Seriousness and Playfulness in Plotinus' Enneads

Roman T. Ciapalo

Loyola University Chicago

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SERIOUSNESS AND PLAYFULNESS

IN PLOTINUS' ENNEADS

by

Roman T. Ciapalo

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of Loyola University of Chicago in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts

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VITA

The author, Roman Theodore Ciapalo, is the son of Peter Ciapalo and Oksana (Sawyn) Ciapalo. He was born on May 12, 1950, in Quilmes, Argentina.

His elementary education was obtained in the public schools of Quilmes, Argentina, and in St. Nicholas School, Chicago, Illinois. His secondary education was obtained in St. Ignatius High School, Chicago, Illinois, where he graduated in 1968.

In September, 1968, he entered Loyola University, Chicago, Illinois, and in June, 1972, received the degree of Bachelor of Arts with a major in philosophy.

In September, 1972, he was granted an assistantship in philosophy at Loyola University, Chicago, Illinois. From September, 1973, to June, 1975, he was president of the Graduate Students Philosophy Association at Loyola University. In February, 1978, he was awarded the Master of Arts in Philosophy.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

From antiquity to the present, \(^1\) seriousness and play have been topics of considerable discussion and writing (with play being the more popular of the two). Contemporary literature on play seems to deal not so much with its philosophical meaning and application as with its psychological, sociological, and even theological dimensions and its practical application in man's everyday life. \(^2\) For some

\(^1\)Discussions of play are found in Plato, for example, (Republic, 4, 425a and 7, 336a; and Laws, 2, 667d sq. and 7, 803c sq.) and also in Aristotle (Nichomachean Ethics, 4, 1128 a ff. and 10, 1176b ff.). An excellent survey of early primary literature on play and seriousness can be found in Hugo Rahner, Man at Play, translated by Brian Battershaw and Edward Quinn (New York: Herder and Herder, 1967), pp. 11-45. Johann Huizinga, Homo Ludens, A Study of the Play Element in Culture (Boston: Beacon Press, 1950) also contains a comprehensive study of the history of play.

contemporary thinkers, then, play is an important aspect of man's physical and intellectual development and, hence, is a serious and necessary part of life.

This position is best expressed by Hugo Rahner who, in *Man at Play*, defines play as

... a human activity which engages of necessity both soul and body. It is the expression of an inward spiritual skill, successfully realized with the aid of physically visible gesture, audible sound and tangible matter ... As such it is precisely the process whereby the spirit 'plays itself into' the body of which it is a part.

And so we talk of play whenever

... the physically visible has become the expression of an inner fullness that is sufficient to itself. Play is thus an activity that is undertaken for the sake of being active, meaningful but directed towards no end outside itself.  

In this book Rahner also analyzes systematically, though often not very intensely, the positions which a number of thinkers have taken on play and seriousness. Included in this survey are the views of Plotinus as found in certain passages from the *Enneads* which Rahner has carefully chosen for their information on seriousness and play. However, these passages are often misinterpreted by him and thus seem to support his position on play. We shall return to Rahner's

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interpretation of Plotinus later in this chapter.

From this survey Rahner concludes that only the man whose foundation is in the reality of God and who can conceive of his life and of all the happenings in the world as a single great theatrical performance (because he knows something of the secrets behind the stage) can call life on earth a game and a shadow play. And only thus

... does gay melancholy become both possible and justified, the mood which must always govern the Christian, the true *homo ludens*, as he follows his middle road. Love for the world and rejection of the world—both of these must draw him and he must at one and the same moment be ready to fold that world in his embrace and to turn his back upon it.⁵

Thus, for Rahner, man is fully real only when his life consists of proper amounts of both seriousness and play. Life has this dual character: "it is gay because secure in God, it is tragic because our freedom continually imperils it, and so the man who truly plays must be both gay and serious at the same time."⁶

Plotinus, however, argues that there is a radical contrast between seriousness and play. It is equivalent to the contrast between philosopher and non-philosopher and, ultimately, between reality and unreality.

In one of his later treatises, for example, Plotinus says that "in the events of our life here it is not the soul within but the outside shadow of man which cries and moans and

carries on in every sort of way as though on a stage which is the whole earth . . . Doings like these belong to a man who knows how to live only the lower and external life and is not aware that he is playing in his tears, even when they are [for him] serious tears. For only the serious part of man can treat serious affairs seriously; the rest of man is a toy. But toys, too, are taken seriously by those who do not know how to be serious and are toys themselves. If anyone joins in their play and suffers their sort of sufferings, he should realize that he has only tumbled into a children's game and he must put off this play costume" (III, 2 [47], 15, lines 45-57). 8

In another late treatise he remarks that "the serious man has already reasoned even when he reveals what he has in himself to another; but with respect to himself he is vision. For

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[7] In the Liddell-Scott Greek-English Lexicon (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1968), p. 1630, σοφικτος means "in haste, quick, . . . in ordinary use denoting energy or earnestness." When used to describe persons it means "earnest, serious, . . . active, zealous." It also means good or excellent, both in the general and moral senses. The adverbial form is translated as "with haste or zeal, seriously, earnestly, well, . . . most carefully, in the best way." The man who is σοφικτος, then, is both intellectually astute and morally good. Furthermore, he pursues his interests not haphazardly but with zeal and care. Therefore, here and throughout this thesis we shall translate δοφικτος as "the serious man" and not as "the wise man" or "the truly good and wise man." These latter expressions are inaccurate and will only lead us away from Plotinus' intended meaning.

[8] Here and elsewhere in this thesis we shall refer to portions of the Enneads as follows: (III, 2 [47], 15, lines 45-57) where III refers to the Ennead, 2 to the treatise, [47] to the chronological position of the treatise according to Porphyry's ordering, and 15 to the chapter.
already he is turned toward the One and toward the quiet which is not only of what is outside, but also of what is in relation to himself; and all is within him" (III, 8 [30], 6, lines 37-40).

The playful man, for Plotinus, is concerned only with the needs of the body and the shallow pursuits of everyday life—and therefore with unreality; while it is the philosopher or serious man who plumbs the depths of reality and truth. He alone becomes serious and real, then, who achieves unity within himself and with the Primal Reality, the One or Good.

These few brief remarks will serve to introduce us to the purpose of our thesis: to study those texts in which Plotinus speaks of seriousness or play in order to make explicit what seriousness means and why it alone is the proper state for man. Furthermore, because it is the serious man who is unified with the Primal Reality, the One or Good, our examination of seriousness will help us to achieve a better understanding of what "to be real" means for Plotinus and thus will provide a significant insight into his entire Weltanschauung.

Although there are, as we have already mentioned, many studies which are wholly or partially concerned with seriousness and play in general, little or no work has been done on these notions specifically as they appear in Plotinus' Enneads.

This conclusion was reached after first consulting Bert Marien, "Bibliografia Critica degli Studi Plotiniani" (Bari: G. Laterza & Figli, 1949; in V. Cilento, Plotino Enneadi, Vol.
3, Part 2, pp. 391-622). There we found that no work had been done ex professo on seriousness or play in the Enneads prior to 1949.

Furthermore, no work has been done ex professo on seriousness or play in the Enneads since 1949, as anyone consulting apposite volumes of J. Marouzeau, Juliette Ernst, et al (eds.) L'année philologique (Paris: "Les Belles Lettres," 1949 sqq.) can discover.

