powered One and the mental acts he must perform at each stage; in a subsequent passage, at 60.14-61.22, *Allogenes* himself recounts his ascent as having happened precisely as it was previously instructed.

⁴⁰ *Allog.* 48.13: *oushorp nennoia*; 50.28-9 and 60.39-61.1: *shorp nouônh ebol*; 60.10-11: *ouennoia ese nouoein*; 64.31-33: *pibal ethork mmof nte piouônh ebol*.

⁴¹ *Zost.* 24.10-12: *tiennaia taï etshoop tinou hn ousigê nhraï de hn tishorp n ennoia*.

12. If my hypothesis is correct, Plotinus' mysticism should be seen against the background of this kind of ritual praxis.⁴² Therefore, if we are today incapable of repeating Plotinus' experiences ourselves, it is not, I think, because we lack some putatively innate capacity, but rather because this particular tradition of praxis— a sophisticated technique of visualization that was presumably taught directly by a teacher to a pupil— has been lost in the vicissitudes of intellectual history, and the contemporary philosophical tradition has preserved from antiquity only the discursive aspect, which, though certainly important, gives but a partial idea of what Plotinus and his contemporaries were actually doing.

13. Now at this point I should anticipate a certain amount of resistance from those who fear that a suggestion of a ritual substrate might contaminate Plotinus' ostensible philosophical purity or the authenticity of his religious sentiment.⁴³ Elsewhere I have tried to propose a category of interiorized ritual, one that cannot be entirely subsumed into discursive philosophy and that has much in common with better-known techniques of visualization in, for example, certain varieties of Buddhism and Tantric yoga.⁴⁴ While typical definitions of ritual require a performance of observable actions, there exist certain rituals which internalize one or another pattern of formerly external ritual action, so that they are iterated in the subjective awareness alone; examples include the repetitive, unvocalized prayer in Hesychasm, Kabbalah, and Sufism, or, in the case of Tantric and yogic meditation, the construction of complex mental images based on external ritual acts.⁴⁵ Something of this sort, I believe, lies behind both the Sethian ascent treatises and Plotinus' accounts of the final stages of union. This kind of ritual would find a natural home in the broader socio-religious context of late antiquity, in which the

⁴² Of course, Plotinus' notion of ascent towards mystical union differs from that of the Sethians in terms of both specific details and rhetorical mode; but the fundamental structure of these accounts of mystical ascent have much in common. This kind of deliberate visualization is certainly not foreign to Plotinus; one may recall the numerous moments in his mystical passages where he vacillates between descriptive and prescriptive language. In several places— at, for example, V.1[10].2.1-23, V.8[31].9.1-18, and VI.7[38].15.25-33— Plotinus does advise a complex guided visualization of the noetic sphere of the cosmos, and then instructs one to somehow assimilate oneself to the visualized sphere. Although these particular passages do not occur in the immediate context of the ultimate union, I would suggest that we understand the final stages of ascent towards union with the One as this type of ritualized visualization. In this I am in agreement with, J. Dillon who has discussed these exercises in relation to Plotinus' notion of various kinds of *phantasia* in "Plotinus and the Transcendental Imagination," 55-64 in J. P. Mackey, ed. *Religious Imagination* (U of Edinburgh P, 1986).

⁴³ This resistance is, I believe, founded on an excessively narrow definition of philosophy as well as certain implicit assumptions about the oft-discussed but relatively underexamined category of ritual, which is typically contrasted with more "genuine" forms of religious mysticism. A recent example may be found in W. Beierwaltes' recent critique of my *Unio Magica* I and II, "Plotins philosophische Mystik und ihre Bedeutung für das Christentum," 81-95 in P. Schäfer (ed.), *Wege mystischer Gotteserfahrung / Mystical Approaches to God*, [Schriften des Historischen Kollegs Kolloquien 65], (München: Oldenbourg, 2006). While Hadot's emphasis on "spiritual exercises" has generally helped to broaden the category of philosophy in late antiquity to include practical as well as discursive element, it may be too vague a notion to describe what I would suggest both the Sethians and Plotinus himself might have been doing; see P. Hadot, *Exercices Spirituels et philosophie antique* (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1987).

⁴⁴ Mazur, *Unio Magica* II, 42-44.

