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PLOTINUS AND BUDDHISM



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Under the influence of the mysterious Ammonius Saccas, Plotinus (204–270) conceived a desire to learn Persian and Indian philosophy firsthand. This led him to a romantic participation in the emperor Gordian's ill-fated Persian expedition. He managed to escape to Antioch and two years later began teaching in Rome.¹ It is unlikely he was vouchsafed any contact with Hinduism or Buddhism,² but the parallels between his thought and especially Buddhist philosophy are striking. The parallels with Buddhism are closer than with Hinduism since Buddhism worked with three rather than two levels or substructures of reality,³ yet the Hindu connection has been more frequently explored by Neoplatonist scholars than the Buddhist.⁴ Persian philosophy has been explored least of all⁵ though it would shed light on the relationship between Neoplatonism and the philosophy of Mani who accompanied Shapur I in the capacity of a royal attendant during the same campaign in which Plotinus took part on the other side.⁶

We will proceed by highlighting parallels between the Plotinian and Buddhist thought worlds rather than engaging in rigorous argumentation. In keeping with the irenic spirit of Eastern philosophy the evidence will be presented in an undogmatic way. It should be kept in mind both that the similarities between the two philosophies are often untidy and that there are equally large differences; chief among these are Plotinus' greater tendency towards theodicy, divine personality, and belief in the possibility of love between mankind and God. It should also be noted that in the West even a monism as thoroughgoing as Parmenides' is taken to have been far less extreme than is the case in Eastern and especially Indian philosophy.⁷ Nonetheless the similarities reveal something about philosophy's attraction to such concepts as unity and simplicity.

The Yogācārin Vasubandhu

Buddhism in general accepts reincarnation and holds ignorance responsible for the cycle of incarnations which can only be brought to an end by knowledge. For Plotinus, who also accepted metempsychosis, ignorance (*ἄγνοια*) is certainly one of the underlying characteristics of earthly existence.⁸ As far as the more specific aspects of Buddhism we would naturally expect him to be closer to the philosophical form, Mahāyāna Buddhism, than to the more traditional form, Hīnayāna Buddhism. Some of the accretions present in Mahāyāna, however, recall more the elaborate daemonology of his successors Iamblichus and Syrianus.

Most discussions of Plotinus and Buddhism⁹ primarily investigate Mahāyāna Buddhism and specifically Yogācāra which originated a century after him. If Yogācāra is a neutral monism as has been alleged¹⁰ this alone has something in common with Plotinus.¹¹ One of its primary figures was Vasubandhu (300s), and a word should first be said about his *Abhidharmakośa*, written before he had been fully converted from Hīnayāna Buddhism by his half brother Asaṅga, unless he was a secret adherent of Yogācāra all along as some scholars have affirmed.¹² The particular point of the *Abhidharmakośa* that interests us relates to the omniscience of the Dharmakāya (the cosmic Buddha) and Plotinus' World Soul. The Dharmakāya knows the future not in the way that fortune-tellers do but by actually seeing it before him. In the same way the World Soul knows reality not in the way that diviners do but like someone who has full control over his actions and who sees the future as ineluctably as he does the present.¹³

A useful analogy between Plotinus and Vasubandhu is that their classes were open to all hearers and that they eagerly welcomed questions.¹⁴ Plotinus was ready to entertain and meet objections while Vasubandhu was more interested in the debating process.¹⁵ Towards the end of his life the latter refused to debate the Hīnayāna scholar Saṅghabhadra. His later comment on Saṅghabhadra reminds one of Plotinus' estimation of the Middle Platonist Longinus: "Saṅghabhadra was a clever and ingenious scholar, [but] his intellectual powers were not deep."¹⁶ Plotinus had told Porphyry, "Longinus is a scholar but in no sense a philosopher."¹⁷

Vasubandhu recognized three levels in the individual rather than the universe, but, as Thomas McEvilley has shown, this is somewhat irrelevant since he believed the mind created the universe. Plotinus' One, Nous, and World Soul correspond to his Pariniṣpanna, Paratantra, and Parikalpita (Absolute Being, Dependent Being, and Nonbeing).¹⁸ Nonbeing is imagined nature with the implication of falsehood. Attachment to Nonbeing, to our imagination of the world, leads to suffering. The escape from suffering is central to Buddhism, and it was the flight from suffering in late antiquity which helped engender Neoplatonism. Absolute Being is the storehouse consciousness; in its pure state it resembles the One. It is free from longing, sensation, association, and ignorance while its impure state is "always flowing like a torrent."¹⁹