But are there studies done since 1949 which, though they do not mention seriousness or play in their titles, nevertheless are devoted to topics linked to seriousness by Plotinus (e.g., the One, inner and outer man, contemplation, soul, ἐνδιάμονα)? And are there studies in which there are discussions of passages in the Enneads furnishing us with key texts on seriousness (i.e., III, 8 [30], 6 and 8; III, 8 [30], 1; I, 4 [46], 9 and 11; III, 2 [47], 15)? In sampling such secondary literature we asked the following two questions: Does the work deal with a topic which is other than, yet relevant to, seriousness or play in the Enneads? Secondly, does the work discuss a passage from the Enneads which is a part of a key text? The survey which follows illustrates that few if any works thus approached contained discussions of seriousness or play.

We have already noted that Rahner, in a portion of his book on man at play, treats the views of Plotinus on seriousness and play. There he examines III, 8 (30), 1 and III, 2
(47), 15 and concludes that, for Plotinus, the man who plays is really

...always two men in one: he is a man with an easy gaiety of spirit ... but he is also a man of tragedy, a man of laughter and tears, indeed, of gentle irony, for he sees through the tragically ridiculous masks of the game of life and has taken the measure of cramping boundaries of our earthly existence. And so, only one who can fuse these two contradictory elements [i.e., his seriousness and his gaiety] into spiritual unity is indeed a man who truly plays. 10

According to Rahner, then, "mere seriousness does not get down to the roots of things, and ... a spirit of fun, of irony and of humour often digs deeper and seems to get more easily--because more playfully--down to the truth." 11

Though Rahner's theological study of play is interesting and helpful in itself, there are difficulties with his interpretation of Plotinus. For example, he ascribes to "the man who truly plays" two dialectical aspects, namely, his seriousness and his gaiety. A careful reading of all relevant texts on seriousness and play in the Enneads reveals, however, that the playful man and the serious man, for Plotinus, are not at all similar and, in fact, represent contradictory views of reality and life style. Therefore, Plotinus' own view is that the man who truly plays is not the serious man. Second, it is the serious man and not the playful man who has achieved his true state and is therefore truly real. Finally, though the

9 See above, p. 2.
10 Hugo Rahner, Man at Play, p. 27.
11 Ibid., p. 29.
serious man may sometimes play, this play is always for the sake of something serious and never for its own sake. Thus, although Rahner chooses relevant and helpful passages from the Enneads, his exegesis of them nevertheless suffers from inaccuracies, which this thesis will undertake to correct.

Jean Trouillard does not mention seriousness in his excellent book on Plotinian purification, even though he discusses the individual soul and its purification. Yet, for Plotinus, it is precisely the soul of the serious man which is purified by its coming to unity with itself and eventually with the One.

Although he devotes considerable space to a discussion of the One in his article on infinity in Plotinus, Leo Sweeney does not mention seriousness. But, for Plotinus, unity with the One is precisely the characteristic of the serious man. Similarly, in his article on the basic principles of Plotinus' philosophy, Sweeney omits discussion of seriousness even though he devotes considerable attention to the topic of unity.

E. R. Dodds, in an article evaluating the philosophy of Plotinus, does not mention seriousness when describing the individual's realization of his "true self" by a "voluntary identification with his source [the One]." Dodds also speaks

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of a "tract of personality which lies above the ego-consciousness and beyond its everyday reach ... a secret 'inner man' who is timelessly engaged in νόησις."\(^{16}\) But he fails to point out that this "voluntary identification" and the "inner man" are precisely characteristics of seriousness and of the serious man, respectively.

Although Pierre Hadot accurately translates ὀσύνδαλος as "l'homme sérieux," he offers no further explication of this notion in his book on Plotinus.\(^{17}\) Furthermore, there is no discussion of seriousness or play when Hadot cites and explicates passages from I, 4 and III, 2, from which two of our key texts are taken.\(^{18}\)

In his book on the philosophy of Plotinus, Cleto Carbonara speaks of the ascent of the mind or soul to the suprasensible in terms of the purification of the wise man.\(^{19}\) But Carbonara does not make the further point that only the serious man is purified and only consequently becomes wise, good, and so on.

Although he cites relevant passages from III, 2 and discusses providence and unity in his book on the meaning of images and metaphors in Plotinus, R. Ferwerda does not mention

\(^{16}\)Ibid., p. 6.


\(^{18}\)Ibid., pp. 143-150.

man's seriousness or his unity. Specifically, he discusses the imagery of plays, the theatre, and actors in Plotinus' philosophy but fails to explicate their important connection with the serious man and with his perspective on earthly concerns.

In chapters of his book on Plotinus dealing with eudaimonia and with the self, John M. Rist speaks of "the man who lives at the level of nous" and of "the just man" but never mentions the term Plotinus himself so often uses to describe this sort of man: ὁ σοφός, "the serious man."

In an article on integration and undescended soul, Rist discusses the "empirical self" and the "second self," or the outer man and inner man, and then considers their relation "in the case of the best soul, the soul of the philosopher... whose ego has become identified with or perhaps integrated with the higher soul. It has become the higher self in actuality." But Rist fails to mention that the philosopher is the serious man for Plotinus, and that the identification or integration achieved by his "ego" is nothing else than its unity, with itself and with the One, which is the chief characteristic of seriousness.


Finally, in an article on the Plotinian One and the God of Aristotle, Rist incorrectly translates δ ὅπουδαῖος as the "good man" (while quoting from I, 4 [46], 9, lines 5-15). There Plotinus speaks of the serious man, whose inner reality is unaffected by sleep, ill health or magic. It is misleading to refer to this man simply as the "good man" because (as we shall see below) his goodness is not coterminous with his state of seriousness.

Although his fine book on nature, contemplation and the One contains an extensive examination of III, 8, John N. Deck nowhere discusses seriousness or play. Similarly, in his chapter on the One no examination of these topics can be found.

Dietrich Roloff, in an otherwise helpful explication of four related treatises, mentions δ ὅπουδαῖος only once in his treatment of III, 8 and does not explain its meaning at all. Many other portions of III, 8 treat seriousness and play, but Roloff does not mention them.

25 Ibid., Ch. 2, pp. 7-21.
No references to seriousness can be found in Chapter Sixteen of Joseph Moreau's book on Plotinus even though the chapter is entitled "La vision unitive" and relates the soul's going beyond intellection, its final conversion, and the intellect's contemplation. For Plotinus, these are all aspects of the soul of the serious man; yet Moreau does not make this important point.

Hans Buchner speaks of man's soul in a chapter of his work on Plotinus, yet he does not mention seriousness or play. There is no mention of seriousness or play in H. J. Blumenthal's helpful book on Plotinus' psychology. While he discusses the unity of the soul and the relation of the higher soul to the lower, he never points out that it is the soul of the serious man which is fully unified.