⁴⁵ On internalized ritual in Tantrism, see A. Sanderson, "Meaning in Tantric Ritual," in *Essais sur le rituel III* [E.P.H.E. Section des sciences religieuses vol. 52], A.-M. Blondeau and K. Schipper, eds. (Louvain: Peeters, 1995) 15-95.

progressive deracination of individual identity from its prior socio-geographical context contributed not only to a widening competition among philosophical schools and sects, but also, simultaneously, to the individualization and miniaturization of formerly public ritual praxis,⁴⁶ and to the proliferation of freelance techniques for the mediation of divine power.⁴⁷

14. Furthermore, we may also be able to identify this kind of visionary praxis more precisely. In the ancient Mediterranean world there was, of course, a long tradition of mantic vision and dream divination.⁴⁸ Yet one might distinguish between divinatory vision for the sake of obtaining information, on the one hand, and, on the other, the deliberate use of contemplative visualization in the context of ritual praxis. Indeed, in late antiquity, concurrent with the widespread emergence of rituals of ascent, one finds a proliferation of visionary techniques whose purpose was not divinatory *per se*, but rather was intended to manifest and reaffirm one's connection with the source of divine power.⁴⁹ These texts often take the form, "perform action X, and you will see Y." In these cases the content of the vision is quite specifically predetermined. One can find examples of this in the *Chaldaean Oracles*,⁵⁰ Hekhalot literature,⁵¹ the so-called Mithras Liturgy,⁵² and occasionally, elsewhere in the

⁴⁶ The privatization and miniaturization of ritual during this period is explored by J. Z. Smith in "The Temple and the Magician," pp. 172-189 in his *Map is Not Territory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978); *idem*, "Trading Places," pp. 13-27 in M. Meyer and P. Mirecki, eds., *Ancient Magic and Ritual Power* (Leiden: Brill, 2001). In a brilliant essay—"Myth and Mysticism; a Study of Objectification and Interiorization in Religious Thought," *Journal of Religion* 44 (1968)—Hans Jonas noted the tendency in late antique religiosity towards the transmutation of objective mythology into subjective mysticism: in this way the heavenly ascent of the mystery-cults were gradually internalized and experienced as a journey through successive levels of the microcosmic self.

⁴⁷ This has been pointed out by Peter Brown in, e.g., *The Making of Late Antiquity* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1978) 12 ff.; also, *inter alia*, P. Athanassiadi, "Dreams, Theurgy, and Freelance Divination: the Testimony of Iamblichus," *Journal of Roman Studies* 83 (1992), 115-130, and the vast "holy man" literature.

⁴⁸ There is also a literary genre of apocalyptic involving describing involuntary raptures and visionary ascent; this, of course, is the literary template for the Sethian revelations. The philosophical tradition is itself one source for this theme; one need only think of the myth of Er in Plato's *Republic* 10.614b-621b, or its various echoes in Cicero (*Republic* VI.9-26) and Plutarch (*De sera numinis vindicta* 563d-568a).

⁴⁹ Which is not to say that there is no interesting overlap between visualization practices and divinatory vision; many spells in the PGM advise what seems to be a visionary or visualization technique as preparation for an oracular inquiry of the manifestation. Another such example may be found in Zosimos of Panopolis' series of deliberately-sought symbolic dreams or trance-visions; the visions informed his alchemical procedures, but were also structured upon these processes themselves.