In Yogācāra, as in Neoplatonism, there is not only an I-Thou and an I-It dimension.²⁰ There is a middle realm, Paratantra or Dependent Being.²¹ Cognition²² is the main concept in Dependent Being, as it is in Plotinus' Nous which means "intellect." Dependent Being is the only way to see beyond Nonbeing to Absolute Being; it is the way we navigate between the higher and lower realms.²³ Another Buddhist quality of the Nous is that it is a limited infinity.²⁴ The Buddha field of Pure Land Mahāyāna Buddhism is one of the infinite world systems in the universe, ruled over and protected by a Buddha.²⁵

For Plotinus the three levels of reality can be seen as three different ways of looking at the same reality: the absoluteness of the One, a system of Forms, and the workings of the World Soul.²⁶ Similarly, for Vasubandhu, the three levels are really three natures: the thing as it appears to be, its dependent nature, and its unreal

nature.²⁷ The world of men, animals, heaven, and hell are one world which can be converted into the three realms or natures of Absolute Being, Dependent Being, and Nonbeing.²⁸ These realms do not exist apart from the one world. Willows are green and flowers are red in Absolute Being and Nonbeing alike,²⁹ but the sage is concerned only with Absolute Being, with the world as it truly is.

Later Yogācāra

Vasubandhu's Indian followers added to Absolute Being's pure state freedom from being, nonbeing, and knowledge. They also introduced a concept similar to Plotinus' doctrine of procession from and return to the One: the permeation of non-enlightenment and enlightenment. These two forces are at work in all three levels of reality; non-enlightenment moves from being to multiplicity, and enlightenment from multiplicity to being. Nagao divines such ascent and descent in numerous philosophical traditions, for instance in the *fanā'* and *baqā'* of Sufism³⁰ which was directly indebted to Neoplatonism.³¹ In *fanā'* the mystic annihilates his ego in union with the divine as did Moses and Muhammad.³² *Fanā'* is a loss of self, a kind of *Liebestod* which results not in physical death, as might be expected, but in *baqā'*, abiding or permanence in God's will.³³ The metaphysical concepts of ascent and descent in Buddhism are paralleled by the ascent of the Buddha to enlightenment and his descent, for the rest of his life, in order to help others. An obvious parallel with Platonism, though it largely concerns the political arena, is Plato's advice for the philosopher to reenter the cave of shadows to aid his fellow mortals.³⁴ This process, from ascent to descent, is the opposite of that distinguished in the life of Jesus. In Sufism, correspondingly, the descent of the Qur'an into the heart of the Prophet occurred before his ascent from Jerusalem to heaven.³⁵

It is possible that Vasubandhu's Indian followers applied the three divisions of his individual reality to the universal reality, but it is certain that his Chinese followers in the Fa-hsiang and Hua-yen schools did so. The She-lun school, which flowed into the second of these,³⁶ also transferred his impure aspect of Absolute Being to the second level, Dependent Being, and thereby made it more Plotinian.³⁷ For both Vasubandhu's Indian and Chinese followers, as for Plotinus, it was the middle rather than the ultimate level of reality that was the usual place for mystical experiences.³⁸

In the *Uttaratantra* of the Yogācārin Sthiramati, who consolidated the work of Vasubandhu in the 500s,³⁹ we are faced with a number of similes that were also employed by Plotinus and that have been brought to our attention by Richard Wallis.⁴⁰ One of these is akin to the sun simile of the *Republic* which Plotinus used to show how the One, like the sun issuing forth sunlight, emanates without being moved: The Nous "must be an irradiation from it while it remains unchanged, like the bright light of the sun which runs around it, as it were, springing from it continually while it remains unchanged."⁴¹ For Sthiramati the Dharmakāya, the Buddha in his role as ultimate reality, is also reflected by the sun, which "free from any searching thought," causes plants to ripen and the lotus to unfold its leaves.⁴² The sun

simile reveals that Plotinus' One and the Dharmakāya are immune from increase or decrease and that they neither originate nor vanish but constitute an eternal process.⁴³ Plotinus availed himself of another Platonic sun simile, indebted to the *Parmenides*, to explain how Being, like sunlight, is fully present in every part of the universe.⁴⁴ The *Uttaratantra* likewise compares the sun's rays to the ability of the Dharmakāya to manifest itself in everything that exists.⁴⁵ Plotinus further applied the analogy of the contact of sunlight on air to show how the soul is unaffected by the passions of the physical body.⁴⁶ The *Uttaratantra* employed the same analogy to illustrate that the spiritual essence cannot be polluted by defiling forces like desire.⁴⁷ Besides the sun simile Plotinus and Sthiramati used the analogy of speech in relation to thought to describe, on the one hand, the emanation of the World Soul from the Nous and, on the other, to describe the outflow of the Buddha's teachings from the Dharmakāya.⁴⁸