Finally, R. T. Wallis, in his book on Neoplatonism, discusses the relation of the individual soul to the One and

28 Ibid., p. 183.
29 Ibid., pp. 195 ff.
30 Ibid., p. 196.
33 Ibid., pp. 14, 29, 73-4.
34 Ibid., pp. 27 f., 65 f., 23-30, 85 f., 89-94.
36 Ibid., pp. 88-90.
comments that "for Plotinus our true self is eternally saved and all that is required is to wake up to this fact, a process requiring self discipline." He never mentions seriousness in this context. Nor does he indicate that the "true self" is, for Plotinus, the serious man. Likewise, when explaining that the "higher souls . . . of men" and the "philosopher" are immune to the powers of magic, Wallis fails to point out that it is only the serious man who enjoys such immunity.

As the above sampling of secondary literature reveals, little significant work has been done on seriousness or play in the Enneads. Accordingly, our thesis will be mainly based on portions of the Enneads themselves in which seriousness or play are discussed. Before we describe our manner of proceeding in the chapters which are to follow, let us first enumerate (in chronological order) all the places in the treatises of the Enneads in which ὁ σοφός (the serious man) or some derivative expression occurs.

37 Ibid., p. 90.
38 Ibid., p. 71.
39 For Enneads I-III we are following the Greek text as found in Paul Henry and H.-R. Schwyzer, Plotini Opera, Vol. 1, "Oxford Classical Texts" (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964); for Enneads IV-VI we are following Paul Henry and H.-R. Schwyzer, Plotini Opera, Vols. 2 and 3 (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1959 and 1973). The translations in this thesis are my own, but I have been helped by the advice of Leo Sweeney and David Hassel and by the following editions and translations of the Greek text:
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From the above texts we have selected the following as key texts because they contain important information on what Plotinus means by seriousness or play; we shall take them up in the following order:

1) III, 8 (30), 6 and 8
2) III, 8 (30), 1
3) I, 4 (46), 9 and 11
4) III, 2 (47), 15

Our procedure shall be, first, to give the key text in paraphrase and/or translation; second, to comment on the text; and third, to make a summary and to draw conclusions. After we have examined all four key texts in this way, we shall, in a final chapter, summarize the conclusions issuing from these key texts and note how they fit into Plotinus' philosophy as a whole.

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40 It is noteworthy that all the key texts are relatively close together in chronology and belong to Plotinus' later, more mature writings. See Porphyry, "On the Life of Plotinus and the Order of His Books," to be found in A. H. Armstrong (transl.), Plotinus (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1968), vol. 1, p. 25, lines 30 ff.
CHAPTER II

ANALYSIS OF ENNEADS III, 8 (30), 6 and 8

The key texts that we shall examine in this treatise are found in chapters one, six and eight of III, 8. Even though chapter one is introductory, it presents a general summary of the entire treatise, the details of which are only worked out in subsequent chapters. For our purposes, therefore, it will be better to leave chapter one for consideration as the second key text. We accordingly shall first examine chapter six, which initially describes what seriousness means, as well as the first ten lines of chapter eight which together with chapter six constitute our first key text.

Before turning our attention to this key text, however, let us describe the treatise as a whole. According to Porphyry, III, 8: "On Nature, Contemplation, and the One," is the thirtieth treatise that Plotinus wrote and, hence, belongs to his middle period, during which he produced works "of the highest perfection." It can be assumed, then, that this treatise

1 We shall not consider chapter eight, lines 1-10, as a separate key text but shall take it up along with chapter six.

2 Porphyry, "On the Life of Plotinus," p. 25, lines 30-35. Treatise III, 8 is in fact the first part of a major work of Plotinus, including V, 8; V, 5; and II, 9, the four sections of which Porphyry arbitrarily separated into distinct treatises (see Armstrong, Plotinus, vol. 1, p. xi and vol. 3, p. 16
represents Plotinus' mature thought.

We shall proceed by first giving the key text in paraphrase and translation, to be followed by commentary and conclusions.

Key Text III, 8 (30), 6 and 8

[1] Even action is for the sake of contemplation with the result that men of action also aim at contemplation in a roundabout way. The object of their activity, when they achieve it, becomes present in their souls also as an object of knowledge and contemplation. Why so? Because the object is the good which is the goal of their activity and thus is not outside but inside their soul. "[2] Action bends back again to contemplation, for what someone receives in his soul, which is logos, what can it be other than a silent logos? And the more so, the more it is within the soul. [3] For then the soul keeps quiet and seeks nothing since it is filled, and the contemplation which is there in such a state rests within by reason of confident possession. And in proportion as the confidence is more manifest, the contemplation is more quiet and comes into greater unity, and what knows, insofar as it knows—for now we must be serious—comes into unity with

358). For further information on these four treatises see D. Roloff, Die Grossschrift III, 8; V, 8; V, 5; II, 9. The problems raised by the appearance of these subdivisions as separate treatises are discussed in H.-R. Schwyzer, "Plotin," in Pauly's Realencyclopadie B. XXI. col. 487. For an evaluation of Porphyry's principles for arranging the treatises see R. Harder, "Eine Neue Schrift Plotins," in Kleine Schriften (Munich: Beck, 1960), pp. 303-13.
the known. [4] For if they are two, the knower will be one thing and the known another, so that there is a sort of juxtaposition, and the contemplation has not yet made this pair akin to each other, as when logoi present in the soul do nothing."

[5] For this reason the logos should become united with the soul. And the soul, even when it has become akin to the logos, still utters and propounds it since it did not possess it originally. And through the soul's expressing of the logos, the latter becomes other than the soul, which then can look at the logos and consider it more carefully. [6] And the soul, too, is a logos and a kind of intellect, but it is an intellect which sees something else. The soul is not full and complete, for it lacks something with respect to what is above it, but it itself sees quietly what it utters. [7] The soul does not need to go on uttering what it already possesses with clarity within itself. It utters only that about which it is not yet clear due to the soul's deficiency. And it does this with a view to examining it and trying to learn accurately what it possesses. But in men of action the soul fits what it possesses to the things outside it.

"[8] Because the soul possesses its content more completely than Nature, it is more quiet than Nature, and because it has more content it is more contemplative, but because the soul does not possess the content perfectly it desires to learn more thoroughly what it has contemplated and to gain a fuller
contemplation as a result of its inquiry. [9] And when the soul leaves itself and comes to be among other things, and then returns back again, it contemplates with that part of itself which it left behind; but the soul at rest does this less. [10] Therefore, the serious man has already finished reasoning when he reveals what he has in himself to another; but with respect to himself he is vision. [11] For already he is turned toward the One and toward the quiet which is not only of what is outside but even of what is in relation to himself—and all is within him."

Now let us turn to the final portion of the key text found in lines 1-10 of chapter eight where Plotinus also speaks of seriousness. "[12] As contemplation ascends from Nature to Soul, and from Soul to Intellect, and as the contemplations become always more intimate and united to the contemplators, and as, in the soul of the serious man, the objects known tend to become identical with the knowing subject since they are pressing on towards intellect, it is clear that in intellect both are one, not by their becoming akin as in the best soul, but substantially and by the fact that thinking and being are the same. [13] For there is not still one thing and another, for if there is, there will be something else again which is neither the one nor the other. [14] So this must be something where both are really one."

Comments. In order to understand seriousness, here are the notions which we need to clarify in the preceding text:
action (#1, #2, #7), contemplation (#1-4, #8, #9, #12), soul (#1-7, #9, #12), logos (#2, #4-6), Nature (#8, #12), Intellect (#6, #12), and the One (#11). This clarification we shall attempt by summarizing pertinent information from other chapters in III, 8.

