

## Seminar 3

*Power Structuralism in Ancient Ontologies – University of Oxford*

### Plotinus: The Power of the Soul

Giannis Stamatellos

*Center for Neoplatonic Virtue Ethics - University of Copenhagen*

#### HANDOUT

*Πᾶσα γὰρ ψυχὴ ἔχει τι καὶ τοῦ κάτω  
πρὸς σῶμα καὶ τοῦ ἄνω πρὸς νοῦν  
(IV.8.8.11-13)*

#### **Summary**

Plotinus identifies the soul with the third hypostasis of being. The psyche occupies a “middle rank” at the boundary between the intelligible world of the Forms and the world of perceptible reality. The soul is an “amphibious” nature, a double life, participating in both the intelligible and the perceptible realms. It is an “officious nature” which includes an “unquiet power”; a creative power that drives the soul to transfer continually what it contemplates in the eternal world to the temporal realm. For Plotinus, every soul has something of what is below, in the direction of the body, and of what is above, in the direction of Intellect. The soul illuminates and animates the perceptible bodies through its inner formative principles (*logoi*), and so the soul is not conceived as present in the body but the body as present in the soul. In this seminar we discuss passages mainly from *Enneads* IV.8 [6] *On the Descent of the Soul into Bodies*, IV.3 [27] 22 *On Difficulties About the Soul I* and III.7 [45] *On Eternity and Time*.

#### ***The body is present in the soul***

[P1] IV.3 [27] 22.1-13 *On Difficulties About the Soul I*

Ἄρ' οὖν οὕτω φατέον, ὅταν ψυχὴ σῶματι παρῆ, παρεῖναι αὐτὴν ὡς τὸ πῦρ πάρεστι τῷ ἀέρι; Καὶ γὰρ αὐτὸ καὶ τοῦτο παρὸν οὐ πάρεστι καὶ δι' ὅλου παρὸν οὐδενὶ μίγνυται καὶ ἔστηκε μὲν αὐτὸ, τὸ δὲ παραρρεῖ· καὶ ὅταν ἔξω γένηται τοῦ ἐν ᾧ τὸ φῶς, ἀπῆλθεν οὐδὲν ἔχων, ἕως δὲ ἐστὶν ὑπὸ τὸ φῶς, πεφώτισται, ὡστ' ὀρθῶς ἔχειν καὶ ἐνταῦθα λέγειν, ὡς ὁ ἀήρ ἐν τῷ φωτί, ἤπερ τὸ φῶς ἐν τῷ ἀέρι. Διὸ καὶ Πλάτων καλῶς τὴν ψυχὴν οὐ θεῖς ἐν τῷ σῶματι ἐπὶ τοῦ παντός, ἀλλὰ τὸ σῶμα ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ, [καί] φησὶ τὸ μὲν τι εἶναι τῆς ψυχῆς ἐν ᾧ τὸ σῶμα, τὸ δὲ ἐν ᾧ σῶμα μηδέν, ὧν δηλονότι δυνάμεων οὐ δεῖται τῆς ψυχῆς τὸ σῶμα. Καὶ δὴ καὶ ἐπὶ τῶν ἄλλων ψυχῶν ὁ αὐτὸς λόγος.

Are we to say then that when soul is present to body it is present as fire is present to air? For this too like soul is present without being present, and is present throughout the whole and mixed with none of it, and stays still itself while the air flows past; and when the air goes outside the space where the light is, it departs without retaining anything of it, but while it is under the light it is illuminated, so that one can rightly say here too that the air is in the light rather than the light in the air. That is why Plato rightly does not put the soul in the body when he is speaking of the universe, but the body in the soul. He also says that there is a part of the soul in which body is and part in which there is no body, clearly the powers of the soul of which the body has no need. And the same principle of course applies to the other souls.

### ***An amphibious nature***

#### **[P2] IV.8 [6] 4.31-35 *On the Descent of the Soul into Bodies***

Γίνονται οὖν οἷον ἀμφίβιοι ἐξ ἀνάγκης τὸν τε ἐκεῖ βίον τὸν τε ἐνταῦθα παρὰ μέρος βιοῦσαι, πλείον μὲν τὸν ἐκεῖ, αἱ δύνανται πλείον τῷ νῷ συνεῖναι, τὸν δὲ ἐνθάδε πλείον, αἷς τὸ ἐναντίον ἢ φύσει ἢ τύχαις ὑπῆρξεν.

