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## SUMARIO

BÉLO, Tais Pagoto, Fulvia and Octavia: the female warrior's and the matron's coins.

*Resumen:* Este trabajo destaca a dos mujeres, Fulvia y Octavia, personajes muy distintos entre sí: la primera no fue un modelo a ser seguido, y la última, una verdadera matrona. Para desarrollar el tema se investigaron fuentes escritas y materiales, tales como monedas. Sabidamente se utilizaron algunas fuentes escritas de origen romano para construir las jerarquías de un discurso idealizado en perspectiva con el predominio del pensamiento masculino. Sin embargo, las monedas cuñadas con el busto de estas mujeres fueron analizadas bajo la luz de lo que se quería comunicar en aquella época, especialmente sobre las estrategias de género construidas por ocasión de su acuñación, lo que sugería cuestionar la manera cómo se presentaba al público Fulvia y Octavia. Para comprender el contexto en el que vivían estas mujeres, hay que tener en cuenta que, teóricamente, en el período de la República Romana y comienzo del imperio, la familia permanecía bajo el poder del *paterfamilias* (*patria potestas*). Se concluyó que Fulvia y Octavia demostraban una diversidad femenina advenida de diferentes fuentes, y estaban intrínsecamente constituidas de manera múltiple, asumiendo múltiples posiciones o jerarquías dentro de la amplia gama de discursos y prácticas sociales en su entorno.

*Palabras claves:* Mujeres romanas; género; monedas; propaganda; actividad pública.

*Abstract:* This paper aims to discuss the representation of two Roman women, Fulvia and Octavia, who were very different characters: the former was a model not to be followed; and the latter, a real matron. To work with this theme, written and material sources such as coins were used. It is known that Roman written sources were used to build hierarchies linked to an idealized discourse related to male domination. However, coins of these women were analysed in terms of what they wanted to communicate, especially the gender strategies built in their coinage, which suggested questioning how Fulvia and Octavia were presented to the public. To introduce the context in which these women lived, it should be borne in mind that, theoretically, the family remained under the power of the *paterfamilias* (*patria potestas*) at the period of the Republic and beginning of Empire. It was concluded that Fulvia and Octavia showed a female diversity in different sources, which were multiple constituted and took up multiple positions within a range of social discourses and practices.

*Keywords:* Roman women; gender; coins; propaganda; public activity.

DOMINGO SOLÁ, Gerard, Heródoto y el consejo al líder.

*Resumen:* El objetivo final de este artículo es poner de manifiesto la posible disyuntiva entre destino y racionalidad en la obra de Heródoto. Desde el punto de vista metodológico, se ha seleccionado un concepto, el consejo al líder, como medio para visualizar el trasfondo racional de la obra de Heródoto, inmerso en un contexto en que el destino lo controla todo. Para poner de manifiesto la diferencia entre las dos visiones del mundo (destino y racionalidad) se ha usado intencionadamente un método basado en gráficas que permite un contraste entre los resultados cuantitativos y las claves tradicionales en las *Historias* de Heródoto.

*Palabras clave:* consejo; líderes; consejeros; balance; destino.

*Abstract:* The final objective of this article is to highlight the possible dilemma between destiny and rationality in the work of Herodotus. From the methodological standpoint, a concept has been selected, the advice to the leader, to visualize the rational background of the work of Herodotus, in a world where fate rules everything. A graphical method was purposely utilized to show the rational analysis and highlight the difference between the two worldviews (fate and rationality), allowing a comparison between the results of a quantitative study and the traditional keys in Herodotus' *Histories*.

*Keywords:* advice; leaders; advisers; balance; destiny.

MARTINS, Maria Manuela Brito, The Problem of Evil in Plotinus.

*Abstract:* First the aim of my study is to focus on Plotinus's conception of evil, as presented in both Ennead I 8 [51]. However, this is not the only place that Plotinus speaks about this subject. In other treatises he speaks about the evil in a context of human freedom and destiny, like Ennead III, 1 [3, III, 2 [47] and III 3 [48] or in the Ennead IV 8 [6] On the descent of soul into bodies. The big difference between Enneads I, 8, and Enneads III and IV is that the treatises that touch on evil are being analyzed in terms of mainly anthropological and existential issues. On the contrary, in Ennead I 8 [51] the problem of evil has a mainly metaphysical and theodicy treatment. We will mainly analyze the notion of absolute evil, and its consequences for the notion of matter.

Second, we intend to address the possible esoteric influences on the issue of evil in Plotinus. We will try to argue that Plotinus, in the confrontation with the Gnostics, particularly in the treaty 33, that we find elements consonant with the treaty 51, and that come from a Christian and not a Gnostic influence. This one will be more esoteric than exoteric, contrary to the doctrine professed by certain Neoplatonists, after Plotinus, where exoteric and esoteric elements are mixed with philosophical thought.

*Keywords:* Evil; Good; Matter; Non-Being; Exoteric; Esoteric; Platonic; Neoplatonic.

MONTIEL VALADEZ, Daniel, Los ascetas o monjes tardoantiguos y su proyección filmica.

*Resumen:* En este artículo se compara la imagen de los primeros ascetas o monjes trasladada por diferentes películas ambientadas en la Antigüedad Tardía con la información histórica de esos mismos personajes. Se comprueba que sí hay traspaso de conocimiento



y que las películas presentan una imagen de los monjes primitivos como: soldados de Cristo contra la tentación de las mujeres (el demonio), santos con poderes mágicos, cristianos fanáticos y evangelizadores, en ocasiones violentos.

*Palabras clave:* imagen; ascetas; monjes; cine; Antigüedad Tardía.

*Abstract:* This paper compares the image of the first ascetics or monks appeared in different films, set in Late Antiquity with the historical information of these characters; and it verifies the transference of historical knowledge and a monk's image where they are: Christ's soldiers against women's temptation (the demon), saints with magical powers, fanatical christians and missionaries, sometimes violent.

*Keywords:* image; ascetics; monks; cinema; Late Antiquity.

ORTIZ CÓRDOBA, José, La depresión de Ronda entre el Alto Imperio y la Antigüedad Tardía: transformaciones, cambios y continuidades.

*Resumen:* En este trabajo presentamos las líneas generales de la evolución histórica del espacio urbano y rural en la depresión de Ronda durante el periodo imperial, prestando especial atención a los cambios que tuvieron lugar a partir de los siglos III-IV d.C. En este periodo la zona estudiada experimentó una serie de transformaciones que implicaron notables cambios respecto a la etapa altoimperial. Estas dinámicas se reflejaron tanto en las ciudades, que sufrieron una importante reestructuración de los espacios urbanos, como en el campo, donde se detecta un cambio en el régimen de propiedad en un contexto de progresiva concentración de tierras. Todo ello se produjo en un marco general caracterizado por el desarrollo de profundos cambios sociales y religiosos, pues la presencia de la nueva fe cristiana se documenta en las ciudades y estructuras rurales de la depresión de Ronda desde época temprana

*Palabras clave:* depresión de Ronda; *Acinipo*; *Arunda*; Alto Imperio; Antigüedad Tardía; cambio; continuidad.

*Abstract:* In this paper we present the general dynamics of the historical evolution of the urban and rural space in the depression of Ronda during the imperial period, with particular attention to the changes that happened in the 3rd-4th centuries AD. During this period, the area under study underwent transformations that implied notable changes respect to the high imperial period. These dynamics were reflected both in the cities, which suffered an important restructuring of urban spaces, and in the countryside, where a change in the property regime was detected in a context of progressive land concentration. All this took place within a general context characterised by the development of profound social and religious changes, as the presence of the new Christian faith is documented in the towns and rural structures of the depression of Ronda from an early period.

*Keywords:* depression of Ronda; *Acinipo*; *Arunda*; High Empire; Late Antiquity; change; continuity.

MARTÍNEZ CHICO, David, Anillo romano de plata con un raro cognomen: *Maricanus*.

*Resumen:* Esta nota tiene por objeto la publicación de un anillo de plata con una inscripción alusiva a su propietario: *Maricanus*. El nombre de dicho propietario representa un *cognomen* raramente documentado en el Imperio Romano. Además, el nuevo anillo puede fecharse entre los siglos I y II d.C.