[15] At the end of chapter one Plotinus asks how Nature has contemplation and thus produces its products (ch. 1, 22-24). [16] In chapter two he proposes an answer to this question. In order to produce, Nature does not need hands nor feet nor levers (as some of his contemporaries suggested), but only matter on which it can work and which it forms (ch. 2, 1-5). [17] How does this forming come about? Nature itself is a form without matter (ch. 2, 22-23). Matter comes to it and Nature gives it form by imparting a logos from its store of logoi so as to make matter be fire or an animal or a plant (ch. 2, 23-28). Therefore, those logoi are the means through which Nature, itself a logos, produces those sensible existents.

3Here and throughout this thesis the number in parentheses -- e.g., (#1) -- will be used to refer to the corresponding portion of our paraphrase or translation given earlier.

4Throughout this thesis we shall simply transliterate and leave untranslated the greek word λόγος. We agree with Gelpi for whom "the search for an adequate English equivalent is a difficult one" (Donald Gelpi, S.J. "The Plotinian Logos Doctrine," Modern Schoolman 37 [1959-60], 315. Hereafter we shall refer to it as Gelpi.)

5Since almost all references in this chapter of our thesis will be to III, 8, we shall refer to them simply as follows: (ch. 1, 22-24) where 22-24 refer to the lines.
Those logoi are themselves dead and they are at the end of the line of contemplation since they do not themselves set up another and lower level of things (ch. 2, 30-34).

[19] But what is a logos? Although the word appears frequently in the chapters of this treatise, it is never adequately described. The following brief characterization will try to remedy this deficiency. The Plotinian logos, as Donald Gelpi summarizes in his article, "The Plotinian Logos Doctrine," is "an active power identical with the being of the hypostasis in which it exists and ordered to the production of some reality lower than itself." Furthermore, "the lower reality which it produces will always be another logos of an inferior nature, except in the case of the final logoi. The final logoi are the logoi of sensible form. Since sensible form does not produce any other being, the logoi of sensible form terminate the process of universal emanation." Logos, then, is the ultimate ontological explanation of the dynamic aspects of Plotinian being.

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6 Gelpi, p. 315.

7 Gelpi, however, also says in this same article that "logos is found only in Nous and Soul" (p. 315). But it is certainly clear from passages in III, 8 (#17, #18, #21-24) that logos is also found on the level of Nature. There matter is given form through and by the individual logoi which, however, are themselves no longer contemplative and productive of a further reality but which nevertheless are logoi.

As Gelpi describes it, logos must be both "an active power identical with the being of the hypostasis in which it exists" and "ordered to the production of some reality lower than itself" (p. 315). And although he points out that the final
[20] Now we can apply logos to chapter two which we summarized above (#16-18). The logoi through which Nature produces sensible things are precisely the content of its contemplation. Furthermore, Nature itself is a logos of Soul. In this way Nature, because it is a logos, is related both to the sensible things below and to the Soul above. And logos will retain this meaning in chapter three, immediately to be summarized.

[21] In chapter three Plotinus investigates how the production which nature accomplishes is related to contemplation (ch. 3, 1-2). His answer is that it is contemplation because Nature is a logos (ch. 3, 2-7). If so, Nature is related both to what is below and to what is above (ch. 3, 7-13). [22] Since every contemplation involves a content, Nature's contemplation does also. This content consists of the individual logoi which it uses to make fire, individual animals, trees, and so on, and which can be called contemplation in a passive sense as the content of contemplation.

[23] But Nature is also related to what is above, namely, Soul. For Soul also contemplates and the content of its contemplation is the logos which is Nature (ch. 3, 8-12).

[24] Nature, as we have just seen, also contemplates and has a content (i.e., the individual logoi). Hence, as Plotinus

logoi are the logoi of sensible form which does not produce any other being, and that these logoi terminate the process of universal emanation, it is not clear from this why he should exclude logos from the level of Nature.
says, "Nature possesses, and just because it possesses, it also makes" (ch. 3, 16). For it to be Nature is for it to make: its making is its being what it is, namely, contemplation, in the twofold sense of an operative state and its content, because Nature is a logos (ch. 3, 17-25). Accordingly, (Plotinus repeats), Nature makes insofar as it is contemplation taken as a state with content. And thus its making has shown it to be a contemplation which makes not by doing anything but simply by being contemplation.

[25] In chapter four Plotinus reiterates points on the contemplation of Nature and then gives new information on human contemplation. Nature produces through contemplation (Plotinus begins) and is itself originated from the contemplation of Soul and even of Intellect. It is a soul which is the offspring of a prior soul with a stronger life (ch. 4, 14-16). Nature contemplates itself quietly and in repose through a sort of self-consciousness (ch. 4, 16-18). This latter, though, is not the sort of understanding or perception to be found in higher existents but is a silent contemplation and somewhat blurred and unclear (ch. 4, 22-27).

Why? Because Nature is the image of another and higher contemplation and thus what it produces is weak in every way because a weak contemplation produces a weak content (ch. 4, 27-30).

[26] Men, too, whose contemplation is weak make action a substitute for or shadow of contemplation and reasoning (ch.
4, 30-32). Because their souls are weak and their contemplation proves insufficient, they are no longer able to see or understand clearly (ch. 4, 32-33). Nevertheless, since they still long to see and to be filled with contemplative vision, they are carried into action so that they might see in some other way what they cannot directly see with their intellect (ch. 4, 34-35). "When they make something, then, it is because they want to see their object themselves and also because they want others to be aware of it and contemplate it when their object is realized in practice as well as possible" (ch. 4, 36-39).

[27] Everywhere (Plotinus concludes) we shall find that making through action is either a weakening of contemplation or a consequence of it. It is a weakening of contemplation if the person had nothing in view beyond the thing done. And it is a consequence of contemplation if the person had another prior object of contemplation better than what he made (ch. 4, 40-43). "For who, if he is able to contemplate what is truly real, will deliberately go after its image?" (ch. 4, 44-45). Evidence of this can be found even among those who, being incapable of learning and contemplation, turn to various crafts and manual activities (ch. 4, 45-47).

[28] Having considered how nature's making is a contemplation, Plotinus in chapter five turns to the Soul in order to show how and what its contemplation produces. When the Soul attains its fullness of knowledge in contemplation and becomes
itself all a vision, produces another vision (i.e., Nature). Its production of Nature is analogous to the way in which any art produces (ch. 5, 4-6). How is this so? Because when a particular art reaches completion, its product (e.g., a toy) is a miniature of that art and possesses traces of the art in it. But, even so, such visions or such toys are very weak objects of contemplation (ch. 5, 7-11). [29] This is so because Soul, although it is always filled and illuminated by the Intellect in which it remains, has two further parts or aspects. The first is the World Soul, which is the Soul in its function of animating the visible universe as a whole. But the second part, Nature, goes forth, leaving Soul in quiet repose above, and thereby produces the individual existents of this world (ch. 5, 12 ff).

This second aspect of Soul is weaker than the first, because what goes forth is not equal to what remains. Thus, all actuation of Soul is contemplation, which however is weaker in Nature than in Soul (ch. 5, 14-22). "So what appears to be action according to contemplation is really the weaker form of contemplation, for that which is produced must always be of the same kind as its producer, but be weaker through losing its strength as it comes down" (ch. 5, 23-25).