Souls, then, become, as it were, amphibious, compelled to live by turns the life There, and the life here: those which are able to be more in the company of Intellect live the life There more, but those whose normal condition is, by nature or chance, the opposite, live more the life here below.

#### **[P3] IV.8 [6] 7.1-14 *On the Descent of the Soul into Bodies***

Διτῆς δὲ φύσεως ταύτης οὐσίας, νοητῆς, τῆς δὲ αἰσθητῆς, ἄμεινον μὲν ψυχῇ ἐν τῷ νοητῷ εἶναι, ἀνάγκη γε μὴν ἔχειν καὶ τοῦ αἰσθητοῦ μεταλαμβάνειν τοιαύτην φύσιν ἐχούση, καὶ οὐκ ἀγανακτικῆς αὐτὴν ἑαυτῇ, εἰ μὴ πάντα ἐστὶ τὸ κρείττον, μέσην τάξιν ἐν τοῖς οὐσίαις ἐπισχοῦσαν, θείας μὲν μοίρας οὐσαν, ἐν ἐσχάτῳ δὲ τοῦ νοητοῦ οὐσαν, ὡς ὁμορον οὐσαν τῇ αἰσθητῇ φύσει διδόναι μὲν τι τούτῳ τῶν παρ' αὐτῆς, ἀντιλαμβάνειν δὲ καὶ παρ' αὐτοῦ, εἰ μὴ μετὰ τοῦ αὐτῆς ἀσφαλούς διακοσμοῖ, προθυμία δὲ πλείονι εἰς τὸ εἶσω δύοιτο μὴ μείνασα ὅλη μεθ' ὅλης, ἄλλως τε καὶ δυνατὸν αὐτῇ πάλιν ἐξαναδύνασθαι, ἱστορίαν ὧν ἐνταῦθα εἶδέ τε καὶ ἔπαθε προσλαβούση καὶ μαθούση, οἷον ἄρα ἐστὶν ἐκεῖ εἶναι, καὶ τῇ παραθέσει τῶν οἷον ἐναντίων οἷον σαφέστερον τὰ ἀμείνω μαθούση.

Since this nature [the soul] is twofold, partly intelligible and partly perceptible, it is better for the soul to be in the intelligible, but all the same, since it has this kind of nature, it is necessarily bound to be able to participate in the perceptible, and it should not be annoyed with itself because, granted that all things are not the best, it occupies a middle rank among realities, belonging to that divine part but being on the lowest edge of the intelligible, and, having a common boundary with the perceptible nature, gives something to it of what it has in itself and receives something from it in return, if it does not use only its safe part in governing the universe, but with greater eagerness plunges into the interior and does not stay whole with whole, especially as it is possible for it to emerge again, having acquired the whole story of what it saw and experienced here and learnt what it is like to be There, and, by the comparison of things which are, in a way, opposite, learning, in a way more clearly, the better things.

#### **[P4] IV.8 [6] 8.1-6 *On the Descent of the Soul into Bodies***

Καὶ εἰ χρὴ παρὰ δόξαν τῶν ἄλλων τολμήσαι τὸ φαινόμενον λέγειν σαφέστερον, οὐ πᾶσα οὐδ' ἡ ἡμετέρα ψυχῇ ἔδου, ἀλλ' ἔστι τι αὐτῆς ἐν τῷ νοητῷ ἀεὶ τὸ δὲ ἐν τῷ αἰσθητῷ εἰ κρατοῖ, μᾶλλον δὲ εἰ κρατοῖτο καὶ θορυβοῖτο, οὐκ ἐὰν αἰσθησιν ἡμῖν εἶναι ὧν θεᾶται τὸ τῆς ψυχῆς ἄνω.

And, if we should venture to speak out more clearly, contradicting the opinion of others, even our soul does not altogether come down, but there is always something of it in the intelligible; but if the part which is in the world of sense-perception gets control, or rather if it is itself brought under control, and thrown into confusion [by the body], it prevents us from perceiving the things which the upper part of the soul contemplates.