*Palabras clave:* *Cognomina* latinos; epigrafía romana; anillos; onomástica.

*Abstract:* This note aims at publishing a Roman inscribed silver ring with Latin ownership inscription: *Maricanus*. The owner's name is a *cognomen* rarely documented in the Roman Empire. Furthermore, the new ring can be dated to between the 1st and 2nd centuries A.D.

*Keywords:* Latin *cognomina*; roman epigraphy; rings; onomastics.

# The Problem of Evil in Plotinus

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## *Abstract*

First the aim of my study is to focus on Plotinus's conception of evil, as presented in both Ennead I 8 [51]. However, this is not the only place that Plotinus speaks about this subject. In other treatises he speaks about the evil in a context of human freedom and destiny, like Ennead III, 1 [3, III, 2 [47] and III 3 [48] or in the Ennead IV 8 [6] On the descent of soul into bodies. The big difference between Enneads I, 8, and Enneads III and IV is that the treatises that touch on evil are being analyzed in terms of mainly anthropological and existential issues. On the contrary, in Ennead I 8 [51] the problem of evil has a mainly metaphysical and theodicy treatment. We will mainly analyze the notion of absolute evil, and its consequences for the notion of matter.

Second, we intend to address the possible esoteric influences on the issue of evil in Plotinus. We will try to argue that Plotinus, in the confrontation with the Gnostics, particularly in the treaty 33, that we find elements consonant with the treaty 51, and that come from a Christian and not a Gnostic influence. This one will be more esoteric than exoteric, contrary to the doctrine professed by certain Neoplatonists, after Plotinus, where exoteric and esoteric elements are mixed with philosophical thought.

*Keywords:* Evil; Good, Matter; Non-Being; Exoteric; Esoteric; Platonic; Neoplatonic.

## I. Introduction

From the origins of Greek philosophical tradition to the first centuries of Christianity, there is no other author who focused on the problem of evil and dedicated such attention to its study as Plotinus. In fact, at the beginning of the third century CE, Plotinus (204/-270) was one of the first philosophers to reflect on this matter and his writings would decisively mark all subsequent thought in this domain. At the dawn of Western philosophy, in the Pre-Socratic tradition, the question of evil was always associated to a religious-mythical order, such as Orphism, Pythagoreanism, or even in Empedocles of Agrigentum, who expressed some anticipatory ideas of Neoplatonic thought<sup>1</sup> in his *Purifications* (*Καθαρμοὶ*). Later, in Plato, no single dialogue of his work is dedicated to the theme of evil itself, even though the issue does come up in several dialogues, usually when talking of good combined with the theme of virtue. *Timaeus*<sup>2</sup> assumes here particular importance. In this Platonic debate, in the fight between virtue and vice, the winner is Good over Evil. With Aristotle the question of evil arises in different contexts, but still without an exclusive study on this matter. However, there are many *loci* where the question of evil is associated with other philosophical reflections, such as in his book *Physics* or in his biological treatises<sup>3</sup>.

In fact, as Benjamin Fuller argues, in his important study on evil in Plotinus: “the problem of Evil does not appear as a conceived philosophic problem before the time of Plato, even if it does so then. For Plato and Aristotle, it is certainly not an interesting or important problem. Neither faces it directly. They merely find that in the course of solving other and to them far more vital questions they have answered it” (1912: 25). Nevertheless, Plotinus does not only invoke Plato and Aristotle in his doctrine on evil, as he refers to other Pre-Socratic ancient philosophical traditions as well. They are not the only sources to inspire Plotinus’ reflections on the resolution of the problem of evil. Other traditions can be detected which Plotinus

1. Benjamin A. G. Fuller says in his study: “in the system of Empedocles [there is] a dualism of two principles contending for mastery over an inert world-stuff, which is curiously anticipatory of some Neo-Platonic thought” (1912: 26). Plotinus speaks on Empedocles, for instance, in *Ennead* II 4 [12] 7, 1 and IV 8 [6], 1, 17. In these two cases, Plotinus discusses the doctrine of Empedocles on the matter and the descending of the soul.

2. Later Platonism continued to work on this reflection throughout the centuries. However, it is not only *Timaeus*, but also the *Republic* and *Theaetetus* that address the subject of evil. Plotinus will develop the problem of evil based on a passage of *Theaetetus* in part two of his Treatise 51 I 8 [51] 1; 6: cf *Theaetetus* 176 a; *Timaeus*, 47 e - 48 a.

3. See Narbonne (1997: 87-103).

consciously or unconsciously adopted, such as the dualistic exoteric doctrine from Neo-Pythagoreanism<sup>4</sup> and Philonism<sup>5</sup>, as well as a certain gnostic tradition and an esoteric monism from Numenius. In this paper we will explore Plotinus' doctrine of evil, particularly in Treatise 51 (I 8), and we will try to discuss how the exoteric and esoteric tradition goes beyond the Gnostic tradition.

## II. *The Nature of Good and Evil as 'absolute evil' (I 8)*

In the first *Ennead*, Treatise 51, which Porphyry placed in the last Plotinus period in his compilation, the problem of evil is discussed based on questions Plotinus put forward: 1) where does evil come from?; 2) does it exist in all beings or just in some in particular?; 3) what is evil?; 4) how do we know evil?; 5) in what manner does one recognise evil in relation to Good? After having asked himself these questions, he went on to expose the nature of Good, as the origin of all things, existing within itself, and all things depending on it. Only the Good has the supreme power of being and does not have the necessity of another; it is the being of measure (μέτρον) and the limit (πέρας) of all existence. Plotinus takes up Aristotle's definition of the Good, as being the principle of all existence, and takes this idea further. In his endeavour to enter its very nature, Plotinus came up with the following explanation of the nature of evil:

“Now we must state what is the nature of the Good, as far as the present argument requires. It is that on which everything depends and «to which all beings aspire»; they have it as their principle and need it: but it is without need, sufficient to itself, lacking nothing, the measure and bound of all things, giving from itself intellect and real being, and soul and life and intellectual activity. Up to it all things are beautiful. But he is beautiful beyond all beauty (αὐτός τε γὰρ ὑπέκαλος) and is king in the intelligible realm transcending the best (ἐπέκεινα τῶν ἀρίστων)”<sup>6</sup>.

4. Simplicius (1862: 181-13); Cf. Diogenes Laertius (1964: 403); Fuller (1912: 37-38).

5. Fuller (1912: 38, n. 2) refers to Philo of Alexandria's doctrine on emanation. In this doctrine, the creation of the world has two causes: the active god creator and the other entirely passive, which is matter. The matter is a non-being which is, simultaneously, a substance: thus, the dualism in Philo. Cf. Vacherot (1844: 157-158): “Dans sa doctrine primitive, Philon ne voyait en ce Dieu ineffable et inaccessible que la puissance féconde, la source d'où émanent tous les êtres créés. Maintenant, sous l'influence d'une philosophie étrangère, il conçoit Dieu comme la cause finale de l'univers, comme le Bien. Sa doctrine cosmologique n'a rien de commun avec sa théologie traditionnelle. Il y a deux causes du monde, l'une active, qui est Dieu, l'autre passive qui est la matière”.

6. Plotinus, *Enneads* I 8 [51] 2 [trad. by Armstrong (Plotinus 1989: 281)]. We always use the Armstrong's translation of *Enneads*. We also use the edition of Henry & Schwyzzer (Plotini opera: 1983).

Plotinus says that if all things exist and if all beings depend on Good, then Good is above beauty and above the transcendent in its intelligibility. Therefore, the nature of Good can only be understood because of its attributes of essence and substance. There is in fact some similarities between the notion of Good in Plotinus and Numenius, for whom Good is understood as being the first God, Good itself or Good as the One<sup>7</sup>, even as its essence transcends<sup>8</sup>.