[30] Soul, then, contemplates and makes that which comes after it, Nature, which in turn contemplates but in a more external way and thus unlike its predecessor. In this manner contemplation makes contemplation—ever weaker and less vivid, but contemplation nevertheless.
We shall postpone our consideration of chapter six (because it contains the first two portions of the key text—see above #2-4 and #8-11) until our survey of the notions listed earlier is completed. Furthermore, chapter seven merely repeats points on contemplation which we have already covered. Hence we shall turn directly to chapter eight.

[31] In chapter eight, which contains the third portion of the key text given earlier (#12-14), Plotinus is concerned with contemplation as it pertains to the higher level of Intellect. In Intellect the content of the contemplation is intimately united to the contemplator (ch. 8, 1-5). And they finally unite because there "thinking and being are the same" (ch. 8, 6-8). At the stage of Intellect, then, we find full, living contemplation, not merely the content of another's contemplation (ch. 8, 10-12).

[32] In chapter nine Plotinus turns from the Intellect to the Primal Reality which he calls the Good or the One. The

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8Plotinus is here alluding to Parmenides, fragment 3: "For it is the same thing to think and to be."—see Kathleen Freeman (trans.), Ancilla to the Presocratic Philosophers (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1970), p. 42. Similar citations may be found in V, 1 (10), 8, line 17 and I, 4 (46), 10, line 9. For valuable comments on this fragment, see Leo Sweeney, Infinity in the Presocratics: A Bibliographical and Philosophical Study (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1971), p. 109.

9Plotinus himself will point out in a slightly later treatise that "when we say the One, and when we say the Good, we must understand that we are speaking of one and the same nature" (II, 9, [33], 1, lines 5-6). Hence, for the purposes of this thesis we shall use the One and the Good interchangeably to refer to Plotinus' Primal Reality. At the same time, however, it is worth noting that Fritz Heinemann, Plotin:
Intellect cannot be the first, he argues, because multiplicity comes after unity and Intellect is multiple, for it is both Intellect and intelligible. Hence, what comes before it cannot be Intellect alone, for the intelligible is always coupled with it (ch. 9, 1-14). But if it is not Intellect, then it must be that from which Intellect and the intelligible come. What kind of reality will this be? There is very little we can say to describe it adequately. It is simply the origin of all things and exists before them (ch. 9, 14-54).

In chapter ten the Primal Reality is described as that which gives life to all else yet itself remains original and undispersed (ch. 10, 10-12). Therefore (Plotinus concludes) we go back everywhere to one. "And in each and every thing there is some 'one' to which you will trace it back, and this in every case to the one before it, which is not simply one, until we come to the simply one; but this cannot be traced back to something else" (ch. 10, 20-24). For if we consider the "one" of anything (plant, animal, soul, universe, even the

Forschungen über die plotinische Frage, Plotins Entwicklung und sein System (Leipzig: Felix Meiner, 1921), argues that Plotinus in his first five treatises (IV, 7; IV, 2; I, 2; I, 6; I, 3, according to Heinemann's ordering) calls his primal reality the Good solely. It is not until VI, 9, 6, lines 57-58 (ninth for both Porphyry and Heinemann) that Plotinus explicitly equates the Good and the One, having earlier in VI, 9, 5 implicitly suggested such an identification. And in the treatise which has furnished our key text (III, 8, which both Porphyry and Heinemann consider to be thirtieth chronologically) the identification is developed. For additional information and a critique of Heinemann's position, see A. H. Armstrong, The Architecture of the Intelligible Universe in the Philosophy of Plotinus (Cambridge, England: University Press, 1940), pp. 23-26.
truly real beings), we are taking in each case what is most powerful and really valuable in it (ch. 10, 25-26), their origin and spring and power, which is the One. And ultimately we find that the One is simply above all and we can only come to understand it by throwing ourselves upon it and coming to rest within it through intuition or ἐπιβολή (ch. 10, 27-33).¹⁰

[34] In chapter eleven, Plotinus concludes his characterization of the Primal Reality by calling it "the Good which brings fulfillment to the sight of Intellect" (ch. 11, 9-10). It gives a trace of itself to Intellect so that the Intellect may always see and desire and move towards the Good, which however desires nothing (ch. 11, 22-26).

Having gained data on action, contemplation, soul, logos, Nature, Intellect, and the One from the chapters preceding and following the first key text, we shall now apply it to

¹⁰J. M. Rist points out that the only philosophers to use ἐπιβολή technically before the days of Plotinus were the followers of Epicurus, who employed it in their arguments for the primacy of sensation. The meaning of ἐπιβολή is twofold. First, it is a "comprehensive [ἀθροας] ... view of the data provided by the senses or the mind." In addition to its "comprehensiveness," an ἐπιβολή can be "not a grasping of new external data but a casting back of the mind on itself and on whatever impressions it has." This latter meaning is helpful, Rist argues, in clarifying III, 8, 9, 20 ff. There the One exceeds Intellect or Nous, whereas the highest knowledge we ourselves possess is that of Nous. By what ἐπιβολή ἀθροα, he asks, can we then know the One? For Rist the answer is that "we can know it by means of what is like it in ourselves. In other words ... it is only the One in us that enables us to know the One in itself. ἐπιβολή is then, as for the Epicureans, both ἀθροα and a turning of the self back upon itself." (J. M. Rist, Plotinus: The Road to Reality (Cambridge: University Press, 1967), pp. 49-51).
those notions as they show up in that text.

We shall preface our discussion of seriousness itself by contrasting the serious man with the man of action. We have already seen that even the man of action seeks contemplation, although he does so weakly and incompletely. Nevertheless, when the object of his activity is achieved, it comes to be present in his soul as an object of knowledge and contemplation because it is the good which is the goal of his activity (#1). Thus it is not outside but inside his soul as the proper object of his contemplation. But he is not yet capable of recognizing this good as such because his soul is weighed down and distracted by the various activities and sensible things surrounding him. In this way, then, even action ultimately leads back to contemplation since what the soul receives is always a logos which it understands silently. 11

But this logos resides more properly in the soul of the serious man, where it is more silent and more fully possessed. There the soul keeps quiet and needs nothing because it is filled with knowledge and enjoys the confidence that comes from possessing it fully (#3). The more confident the soul of the serious man becomes, the more silent is its contemplation and

11 Logos is, as we have seen earlier (#19), essentially the higher reality as it is found on a lower level. For example, the content of the Intellect's contemplation insofar as it is found on the lower level of Soul is a logos. Similarly, what the soul of the man of action receives is always a logos which it contemplates because what his soul contemplates now finds itself on a lower level as a result of that contemplation.
the greater is the unity of its contemplation, and the soul's knowing comes into unity with what it knows. It is this unity of knower and known which is the chief characteristic of the serious man (#12).

Let us examine this last point more closely. In the man of action there exists a bifurcation of knower and known. What is known is outside the knower (#4). And this duality exists precisely because his contemplation is of such a sort that it has not yet effected a united between knower and known. The soul of the man of action, then, does not possess its content completely with the result that the soul wants to learn about it more thoroughly and thus achieve full contemplation (#8). It consoles itself by substituting various sorts of activities for a true state of contemplation. The soul does this because even in its weakened state it still longs to see and to be filled with the contemplative vision (#26).