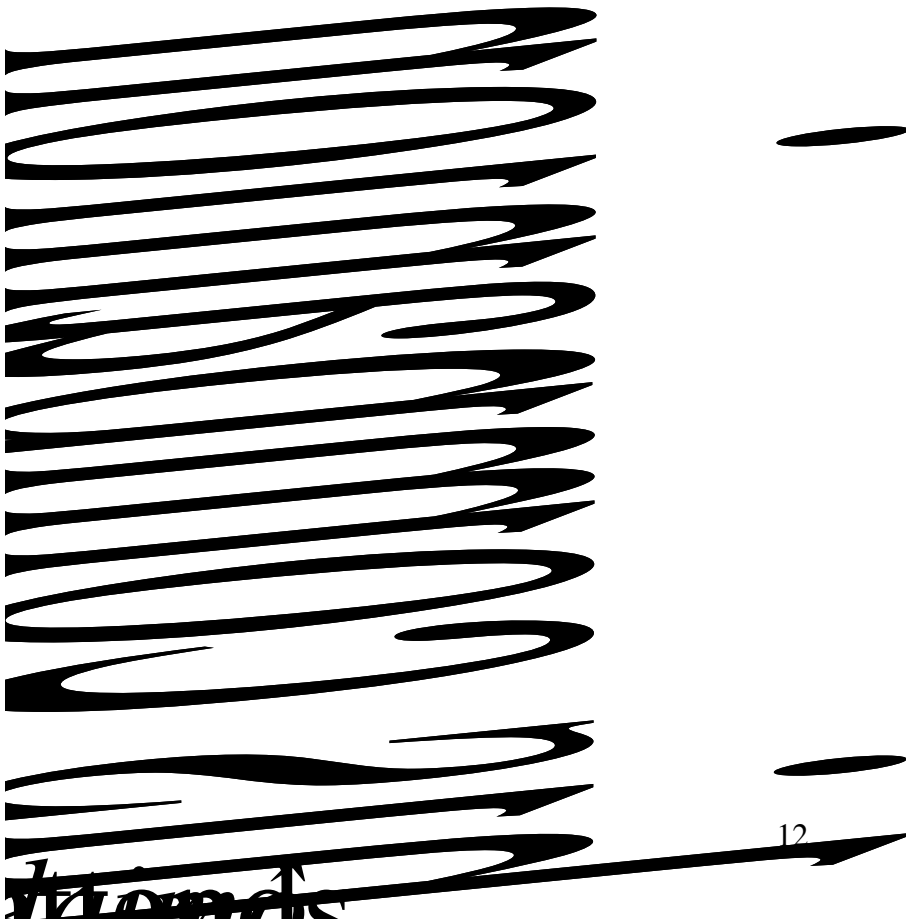
⁵⁰ E.g. *Or. Chald.* fr. 146: ... ταῦτ' ἐπιφωνήσας ἢ παιδί κατόψη / πῦρ ἵκελον σκιρτηδὸν ἐπ' ἠέρος οἶδμα τιταῖνον / ἢ καὶ πῦρ ἀτύπωτον, ὅθεν φωνὴν προθέουσας / ἢ φῶς πλούσιον ἀμφὶ γῆν ροιζαῖον ἐλιχθέν· / "...after this invocation, (it says) you will either see a fire, similar to a child, extended by bounds over the billow of air, or you will see a formless fire, from which a voice is sent forth, or you will see a sumptuous light, rushing like a spiral around the field..." (trans. Majercik).

⁵¹ Described, for example, in I. Gruenwald, *Apocalyptic and Merkavah Mysticism* (Leiden: Brill, 1980).

⁵² The language is remarkably similar to that of Plotinus; see *PGM* IV.539-40: ἔλκε ἀπὸ τῶν ἀκτίνων πνεῦμα γ' ἀνασπῶν, ὃ δύναι[σ]ται, καὶ ὄψη σεαυτὸν ἀνακουφίζόμενον [κ]αὶ ὑπερβαίνοντα εἰς ὕψος, ὥστε σε δοκεῖ[ν μ]έσον τοῦ ἀέρος εἶναι / "Draw up pneuma from the rays, sucking up three times what you are able, and you will see yourself raised up and going up above into the height, so that you appear to be in the middle of the air."

Greek magical papyri.⁵³ Iamblichus hints at what appear to be similar techniques of theurgical visualization in the *De Mysteriis*.⁵⁴ It is of course impossible to know precisely how these were supposed to work, but these apparently efficacious procedures might in practice actually have involved deliberate techniques of ritualized visualization of a sort we find, for example, in Kabbalah⁵⁵ and in medieval Sufism,⁵⁶ where certain descriptions of what is clearly visualization praxis have unmistakable echoes of Plotinus.⁵⁷ [See Appendix II].