But what really concerns Plotinus at this point are the circumstances in which evil occurs and, for that reason, he must justify the question of how does evil appear or where does it come from? (πόθεν). In other words, why does evils (τὰ κακά) happen in this world? For the mystic philosopher, the crux of the matter to know the nature of evil, and to be able to define it, bearing in mind that Good is the origin of all things, and that they are good, since they simply exist. So, to what extent is evil a thing, if it is anything at all, and consequently to what purpose does its nature radiate? Plotinus states that evil cannot take form among beings, but, nevertheless, it is not beyond them. Evil can only belong to the non-being (μὴ ὄν). In fact, beings that emanate from the first emanatory are, in their essence, good as is the reality that underlies them. Compared to Good, evil cannot be included in the things that exist, nor in those that are beyond existence (τὸ ἐπέκεινα τῶν ὄντων). Therefore, if evil exists, it is a form of non-being and can be included in things that exist, as an image of being (εἰκὼν τοῦ ὄντος) or as something less than non-existent.

7. Numenius, *Fragments*, fr. 19: “The good is the One” [trad. by Des Places (Numenius 1973: 59). See also Guthrie (1917: 34). We know very little about Numenius’ life, except that he may have lived in the second half of the second century. He was born in Apamea, in Syria, but later he came to Rome. Owing to his natural birth and life he was influenced by oriental thought. Two of his better-known works reached us as in fragmentary condition: *On the Good*, *On the Dissension of the Academics from Plato*. Other treatises are known from the testimonies of Origen and Eusebius, such as the treatise *On Plato’s secret doctrines*, taken from Eusebius (*Praeparatio Evangelica* XIII, 4.4; fr. 23), and another important treatise, *On the indestructibility of the Soul* that we find in Origen *Against Celsus*. Numenius’s thought makes clear references to Moses and the Old Testament or to the God of the Jews, as we can read in the fragments: 29, 30-35. Waszink explains the information given by Numenius on Hebraic philosophy (1966: 35-78).

8. Numenius, fr. 2 ed. Des Places (Numenius 1973: 44)=Eusebius, *Prae. Ev.* XV, 22, transl. by Gifford (Eusebius of Caesarea 1903: 536): “and the good itself, in peace and benevolence, that gentle, gracious, guiding power, sits high above all being” (αὐτὸ δὲ ἐν εἰρήνῃ, ἐν εὐμενείᾳ, τὸ ἡρεμιον τὸ ἡγεμονικὴν ἴλω ἐποχοῦμενον ἐπὶ τῇ οὐσίᾳ). Plotinus uses the same verbal form (participle present middle passif) as Numenius, “ἐποχοῦμενον” I 1 [53] 8, 9, when he speaks of the first intelligible principle in relation to the soul: “Τὸν δὲ θεὸν πῶς; Ἡ ὡς ἐποχοῦμενον τῇ νοητῇ φύσει καὶ τῇ οὐσίᾳ τῇ ὄντως”. A similar language appears in Philon d’Alexandrie (1966: 318), when he explains the nature of God as a cause that is above all the Universe.

“If, then, these are what really exists and what is beyond existence, then evil cannot be included in what really exists or in what is beyond existence (ἐπέκεινα τῶν ὄντων); for these are good. So, it remains that if evil exists, it must be among non-existent things, as a sort of form of non-existence (οἷον εἰδός τι τοῦ μὴ ὄντος) and pertain to one of the things that are mingled with non-being of somehow share in non-being. Non-being here does not mean absolute non-being but only something other than being; not non-being in the same way as the movement and rest which affect being, but like an image of being or something still more non-existent. The whole world of sense is non-existent in this way, and also all sense-experience and whatever is posterior or incidental to this, or its principle, or one of the elements which go to make up the whole which is of this non-existent kind. At this point one might be able to arrive at some conception of evil as a kind of unmeasuredness (ἀμετρίαν) in relation to measure, and unboundedness in relation to limit, and formlessness in relation to formative principle, and perpetual neediness in relation to what is self-sufficient”<sup>9</sup>.

Plotinus bears in mind the *superior genera* of being, as given to us by Plato in *Sophist* 254 c-d, including evil in the category of non-being. However, Plotinus alerts us to the fact that this non-being cannot be understood as absolute, since only Good has such priority. But evil must not be understood as the ‘other’ of being, whose nature would be inscribed in other genera in relation to being, just as Plato searched for it in the *Sophist* 255 a - 258 b, where non-being is understood as other being ἕτερον τοῦ ὄντος, as part of motion (κίνησις) and rest (στάσις). What kind of non-being is this, then, which determines the nature of evil without itself being a substance? In fact, the philosopher from Alexandria, in chapter 3, refers to negative ‘categories’ of evil, taking Good as reference (τὸ ἀγαθόν). The negative categories could, together, determine a sort of substance (οὐσία) of evil<sup>10</sup>, which is not however substance, even though it is able to be determined as subject (ὑπόστασις)<sup>11</sup>. Plotinus does try to simultaneously define evil according to what it is, in itself (κακὸν τὸ μὲν αὐτό). Evil is defined by Plotinus in relation to Good, which is unmeasuredness (ἀμετρίαν) in relation to the measure, that which is unboundedness (ἄπειρον) in relation to limit (πέρας), that which is formlessness (ἀνείδεον) in relation to a formative principle (εἰδοποιητικόν); the ever-needy in relation to the self-sufficing (αὐταρκες) of the Good, always undefined (ἀεὶ ἀόριστον), always instable (οὐδαμῆ ἑστώς), taking in

9. Plotinus, I, 8 [51] 3, 1-17 (1989: 283).

10. Plotinus, I, 8 [51] 3, 18 (1989: 284).

11. Plotinus, I, 8 [51] 3, 21 (1989: 285).

all kinds of influences, never satisfied, and the most entirety of poverty (πενία παντελής). But for Plotinus, if there is an Absolute-Good, then, there should be an Absolute-Evil (κακὸν τὸ μὲν αὐτό) and, from it, the evil which subsists in something else should be derived<sup>12</sup>. For this reason, he claims and asks: what is unmeasuredness in relation to that which is unmeasured? And what is measure in relation to that which is not measured? Plotinus is rather concerned in this chapter with describing unmeasuredness as a kind of unity that includes the asymmetry to that which is the measure and the unmeasured. “But just as there is measure which is not in that which is measured, so there is unmeasuredness which is not in the unmeasured”<sup>13</sup>.

What Plotinus describes as negative categories and ‘absolute’ primal evil comes close to the negative attributes that Numenius gives to matter, in Fragments three and four<sup>14</sup>, reinforcing, thus, the negative character of matter, in relation to Plotinus.

Evil as non-being is not the absolute non-being, nor is it the ‘other’ of being, it is just the image of being, distinguishing itself from being a non-being, even if of a lower quality than the Platonic non-being. This lesser and inferior non-being is understood by Plotinus as everything that has been described across the negative categories of evil in relation to Good. The question we want to ask on this point is, in what kind of entity do all these forms of evil subsist, whose subject is not defined as being different, but as being itself? For an evil that occurs accidentally, a primal evil (τὸ κακὸν πρότερον) should exist and only, thereafter, can an evil change and subsist into something different. This is the reason why Plotinus, in chapter 4, states that regarding the nature of bodies

12. Plotinus, I, 8 [51] 3, 22-23 (1989: 285).

13. Plotinus, I, 8 [51] 3, 27-28 (1989: 285).

14. Numenius, fr. 3 ed. Des Places (Numenius 1973: 44)=Eusebius, *Prae. Ev.* XV, 17, transl. by Gifford (Eusebius of Caesarea 1903: 880): “But what then is being? Is it these four elements, earth, and fire and the other two intermediate natures? Are then these the real beings, either collectively or anyone of them singly? But how can they be, since they are both created and destroyed again, for we may see them proceeding one out of another and interchanging, and subsisting neither as elements nor as compounds? These cannot thus be a body with true being. But though not these, yet it is possible that matter may have true being? But for matter also this is utterly impossible, through want of power to continue. For matter is a running and swiftly changing stream, in depth, and breadth, and length undefined and endless”; fr. 4, ed. Des Places (Numenius 1973: 45)=Eusebius, *Prae. Ev.* XV, 17, transl. by Gifford (Eusebius of Caesarea 1903: 880): “So it is well stated in the argument that, if matter is infinite, it is undefined; and, if undefined, irrational; and if irrational, it cannot be known. But as it cannot be known it must necessarily be without order, as things arranged in order must certainly be easy to be known; and what is without order, is not stable; and whatever is not stable cannot have true being”.



and of their passions —insofar as they participate in matter as evil, even if it is not a primal evil—, the principle is to turn it into evil, instead of participating in Good, which consists in the complete privation of all good. “For since it is altogether without any share in good and is a privation of good and a pure lack of it, it makes everything which comes into contact with any way like itself”<sup>15</sup>. This altogether is the mixture (μέμικται) of the soul with matter because the soul is not outside matter (ἔξω ὕλης) or by itself<sup>16</sup>. This line of thought is closely followed by Proclus in *De malorum subsistentia*, 19, 51<sup>17</sup>, although Proclus criticizes the arguments of Plotinus on evil, in several places of his text (Opsomer 2001).