When men act or speak or make something, the result is an action or a word or an object which they can be aware of and contemplate. Some men are carried into this kind of action, then, precisely so that they might see in this admittedly inferior way what they are yet incapable of apprehending fully with their intellect. For the soul of the man of action cannot achieve contemplation except by going outside itself in this way. When it returns within itself it has these objects as the content of its contemplation, for there is a part of soul which looks to the Intellect and remains behind (#9).
The soul of the serious man, on the other hand, goes outside itself much less because he has already reasoned and thus with respect to himself he is vision (#10), even when revealing to another what he has in himself. What does Plotinus mean here? First, the serious man, when he goes outside himself, does so not to gain objects for contemplation, for he already has these within, but only in order to communicate them to others insofar as he can (#10). Second, with respect to himself the serious man is already a vision because he has achieved true contemplation by coming to an intuitive unity with what he knows. He becomes increasingly unified within himself and ultimately with the Primal Reality precisely because he is able to focus his intellectual gaze ever more clearly upon the successively higher and more perfect levels of reality. That is, he first contemplates the Soul and comes to a greater and more distinct awareness of its nature and function and thereby comes to reside within the Soul and be unified with it. In doing so he sees that the Soul is the result and content of the Intellect's contemplation and also that the Soul contemplates the Intellect.

This realization impels him to look beyond the Soul and to contemplate the Intellect. When he reaches the level of Intellect, his own intellect becomes akin to it and more and more united to it through this contemplation. But he sees that the Intellect contemplates something even higher still. The serious man, then, cannot stop his ascent when he reaches
the level of Intellect, but must continue beyond it to the One. This final ascent, however, no longer involves contemplation (curiously enough, the Intellect contemplates the One [ch. 8, 31-33], but the serious man does not) but entails a throwing of oneself upon the One, a contact and identity with the One through an intuitive apprehension (ἐμπλοῦτος; see note 10) of this Primal Reality which lies beyond contemplation.

This ascent of the soul of the serious man from the level of Nature through Soul and Intellect to the One, then, is a direct reversal of the process of emanation. In order to reach the One the serious man must understand this hierarchy of reality that unfolds from the One and he must see how it can be collapsed back into the One. To do this the serious man must ascend through the successive levels leading to the One by contemplation and by intuition. The final stage, when he reaches the One and achieves unity with it, no longer involves contemplation but is "another kind of seeing, a being out of oneself [what one is as a distinct and lower existent], a simplifying, a self-surrender [a surrender of what one is as a distinct, less real being], a pressing towards contact, a rest, a sustained thought directed to perfect conformity" (VI, 9, 11, lines 22-25). There the serious man is no longer outside the One but within it and the two are really one.

The serious man has an intimate, personal, and silent

12 ἀλλὰ ἄλλος ἄλλος τοῦ ἴδειν, ἔκτασις καὶ ἀπλωσις καὶ ἐφίδωσις αὐτοῦ καὶ ἐφεδρισ εἰς ἀφέν καὶ σπάσις καὶ περινόησις πρὸς ἐφαρμογήν, εἰπερ τις το ἐν τῷ ὑμνῷ θεισέςα.
vision of the One or Good. The human intellect is able to "see" what it "sees" and to realize that it is one with it. When man has done this he has achieved seriousness, just as the Soul has achieved seriousness through unity achieved in contemplation and as the Nous has achieved seriousness by coming to unity with the object of its contemplation.

There exists, accordingly, not only a unity within the serious man but also within the whole Plotinian hierarchy. For whether we ascend or descend through it, each level is obviously a logos insofar as it is related to what is above it and below it (with two exceptions: the One above which there is nothing, and the lowest level below which there is only the darkness of matter). It is also evident that these logoi or levels are related to one another through contemplation. From this perspective, then, it is possible to see how everything unfolds from the One, the source of all, and also returns to the One. It is this return to the One that the serious man wishes to achieve. And to the extent that he is increasingly unified within himself (and therefore with the Soul and Intellect and, eventually, with the One) he becomes increasingly serious. Unity, the key to the entire Plotinian system, is the heart of seriousness.¹³

Conclusions. What are the chief characteristics of the serious man? He is one who contemplates rather than acts.

¹³On unity see Leo Sweeney, "Basic Principles in Plotinus' Philosophy," pp. 506-16.
He concentrates on knowledge and the pursuits of intellect rather than everyday activity. He has become increasingly unified within himself and eventually with the Soul and Nous and ultimately with the One. Further, because he has turned his gaze to the One or Good, he has all that he needs within, and no longer needs to turn to what is outside himself. Unlike the man of action who must construct artifacts or utter sentences in order to see what he is contemplating, the serious man is already a vision with respect to himself and all is within him (#11).

In seriousness, then, we find that the one intuiting (the serious man) and the object intuited (the One or Good) have become a unity (#12). For the serious man, therefore, genuine fulfillment and, ultimately, true happiness consist in the unification achieved by his intelligence through intuition of its object: the One.
CHAPTER III

ANALYSIS OF ENNEADS III, 8 (30), 1

We shall now turn to III, 8, 1, which contains our second key text. As we did earlier, we shall give the key text in paraphrase and translation, followed by commentary and conclusions.

Key Text III, 8 (30), 1

"[1] If playing at first and before attempting to be serious, we should say that all things (not only rational but also irrational living things, Nature in growing things, and the earth bringing them forth) aspire to contemplation and look to this end; and if we should say that everything attains contemplation insofar as it can by nature, but that different things contemplate and attain their end in different manners (some do so truly, others achieve only imitations and likenesses of this [contemplation]), could anyone endure the paradox of this line of thought?

"[2] Well, since this discussion has arisen among ourselves no danger will come about in such playing. [3] Therefore, are even we now contemplating as we play? Surely. We and all who play are doing just that, or at any rate when they
are playing they are desiring it [contemplation]. [4] And it may be, whether it is a child playing or a man being serious, that the playing and the being serious are both for the sake of contemplation; and every action is a serious effort at contemplation: on the one hand, compulsory action drags contemplation even more towards what is outside; on the other hand, what we call voluntary action does so less, which nonetheless springs also from the desire for contemplation. But these things we shall discuss later.¹

**Comments.** As we noted in the initial paragraph of our previous chapter, Plotinus begins this key text by giving a summary of the entire treatise. He does this by posing a series of hypotheses which at first seem paradoxical and whose full import is revealed only in the subsequent chapters. For our purposes, though, we shall focus on only those aspects of chapter one which will serve to elucidate the notions of seriousness and playfulness. We shall, wherever necessary, supplement our elucidation with information gained from the first key text.

We have already seen that to be serious, for Plotinus, is to turn to unity.² Upon achieving unity with the Soul, Intellect, and finally, the One, the soul, with its needs satisfied,

¹Plotinus will discuss "these things" in chapters 2 to 4 of III, 8. We have already investigated them in our previous chapter, to which we shall refer whenever necessary.

²See above, pp. 27 ff.
remains there in quiet repose. Against this background let us now examine the notions summarized in III, 8, 1.

