

Chapter 8

In a series of vivid images and allusions Plotinus exhorts us to “escape” from the world of lower beauty. The stress is on our own efforts to use the faculty of vision that we all possess.

8. Τίς οὖν ὁ τρόπος; Τίς μηχανή; Πῶς τις θεάσεται
 κάλλος ἀμήχανον οἶον ἔνδον ἐν ἀγίοις ἱεροῖς μένον
 οὐδὲ προῖον εἰς τὸ ἔξω, ἵνα τις καὶ βέβηλος ἴδῃ; Ἴτω δὴ
 καὶ συνεπέσθω εἰς τὸ εἶσω ὁ δυνάμενος ἔξω καταλιπὼν ὅψιν
 ὁμμάτων μὴδ' ἐπιστρέφων αὐτὸν εἰς τὰς προτέρας ἀγλαίας 5
 σωμάτων. Ἰδόντα γὰρ δεῖ τὰ ἐν σώμασι καλὰ μήτοι
 προστρέχειν, ἀλλὰ γνόντας ὥς εἰσιν εἰκόνες καὶ ἵχνη καὶ
 σκιαὶ φεύγειν πρὸς ἐκεῖνο οὗ ταῦτα εἰκόνες. Εἰ γάρ τις
 ἐπιδράμοι λαβεῖν βουλόμενος ὡς ἀληθινόν, οἷα εἰδῶλου

8,1. Note the tricolon with the third member of increased length: τίς ... τίς ... πῶς.... In the opening two lines Plotinus playfully combines two Platonic passages: *Phileb.* 16b7, where Protarchus begs Socrates to tell him what *τρόπος* or *μηχανή* he would recommend to extract himself from the difficulties of the argument in which he finds himself; and *Resp.* 509a6, where the Idea of the Good is compared with the sun and is described as a *κάλλος ἀμήχανον*, exploiting the “paradox” afforded by *μηχανή/ἀμήχανον*.

8,2–3. οἶον ... ἔξω. The sustained imagery of religious ritual strengthens the continuity of this with the previous two chapters.

8,5. αὐτὸν with reflexive meaning.

8,7. προστρέχειν. We should supply an object: “rush up to them.” The word is found only here in Plotinus and is clearly pejorative. Could this be a reminiscence of Plato, *Resp.* 440a2: προσδραμὼν πρὸς τοὺς νεκρούς?

8,8–9. The reference is to the myth of Narcissus, on which see Hadot 1976. For the myth itself, see Ovid, *Metam.* 3.339–510; Pausanias, *Descr.* 9.31.7–9; and Philostratus, *Imag.* 1.23. In Plotinus’s version Narcissus does not die but simply slips into the water after his image. He probably has the same myth in mind in 5.8[31].2,34–35 (*On Intelligible Beauty*): “like someone who sees his own image but does not know where it came from and chases after it.”

καλοῦ ἐφ' ὕδατος ὀχουμένου, ὁ λαβεῖν βουλευθείς, ὥς πού
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 τις μῦθος, δοκῶ μοι, αἰνίττεται, δὺς εἰς τὸ κάτω τοῦ
 ρεύματος ἀφανῆς ἐγένετο, τὸν αὐτὸν δὴ τρόπον ὁ ἐχόμενος
 τῶν καλῶν σωμάτων καὶ μὴ ἀφιεῖς οὐ τῷ σώματι, τῇ δὲ
 ψυχῇ καταδύσεται εἰς σκοτεινὰ καὶ ἀτερπῇ τῷ νῷ βάθῃ, ἔνθα
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 τυφλὸς ἐν Ἄιδου μένων καὶ ἐνταῦθα ἀκεῖ σκιαῖς συν-
 ἔσται. Φεύγωμεν δὴ φίλῃν ἐς πατρίδα, ἀληθέστερον
 ἅν τις παρακελεύοιτο. Τίς οὖν ἡ φυγὴ καὶ πῶς; Ἀναξόμεθα
 οἷον ἀπὸ μάγου Κίρκης φησὶν ἢ Καλυψοῦς Ὀδυσσεὺς

8,10–11. The tentative way (που, δοκῶ μοι) in which Plotinus introduces his interpretation of this well-known myth suggests that it is original to him.