15. Lest one object that Plotinus was either too “rational” or too “spiritual” to have derived the deepest and ostensibly most personal aspect of his philosophical praxis from rituals of this sort, I would like to conclude with one additional piece of evidence. In a much-discussed episode of Porphyry’s *Life of Plotinus*, the latter “readily” (*hetoimôs*) attends an evocation (*klêsis*) of his companion *daimôn* in the ~~Is~~tem of Rome.



of reason,⁶¹ but for one who already lives at the level of *Nous*— remarkably— “that above Intellect is his *daimôn*.”⁶² A mystical ascent, therefore, is an assimilation to one’s *daimôn*,⁶³ which, it seems, Plotinus thought to be potentially coextensive with the brilliantly luminous, transcendental self that is apprehended “within” oneself during the mystical autophany immediately prior to union with One.⁶⁴ It would not have surprised Plotinus that his *daimôn*, as it manifested itself in the Iseum, was exceptionally exalted: for he understood it to be identical with his transcendental self above Being and Intellect. Although this incident does not occur in the context of mystical union,⁶⁵ there is a noncoincidental correspondence between the external, public manifestation of Plotinus’ transcendental self in the context of this ritual, and his own subjective experience of its self-manifestation at the penultimate moment of mystical ascent. This theurgical *klêsis* is, in effect, a mystical autophany writ large; or conversely, perhaps, we might think of a mystical autophany as in some sense a “privatized” interiorization of such a ritual evocation. Significantly, that experience gleaned from such ritual praxis could be at the foundation of Plotinus’ theoretical philosophy is suggested by Porphyry’s claim that this episode led to his writing treatise III.4[15] itself.⁶⁶ One may plausibly suppose, therefore, that a similar familiarity with the practice of visionary ascent in the manner of the Platonizing Sethians lurks behind Plotinus’ accounts of the final union with the One.⁶⁷

⁶¹ III.4[15].3.4-8: τοῦτο γὰρ ἐφέστηκεν ἀργοῦν, ἐνεργεῖ δὲ τὸ μετ’ αὐτόν. Καὶ εἰ μὲν τὸ ἐνεργοῦν ἢ αἰσθητικοί, καὶ ὁ δαίμων τὸ λογικόν· εἰ δὲ κατὰ τὸ λογικὸν ζώημεν, ὁ δαίμων τὸ ὑπὲρ τοῦτο ἐφεστῶς ἀργὸς συγχωρῶν τῷ ἐργαζομένῳ.

⁶² III.4[15].6.3-5: Νοῦς γὰρ ἐνεργεῖ ἐν τούτῳ. Ἡ οὖν δαίμων αὐτὸς ἢ κατὰ δαίμονα καὶ δαίμων τούτῳ θεός. Ἄρ’ οὖν καὶ ὑπὲρ νοῦν; Εἰ τὸ ὑπὲρ νοῦν δαίμων αὐτῷ, διὰ τί οὖν οὐκ ἐξ ἀρχῆς;

⁶³ III.4[15].3.17-20: Εἰ δὲ ἔπεσθαι δύναιτο τῷ δαίμονι τῷ ἄνω αὐτοῦ, ἄνω γίνεται ἐκείνον ζῶν καὶ ἐφ’ ὃ ἄγεται κρεῖττον μέρος αὐτοῦ ἐν προστασίᾳ θέμενος καὶ μετ’ ἐκείνον ἄλλον ἕως ἄνω. / “If one is able to follow the *daimôn* above him, he comes to be living that one above, and places the better part of himself, towards which he is led, in the lead; and after that one, another, up to the above.”

⁶⁴ This interpretation is incidentally supported by a variant interpretation of the enigmatic opening words of Porphyry’s description of Plotinus’ mystical union at *Vita Plotini* 23.8, τούτῳ τῷ δαιμονίῳ φῶτι, generally thought to refer to Plotinus himself (thus Armstrong: “So to this god-like man above all...”; Brisson, Cherlonneix, Goulet-Cazé, *et al.*: “Ainsi, c’est tout particulièrement à cet homme démonique, à cet homme qui...”) but which one could equally render (with, *inter alia*, Ficino) as “to / with this daimonic light” [to one who entered into himself, that god appeared, etc.]: i.e. by means of the self-luminosity of the autophanous, transcendental subject (equivalent to the *daimôn*), the One appears.