Plotinus begins this chapter with the words: "Playing at first, before attempting to be serious ... " (#1). This initial instance of the word "playing" occurs when he is proposing a series of hypotheses concerning how various sorts of entities contemplate. Here the Greek word for "playing" is παιζομενеs, a participial form of παιζω. The latter is defined in the Liddell-Scott Greek-English Lexicon (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968) as "to play like a child ... to jest, sport ... to play with" (p. 1288). From it are derived nouns like παιδь, child, and παιδικа, childish play. With this in mind let us determine precisely what "playing" means for Plotinus.

Plotinus seems, at first, to be using the term "playing"
to suggest that he is merely toying with or manipulating certain ideas that have occurred to him. "Playing," then, initially refers to the activity of one who is speculating about various matters and their possible meanings and interrelations. But such a line of thought (or playing) is paradoxical. Hence, to play means to speculate by speaking paradoxically. In this way, Plotinus might in his role as a teacher have used such an approach to stimulate a discussion among his colleagues or to begin a lecture to his students.

What, then, can we say about his use of this word? For the answer to this we must turn to the second sentence of our key text. There he points out that since such a discussion "has arisen among friends, no danger will come about in such playing". This suggests several things. First, Plotinus is among friends (fellow philosophers and/or students) who know him well enough to understand him correctly. Second, even if this is merely a literary device, it still seems likely that

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4Plotinus is here "playing" in the same way that an inventor, for example, might toy with or wonder at or manipulate in various ways one or more of his recent ideas while not yet being sure whether they will prove to be sound and workable. He therefore experiments with these ideas, toying with various combinations of them until he either arrives at the desired or anticipated result, or until he sees that such manipulation is useless because there is no way in which he can combine these ideas profitably. In either case, he must manipulate, experiment, or toy with his ideas until some conclusion is reached.

5See John Deck, Nature, Contemplation, and the One, p. viii: Plotinus' treatises exhibit a close connection with his schoolroom lecturing. Such an approach is also highly reminiscent of the aporiai of Plato (see Laws, 788c, and Meno, 78e, for example) and Aristotle (see Nichomachean Ethics, 1146b6, and Metaphysics, 1062b31 and 1085a27).
Plotinus assumes that we will correctly understand what he means here by "playing."

Plotinus' playing is similar to what the human soul does even after it has become akin to and disposed according to the logos. Even then the soul "still utters and propounds it [the logos] . . . and through the soul's expressing the logos, it becomes other than the soul, which then can look at it and consider it more carefully" (Ch. 2, #5). Furthermore, the soul "does not need to go on uttering what it already possesses with clarity within itself . . . but utters only that about which it is not yet clear . . . with a view to examining it and trying to learn accurately what it possesses" (Ch. 2, #7). Plotinus, likewise, initially plays (by speaking paradoxically) in order to articulate conclusions which he will clarify in subsequent chapters.

Philosophy, for Aristotle as for Plato, begins with wonder. Similarly, Plotinus' serious man is one who among other things "has contemplated the intelligible world and observed it closely and wondered at it." And just as one who looks up to the sky and seeing the light of the stars thinks of their maker and seeks him, so too, the serious man seeks the maker

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6 Both Plato (see Theaetetus, 155d) and Aristotle (see Metaphysics, A2, 982b13-17 and 983a12-21) point out that men pursue philosophy in order to overcome ignorance. Aside from any practical reasons people have a natural desire to know the nature and causes of things. The first manifestation of such a desire is wonder.

7 III, 8, 11, 33-39. Perhaps Plotinus' own paradoxical remarks are likewise the result of an initial sense of wonder.
of the intelligible world. This sense of wonder marks the beginning of his long journey towards unification within himself and, ultimately, with the One in whom he achieves his true state of seriousness.

We have seen thus far that Plotinus is being very serious, even though he begins by "playing." He is "playing" there in a seemingly mischievous but ultimately harmless way by presenting as paradoxical something which ultimately is not. What underlies this initial "playing," however, is a very comprehensive and dedicated attempt to elucidate the means through which man achieves unity with the Soul, with the Intellect and, ultimately, with the One. In this elucidation Plotinus includes both contemplation (through which man becomes unified with the Soul and the Intellect) and intuition (through which man achieves unity with the One). Plotinus undertakes this elucidation which we have already examined in our previous chapter and to which we now return. There we saw that contemplation involves both an operative state and a content (Ch. 2, #22-24). In the human soul this operative state can perhaps be described as a kind of intellectual gaze in which we "look" at certain kinds of higher level realities from our lower level. In this way, the contemplator "brings down" to his level the higher which has become the content of his contemplation.

More importantly, however, this contemplation is

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8 Ibid., 33-36.
simultaneously also the means by which the contemplator—the serious man—rises to (and through) these higher levels of Soul and Intellect. In each case he achieves unity with what he contemplates insofar as it becomes the content of his contemplation. Upon reaching the level of Intellect, however, and realizing that another even higher level of reality lies beyond, the serious man can no longer rely on contemplation to achieve this ultimate unity. This highest level of reality, the One, can be reached only through another kind of seeing: intuition (Ch. 2, #33).

We may thus point out that "all things aspire to contemplation," albeit in different ways (Ch. 3, #1). So even those who play are contemplating or, at least, desire to contemplate. Furthermore, the man of action also contemplates, although he does so in an inadequate way (Ch. 2, #1). Hence, Plotinus concludes that every action, from a child's playing to a man's being serious, whether voluntary or compulsory, in a serious effort at contemplation (Ch. 3, #4).

Let us now briefly define voluntary and compulsory action. In VI, 8 (39), 1, Plotinus tells us that an action is voluntary if it is performed without coercion and with knowledge of all relevant factors. An action is compulsory, on the other hand, if it is brought about either by the influence of the heavenly circuit or through some antecedent cause determining the consequences (III, 2 [47], 10). 9

9For further discussion of this point see Rist, Plotinus: The Road to Reality, pp. 130 ff.
But what does Plotinus mean when he says that every action is a serious effort at contemplation? He means that actions are serious in the general sense that they all aim at some goal or at the performance of some job or function. A child plays and is never serious, for example, because he has no real job to do. The child's only "job," in a way, is to play. Secondly, a man is serious when he is intent on his job of earning an income, of helping to raise his family, and so on. Seriousness, in his case, consists of the pursuit of various activities, both voluntary and compulsory. Thirdly, Plotinus is serious when he is intent on philosophizing because that is his job. In that philosophizing, however, he realizes that to be truly serious is to be unified, first within oneself and, ultimately, with the One.

In general, therefore, to be serious means to do one's job. But there are many different jobs one can do. To be truly serious, however, one must do a specific kind of job: the job of a philosopher. For only in this way can man ultimately achieve unity with the One and thus become truly real and truly serious.

Conclusions. What does it mean to be playful and how does this differ from being serious? To play, as we have seen, is to manipulate thoughts or to toy with ideas, to speak paradoxically, and ultimately to act in such a way that one does not achieve any sort of unity. To be serious, in this same context, means to live one's life in a way which is opposed to
playing. Plotinus' initial playing was of a mischievous sort, meant to provoke further and deeper thought in his listeners or readers. He was really being serious, then, even in this playing. The truly playful man, however, is one who ultimately is not serious because his job, whatever it might be, does not contribute to but rather dissipates any unity within him.