8,13. καὶ μὴ ἀφιεῖς (“and not letting go”) is to be taken along with ἐχόμενος.

8,13–14. οὐ τῷ σώματι, τῇ δὲ ψυχῇ. These two contrasting phrases (οὐ ... δὲ) are to be construed with καταδύσεται.

8,15. καὶ ἐνταῦθα ἀκεῖ. ἐνταῦθα and ἐκεῖ refer respectively to life in this world and in the next. Both are designated as Hades but in a metaphorical and a literal sense: Hades is a metaphorical way of describing the life in this world of the nonphilosopher who sees only images (shadows) of true reality; the real Hades is peopled by “shadows” (the shades of the dead). Plotinus thought that the soul of the philosopher would escape the real Hades, which would remain the location of unenlightened souls after their death.

8,16. The quotation is from Homer, *Il.* 2.140. As often, Plotinus ignores the context of the lines (it is uttered by the Greeks in their wish to abandon the siege of Troy and return home). But the phrase φίλῃν ἐς πατρίδα occurs frequently in the *Odyssey* (interpreted in general by the Neoplatonists as an allegory of the return of the soul to its heavenly home) and links the quotation more effectively into the context of the *Odyssey* references in the following lines.

8,18. The subject of φησὶν is Homer. Understand ἀνήχθη with Ὀδυσσεὺς. See Homer, *Od.* 5.77–268 for Calypso and 10.133–574 for Circe. There was

αἰνιττόμενος, δοκεῖ μοι, μείναι οὐκ ἀρεσθείς, καίτοι ἔχων
 ἡδονὰς δι' ὁμμάτων καὶ κάλλει πολλῶ αἰσθητῶ συνών.
 Πατρίς δὴ ἡμῖν, ὅθεν παρήλθομεν, καὶ πατὴρ ἐκεῖ. Τίς
 οὖν ὁ στόλος καὶ ἡ φυγή; Οὐ ποσὶ δεῖ διανύσαι· πανταχοῦ
 γὰρ φέρουσι πόδες ἐπὶ γῆν ἄλλην ἀπ' ἄλλης· οὐδέ σε δεῖ

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in antiquity a long tradition of allegorizing Homer as here, for example, in interpreting the journey of Odysseus as the return of the soul to its original home (see Lamberton 1989). Although Odysseus is not mentioned by name, Plotinus probably has him in mind when describing the sort of man who succeeds in reaching the intelligible world of the real self, as being “like a man who arrives in his well-governed land after a long journey” (5.9.1,20–21). Porphyry discourses on the nature of the souls of Odysseus’s men who had been transformed by Circe into animals (F.382 Smith), and, in his *Cave of the Nymphs*, a discourse on the meaning of Homer, *Od.* 13.102–112, Odysseus’s arrival at the harbor of Phorcys is interpreted as symbolizing the end of the soul’s journey (chs. 24–25). In the same passage Porphyry expresses his general approval of Numenius’s allegorization of the *Odyssey*: “For it is my opinion that Numenius and his school were correct in thinking that for Homer in the *Odyssey*, Odysseus bears a symbol of one who passes through the stages of genesis and, in doing so, returns to those beyond every wave.” For Calypso, see also the Nag Hammadi tractate *Exegesis of the Soul* (NHC II 6) 136.27–35.

8,21. πατήρ is often used by Plotinus of Intellect or the One, a usage that probably reflects Homer’s way of referring to Zeus and, more immediately, Plato, *Tim.* 28c3 and 37c7, where the demiurge who creates the world is called πατήρ. For Intellect, see *Enn.* 5.1.1,3 and the image of ourselves as “children” separated from their fathers (1,9–10); see also 2.9.2,4 and 16,9; for the One, see 5.8.1,3.

8,23. σε. Note the way in which the tone becomes more intimate in the course of the exhortations in this chapter. It begins with the third-person (ἴτω), then moves with the quotation from Homer to the first-person plural (ἀναξόμεθα, ἡμῖν, παρήλθομεν) before concluding with the second-person singular (σε).