### III. *The “first evil” (τὸ κακὸν πρῶτον)*

As opposed to Aristotle and Plato, Plotinus considers a “first evil” which must be seen separately from a second evil. How do we then understand this “first evil” in the philosophical sphere? The philosopher from Alexandria describes it especially in chapter 5. The ‘loss of good’ is the fundamental reason for the «existence» of evil. It is that same ‘lack of good’ (ἔλλειψις τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ) that determines the nature of the first evil (τὸ κακὸν πρῶτον). In truth, the loss of good is, for the soul, the evil. Therefore, Plotinus explains this sense of loss of good, by looking into what this evil represents for the soul, when the loss of good occurs.

“But, if lack of good is the cause of seeing and keeping company with the darkness, then evil for the soul will lie in the lack [or the dark] and this will be primary evil - the darkness can be put second – and the nature of evil will no longer be in matter but before matter. Yes, but evil is not in any sort of deficiency but in absolute deficiency: a thing which is only slightly deficient in good is not evil, for it can even be perfect on the level of its own nature. But when something is absolutely deficient – and this is matter – this is essential evil without any share in good. For matter has not even being – if it had it would by this means have a share in good; when we say it ‘is’ we

15. Plotinus, I, 8 [51] 4, 23-24 (1989: 289).

16. Plotinus, I, 8 [51] 4, 14-15 (1989: 286).

17. Proclus Diadochus (1960). See, the chapter of DMS, 30-7, which points out Jan Opsomer and Carlos Steel (2003). But we think that in chapter 19, 51, there is a close dialogue with Plotinus, even if Proclus never mentioned his name, like the above translators say in the “Introduction”, (Opsomer & Steel 2003: 15): “Although Proclus speaks of predecessors in the plural and nowhere in the treatise mentions any of them by name, there can be no doubt that he primarily has Plotinus in mind”.

are just using the same word for two different things, and the true way of speaking is to say it ‘is not’. Deficiency, then, involves being not good, but absolute deficiency evil; great deficiency involves the possibility of falling into evil and is already an evil itself<sup>18</sup>.

The elliptical character of evil reveals itself to Plotinus as the real expression of evil, as the ‘loss of good’ and as ‘darkness (τὸ σκότος)’. For the soul, evil consists in the lack of good, and from there darkness arises. However, evil does not consist in a partial loss of good, but a complete loss of the good. On the other hand, if the loss of good is the first evil, and the frailty of the soul the consequence of that evil, the nature of evil does not consist in matter, but in something prior to it: ἀλλὰ καὶ πρὸ τῆς ὕλης. However, despite this consequence, Plotinus maintains that matter itself may be considered an evil. This paradoxical position regarding evil could be due to methodological reasoning, but it could have another meaning too<sup>19</sup>. For Plato, matter is considered a sort of ‘non-being’ or even as the ‘other’, the indeterminate, or the vessel of being and determination. For Aristotle, matter is conceived as formless, which is pure potentiality, or which has no qualification, or that which can become all things or as nothing at all. This same Aristotelian idea is found in the text of Plutarch (ca. 45-120 a.C) *De Iside et Osiride*, when he explains the reception of form by matter (Plutarch, 2003: 128). On the contrary, in the *Chaldean Oracles*, matter is regarded as the beginning of all evil<sup>20</sup>. The Byzantine author Michael Psellus (ca. 1018-1078), in his comments on the *Chaldean Oracles*, also agrees that the Chaldeans believed in the primordial One, and matter as the origin of evil<sup>21</sup>. In this sense, the exoteric tradition reinforces this dualism which Plotinus does not totally agree with; but this does not mean that this tradition was not introduced in Plotinus’ thought. We shall explore this point further ahead.

In fact, in chapter 7, the Plotinian argument that sensitive matter is the origin of evil, is put in question by Plotinus because, in chapter 8, he asserts that it is not matter that makes us evil, but our ignorance and our evil wishes.

18. Plotinus, I, 8 [51] 5, 1-15 (1989: 289-291).

19. Jan Opsomer defends the same meaning about the paradox of some arguments of Plotinus’ Evil: “Plotinus is not unaware of this paradox, and explicitly addresses the questions how something qualityless can be evil” (2007: 174-175). He quotes I 8 [51] 10, 1 and 12-15.

20. Michael Psellus, *Expositio in Oracula chaldaica* (PG 122, 1137C); fr. 88 (Michael Psellus 1971: 88).

21. Michael Psellus, “Scripta minora I”, (Michael Psellus 1971: 221).

Therefore, evil is much more form than matter<sup>22</sup>. In truth, Plotinian research on this matter is distinct in both contexts. In the first case, in chapter 7, the ὄλη is the last boundary that comes from the primal. Plotinus tries to explain matter as an end (ἔσχατον) drifting from the primal. Evil is what exists in the end of things, in the lower quality of things. Subsisting in evil, therefore, is a certain required characteristic of its real and concrete existence, on the one hand, and its final justification can only be understood within a cosmos-ontological formula, on the other.

“Now it is necessary that what comes after the First should exist, and therefore that the Last should exist; and this is matter, which possesses nothing at all of the Good. And in this way too evil is necessary”<sup>23</sup>.

In the second case, in chapter 8, evil is understood according to the acts of the soul, and so it is seen as a “complete absence of good”. In both contexts, matter is not seen in the same way by Plotinus. In chapter 7, matter is conceived as something concrete, and in chapter 8, matter gives way to an intelligible principle, introduced into matter, which is form. Therefore, Plotinus reinforces what he said in chapter 5, that evil itself is prior to matter. Just as Jean-Marc Narbonne comments, we find in Plotinus a conception of the essence of matter which agrees more firmly with another, that of sensitive beings<sup>24</sup>. It is, thus, in the forms in matter that evil exists.

“Then, too, the forms in matter are not the same as they would be if they were by themselves; they are formative forces immanent in matter, corrupted in matter and infected with its nature” (Narbonne 1993: 250-251)<sup>25</sup>.

22. Plotinus, I, 8 [51] 8, 9-10 (1989: 299). Denis O'Brien (1971: 144) displays a syllogistic argument to put the different agents playing their role in the cause and origin of evil: “The soul *is not* in itself evil: but the soul's weakness *is* a sufficient condition of human evil. Conversely, matter *is* evil itself: but the presence of matter is not a sufficient condition of human evil. We can put this in another way. There cannot be weakness without sin: while there cannot be sin without weakness. But there can be matter without sin: while there cannot be sin without matter”.

23. Plotinus, I, 8 [51] 7, 20-25 (1989: 299). We accept Denis O'Brien's thesis on integral emanatism. Evil turns out to be, therefore, at this point the central node of the larger problem for the Plotinian system.

24. See also what Plotinus says about «matter» on chap. 15: “If anyone says that matter does not exist, he must be shown the necessity of its existence from our discussions about matter where the subject is treated more fully”. Cf. *On the Two Kinds of Matter*, II, 4.