### ***The unquiet power of the soul***

[P5] III.7 [45] 11.20-35 *On Eternity and Time*

Ἐπεὶ γὰρ ψυχῆς ἦν τις δύναμις οὐχ ἡσυχος, τὸ δ' ἐκεῖ ὁρώμενον ἀεὶ μεταφέρειν εἰς ἄλλο βουλομένης, τὸ μὲν ἀθρόον αὐτῇ πᾶν παρῆναι οὐκ ἤθελεν· ὡσπερ δ' ἐκ σπέρματος ἡσυχου ἐξελίττων αὐτὸν ὁ λόγος διέξοδον εἰς πολὺ, ὡς οἶεται, ποιεῖ, ἀφανίζων τὸ πολὺ τῷ μερισμῷ, καὶ ἀνθ' ἑνὸς ἐν αὐτῷ οὐκ ἐν αὐτῷ τὸ ἐν δαπανῶν εἰς μῆκος ἀσθενέστερον πρόεισιν, οὕτω δὴ καὶ αὐτῇ κόσμον ποιούσα αἰσθητὸν μιμήσει ἐκείνου κινούμενον κίνησιν οὐ τὴν ἐκεῖ, ὁμοίαν δὲ τῇ ἐκεῖ καὶ ἐθέλουσαν εἰκόνα ἐκείνης εἶναι, πρῶτον μὲν ἑαυτὴν ἐχρόνωσεν ἀντὶ τοῦ αἰῶνος τοῦτον ποιήσασα· ἔπειτα δὲ καὶ τῷ γενομένῳ ἔδωκε δουλεύειν χρόνῳ, ἐν χρόνῳ αὐτὸν πάντα ποιήσασα εἶναι, τὰς τούτου διεξόδους ἀπάσας ἐν αὐτῷ περιλαβοῦσα· ἐν ἐκείνῃ γὰρ κινούμενος— οὐ γὰρ τις αὐτοῦ [τοῦδε τοῦ παντός] τόπος ἢ ψυχὴ — καὶ ἐν τῷ ἐκείνης αὐτὸ ἐκινεῖτο χρόνῳ.

For since the soul possessed a unquiet power, which always wished to transfer what it saw in that realm to something else, the soul did not wish to have all of it be present to it at once. Just as a formative principle (*logos*) unfolding itself from a quiet seed makes an advance, as it thinks, toward largeness, but actually destroys largeness by making it to be divided, and instead of maintaining its unity within itself expends its unity outside itself by going forward into a weaker extension, so also the soul in making the perceptible cosmos imitates that other cosmos, moving with a motion that is not the Motion of the intelligible realm, but is like the Motion of that realm and wants to be an image of it: first of all the soul temporalized itself, and produced time instead of eternity, then it also made what came into being a slave of time, by making the whole of it to be in time, and by including all of its processes in time. For the perceptible world moves within the soul—for there is no other place for it except the soul—and it also moves in the soul's time.

### ***World Soul and Individual Souls***

[P6] IV.8 [6] 3.1-10 *On the Descent of the Soul into Bodies*

Τὰς δὴ καθέκαστα ψυχὰς ὁρέξει μὲν νοερᾶ χρωμέναις ἐν τῇ ἐξ οὗ ἐγένοντο πρὸς αὐτὸ ἐπιστροφῇ, δύναμιν δὲ καὶ εἰς τὸ ἐπὶ τάδε ἐχούσας, οἷα περὶ φῶς ἐξηρητημένον μὲν κατὰ τὰ ἄνω ἡλίου, τῷ δὲ μετ' αὐτὸ οὐ φθονοῦν τῆς χορηγίας, ἀπήμονας μὲν εἶναι μετὰ τῆς ὅλης μενούσας ἐν τῷ νοητῷ, ἐν οὐρανῷ δὲ μετὰ τῆς ὅλης συνδιοικεῖν ἐκείνῃ, οἷα οἱ βασιλεῖ τῶν πάντων κρατοῦντι συνόντες συνδιοικοῦσιν ἐκείνῳ οὐ καταβαίνοντες οὐδ' αὐτοὶ ἀπὸ τῶν βασιλείων τόπων· καὶ γὰρ εἰσιν ὁμοῦ ἐν τῷ αὐτῷ τότε.