⁶⁵ Although this anecdote has no obvious connection to Sethian Gnosticism, what is interesting in this regard is that the officiant is an Egyptian priest who has recently come to Rome and made Plotinus’ acquaintance through some friend (*dialogetos philou*: 10.16). This suggests a relatively active connection between Plotinus’ Roman entourage and Egypt, long after Plotinus’ migration from Alexandria to Rome, which in turn raises the intriguing (but unprovable) possibility of a transmission (in the opposite direction) of the Greek *Vorlagen* of *Allogenes* and *Zostrianos* directly from the Sethians on the periphery of Plotinus’ circle to the Egyptian milieu in which they were eventually translated into Coptic.

⁶⁶ Porphyry, *Vita Plotini* 10.31-34: Ἔστι γοῦν αὐτῷ ἀπὸ τῆς τοιαύτης αἰτίας καὶ βιβλίον γραφὲν «Περὶ τοῦ εἰληχότος ἡμᾶς δαίμονος», ὅπου πειρᾶται αἰτίας φέρειν περὶ τῆς διαφορᾶς τῶν συνόντων. / “Indeed, it is from this motive that he wrote the book *On our Allotted Companion Daimon*, where he tries to get at the reason for the distinction between indwelling companions.”

⁶⁷ That ritual praxis lurks behind Plotinus’ text, rather than, as in the case of the Sethians, on its surface, may be explained by the fact that both his rhetorical style— that of a fully-identified academic Platonist— and his practical intention—

16. We may therefore see a curious convergence between Plotinus' mysticism, his metaphysical system, and ritual praxis, a convergence which can be summarized with the following four observations:

[1] Plotinus' technique of union with the One was patterned in part upon certain forms of internalized ritual praxis current among the Platonizing Sethian Gnostics;

[2] this kind of ritual praxis and what might be called mystical experience are not mutually exclusive; on the contrary, these rituals involved deliberate techniques of visualization which undoubtedly had an intensely experiential or "mystical" content;⁶⁸

[3] the structure and content of this visualization praxis was itself modeled upon the objective metaphysics of a complex ontogenetic scheme; and finally,

[4] this metaphysical scheme itself did not arise in a vacuum, and was at least in part the result of certain profound subjective experiences. Here I would appeal to Hans Jonas' conception of late antique mysticism as the result of a feedback loop between metaphysics and subjective experience: on the one hand, an objective metaphysical system provides the conceptual framework for the subjective experience, while in return, the subjective experience itself confirms and invigorates that objective metaphysical system.⁶⁹ Indeed, we may conclude that it is only because of the richness and intensity of their common metaphysical thought-world—perhaps forged in the furnace, so to speak, of some shared Alexandrian ritual praxis—that Plotinus and his Sethian contemporaries were actually able to "bring forth the contemplation into an act of seeing"⁷⁰ and "make [themselves] the contemplation,"⁷¹ in a way that would be very difficult for us to repeat today.

philosophical investigation— were quite different from those of the Sethians. This should not lead us to neglect the numerous indications of the origin and structure of his ideas.

⁶⁸ It is of course interesting that the notion of visionary ascent itself has Platonic roots.

⁶⁹ Jonas in an interview with I. Couliano, in *idem, Gnosticismo e pensiero moderno: Hans Jonas* (Rome: L'Erma di Bretschneider, 1985) 143; also, H. Jonas, *Gnosis und spätantiker Geist*, vol. 2.1 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1954).

⁷⁰ V.8[31].11.2: εἰς τὸ ἰδεῖν προφέρη τὸ θέαμα.

⁷¹ VI.7[38].15.32-33: δεῖ δὲ ἑαυτὸν ἐκεῖνο γενόμενον τήν θεάν [ἑαυτὸν] ποιήσασθαι.