Sthiramati was an Indian follower of Vasubandhu, removed from him by two centuries. Vasubandhu's Chinese followers had their own distinct similes which they used to describe the three realms of Yogācāra. One of the favorites of the Fa-hsiang school (fl. 642) was the snake simile.⁴⁹ A man is frightened by a snake, examines it to discover that it is a rope, and, upon further discovery, realizes that it is not so much a rope as a collection of hemp fibers.⁵⁰ This increase in understanding is typical of the ascent up the three realms. Another popular Fa-hsiang analogy was the crystal simile. If a transparent crystal is placed beside gold it appears to be gold, just as Nonbeing is taken to be true reality. The appearance is Nonbeing, the crystal is Dependent Being, and the nonexistence of the gold is Absolute Being.⁵¹

The doyens of the Hua-yen school (fl. 683) acted as an intermediary between Vasubandhu and Zen Buddhism. To put it another way Hua-yen thought is the philosophical basis of Zen, and Tsung-mi, its fifth patriarch, was also a patriarch of Chinese Zen.⁵² It is therefore interesting to note that in Zen Buddhism, as in Plotinus' thought, the vision of ultimate reality comes suddenly and unannounced.⁵³ For instance at *Ennead* 5.3.17 Plotinus writes, "We must believe we have had the vision, whenever the soul suddenly takes light."⁵⁴ In Plotinus the vision is usually supernatural; in Zen it is only occasionally so, as with the woman who was thrown into a trance and was released from it by a bodhisattva snapping his fingers.⁵⁵ Yet in both cases the adept is instructed to mentally prepare himself for the impending revelation.⁵⁶

Plotinus and Tantra

Thomas McEvilley claims to find in the *Enneads* a system of meditation similar to the Tantric meditation of Indian and Tibetan Buddhism, especially when Plotinus instructs his students to imagine a picture of the universe, with sun, stars, earth, sea, and living beings exhibited on a transparent globe.⁵⁷ McEvilley likens this globe to the *maṇḍala* or magic circle which the Tantric mystic was to clearly visualize as Plotinus tells his students to.⁵⁸ "Let this be in your soul," are his words. As in Tantra the

mystic is enjoined to ask the deity to enter the globe and unify him. I think, however, that McEvilley is confusing Plotinus' urging his students to visualize an image for philosophical reflection with his instructing them in meditation. He certainly goes too far when he alleges that Plotinus directed formal meditation classes in his school.⁵⁹ Armstrong denies that he practiced meditation techniques,⁶⁰ and Dillon prefers to think of him here as introducing a spiritual exercise,⁶¹ much as a Jesuit teacher might. There is moreover nothing in the *Enneads* like the involved rituals of Tantra. In Japanese Tantra the mystic sits with his right leg folded on top of his left and recites the words, "Om! I awaken the mind which is in union with everything," and he later holds the fingers of his hands outstretched and interlocking.⁶²

Nonetheless Sara Rappe calls the above episode a meditation because it involves a directed use of the imagination and because it challenges "habitual modes of thought."⁶³ We must therefore consider the use by Plotinus of something very much akin to meditation techniques. This would go a long way toward explaining how he achieved the mystical state with the *Nous* he describes at *Ennead* 4.8.1 and how he attained unity with the One, as Porphyry assures us he did four times when he was with him.⁶⁴ There is another illustration in the *Enneads* of how McEvilley's theory can help us understand Plotinus' thought, that is when he instructs his reader to withdraw into himself and look and so perfect his inner statue.⁶⁵ While Plotinus' intention is mainly ethical and while this section recalls Stoicism more than anything else one is reminded of the technique in Tibetan Tantra where the aspirant is instructed to concentrate on himself as the image of Mañjuśrī, the bodhisattva of wisdom.⁶⁶