25. Plotinus, I, 8 [51] 8, 13-15 (1989: 301).

The «matter» of evil consists in an absolute deficiency of good. In chapter 5, Plotinus defines the complete accomplishment of evil, in a positive sense, as “in absolute deficiency”<sup>26</sup>. But beyond this duality, one intelligible and the other sensitive, another consequence results from this; evil as a metaphysical and ontological problem and evil in its species, that is, evil which is carried out by the soul, when it gives itself to vices; this is what qualifies the bad action of the soul. In this sense, Plotinus distinguishes a nature that is evil in “itself” from evils practiced by the soul. It is for this reason that Plotinus, in chapter 5, introduces the idea of a primal evil (πρῶτον κακόν), that which is in essence defined in chapter 8 as an unmeasured (πρώτος τὸ ἄμετρον κακόν) and, on a second level, the second evil (δευτέρως κακόν)<sup>27</sup>, that which becomes unmeasured (ἀμετρία γεγόμενον). He recaptures this same concept in chapter 8, to clarify the way the secondary evil works in its processes, by way of similarity and participation in relation to the lack of measure, seen as the primal evil. The second evil is understood by the Alexandrine philosopher as darkness, ignorance, and vice; it is a lack of measure with respect to the soul and seen as not “evil in itself” (οὐκ αὐτοκακόν). And as secondary evil is not “evil in itself”, so virtue (ἀρετή) is not primal good (πρῶτον ἀγαθόν) but only a virtue that resembles and participates in the primal Good<sup>28</sup>. In Ennead I, 7 [54] which deals with the first Good and the other Goods (Περὶ τοῦ πρώτου ἀγαθοῦ καὶ τῶν ἄλλων ἀγαθῶν) Plotinus describes the good of the soul and its activity, as the desire (ἔφεσις) for the supreme Good (ἀπλῶς ἀγαθόν). Just as the good of the soul depends on the desire for this good, distancing it from evil, so the evil itself implies the absence of desire for that good.

The Plotinian doctrine of evil hinges on two theories. On the one hand, in terms of a theodicy of a metaphysical and mystic nature, where evil sits in a dualism that is both cosmic and substantial. Plotinus makes a diatribe to deconstruct this dualism, by orienting his research towards a unilateral substantiality where evil is decidedly removed from the ‘other’, the Good. In Numenius’ thought the dualism between matter, as evil, and first principle as Good, is much more evident than in Plotinus<sup>29</sup>. Origen identifies this same dualism in his *De principiis*, where matter is identified with the sin<sup>30</sup>. Origen discusses the identification of

26. Plotinus, I, 8 [51] 5, 6-7 (1989: 289).

27. Plotinus, I, 8 [51] 8, 40 (1989: 303).

28. Plotinus, I, 8 [51] 8, 40-44 (1989: 303).

29. Numenius, fr. 52 ed. Des Places (Numenius 1973: 96): “Deum quippe esse (ut etiam Platoni videtur) initium et causam bonorum, silvam malorum”; Guthrie (1917: 11).

30. Origen (1980 : 415): Illud enim quod dicit Esaias: *Et comedet sicut faenum ulen*, id est materiam, dicens de eis, qui in suppliciis constituti sunt, materiam posuit pro peccatis.

matter with the sin in a Gnostic context, but at the same time, tries to understand it in the Holy Scriptures. On the other hand, Plotinus also removes himself from a whole tradition of a naturalistic nature, simultaneously rational and idealistic, whereby the beginning of evil is solely in the soul and probably to face those who affirm the non-existence of matter. Plotinus evaluates the presence of evil in its multiple expressions, using a forceful rather than rational argument to explain the essence of evil, and the consequence is that evil is neither a complete dualism, nor a complete uniformity<sup>31</sup>. Plotinus, thus, makes use of some of esoteric traditions that have been given to us through either philosophical or religious mythical thought, counter-balancing Aristotle's naturalism with a certain Platonic idealism and oriental mysticism. In fact, the philosopher was brave enough to explore an arduous theme, which the words of Benjamin Fuller clarify, about the most powerful capacity of Plotinian thought (1912: 333):

“By rejecting dualism and seeking to derive matter from the One, Plotinus defeats his own purpose, and refers evil to the One as its ground and cause. Like so many saints and sages who have dealt with our problem, he comes out by the same door wherein he went. His theodicy ends in the dilemma from which it started. Either God is not justified, or Evil is not explained”.

It seems that despite Plotinus' desire to explain the problem of evil, he wants to determine in a comprehensive inquiry what is the real meaning of evil in the existence of beings and what is beyond all existence. And what escapes all relative and natural existence, where evil is mixed with good, is the supreme Good, which is understood as “that which is beyond all substance, all activity and all thought”<sup>32</sup>.

31. As Narbonne points out (2011: 11), “When examining the reception of Platonism in late Antiquity, we can recognize three characteristic periods in the interpretation of the relation between the existence of evil and the generation of sensible matter. Regarding Middle Platonism – with authors such as Plutarch of Chaeronea, Atticus, Numenius, Cronius, Celsus and Harpocraton – it is matter (more specifically matter through an evil Soul, according to Plutarch, and through bodies, according to Harpocraton) which constitutes evil, but this matter is not itself generated, and therefore does not come from an anterior principle. Conversely, all of Plotinus' Neoplatonist successors do not consider matter to be an original reality, but rather one that stems from an anterior principle. However, this matter is no longer identified with evil. Plotinus alone (or nearly alone) would constitute an intermediary figure, since he would profess, on the one hand, the intrinsically evil character of matter, and would claim, on the other —although not always explicitly—, that this matter is generated”.

32. Plotinus, I, 7 [54] 1, 19-20 (1989: 270).

#### IV. *Exoteric or esoteric tradition in Plotinus?*

Plotinus' polemic against the Gnostics in the Enneads is well known, particularly in Ennead II, 9. However, the controversy extends to a debate that can be registered in a tetralogy, which comprises: the second, third and fifth Enneads: III [30] 8; V [31] 8; V [32] 5; and finally, II [33] 9. For Jean-Marc Narbonne, it is not just a matter of understanding this confrontation, limited to an anti-Gnostic cycle, generally understood as a *Großschrift*, but, above all, as a *Großzyklus*, covering the years 263-268, which extends to a set of treatises dating from the middle period of Plotinus' philosophical career, and during the time when Porphyry followed the master's life. The treaty 33 is precisely from this period and there are some similarities between this treaty and the treaty 53, which deals with the issue of evil.

In fact, in Treatise 33, Plotinus clarifies the distinction between the doctrines of Gnostic tradition and the doctrines of Greek philosophy, when he discusses the exegesis that the Gnostics make of the Platonic doctrine. Let's take a closer look at a significant passage from the treatise that exemplifies the Plotinian delimitation in relation to doctrines that are absurd, that is, they are *ἄλογοι*.

“And what ought one to say of the other beings they introduce, their «Exiles» and «Impressions» and «Repentings»? For if they say that these are affections of the soul, when it has changed its purpose, and «impressions» when it is contemplating, in a way, images of realities and not the realities themselves, then these are the terms of people inventing a new jargon to recommended their own school: they contrive this meretricious language as if they had no connection with the ancient Hellenic school, though the Hellenes knew all this and knew it clearly, and spoke without delusive pomposity of ascents from the cave and advancing gradually closer and closer to a truer vision. Some of these peoples' doctrines have been taken from Plato, but others, all the new ideas they have brought in to establish a philosophy their own, are things they have found outside the truth”<sup>33</sup>.

The expressions ‘exiles’ (*παροικήσεις*), ‘impressions’ (*ἀντιτύπους*) and ‘repentings’ (*μετανοίας*) are specific of the Gnostic doctrine, applied both to the soul and to the plurality of intelligibles in their relationship with the material and sensible order, which Plotinus criticizes.

33. Plotinus, II, 9 [33] 6, 1-12 (1989: 243).

For Plotinus, the doctrines of the Gnostics are founded outside the truth (ἔξω τῆς ἀληθείας εὔρηται). So, it seems very clear to him, that Hellenistic philosophy is superior to the teaching of the Gnostics, regarding some important subjects. For this reason, he claims that there is a difference between the ancient Greek philosophers and the Gnostics. Even if the Gnostics use the authority of the ancients, they have a high opinion of themselves, much higher than the Greeks, and for that reason, they do not understand their superiority. Furthermore, Plotinus blames the Gnostic doctrines in that they were in opposition to the ancient doctrines of the Greeks and contain inappropriate additions.