Appendix I: Comparison of *Allogenes* 60.28ff. and Plotinus V.5[32].9-19

<i>theme</i>	<i>Allogenes</i> 60.28-61.14	Plotinus V.5[32].9-13	Plotinus III.8[30].9.18-32
[a] Standing	And when I wanted to <u>stand firmly</u> ,	For Intellect will <u>make itself stand</u> towards the contemplation, looking at nothing else but the Beautiful,	...by <u>standing</u> to listen at any point in the deserted place, you will receive all the voice, and yet not all. What is it, then, which we shall receive when we set our intellect to it?
[b] Self-reversion / withdrawal	I <u>withdrew</u> to the Existence, which I found standing and at rest like an image and likeness of what is conferred upon me by a revelation of the Indivisible One and the One who is at rest.	completely <u>turning and surrendering himself</u> there, but having stood, and,	Rather the intellect, being “double-mouthed,” must (so to speak) <u>withdraw backwards</u> (<i>eis toupisō anachōrein</i>), and, as it were, <u>surrender itself to what lies behind it</u> (<i>heauton aphenta tois opisthen autou</i>)
[c] Filling with strength	I was <u>filled</u> with revelation by means of a primordial manifestation of the Unknowable One. [As though] I were ignorant of him, I [knew] him and I <u>received power [by] him. Having been permanently strengthened.</u>	as if having been <u>filled with strength</u>	
[d] Self-apprehension	I <u>knew the One who exists in me</u> and the Triple Powered One	it <u>sees first of all itself</u> having become more beautiful and glistening, as he is close to him.	
[e] Uncontainableness or unboundedness of the supreme principle	and the revelation of his <u>uncontainableness.</u>	But he did not come as someone expected, but came as not having come; for he was seen not as having come, but as being present before all things, before even Intellect came. There is the Intellect that comes, and there is also the Intellect that goes away, because it does not know where to stay and <u>where that one stays, as it is in nothing.</u> And if it were possible also for Intellect itself to remain nowhere— not because it is in place, for neither is he in place, but rather, <i>absolutely</i> nowhere—	
[f] Apprehension of transcendent principle through special non-noetic faculty	[And] by means of a primordial manifestation of the First One (who is) unknowable to them all the God who is beyond perfection, I saw him and the Triple Powered <u>One that exists in them all.</u>	it would have been gazing at that one eternally; or rather, not gazing, but being one with that and not two. <u>But now, because it is Intellect, it looks, when it looks, with that of itself which is not Intellect.</u>	and there, <u>if it wishes to see that one, it must not be altogether intellect.</u>

Appendix II: Echoes of autophany at *Enn.* I.6[1].9.15-25 in Najm al-din al-Kubra

Najm al-din al-Kubra (1145-1220 CE), *Fawa'il al-jamal wa-fawatih al-jalal* (*The Blossoms of Beauty and the Perfumes of Majesty*) §66, from H. Corbin, *The Man of Light in Iranian Sufism*, N. Pearson trans. (New Lebanon, NY: Omega, 1994), 85:

[When the circle of the face has become pure] it effuses lights as a spring pours forth its water, so that the mystic has a sensory perception that these lights are gushing forth to irradiate his face. This outpouring takes place between the two eyes and between the eyebrows. Finally it spreads to cover the whole face. At that moment, before you, before your face, there is another Face also of light, irradiating lights; while behind its diaphanous veil a sun becomes visible, seemingly animated by a movement to and fro. In reality this Face is your own face and this sun is the sun of the Spirit that goes to and from in your body. Next, the whole of your person is immersed in purity, and suddenly you are gazing at a person of light who is also irradiating lights. The mystic has the sensory perception of this irradiation of lights proceeding from the whole of his person. Often the veil falls and total reality of the person is revealed, and the with the whole of your body you perceive the whole. The opening of the inner sight begins in the eyes, then in the face, then in the chest, then in the entire body. This person of light before you is called in Sufi terminology the suprasensory Guide. It is also called the suprasensory personal Master, or again the suprasensory spiritual Scales.

Plotinus I.6[1].9.15-25:

Go back into yourself and look; and if you still do not see yourself beautiful, just as the maker of a statue which needs to be beautiful cuts some parts away and polishes others and makes some parts smooth and others pure until he has revealed the beautiful face in the statue, so also you cut away whatever is excessive, and straighten whatever is crooked, and remove whatever is dark and make it shiny, and not stop “crafting your statue” until you should see “temperance mounted upon a holy pedestal.” If you have become this, and see it, and, you, pure, ‘come together’ with yourself, having no impediment to thus coming towards one, nor having with it anything else mixed inside, but wholly yourself, only true light, not measured by magnitude nor circumscribed into diminution by shape nor, conversely, expanded into magnitude by unboundedness, but everywhere unmeasurable because greater than all measure and better than all quantity; if you see yourself having become this, at this point, having become vision, you have confidence with respect to yourself, and in this very moment, having ascended, you have no need of a guide; look intently; for this alone is the eye that sees the great beauty.