There are certain interesting but relatively minor parallels between the lives of Plotinus and the Tibetan Tantrist Ra Lotsāwa (fl. 1056).⁶⁷ Lamentably we know more about his teacher than we do about Plotinus' own teacher Ammonius. Ra Lotsāwa was consecrated when he was eight, the age at which Plotinus was weaned.⁶⁸ He was privy to supernormal experiences, and like Plotinus he gravitated toward the highest social circles.⁶⁹ He earned the enmity of the magician Pūrṇakāla much as Plotinus did that of Olympius who was unsuccessful in his attempt to destroy him by star spells.⁷⁰ Ra Lotsāwa was able to protect himself from his opponent by setting a painting of a Buddhist goddess on his bed and hiding himself in a jar; Pūrṇakāla's magic destroyed the painting but not Ra Lotsāwa.⁷¹ Plotinus' supernatural self-defense, however, involved no recourse to idols and no previous insult to his enemy, nor was it abetted by his master. The *Vita Plotini* additionally does not suggest the violence and lechery that would increasingly dominate Ra Lotsāwa's progress.⁷² In his destructive use of magic Ra Lotsāwa resembled Olympius more than Plotinus; in this he was not alone. Williams describes Tibetan Buddhism of his time as inhabited by immoral and megalomaniac magicians who believed they were already Buddhas and therefore beyond good and evil.⁷³ Yet it can safely be said that Plotinus' immediate milieu had something in common with Buddhist Tantra. There is an even closer affinity between Tantra and the theurgic rituals of later Neoplatonism than there is between Tantra and Plotinus.⁷⁴ In the case of both Tantra and Neoplatonic theurgy scholars are less scornful than they once were, recognizing the beneficent effect of ritual on the human mind.⁷⁵

Conclusion

The present article has been something of a concordance of Buddhism and the *Enneads*. One of its most distinctive discoveries is its observation of the similarities between the careers of Plotinus and those of Vasubandhu and Ra Lotsāwa. But like its predecessors the article has come to a dead end. Many of the parallels it has enumerated between Plotinus and Mahāyāna Buddhism are far from tidy, with the Dharmakāya being compared to the World Soul at one point and the One at another. As we have intimated, the differences between Plotinus and Buddhism are perhaps more revealing than the similarities. His view of the One is more personal than Buddhist conceptions of ultimate reality, and he sometimes uses the masculine pronoun when referring to it.⁷⁶ In relation to this is his strong theodicean bent,⁷⁷ something irrelevant in Eastern philosophy.⁷⁸ He also envisions a kind of love between mankind and God, “the noble love of a daughter for her noble father,” and although this is far less pronounced than is the case with Proclus⁷⁹ he frequently comes very close to the spirit of Christian mysticism.⁸⁰

The influence or lack of influence of Eastern philosophy on Plotinus has become something of an ideological issue, with lovers of Western civilization denying the former and detractors of the West⁸¹ championing it. The latter also run the danger of being overly enthusiastic. Gregorios, for instance, speaks of Plato and Socrates as Plotinus’ gurus, but Plott warns us that we should not turn Plotinus into a yogin.⁸² The influence of Plotinus on premodern Eastern philosophy has never really been considered. Wallis writes, “It cannot, of course, be assumed that any borrowing must have been [only] on the Greek side,”⁸³ but this has long been assumed by scholars who are open to the question of influence. Many of the most “Plotinian” of the Buddhist philosophers postdated him, but I believe it is unlikely they owed anything to Plotinus or even knew about him. The Plotinian elements in the Mahāyānists can be traced back to tendencies in the earliest Indian philosophy just as the “Buddhist” elements in Plotinus can be traced back to tendencies in the earliest Greek philosophy.⁸⁴ Thomas McEvilley thinks these last tendencies owed something to Jainism, traveling to Greece by way of the Orphics.⁸⁵ More likely they arose independently of one another and reflect the attraction of the human mind towards order and simplicity and of the philosophical mind towards monism.⁸⁶

Notes

I would like to thank John Dillon, Mark Edwards, and Svetla Slaveva-Griffin for their help with this article.

- 1 – *Vit. Plot.* 3. Few scholars have noticed that Plotinus’ trajectory was from Africa to Asia to Europe.
- 2 – Yet there were Indian yogis in Alexandria in his time, and the Alexandrian Pan-taenus is said to have made the trip to India by Eusebius in *Hist. Eccl.* 5.10.