The individual souls, certainly, have an intelligent desire shown in the impulse to return to the principle from which they came into being, but they also possess a power directed to the world here below, like a light which depends on the sun in the upper world but does not grudge of its abundance to what comes after it, and they are free from sorrow if they remain with universal soul in the intelligible, and in heaven with the universal soul they can share in its government, like those who live with a universal monarch and share in the government of his empire; these also do not come down from the abode of royalty: for they are then all together in the same [place].

### ***Soul and Bodies***

#### **[P7] IV.3 [27] 10.20-22 *On Difficulties About the Soul I***

Ἡ δὲ οὐσίας δυνάμει κυρία σωμάτων εἰς τὸ γενέσθαι τε καὶ οὕτως ἔχειν ὡς αὐτὴ ἄγει, οὐ δυναμένων τῶν ἐξ ἀρχῆς ἐναντιοῦσθαι τῇ αὐτῆς βουλήσει.

But soul is by its essential power in control of bodies, so that they come to be and are in the state to which soul leads them, since their first principles are unable to resist its will.

#### **[P8] IV.3 [27] 10.35-42 *On Difficulties About the Soul I***

Ψυχῆς δὲ ἔργον καὶ τὸ ἐν αὐτῇ ἐγρηγορός τι καὶ τὸ εἰς ἄλλο ὡσαύτως. Ζῆν οὖν καὶ τὰ ἄλλα ποιεῖ, ὅσα μὴ ζῆ παρ' αὐτῶν, καὶ τοιαύτην ζωὴν, καθ' ἣν αὐτὴ ζῆ. Ζῶσα οὖν ἐν λόγῳ λόγον δίδωσι τῷ σώματι, εἶδωλον οὐ ἔχει – καὶ γὰρ καὶ εἶδωλον ζωῆς, ὅσον δίδωσι τῷ σώματι – καὶ μορφὰς σωμάτων, ὧν τοὺς λόγους ἔχει· ἔχει δὲ καὶ θεῶν καὶ πάντων. Διὸ πάντα καὶ ὁ κόσμος ἔχει.

But the work of soul is something awake, both that within it and in the same way that which goes out to something else. Soul therefore makes alive all the other things which do not live of themselves, and makes them live the sort of life by which it lives itself. So since it lives in a rational principle, it gives a rational principle to the body, an image of that which it has-for what it gives to the body is also [only] an image of life-and the shapes of body, of which it has the rational formative principles: it has these of gods and of everything. This, then, is why the universe too has everything.

#### **[P9] IV.8 [6] 6.23-28 *On the Descent of the Soul into Bodies***

Δεῖξις οὖν τῶν ἀρίστων ἐν νοητοῖς τὸ ἐν αισθητῷ κάλλιστον, τῆς τε δυνάμεως τῆς τε ἀγαθότητος αὐτῶν, καὶ συνέχεται πάντα εἰσαεὶ τὰ τε νοητῶς τὰ τε αισθητῶς ὄντα, τὰ μὲν παρ' αὐτῶν ὄντα, τὰ δὲ μετοχῆ τούτων τὸ εἶναι εἰσαεὶ λαβόντα, μιμούμενα τὴν νοητὴν καθόσον δύναται φύσιν.

The greatest beauty in the world of sense, therefore, is a manifestation of the noblest among the intelligibles, of their power and of their goodness, and all things are held together for ever, those which exist intelligibly and those which exist perceptibly, the intelligibles existing of themselves and the things perceived by the senses receiving their existence for ever by participation in them, imitating the intelligible nature as far as they can.

#### **[P10] IV.4 [28] 3.3-6 *On Difficulties About the Soul II***

Μνήμη δὲ ἢ μὲν τῶν ἐκεῖ ἔτι κατέχει μὴ πεσεῖν, ἢ δὲ τῶν ἐνταῦθα ὡδὶ φέρει, ἢ δὲ τῶν ἐν οὐρανῷ ἐκεῖ κατέχει, καὶ ὅλως, οὐ μνημονεύει, ἐκεῖνό ἐστι καὶ γίνεται.

The memory of what is in the intelligible world still holds it [the soul] back from falling, but its memory of the things here below carries it down here; its memory of what is in heaven keeps it there, and in general it is and becomes what it remembers.

**Note:** The translation of *Ennead* III.7 has been taken from McGuire and Strange (1988) with some modifications. All other translations have been taken from Armstrong with some modifications.

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