ἵππων ὄχημα ἢ τι θαλάττιον παρασκευάσαι, ἀλλὰ ταῦτα
 πάντα ἀφεῖναι δεῖ καὶ μὴ βλέπειν, ἀλλ' οἷον μύσαντα ὄψιν 25
 ἄλλην ἀλλάξασθαι καὶ ἀνεγεῖραι, ἣν ἔχει μὲν πᾶς, χρώνται
 δὲ ὀλίγοι.

8,25. μύσαντα (shutting the eyes) shares the same root as μυστήριον, μυστικῶς, although Plotinus here is probably thinking primarily of the physical metaphor of shutting the eyes. See Celsus (Origen, *Cels.* 7.39): “Only then will you see god, if you shut your eyes to perceptions [αἰσθήσεσι μύσαντες] and look up with your mind and, turning away the eye of flesh, awaken the eye of the soul.” The idea of linking improved inner vision with diminished external vision also recalls Plato, *Symp.* 219a2–4: “A man’s mental vision does not begin to be keen until his physical vision is past its prime.”

8,26–27. Plotinus here affirms that the highest level of contemplation is accessible for all people—there is no elite—even though few in fact manage to attain it. This optimism is supported by his doctrine that part of our soul remains undescended (see note on 6,13), thus providing us with a link that we can use to reach the transcendent. Later Platonists strongly rejected the notion of an undescended part of the soul and correspondingly reduced the status of the human soul and its possibility of reaching the Intelligible.

Chapter 9

The faculty of vision alluded to at the end of the previous chapter is now more fully explained by referring back to the idea of inner sight that is awakened by viewing external beauty, which in turn leads us to find true beauty both within external objects and within our own selves. When we have fully identified ourselves with the beauty within, we no longer need instruction or philosophical discourse to assimilate ourselves with the ultimate principle, the One. This naturally leads to the question whether Intellect or the One is to be identified with Beauty itself.

9. Τί οὖν ἐκείνη ἡ ἔνδον βλέπει; Ἄρτι μὲν ἐγειρομένη οὐ πάνυ τὰ λαμπρὰ δύναται βλέπειν. Ἐθιστέον οὖν τὴν ψυχὴν αὐτὴν πρῶτον μὲν τὰ καλὰ βλέπειν ἐπιτηδεύματα· εἶτα ἔργα καλὰ, οὐχ ὅσα αἱ τέχναι ἐργάζονται, ἀλλ' ὅσα οἱ ἄνδρες οἱ λεγόμενοι ἀγαθοί· εἶτα ψυχὴν ἴδε τῶν τὰ ἔργα τὰ καλὰ ἐργαζομένων. Πῶς ἂν οὖν ἴδοις ψυχὴν ἀγαθὴν οἷον τὸ κάλλος ἔχει; Ἄναγε ἐπὶ σαυτὸν καὶ ἴδε· καὶ μὴ πω σαυτὸν ἴδῃς καλόν, οἷα ποιητῆς ἀγάλματος, ὃ δεῖ καλὸν γενέσθαι, τὸ μὲν ἀφαιρεῖ, τὸ δὲ ἀπέξεσε, τὸ δὲ λείον, τὸ δὲ καθαρὸν ἐποίησεν, ἕως ἔδειξε καλὸν ἐπὶ τῷ ἀγάλματι πρόσωπον, οὕτω καὶ σὺ ἀφαίρει ὅσα περιττὰ καὶ ἀπεύθυνε

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9,1. ἐκείνη ἡ ἔνδον. Understand ὅψις from 8,25.

9,2. οὐ πάνυ τὰ λαμπρὰ δύναται βλέπειν recalls the experience of the newly escaped prisoner from the cave in Plato's *Resp.* 516a, where we have a similar hierarchy of objects to observe before it is possible to view the sun itself. This culminating vision is, in fact, for Plotinus a complete identification of the self with the light of the sun, as expressed in line 18: ὅλος αὐτὸς φῶς ἀληθινὸν μόνον.

9,5. ἴδε. Note how once again the use of the intimate second-person singular is resumed.