McEvelley believes it is fairly certain Plotinus had limited contact with Indian ideas. See Thomas McEvelley, *The Shape of Ancient Thought: Comparative Studies in Greek and Indian Philosophy* (New York: Allworth Press, 2002), pp. 549–550; cf. Paul Hacker, “*Cit* and *Noûs*,” in *Neoplatonism and Indian Thought*, ed. R. Baine Harris (Norfolk, VA: International Society for Neoplatonic Studies, 1992), p. 161.

- 3 – McEvelley, *Shape of Ancient Thought*, p. 568. Tripartite structures appear to correspond to something in the human mind and are evident in such systems as Pythagoreanism, Middle Platonism, Neoplatonism, and Syriac Christian theology. See Walter Burkert, *Lore and Science in Ancient Pythagoreanism*, trans. Edwin L. Minar, Jr. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1972), p. 467; Pseudo-Macarius, *The Fifty Spiritual Homilies and The Great Letter*, trans. George A. Maloney (New York: Paulist Press, 1992), p. xiii; Lars Thunberg, *Microcosm and Mediator: The Theological Anthropology of Maximus the Confessor* (Chicago: Open Court, 1995), pp. 176–195; Jonathan Hill, *Zondervan Handbook to the History of Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), p. 112; Brian E. Colless, trans., *The Wisdom of the Pearlers: An Anthology of Syriac Christian Mysticism* (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 2008), pp. 75, 87; Sebastian Brock, trans., *The Syriac Fathers on Prayer and the Spiritual Life* (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1987), pp. 314–315; cf. Norman Hillyer, *1 and 2 Peter, Jude* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1992), p. 19.
- 4 – E.g., Harris, *Neoplatonism and Indian Thought*; Paulos Mar Gregorios, ed., *Neoplatonism and Indian Philosophy* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002).
- 5 – But see John Dillon’s unpublished article “Plutarch, Plotinus, and the Zoroastrian Concept of the *Fravashi*.”
- 6 – *Vit. Plot.* 3; L.J.R. Ort, *Mani: A Religio-Historical Description of His Personality* (Leiden: Brill, 1967), p. 211; R. T. Wallis, *Neoplatonism* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1995), 39.
- 7 – McEvelley avers that Greek and Chinese Buddhist philosophers were less willing to deny metaphysical reality to the universe than Indian Buddhist philosophers. See his “Plotinus and Vijñānavāda Buddhism,” *Philosophy East and West* 30, no. 2 (April 1980): 190; cf. Wallis, *Neoplatonism*, p. 89. In the case of the Chinese philosophers this may have been because of their instinctive dislike of extremes. See Liu Ming-Wood, “The *P’An-chiao* System of the Hua-yen School in Chinese Buddhism,” *T’oung Pao* 67, nos. 1–2 (1981): 43.
- 8 – *Enn.* 5.1.1; Hacker, “*Cit* and *Noûs*,” p. 176.
- 9 – McEvelley, *Shape of Ancient Thought*, pp. 568–594; Wallis, “Phraseology and Imagery in Plotinus and Indian Thought,” in Harris, *Neoplatonism and Indian Thought*, pp. 101–120.

- 10 – *Apud* Jay Garfield, *Empty Words: Buddhist Philosophy and Cross-Cultural Interpretation* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 155.
- 11 – See his last words at *Vit. Plot. 2*; cf. John M. Rist, *Plotinus: The Road to Reality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), pp. 215–216, 229–230; Wallis, *Neoplatonism*, p. 89; A. H. Armstrong, ed., *The Cambridge History of Later Greek and Early Medieval Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), p. 263.
- 12 – Jonathan C. Gold, “Vasubandhu,” in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta (Winter 2012), <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2012/entries/vasubandhu>.
- 13 – *Enn.* 4.4.12; Wallis, “Phraseology and Imagery,” p. 109.
- 14 – *Vit. Plot.* 1, 3; Gold, “Vasubandhu.”
- 15 – *Vit. Plot.* 13; Garfield, *Empty Words*, p. 111; Gold, “Vasubandhu.”
- 16 – Stefan Anacker, *Seven Works of Vasubandhu the Buddhist Psychological Doctor* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1984), p. 23.
- 17 – *Vit. Plot.* 14.
- 18 – Garfield translates these words imagined, other-dependent, and consummate in *Empty Words*, p. 117.
- 19 – *Triṃśikā* 4; McEvilley, *Shape of Ancient Thought*, p. 573.
- 20 – It thus differed from the Upaniṣads and the Vedas. See McEvilley, *Shape of Ancient Thought*, p. 568.
- 21 – G. M. Nagao, *Mādhyamika and Yogācāra: A Study of Mahāyāna Philosophies*, ed. L. S. Kawamura (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), pp. 65–66.
- 22 – The Sanskrit word is *vijñāna*; Vijñānavāda is an alternate name for Yogācāra.
- 23 – Garfield relates the three levels of Parikalpita, Paratantra, and Pariniṣpanna to the Western idealists Berkeley, Kant, and Schopenhauer. Berkeley said the physical world was imaginary, Kant that it was dependent upon mind, and Schopenhauer that everything was Will. See *Empty Words*, pp. 160–167.
- 24 – *Enn.* 5.7.3; Kevin Corrigan, *Reading Plotinus: A Practical Introduction to Neoplatonism* (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 2005), p. 149.
- 25 – Paul Williams, *Mahāyāna Buddhism: The Doctrinal Foundations* (London: Routledge, 1989), p. 127. Randolph Kloetzli investigates Buddha fields in Hīnayāna and Mahāyāna Buddhism in relation to the *Enneads*, using as his chief text Vasubandhu’s *Abhidharmakośa*. He particularly notes the connection in Buddhism between omniscience and the concept of an infinite world system. See his “*Nous* and *Nirvāṇa*: Conversations with Plotinus, An Essay in Buddhist Cosmology,” *Philosophy East and West* 57, no. 2 (April 2007): 140–177.

