

Neoplatonism

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Abstract

The term “Neoplatonism” refers to a philosophical school of thought that first emerged and flourished in the Greco-Roman world of late antiquity, roughly from the time of the Roman Imperial Crisis to the Arab conquest, i.e., the middle of the 3rd to the middle of the 7th century. [...]

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1\ Historical Orientation: Antiquity

Rightly or wrongly, the Egyptian-born Plotinus (204/5–270) is commonly regarded as the founder of Neoplatonism. He was a pupil of the Alexandrian philosopher Ammonius Saccas (3rd century), who reportedly did not publish anything and remains one of the most enigmatic philosophers of all antiquity. [...]

2\ The One

What was it that made the radically top-down idealism of the Neoplatonists so appealing?

Disregarding in this context the religious\sentimental appeal Neoplatonism undoubtedly must have had and perhaps still has, its *philosophical* attractiveness and significance lies in the fact that it offered a maximum of explanatory power on the basis of just one metaphysical principle. [...]

3\ Absolute Consciousness

In accordance with the Platonic\Aristotelian commitment to Mind over Matter the Neoplatonists' answer to this question was that the outer activity and effect of the First must be *nous*, a difficult and ambiguous concept commonly translated as "Intellect". [...]

4\ Soul and Nature

According to the second law of thermodynamics, structural and dispositional diversities present in the inanimate material world converge towards irreversible entropy and disorder. In the biosphere, however, we witness a tendency to ever increasing diversification of natural kinds and species. [...]

5\ Matter

Without light, it would not make any sense to speak of darkness. In fact, there would be no such thing as darkness, since darkness is, if it is anything, light's absence and opposite. In the same way as darkness is a by-product of light, so matter, the Neoplatonists reasoned, is nothing but a by-product of the dynamic emanation of the First. [...]

6\ Ethics

As human beings we are, with our bodies, part of the material world; but importantly, we are living organisms that can place ourselves in opposition to the needs and concerns of the body and reflect upon our own condition. [...]

7\ Later Developments in Antiquity

At a time when the considered wisdom of Greece and Rome came under increasing pressure to rearticulate its commitments in the face of waves of novel movements that lay claim to revelatory truth, the Neoplatonists too strove to refine their teachings and to delineate the metaphysical architecture of the world as they saw it. [...]

8\ Influence

It is an undeniable fact, although nowadays rarely acknowledged, that the general outlook

and the principal doctrines of the Neoplatonists proved exceedingly influential throughout the entire history of western philosophy. [...]

Bibliography

Essential readings of late\-antique Neoplatonic Works

- Plotinus, *Enneads*
- ---- I 1 (*What is the Living Being and what is Man?*)
- ---- I 2 (*On Virtues*)
- [...]

Selected Introductory Secondary Literature

- Chiaradonna, Riccardo and Franco Trabattoni (eds.), 2009, *Physics and Philosophy of Nature in Greek Neoplatonism*, Leiden and Boston: Brill.
- Cooper, John M., 2012, *Pursuits of Wisdom: Six Ways of Life in Ancient Philosophy from Socrates to Plotinus*, Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, Ch. 6\.
- [...]

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Other Internet Resources

- [Enneads](<http://classics.mit.edu/Plotinus/enneads.html>), translated by Stephen Mackenna and B. S. Page.
- [Porphyry's *Isagoge*](http://www.tertullian.org/fathers/porphyry_isagogue_02_translation.htm), translated by Octavius Freire Owen, hosted at The Tertulian Project.

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