“... without in any way disparaging those godlike men but receiving their teaching with a good grace since it is the teaching of more ancient authorities and they themselves have received what is good in what they say from them, the immortality of the soul, the intelligible universe, the first god, the necessity for the soul to shun fellowship with the body, the separation from the body, the escape from becoming to being. For these doctrines are there in Plato, and when they state them clearly in this way they do well. If they wish to disagree on these points, there is no unfair hostility in saying to them that they should not recommend their own opinions to their audiences by ridiculing and insulting the Greeks but that they should show the correctness on their own merits of all the points of doctrine which are peculiar to them and differ from the views of the Greeks, stating their real opinions courteously, as befits philosophers, and fairly on the points where they opposed, looking to the truth and not hunting fame by censuring men who have been judged good from ancient times by men of worth and saying that they themselves are better than the Greeks. For what was said by the ancients about the intelligible world is far better, and is put in a way appropriate to educated men, and it will be easily recognized by those who are not utterly deceived by the delusion that is rushing upon men that these teachings have been taken by the [Gnostics] later from the ancients, but have acquired some in no way appropriate additions: on the points, at any rate, on which they wish to oppose the ancient teachings they introduce all sorts of comings into being and passings away, and disapprove of this universe, and blame the soul for its association with the body, and censure the director of this universe and identify its maker with the soul, and attribute to this universal soul the same affections as those which the souls in parts of the universe have”<sup>34</sup>.

34. Plotinus, II, 9 [33] 6, 36-60 (1989: 245-249).

The controversy between Plotinus and the Gnostics is proclaimed by Porphyry in the *Life of Plotinus*, chapter 16<sup>35</sup>, and we should keep in mind that it is not only the content of their doctrines that is important, but rather how they were carefully worked out, and for what purpose these doctrines were developed. He explains why the Gnostic teachings must be looked upon with some caution. He examines what is superficial, but also indebted to the Platonic tradition. In fact, the Gnostics have received from Plato their most important ideas: a) the immortality of the soul; b) the intelligible universe; c) the first Good; and, finally, d) the need of the soul to not have a relationship with the body and, therefore, the need of the essential being to escape from the world of generation and becoming. These doctrines can be found in Plato's theory. But, despite this, Plotinus criticizes the Gnostics in such a severe manner that we cannot consider H.-C. Puech's point of view when Plotinus treats them as «friends» (1960: 182-183). The major problem that must be focussed on is a better understanding of what the *corpus gnosticum* really means at the core of the Plotinian thought, and how Plotinus works out the Gnostic doctrine: was the Gnostic doctrine working with the exoteric or esoteric philosophical tradition, or both at the same time? Could Plotinus or his successors provide us with a deeper understanding of the difference between the exoteric doctrines, much in the same way as he or his disciples applied it to the distinction between the teaching of Gnostics and the teaching of Greek philosophy?

The Syrian philosopher Iamblichus (ca. 245-327 A.D) in his work *De vita Pythagorica* speaks about the exoteric doctrine of Pythagoras with these words:

“It is likewise said that these men expelled lamentations and tears, and everything else of this kind. They also abstained from entreaty, from supplication, and from all such illiberal adulation, as being effeminate and abject. To the same conception likewise the peculiarity of their manners must be referred, and that all of them perpetually preserved among their arcana, the most principal dogmas in which their discipline was chiefly contained, keeping them with the greatest silence from being divulged to strangers (πρὸς τοὺς ἔξωτερικοὺς), committing them unwritten to the memory, and transmitting them orally to their successors, as if they were the mysteries of the Gods”<sup>36</sup>.

35. For the history of Plotinus' dialogue with the Gnostics, we find a detailed description of the several places of the *Enneads* in Narbonne (2011: 6). We can find also important information in Puech (1960: 183).

36. Iamblichus 32.226 (1963: 218); Iamblichus, trans. by Taylor (1818: 116). In chapter 17, 72, Iamblichus uses the word ἔσωτερικοί understood as someone who is ‘disciple of the Pythagorean School’, which means ‘inside of this school’.



In his other work, *De communi mathematica scientia*, Iamblichus explains the Pythagorean doctrine and its disciples, showing the different kinds of teachings, as well as establishing who must be taught, what kind of matters these teachings correspond to and, finally, how they should be applied:

“In another way, they paid attention to their disciples, to find out what their capacity is, and how to help them, what things it is fitting to teach to beginners and what teachings to those making progress, what teachings should be considered as esoteric (τίνα ἔσωτερικὰ) and what teachings as exoteric (τίνα ἔξωτερικὰ), what things one could talk about and what teachings one should keep silent about, and to whom these teachings should be taught with the science of realities, and to whom they should be taught exclusively in a mathematical mode<sup>37</sup>.

For Iamblichus, the contexts of these two works show that exoteric or esoteric is a kind of teaching that belongs to a hierarchy of knowledge. The meaning of exoteric and esoteric teachings appears here as a kind of knowledge that belongs to a different level, even though he does not explain what this distinction is. The only thing he explains is that some teachings are for beginners and others for those making progress. We can find different contents in these two teachings: some should be considered esoteric and other exoteric. This distinction is generally accepted in some Patristic authors like Origen<sup>38</sup>, Clement of Alexandria<sup>39</sup>, and Gregorius of Nyssa<sup>40</sup>. Does this kind of definition have any similarity with the context of Plotinus’s controversy on the teaching of the Gnostics and the teachings of the ancient Greek philosophy? Do they, the teachings of the Gnostics, correspond to the Aristotelian conception of exoteric, which establishes an opposition between exoteric discussions and philosophical treatises?<sup>41</sup> We think

37. Iamblichus (1891: 62-63), translation by Luc Brisson, “Chapter 18 of the *De communi mathematica scientia*”. Translation and Commentary (translated from the French by Michael Chase) in Afonnasin *et al.* (2012: 46).

38. Origenes, *Contra Celsum libri octo*, (PG 11, 668B). In this context, Origen explains that the Stoics and the Peripatetics distinguish the exoteric from the esoteric philosophical writings.

39. Clemens Alexandrinus, *Stromata* V, 9 (PG 9, 89B).

40. Gregorius Nyssenus, *Contra Eunomium* XII (PG 45, 1016D).

41. In Aristotle, in some contexts of his work, the exoteric discussions are synonym of popular writings; they were discussions made for the public, or outside of the Peripatetic school: *Metaphysics*, M 1, 1076 a 28; *Nicomachean Ethics*, I 13, 1102 a 26; VI 4, 1140 a 3; *Politics* III 6, 1278 b 31. A similar idea is found in *Poetics* 1454 b 18, where Aristotle speaks about his published writings (ἐκδεδομένοις λόγοις). Cicero gives us the same idea in *De finibus* V, 5, 12: “Populariter scriptum quod ἔξωτερικόν appellabant”.

that these questions were insufficiently discussed and settled in Plotinus' thought. In several of his works, Aristotle elaborates on his exoteric texts. In *Metaphysics* he says that the discussions held outside his school belong to another kind of studies<sup>42</sup>. And in *Eudemian Ethics*, he refers clearly to these kinds of texts as 'exoteric studies', distinguishing them from the philosophical ones<sup>43</sup>. And Aristotle was always very interested in the exoteric doctrines taught by Plato.

On the other hand, we find a similar idea in Plutarch's *Adversus Colotes*, when he displays the Epicurean doctrine in relation to Plato's and Aristotle's Ideas. In his *Reply to Colotes*, Plutarch takes the opportunity to show the methodological approach of Aristotle in his exoteric dialogues. But, besides that, Plutarch's explanation gives a deeper understanding of the complexity of the reception of Platonic doctrine by other philosophical schools, and at the same time, displays how the dispute between Aristotle and Plato was understood. In fact, according to the testimony of Plutarch, Aristotle has, in these dialogues, a somewhat contentious view in his disagreement with the Platonic school, rather than an attitude of philosophical inquiry:

“As for the ideas, for which our Epicurean denounces Plato, Aristotle, who everywhere assails them and brings up against them every sort of objection in his treatises on ethics and on natural philosophy and in his popular dialogues (ἐξωτερικῶν διαλόγων), was held by some to be more contentious than philosophical in his attitude to this doctrine and bent on undermining Plato's philosophy – so far was he from following him. How frivolous can a man be! Not to inform himself of these men's views, then to father on them views that they did not hold, and in the conviction that he is exposing others to bring out in his own hand an exposure of his own ignorance and recklessness when he asserts that men who differ with Plato agree with him and that men who attack him are his followers!” (1967: 237).