- 26 – John Dillon in Plotinus, *The Enneads*, trans. Stephen MacKenna, abridged with introd. by John Dillon (London: Penguin, 1991), p. xci; cf. Wallis, *Neoplatonism*, pp. 82, 92. Armstrong makes this same assertion about Plotinus' use of the Platonic categories being, motion, rest, sameness, and otherness in *Cambridge History of Later Greek and Early Medieval Philosophy*, p. 247. Related to this Plotinus often conflates the World Soul in its higher aspect with the Nous. His immediate disciple Porphyry telescopes the hypostases even more radically. See Plotinus, *Enneads*, p. xcvi; Wallis, *Neoplatonism*, p. 111; Corrigan, *Reading Plotinus*, p. 234; McEvilley, *Shape of Ancient Thought*, pp. 585–586; cf. David Furley, ed., *From Aristotle to Augustine* (London: Routledge, 1997), pp. 376–377.
- 27 – Gold, “Vasubandhu.”
- 28 – Nagao, *Mādhyamika and Yogācāra*, p. 62. This was also true of Hua-yen Buddhism. See Liu Ming-Wood, “The Three-Nature Doctrine and Its Interpretation in Hua-yen Buddhism,” *T'oung Pao* 68, nos. 4–5 (1982): 200–204.
- 29 – This rather gaudy illustration is a Zen saying. See Nagao, *Mādhyamika and Yogācāra*, pp. 63, 242.
- 30 – Nagao, *Mādhyamika and Yogācāra*, pp. 34, 207.
- 31 – Ibn 'Ata' Illah, *The Book of Wisdom*, and Kwaja Abdullah Ansari, *Intimate Conversations*, trans. Victor Danner and Wheeler M. Thackston (New York: Paulist Press, 1978), pp. 10, 16.
- 32 – The incidents are Moses on Mount Sinai and Muhammad by the lote tree. See Michael A. Sells, trans., *Early Islamic Mysticism: Sufi, Qur'an, Mi'raj, Poetic, and Theological Writings* (New York: Paulist Press, 1996), pp. 21, 82; Nizam ad-din Awliya, *Morals for the Heart: Conversations of Shaykh Nizam ad-din Awliya Recorded by Amir Hasan Sijzi*, trans. Bruce B. Lawrence (New York: Paulist Press, 1992), pp. 170, 313–314; Algis Uždavinys, *Ascent to Heaven in Islamic and Jewish Mysticism* (London: Matheson Trust, 2011), pp. 1–7.
- 33 – See Nizam ad-din Awliya, *Morals for the Heart*, pp. 72–73. This can be related to the rapture (ἀνάληψις) of Maximus the Confessor in *Ambig.* 16.
- 34 – *Rep.* 7.520c; cf. *Enn.* 6.9.7.
- 35 – Nagao, *Mādhyamika and Yogācāra*, pp. 202–203; Uždavinys, *Ascent to Heaven in Islamic and Jewish Mysticism*, p. 1.
- 36 – Francis H. Cook, *Hua-yen Buddhism: The Jewel Net of Indra* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1977), pp. 23, 31; Ming-Wood, “P'An-chiao System of the Hua-yen School,” pp. 13–14.
- 37 – McEvilley, *Shape of Ancient Thought*, p. 574.
- 38 – E.g., *Enn.* 4.8.1.
- 39 – Garfield, *Empty Words*, p. 111.