9,7. ἀναγε ἐπὶ σαυτὸν καὶ ἴδε. With this important injunction Plotinus tells us that intellectual and spiritual awareness are produced not merely by external stimuli but, more importantly, by looking into our inner selves and making the soul like its objects, in this case by making the soul beautiful so that it can more fully perceive beauty. This idea has already occurred in 1.3,3–4, where soul is said to “make a statement by fitting [what it sees] with the form in it.” We can compare this with Plotinus's ethical theory, which implies that ethical conduct is both a prerequisite *and* a consequence of contemplative progress. See Smith 1974, 76–77. See also 5.8.2,41–46 for the same idea of seeing oneself beautiful within.

9,8–15. The long flow of this sentence expresses well the long, continuous, and relentless effort required to bring the inner self into harmony with the divine. It is not without rhetorical flourishes:

ὅσα σκολιά, ὅσα σκοτεινὰ καθαίρων ἐργάζου εἶναι λαμπρὰ
καὶ μὴ παύση τεκταίνων τὸ σὸν ἄγαλμα, ἕως ἂν ἐκλάμ-
ψειέ σοι τῆς ἀρετῆς ἡ θεοειδῆς ἀγλαία, ἕως ἂν ἴδῃς σωφρο-
σύνην ἐν ἀγνώ βεβῶσαν βάθρῳ. Εἰ γέγονας τοῦτο

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tricolon with lengthened third member:

ἀφαιρεῖ ... ἀπέξεσε ... ἐποίησεν

ἀφαίρει ... ἀπεύθυνε ... ἐργάζου

chiasmus: ἀπεύθυνε ὅσα σκολιά, ὅσα σκοτεινὰ ... ἐργάζου

repetition: ἕως ἔδειξε ... ἕως ἂν ἐκλάμψειε ... ἕως ἂν ἴδῃς

9,13. τεκταίνων τὸ σὸν ἄγαλμα. Cf. Plato, *Phaedr.* 252d7: καὶ ὡς θεὸν αὐτὸν ἐκεῖνον ὄντα ἑαυτῷ οἶον ἄγαλμα τεκταίνεται. In Plato, however, the statue is not the inner self but an image of the beloved, the object of physical desire. See Armstrong 1961, 112. A similar idea is found in 4.7[2]10,44–47: “For the soul does not, of course, ‘see wisdom and justice’ [Plato, *Phaedr.* 247d6] by making excursions but by contemplation within itself of itself and of what it was formerly, seeing them firmly fixed within itself like statues that have become tarnished with the passage of time and which it has now burnished” (Fleet). A comparable idea is found in Porphyry, *Marc.* 11.112,2–5: “The wise man ... must prepare by his wisdom a sanctuary for god in his mind, adorning it with a living statue, intellect, in which god has impressed his image” (Des Places); and in the fifth-century Platonist Hierocles of Alexandria, *Commentary on the Golden Verses of Pythagoras*: “He alone knows how to honor [the gods] who does not contaminate the dignity of those who are honored, and who makes it his foremost concern to present himself as a sanctuary, and works to make his own soul a divine statue and prepares his own intellect as a temple to receive the divine light” (31,21–32,4 Mullach).

9,14–15. σωφροσύνην ἐν ἀγνώ βεβῶσαν βάθρῳ. Cf. Plato, *Phaedr.* 254b6–7: μετὰ σωφροσύνης ἐν ἀγνώ βεβῶσαν βάθρῳ.

9,15. εἰ γέγονας τοῦτο. See also lines 21 and 23. The notion of becoming identical with the object of striving or contemplation is central to Plotinus. It is another expression of the idea that true knowledge is attained only when the thinking subject is identical with the object of its thinking (for which see 5.5.1–2). This is valid not only for the hypostasis Intellect