Thus, for Plutarch, the exoteric dialogues mean necessarily that they contain matters outside the philosophical domain, and they do not represent any kind of mystical thought or even a mixture of eclectic ideas. Therefore, Plutarch

42. Aristotle, *Metaphysics* M 1, 1076a 28.

43. Aristotle, *Eudemian Ethics*, I 8, 1217 b 22: “But if we must speak briefly about them, we say first that to assert there is an idea not only of the good but of anything else in a logical and empty statement. The matter has been examined in many fashions, both in exoteric discussions and in philosophical one”; *Nicomachean Ethics* I 5, 1096 a 3, but in this context Aristotle use the expression ἐν τοῖς ἐγκυκλίοις that its literally meaning can be saying: in the current discussions or even texts that they are in public circulation.

extends the same understanding of Aristotle's view. For him exoteric texts or even exoteric ideas mean a kind of discourse, which, if it is not that philosophical, it is, at least, on the border of this domain<sup>44</sup>. But both Plutarch and Iamblichus are much more permeable to a greater influence of Gnosis and other religious currents exogenous to Hellenic thought than Plotinus himself. And this influence can be found, according to Plutarch, already in Plato, as John Dillon points out<sup>45</sup>. Therefore, when we confront the thought of Plotinus with the doctrines of the Gnostics, it seems that the Alexandrine philosopher saw them as a collection of writings that are not always within the domain of truth, in a deeper search for the intelligible essence. Hence, when we deal with the controversy between Plotinus and the doctrine of the Gnostics, on issues such as: a) the origin of matter; b) on the descending of the Soul; c) and on the origin of evil by matter or not, we are sometimes confronting theories outside of philosophical reflection, because, for Plotinus, the Gnostics were kept away from the philosophy of the ancients' authors. It's the reason why in his *Life of Plotinus* Porphyry call the Gnostics who come to hear Plotinus: "and sectarians who had abandoned the old philosophy (αἰρετικοὶ ἐκ τῆς παλαιᾶς φιλοσοφίας)". Porphyry declares (c. 16):

"There were in his time many Christians and others, and sectarians who had abandoned the old philosophy, men of the schools of Adelphius and Aculinus, which possessed a great many treatises of Alexander the Libyan and Philocomus and Demonstratus and Lydus and produced revelations by Zoroaster and Zostrianus and Nicotheus and Allogenes and Messus and other people of the kind" (1969: 44).

This passage is difficult to translate. H.-C. Puech identifies Χριστιανῶν with ἄλλοι and, as such, he identifies this group with some Christians, who were inspired by ancient philosophy. But we do not agree with this interpretation, because we need to determine who these αἰρετικοὶ are, who had abandoned (ἀνηγγμένοι) the ancient philosophy. The text says that they are αἰρετικοὶ not because they are Christians, but because they had abandoned the old philosophy. Furthermore, the

44. When consulting the TLG —*Thesaurus Linguae Graecae*— : <http://tlg.uci.edu/Iris/canon/csearch.jsp> we found three fundamental meanings: 1) ἐξωτερικός, η, ον as synonymous of external, belonging to the outside; 2) as the meaning of popular arguments or treatises; 3) as an adverb comparative of ἔξω – more outside; hence later, it is used as an adj. ἐξωτερικός, outer.

45. Dillon (1996: 203): "Plutarch, as in all probability Ammonius before him, seems to have been stimulated in his interpretation of Plato (as perhaps was Plato himself in making the suggestion) by a study of Persian religion. At De Is. 369E, he bestows high praise on the Zoroastrian theology referring to it as the 'opinion of the majority of the wisest men'".

conjunction copulative καὶ in the sentence allows us to distinguish Χριστιανῶν πολλοὶ from ἄλλοι, even if both must be understood in relation to: “some of the Christians and others (who are not Christians), have abandoned the old philosophy”. The solution given by Puech does not solve the problem, but rather amplifies it. If these *airetikoi* correspond only to the *Christianoi* we may ask, why had they abandoned the old philosophy? Which meaning does Porphyry apply in this context to the word *airetikoi*: in a religious or in philosophical sense? Are they *airetikoi* because they had abandoned the true Christian religion or rather because they had abandoned the old philosophy? Porphyry lists in the text the names of these sectarians, and in all of them we must include individuals, Christian Gnostics or not, who possess a large variety of writings from Alexander the Libyan, producer of the revelations of Zoroaster<sup>46</sup>. Plotinus often attacked their doctrine in his lectures, as did some of his disciples, like Porphyry himself, and Amelius, who extended this response.

#### V. *Is matter the origin of evil in the soul?*

Plotinus ratifies the words of Porphyry, when he says, in the *Fifth Ennead*, Treatise 10 (V 1) that his thought is not something new, or an invention of ‘today’ but it comes from the ancient Greek authors. He takes himself as an exegete of these old philosophical theories and gives testimony to them<sup>47</sup>. To some extent, for Plotinus, the Gnostics are working with theories that come from the ancient Greek philosophy. In Treatise 51 (I 8), 13, Plotinus shows that he is working with different traditions; we need to understand what tradition he applies and if it is inside or outside the philosophical tradition. When he raises the question of the weakness of the Soul that comes from matter, it seems that he is working with both. Jean-Marc Narbonne (2011: 7) has pointed out that “Treatise 51 must be considered as a conclusion of sorts to the criticism of Gnosticism developed more specifically in 33 (II 9), 10-12”. Nevertheless, even if it is true that Plotinus uses the Gnostic thesis, it is also true that there is in Plotinus’ doctrine of evil a “dense anti-Gnostic argumentation”. And more than this, there is a need to clarify what, in Plotinus, is derived from Gnostic thought and what does he

46. The *Vita Plotini*, 16 is the fundamental reference to the Gnostics. With The Library Gnostic, discovered in 1945, near the *Nag Hammadi*, we can understand better these Gnostics and who they are in Plotinus’ circle and that of his disciples. This library contains hermetic writings, Sethians and Gnostics, which are the same doctrines that Porphyry identifies in his *Vita Plotini*. Cf. *The Nag Hammadi Library in English* [rev. ed.]. Ed. J. M. Robinson. Leiden, Brill, 1966.

47. Plotinus, V, 1 [10] 8, 10-13.

owe to other schools of thought. The Plotinian filiation in Numenius could lead us to another source of his thought on evil. It seems that for both Plotinus and Numenius the evil comes from necessity:

“We must consider, too, what Plato means when he says: «Evils can never be done away with» but exist «of necessity»; and that «they have no place among the gods but haunt our mortal nature and this region forever»<sup>48</sup>.

We can find in some fragments of Numenius, the necessary existence of evils in the world. Guthrie considers that this passage from Plotinus is taken from Numenius' fragment 52, that we recovered in Calcidius, in his commentary to *Timaeus*:

“The Stoics and Pythagoras agree that matter is formless and lacking in qualities. Pythagoras however considers it evil; the Stoics, however, as neither good nor evil. But if you ask these same Stoics from where comes the evil, they are wont to assign as its cause the *perversity* of its *germs* (*perversitas seminarum*). Nevertheless, they are unable to go further and in turn explain this perversity inasmuch as their teachings allow only for two principles of the world: God and matter; God, the highest and supereminent Good and indifferent matter. Pythagoras, however, does not hesitate to defend the truth, even if he has to do so with assertions that are remarkable, and contradict the universal opinions of humanity. For he says that evils must exist necessarily, because of the existence of Providence, which implies the existence of matter, and its inherent badness. For if the world derives from matter, then must it necessary have been created from a precedingly existing evil nature. Consequently, Numenius praises Heraclitus, who finds fault with Homer for having wished that all evils might be so eradicated from life as to evanesce. (...) Unfortunately, Homer seems to have forgotten that evil was rooted in matter and that in thus desiring extermination of evil he was in realty evoking the destruction of the world”<sup>49</sup>.