- 40 – On the Mahāyāna love of similes see Cook, *Hua-yen Buddhism*, p. 23; Wallis, “Phraseology and Imagery,” p. 103.
- 41 – *Enn.* 5.1.6 (Armstrong, slightly altered); cf. *Rep.* 6.507e–509c.
- 42 – *Uttara* 4.62.
- 43 – Wallis, “Phraseology and Imagery,” pp. 106–107.
- 44 – *Parm.* 131b; *Enn.* 6.4.7.
- 45 – *Uttara* 1.83, 85; Wallis, “Phraseology and Imagery,” pp. 111–112.
- 46 – *Enn.* 1.1.3, 4.3.22.
- 47 – *Uttara* 1.62; Wallis, “Phraseology and Imagery,” pp. 113–114. In the earliest Chinese Yogācāra the purity of the mind is not destroyed by phenomena; the metaphor the Tī-lun masters used was that of an ocean and its waves. See Liu, “Three-Nature Doctrine and Its Interpretation,” pp. 189, 209, 219.
- 48 – *Enn.* 1.2.3; *Uttara* 1.143; Wallis, “Phraseology and Imagery,” p. 111.
- 49 – Nagao, *Mādhyamika and Yogācāra*, p. 74.
- 50 – Cf. Carneades *apud* Sextus Empiricus, *Adv. Log.* 188. Carneades was the first Greek to employ this metaphor. See John C. Plott, *Global History of Philosophy*, vol. 2, *The Han-Hellenistic-Bactrian Period* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1989), p. 3.
- 51 – Nagao, *Mādhyamika and Yogācāra*, pp. 67, 72.
- 52 – Cook, *Hua-yen Buddhism*, pp. 20, 26; Williams, *Mahāyāna Buddhism*, p. 127.
- 53 – John G. Rudy, *Wordsworth and the Zen Mind: The Poetry of Self-Emptying* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), p. 48; Alan Watts, *Eastern Wisdom, Modern Life: Collected Talks, 1960–1969* (Novato: New World Library, 2006), p. 164.
- 54 – See also *Enn.* 5.5.7–8; 6.7.36; 6.9.8; Wallis, *Neoplatonism*, p. 90; cf. Plato, *Symp.* 210e; *Ep.* 7.341c–d.
- 55 – Steven Heine, *Opening a Mountain: Kōans of the Zen Masters* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 103–104; cf. Wolfram von Eschenbach, *Parzival*, trans. A. T. Hatto (London: Penguin), p. 157. On the supernatural in Zen see Bernard Faure, ed., *Chan Buddhism in Ritual Context* (London: Routledge Curzon, 2003), pp. 250–265.
- 56 – Pierre Hadot, *Plotinus, or The Simplicity of Vision*, trans. Michael Chase (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), p. 33.
- 57 – *Enn.* 5.8.9; McEvelley, *Shape of Ancient Thought*, p. 589.
- 58 – Sustained vision, often on a *maṇḍala* or a golden image of Buddha, was important in Tantra. See David Gordon White, ed., *Tantra in Practice* (Princeton:

- University Press, 2000), p. 525. For a parallel with Hinduism see W. B. Yeats, *Essays and Introductions* (New York: Macmillan, 1961), pp. 460, 478–479, 483.
- 59 – Cf. Hadot, *Plotinus*, p. 75. More believable is McEvilley's theory that Damascius' teacher Isidore of Alexandria meditated. Formal meditation classes are something we would expect more from Iamblichus' school than Plotinus's. See Damascius, *Vit. Isid.* 36a; McEvilley, *Shape of Ancient Thought*, p. 593; Pauliina Remes, *Neoplatonism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), p. 25.
- 60 – Armstrong, *Cambridge History of Later Greek and Early Medieval Philosophy*, p. 260; "The Dimensions of the Self: *Buddhi* in the *Bhagavad-Gītā* and *Psychē* in Plotinus," *Religious Studies* 15, no. 3 (September 1979): 341.
- 61 – Plotinus, *Enneads*, p. 419; cf. *Enn.* 6.4.7.
- 62 – Ian Astley, "The Five Mysteries of Vajrasattva: A Buddhist Tantric View of the Passions and Enlightenment," in *Tantric Buddhism in East Asia*, ed. Richard K. Payne (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2006), pp. 125–126.
- 63 – Sara Rappe, "Self-Knowledge and Subjectivity in the *Enneads*," in *The Cambridge Companion to Plotinus*, ed. Lloyd P. Gerson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 260–261.
- 64 – *Vit. Plot.* 23.
- 65 – *Enn.* 1.6.9.
- 66 – White, *Tantra in Practice*, pp. 526–527; cf. p. 525.
- 67 – Alexander Gardner, "Ra Lotsāwa Dorje Drakpa," in *Treasury of Lives* (December 2009), <http://treasuryoflives.org/biographies/view/Ra-Lotsawa-Dorje-Drakpa>.
- 68 – *Vit. Plot.* 3; Ronald M. Davidson, *Tibetan Renaissance: Tantric Buddhism in the Rebirth of Tibetan Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), p. 130. Mani's first revelation was at the age of twelve; next to him and Ra Lotsāwa, Plotinus emerges as a very late bloomer. See J. D. Douglas, *The New International Dictionary of the Christian Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), p. 624.
- 69 – *Vit. Plot.* 7, 12; Davidson, *Tibetan Renaissance*, pp. 130, 135.
- 70 – *Vit. Plot.* 10.
- 71 – Davidson, *Tibetan Renaissance*, pp. 135–136. This scenario was repeated in Ra Lotsāwa's conflict with Dharma Dodé. See Peter Alan Roberts, *The Biographies of Rechungpa: The Evolution of a Tibetan Hagiography* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007), p. 214.
- 72 – Davidson, *Tibetan Renaissance*, pp. 137–140; Roberts, *Biographies of Rechungpa*, p. 214; Gardner, "Ra Lotsāwa Dorje Drakpa."

- 73 – Williams, *Mahāyāna Buddhism*, p. 190. Black magic is still occasionally practiced in Tibet.
- 74 – Wallis, *Neoplatonism*, p. 107; McEvilley, *Shape of Ancient Thought*, p. 586. Like Proclus, and unlike Plotinus, Ra Lotsāwa was able to perform healings. See Marinus, *Vit. Proc.* 29; Davidson, *Tibetan Renaissance*, p. 135.
- 75 – Wallis, *Neoplatonism*, p. 107.
- 76 – Corrigan, *Reading Plotinus*, p. 26.
- 77 – E.g., *Enn.* 2.9; 3.2–3.
- 78 – On the theodicean nature of Western philosophy, from which some philosophers should be excepted, see Ming-Wood, “P’An-chiao System of the Hua-yen School,” p. 45.
- 79 – *Enn.* 6.9.9; John M. Rist, *Eros and Psyche: Studies in Plato, Plotinus, and Origen* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1964), pp. 218–219. Plotinus also comes close to praising God in such passages as *Enn.* 3.8.11.
- 80 – *Enn.* 6.7.34; 6.9.9.
- 81 – E.g., I. C. Sharma, “Some Critical Conclusions,” in Harris, *Neoplatonism and Indian Thought*, pp. 323–343; Paulos Mar Gregorios, “Does Geography Condition Philosophy? On Going Beyond the Occidental-Oriental Distinction,” in *Neoplatonism and Indian Philosophy*, pp. 13–29. Garfield’s attempt at comparative philosophy is more balanced. See *Empty Words*, pp. 152–168. On the dangers of comparative philosophy see Faure, *Chan Buddhism in Ritual Context*, p. 11.
- 82 – Gregorios, “Does Geography Condition Philosophy?” p. 15; Plott, *Global History of Philosophy*, 2: 158.
- 83 – Wallis, *Neoplatonism*, p. 15; cf. Wallis, “Phraseology and Imagery,” p. 115.
- 84 – Cf. Wallis, *Neoplatonism*, p. 15.
- 85 – John Bussanich, “The Roots of Platonism and Vedānta: Comments on Thomas McEvilley,” *International Journal of Hindu Studies* 9, no. 1 (January 2005): 8.
- 86 – The presence in Greece of a concept like eternal recurrence, to be distinguished from reincarnation, is harder to account for without recourse to India and specifically Sāṃkhya Hinduism. See Freny Mistry, *Nietzsche and Buddhism: Prolegomenon to a Comparative Study* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1981), p. 141.