καὶ εἶδες αὐτὸ καὶ σαυτῷ καθαρὸς συνεγένου οὐδὲν ἔχων
ἐμπόδιον πρὸς τὸ εἶς οὕτω γενέσθαι οὐδὲ σὺν αὐτῷ ἄλλο τι
ἐντὸς μεμιγμένον ἔχων, ἀλλ' ὅλος αὐτὸς φῶς ἀληθινὸν μόνον,
οὐ μεγέθει μεμετρημένον οὐδὲ σχήματι εἰς ἐλάττωσιν πε-
ριγραφὴν οὐδ' αὖ εἰς μέγεθος δι' ἀπειρίας αὐξηθέν, ἀλλ' 20
ἀμέτρητον πανταχοῦ, ὡς ἂν μεῖζον παντὸς μέτρου καὶ παντὸς
κρεῖσσον ποσοῦ· εἰ τοῦτο γενόμενον σαυτὸν ἴδοις, ὅψις ἤδη
γενόμενος θαρσήςας περὶ σαυτῷ καὶ ἐνταῦθα ἤδη ἀναβε-
βηκὼς μηκέτι τοῦ δεικνύντος δεηθεὶς ἀτενίσας ἴδε· οὗτος 25
γὰρ μόνος ὁ ὀφθαλμὸς τὸ μέγα κάλλος βλέπει. Ἐὰν δὲ ἴῃ
ἐπὶ τὴν θεὰν λημῶν κακίαις καὶ οὐ κεκαθαρμένος ἢ
ἀσθενής, ἀνανδρία οὐ δυνάμενος τὰ πάνυ λαμπρὰ βλέπειν,
οὐδὲν βλέπει, καὶ ἄλλος δεικνύη παρὸν τὸ ὁραθῆναι δυνά-

but also for the intellect of the individual. This becomes even more complex when viewed dynamically, when Plotinus considers the ascent of the individual within the different levels of his or her own being, from that of perception to discursive reason (vested in the rational soul) and from discursive reason to intellection. For this transition to complete identity of subject and object at the level of our intellect, one may consult the first part of 5.3, already cited at 6.13 where it was noted that Plotinus uses the verb γίγνεσθαι three times to indicate that, in becoming intellect, we “become” completely other than what we were before.

9,22–24. The accumulation of participles in this sentence is a particularity of Plotinus’s condensed style of writing.

9,24. τοῦ δεικνύντος. Having no further use of a guide marks the point of transition from discursive reasoning, whether done privately or in the teaching context of the philosophical school, to a direct encounter with the object sought. See also 6.9.4,14–15 where, in speaking of the One, he says that before we have a personal encounter with it our discursive reason can only point the way (ὥσπερ ὁδὸν δεικνύντες) rather than give explicit directions, for teaching goes only so far as the road and the traveling (μέχρι γὰρ τῆς ὁδοῦ καὶ τῆς πορείας ἢ δίδασκεις), after which personal vision must be engaged (ἢ δὲ θεὰ αὐτοῦ ἔργον ἤδη τοῦ ἰδεῖν βεβουλευμένου).

μενον. Τὸ γὰρ ὁρῶν πρὸς τὸ ὁρώμενον συγγενὲς καὶ ὅμοιον
 ποιησάμενον δεῖ ἐπιβάλλειν τῇ θέᾳ. Οὐ γὰρ ἂν πώποτε 30
 εἶδεν ὀφθαλμὸς ἥλιον ἡλιοειδὴς μὴ γεγενημένους, οὐδὲ τὸ
 καλὸν ἂν ἴδοι ψυχὴ μὴ καλὴ γενομένη. Γενέσθω δὴ πρῶ-
 τον θεοειδὴς πᾶς καὶ καλὸς πᾶς, εἰ μέλλει θεάσασθαι θεόν
 τε καὶ καλόν. Ἡξει γὰρ πρῶτον ἀναβαίνων ἐπὶ τὸν νοῦν 35
 κάκει πάντα εἴσεται καλὰ τὰ εἶδη καὶ φήσει τὸ κάλλος
 τοῦτο εἶναι, τὰς ἰδέας· πάντα γὰρ ταύταις καλὰ, τοῖς
 νοῦ γεννήμασι καὶ οὐσίᾳς. Τὸ δὲ ἐπέκεινα τούτου τὴν
 τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ λέγομεν φύσιν προβεβλημένον τὸ καλὸν πρὸ
 αὐτῆς ἔχουσιν. Ὡστε ὁλοσχερεῖ μὲν λόγῳ τὸ πρῶτον

9,29. The most natural grammatical “subject” of this sentence (i.e., with the impersonal δεῖ) would be τὸ ὁρῶν, but τὸν ὀφθαλμόν or even τινα is possible.