The major difference between Plotinus and Numenius consists in the dualistic way of thinking evil. Plotinus rejects this dualism, as we can read in

48. Plotinus, I, 8 [51] 6, 1-3 (1989: 291-293). Cf. Guthrie (1917: 60). *Numenii Fragmenta*, 16,17; and: I 4 [46] 11; III 3 [48] 7.

49. Numenius, fr. 52 ed. Des Places (Numenius 1973: 96-97)=Calcidius in *Timaeum*, c. 295-299 (Waszink 1962: 297). Translation modified from K. Sylvan Guthrie, *Numenius of Apamea*. fr. 16 (1917: 10-12). Translation has been slightly modified.

this same section. Plotinus addresses the question of evil in matter and gives a first solution, upholding consistently that the *ἀτοκακόν* is the *unmeasuredness* (*ἀμετρία*) and the darkness (*σκοτός*) in chapter 8. We find a similar language in Philo of Alexandria when he speaks about the creation of the World by God, which is the Light, and the darkness is the sensible world and the opposite<sup>50</sup>. In chapter 13 of I 8, Plotinus describes how we can understand evil in the soul. Emile Bréhier saw in this passage a reminiscence of Philo:

“One will contemplate it with the contemplation which belongs to absolute evil, and participate in it when one becomes it; one enters altogether into «the region of unlikeness» when one sinks into it and has gone falling into the mud of darkness (*βόρβορον σκοτεινόν*); for when the soul is fallen utterly into utter vice, it no longer *has* vice, but has changed to another nature, a worse one (for vice which is mixed with anything of its contrary is still human). So it dies, as far as the soul can die, and its death, while it is still plunged in the body, is to sink in matter and be filled with it, and, when it has gone out of the body, to lie in matter till it raises itself and somehow manages to look away from the mud (*βόρβορον*); this is «going to Hades and falling asleep there»<sup>51</sup>.

Bréhier points out that this idea of a mud of darkness can to some extent be found in Philo, meaning a place of death for the soul, similarly to Plotinus<sup>52</sup>. The *βόρβορον σκοτεινόν* means a place, but at same time, the image the Soul can figure out of this place when it goes to Hades. Plotinus gives this idea of *βόρβορον* as: “going to Hades and falling asleep there”<sup>53</sup>. The “region of unlikeness” is an expression that we find in Plato, its origin coming from Orphic views<sup>54</sup>. In fact, we can speak of a reminiscence of Philo in Plotinus through Numenius and this may, perhaps, comprise another way of understanding Plotinus. Numenius was

50. Philon D’Alexandrie, *De fuga et inventione* § 135 (1966: 202); *Quis rerum divinarum heres sit*, § 86. Here we find the difference between the light and the darkness.

51. Plotinus, I, 8 [51] 13, 15-25 (1989: 309-311).

52. Plotin (1976: 127-128, n.1): “Le bourbier, et un peu plus loin, la mort de l’âme et le Hadès sont des images des plus ordinaires dans la piété néoplatonicienne; comp. Philon d’Alexandrie, *Quis rerum divinarum heres sit*, 79; *De mutatione nominum*, 107.” The expression *βόρβορον* is found on Plato: *Phaedo*, 69 c; The expression *βορβορώδης* is found also in *Phaedo* 111 d, and in Aristotle *Historia animalium* 547 b 20.

53. Plotinus, I, 8 [51] 13, 25 (1989: 310). We find the same word in Clement of Alexandria’s *Stromata* V, 8 (PG 46 81) when he explains the use of symbolic and secret meanings in philosophy.

54. Cf. Plato, *Politics* 273 D 6 – E. This is what Augustin understand by ‘regio dissimilitudinis’ in the *Confessions* VII, 10, 16.

read carefully by Origen and Clement of Alexandria, and this does not mean a Gnostic reading.

But despite this, we cannot affirm or say that for Plotinus matter is the cause of evil in the soul. And, at this precise point, we consider that the problem of evil, in Plotinus' treatise 51 and 33, shows precisely that this is not so the case. Suffice it to mention that in II, 9, chapter 12 Plotinus rejects the idea of considering the sensible world as something negative and matter as the cause of evil, contradicting the Gnostic thesis. In treatise 51, Plotinus also mentions that evil in the soul is a second evil. Consequently, the Gnostic theses are dismantled by Plotinus. However, there is an influence that does not come from the Gnostics and that seems to us closer to Christianity than to Gnosis.

Without intending to give a complete answer, in this study, we try to understand the Plotinian conception of evil through other filiations, other than the Gnostics, and we have tried to show that we must search deeper into the Plotinian text to examine this issue more thoroughly.

## VI. *Some conclusions*

The exegesis of the *Enneads* of Plotinus is always challenging, especially when we want to understand his philosophical background. The question of evil is one of the major problems discussed by Plotinus, and one of the best philosophical understandings of it. In this inquiry, he uses a dialectic method that implies a concatenate of arguments, but simultaneously, and most probably, the contributions from different traditions. It was our intention to give here an outline of some important points of Plotinian thought on evil and we have tried to explore other philosophical or religious sources, such as, for example, Christians, to which Plotinus would have paid attention<sup>55</sup>. The esoteric doctrines comprise one of our own lines of inquiry into this explanation.

In our opinion, Gnostic thought is not the only one that should be explored in Plotinus's thought on evil. In fact, the paradoxical method of Plotinus and his attack of the Gnostic thesis should be seen considering other influences that could lead us to better understand his writings and his thought. Our fundamental aim was to understand some issues of the doctrine of evil in Plotinus, starting with the influence of the «esoteric» doctrines, which, in the context of Platonic exegesis and as a counterpoint to the Gnostic theses, may be related, in the first place, with the enigmatic and cryptic character of Plato's doctrine. Plotinus says

55. See for example, the allusion to Christian monotheism: II 9 [33] 9, 33-39.

in several passages of the *Enneads* that Plato expressed himself enigmatically on various themes: “And Plato speaks riddling the way in which intellect sees the idea in the complete living creature observing of what kind they are and how many they are”<sup>56</sup>.

Therefore, on the one hand, we follow “the Gnostic line” *stricto sensu*, which stems from an anti-Gnostic position. On the other hand, we sought to determine if there could have been other filiations in Plotinian thought that were not necessarily Gnostic or anti-Gnostic. The subject of evil allows us to justify that Plotinus does not have such a negative conception of sensible matter as it is considered by the Gnostics and by some Middle-Platonics. The principle of evil according to Plotinus is prior to sensible matter. Furthermore, there is a doctrinal Plotinian coherence about the origin of evil, both in treaty 33 and in treaty 5, regarding the origin of evil. In both, evil does not have its origin in sensible matter, but in something prior to it. This position is contrary to the Gnostic theses and to Platonic and Middle Platonic thought, of Neo-Pythagorean influence. Plotinus not only does not attribute to sensible matter the sole foundation of evil, as happens with the Gnostics, but he also does not attribute to it any identity capable of opposing the integral emanation that comes from the supreme Good, from the intelligence and, finally, from the soul of the world. We therefore take the problem of evil as a reason to explain the Plotinian position, which contains esoteric elements, but not exoteric ones, in the sense given to it by the Middle Platonic or Neoplatonic authors, much later than Plotinus.

In this sense, we think that there is still much that needs to be done to achieve a more comprehensive understanding of Plotinus’ writings and his background.

56. Plotinus VI 2 [43] 22, 1-5. There are several passages in the *Enneads*, where Plotinus says that Plato expressed himself in an enigmatic way about his doctrine: I, 6, 6; III, 4, 5; III, 5, 2; IV, 8, 1; IV, 2, 2; IV, 3, 12; V, 1, 7; V, 8, 4; VI, 18, 19; VI, 9, 11; VI, 9, 9.



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