9,35. πάντα ... καλὰ: πάντα and καλὰ are to be taken as predicative of τὰ εἶδη: “all of them beautiful.” The identity of beauty with the Ideas, the contents of Nous as a whole, as affirmed in 6,21, is once again expressed by the transition from all the Forms individually (πάντα τὰ εἶδη) to their identification as a single whole, τοῦτο: “and he will say that this is Beauty, the Ideas.”

9,36–37. τοῖς ... οὐσίᾳς is in apposition to ταύταις. By describing the Ideas as the product of Intellect, Plotinus is probably thinking both of the generation of the Ideas within Intellect as its essential activity of thinking and of the external effect of Intellect, through the Ideas, on all that is below it, which makes them beautiful (πάντα γὰρ ταύταις καλὰ), beginning with soul and the physical universe. For the soul as the product of Intellect, see V.1.7,42: νοῦ δὲ γέννημα λόγος τις.

9,39–43. ὥστε ὁλοσχερεῖ μὲν λογῷ τὸ πρῶτον καλόν...: “so in a rough sense it [the One] is the primal beauty...” Can the One (the Good) be also termed “the Beautiful”? The same question arises in the treatise *On the Categories* (6.2[43].18) and *On the Forms and the Good* (6.7[38].22), both composed in a later period. Clearly the question, which appears to be dismissed rather cursorily here in 1.6, is of some importance to Plotinus. In fact, it raises difficult issues about ascribing positive characteristics to

καλόν· διαιρῶν δὲ τὰ νοητὰ τὸ μὲν νοητὸν καλὸν τὸν τῶν
εἰδῶν φήσκει τόπον, τὸ δ' ἀγαθὸν τὸ ἐπέκεινα καὶ πηγὴν
καὶ ἀρχὴν τοῦ καλοῦ. Ἡ ἐν τῷ αὐτῷ τάγαθόν καὶ

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the nature of the One as ultimate principle. In 6.2 Plotinus seems happy enough to identify Beauty with Being, although he does initially suggest (18,1–4) that one might locate it somewhat higher, either with the One itself or rather with something “shining out from it” (οἷον ἀπόστιλβον): “As for the beautiful [τοῦ καλοῦ], if the primary Beauty [ἡ καλλονή] is that [transcendent First], what could be said about it would be the same and similar to what was said about the Good; and if it is that which, one might say, shines out upon the Idea [of beauty], [one would say that it is not the same in all] the Forms and that the shining on them is posterior.” In 6.7 Plotinus goes into greater detail; in chapter 22, while placing beauty at the level of Intellect, he suggests that it receives from the One a kind of illumination that gives life to that beauty (ἀργόν τε γὰρ τὸ κάλλος αὐτοῦ, πρὶν τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ φῶς λάβῃ 6.7.22,11–12). It should be noted that, as in 1.6, the immediate context for these remarks is the ascent of the individual soul and its experience of something above Intellect. But not content with this explanation, Plotinus returns once again to the same issue in chapter 32, where he refers to the Good (the One) as παντὸς καλοῦ ἄνθος (32,31) and states that its beauty is of a different order that is beyond beauty (32,28–29: τὸ κάλλος αὐτοῦ ἄλλον τρόπον καὶ κάλλος ὑπὲρ κάλλος) and in that “the primary beautiful, then, and the First is without form, and Beauty [ἡ καλλονή] is that, the nature of the Good” (33,21–23). Nothing could more clearly express Plotinus’s difficulty in delineating the nature of the One, which he wants to be not merely the cause of all that is beneath it but also in some way to be the totality of everything that exists, an idea most graphically expressed in the opening sentence of 5.2[11]: “The One is all things and not a single one of them; it is the principle of all things, not all things, but all things in a transcendent way; for in a sense they do occur in the One” (1,1–2). For a more detailed discussion of these passages concerning the location of Beauty, see Smith 2014.

9,40. διαιρῶν. Supply an indefinite subject: “if one makes distinctions in the intelligible world.”

καλὸν πρῶτον θήσεται· πλὴν ἐκεῖ τὸ καλόν.

9,43. πλὴν: an adverb meaning “in any case.” In other words, even if we do put Beauty and the Good on the same level (the One), beauty is still to be found in the intelligible world (ἐκεῖ).