Again, playfulness for Plotinus is only a point of departure for a subsequently serious discussion. For some, however, playfulness is a way of life. They have their jobs to do and pursue them seriously (that is, faithfully and conscientiously). But all jobs (except for the job of the philosopher) are ultimately mere play because none of them in themselves helps man to achieve unity—the mark of true seriousness. On the contrary, these jobs and activities are only distractions from the one truly important pursuit: the achievement of unity within oneself and then with the One.

In light of the two key texts we have examined thus far (III, 8, 6 and 8 and III, 8, 1), what can we conclude about seriousness? To be truly serious is to be non-playful. It is to strive for greater understanding of, and unity with, oneself, Soul, Intellect and, eventually, the One.
CHAPTER IV

ANALYSIS OF ENNEADS I, 4 (46), 9 and 11

Let us now examine our third key text, which is found in chapters nine and eleven of I, 4. Following a brief introduction to the treatise as a whole, we shall summarize relevant points in the chapters preceding the key text. After this we shall give the key text in paraphrase and translation, followed by comments and conclusions.

According to Porphyry, the treatise I, 4: "On the Good State of One's Inner Reality," is the forty-sixth Plotinus wrote. It is thus a very late treatise written towards the

1 There are numerous references in I, 4 to seriousness and to the serious man: ch. 4, line 34; ch. 5, lines 11 and 17; ch. 7, line 24; ch. 8, line 11; ch. 9, lines 2-10 and 23; ch. 10, line 32; ch. 11, lines 5, 8, and 12; ch. 12, lines 8, 11, and 12; ch. 14, line 2; ch. 16, lines 2, 4 and 13. But only the combined passages from chapters nine and eleven yield new and different information on seriousness and, hence, constitute our key text. In our examination of this key text we shall refer to relevant information contained in other chapters of I, 4 and in other chapters of our thesis.

2 We shall translate εὐδαιμονία, which is a composite of εὖ (meaning "well" or "good") and δαιμον (meaning "genius," "spirit," or "inner reality") as "the good state of one's inner reality." Translations such as "well being" or "happiness" do not accurately express what Plotinus here means by εὐδαιμονία and, therefore, are misleading and inadequate. For additional discussion of the meaning of εὐδαιμονία see John H. Cooper, Reason and Human Good in Aristotle (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1975), pp. 89 ff.
end of Plotinus' life. In it he explains what this "good state" is and how it is achieved.

[1] In the first two chapters of I, 4 Plotinus discusses ἐυδαιμονία as viewed by the Stoics and Epicureans, who equated it respectively with the rational life and the good life. [2] In chapter three Plotinus begins to elaborate his own position. If all living things could be said to have "life" in exactly the same way, then we could allow that all of them were capable of achieving a good state in their inner reality. [3] But some living things have more life than others. Thus, a good state of inner reality belongs only to that which has a superabundance of perfect and true life. [4] And as long as living things proceed from a single origin but have not life to the same degree as it, the origin must be the first and most perfect life. But man too is capable of having this perfect life.

[5] If man, Plotinus continues in chapter four, can have the perfect life, he who has this life has achieved the good state of his inner reality. [6] But what is this "good"? He is what he has: his own good. The One or Good is the cause of

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3In fact, it is the first of the final nine treatises written by Plotinus, whose "power was already failing, and this is more apparent in the last four than in the five which precede them" (Porphyry, "On the Life of Plotinus," p. 25, ch. 6, lines 35-38). The lack of power which Porphyry mentions here is the result of Plotinus' failing physical health. There is no good reason, however, for assuming from this that his intellectual powers suffered similar deterioration. Thus we may, and shall, assume that even these final treatises, of which I, 4 is a member, represent Plotinus' mature thought.
the good in him. The fact that It is good is different from
the fact that It is present to him. The man who has achieved
the good state of his inner reality actually is that state;
he is identical with it. Everything else is just something
he wears. [7] If he is serious, he has all that he needs for
the good state of his inner reality and for the acquisition
of the good, for there is no good which he does not possess.
[8] The things which he does seek are, out of necessity, not
for himself but for the body which is joined to him. He
knows its needs and fulfills them without taking anything away
from his own true life. [9] Thus neither pain, nor sickness,
nor anything else of this sort can reduce the good state of
the serious man's inner reality.

[10] Such things as good health and good fortune, Plotinus
points out in chapters five through eight, have no attraction
for the serious man because they do nothing to enhance his
good state. But he seeks them nonetheless since they contrib­
ute to his being. [11] And he rejects their opposites because
they move him towards non-being and because their presence is
an obstacle to his goal. But even if such opposites are pres­
ent they do not diminish his good state at all. Thus, while
the serious man does not actively desire misfortune, he sets
his excellence against it and thus overcomes it if it should
come. [12] In general, the serious man does not look at real­
ity as others do. He holds his reality within and allows no­
thing, not even personal pain or bad fortune, to penetrate
there.

The key text, found in chapters nine and eleven, now follows.

Key Text I, 4 (46), 9 and 11

[13] Suppose that the serious man becomes unconscious, sick or possessed by magic, what prevents him even then from achieving the good state of his inner reality? Nothing. Similarly, what prevents him from also being serious then? Again, nothing. And those who claim he is not serious under these conditions are not talking about the serious man.

"[14] We are taking the serious man as our starting point and asking if his inner reality is in a good state as long as he is serious. [15] 'But,' they say, 'granted that he is serious, if he is not conscious of it or acting according to his excellence, how can his inner reality be in a good state?'

[16] Well, if he does not know that he is healthy, he is healthy just the same, and if he does not know that he is handsome, he is handsome just the same. So if he does not know that he is wise, will he be any the less wise? [17] Perhaps someone might say that wisdom requires awareness and consciousness of its presence, because it is in actual wisdom that the good state of one's inner reality is to be found. [18] If intelligence and wisdom were something brought in from outside, this argument would perhaps make sense. But if the underlying reality of wisdom consists in some or other being or, better
yet, in the very being of wisdom, and this being does not cease in someone who is asleep or (in some sense of the term) unconscious; if the actuation itself of this being [of wisdom] goes on in him and is unsleeping, then the serious man, insofar as he is serious, will still be actuate [and thus be wise and serious]. [19] It will not be the whole but only a part of him that is unaware of this actuation. [20] In the same way when our growth activity is operative, no perception of it reaches the rest of man through our sense faculties; if that in us which grows were ourselves, it would be ourselves that would be active. [21] Actually, however, we are not it, but we are the very actuation of the intellection so that when that is actuate we are actuate."

[22] In chapter ten (the bridge between chapters nine and eleven, which form our key text) Plotinus observes: maybe we do not notice this actuation of intellect in us because it is not an object of sense experience. [23] But the intellect can be and is actuated without perception, for there must be a state which is prior to sensory awareness if Parmenides' dictum that thinking and being are the same is to remain true. [24] There

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4 The word ἐνεργεία may be translated (1) as "actuation" or "state" or (2) as "activity" or "action." In the context of the present key text we understand ἐνεργεία in the first sense, as an "actuation" or as being "actuate," because it refers to the intellect of the serious man which is in a constant state of being and is not involved in any action, activity, or change (like physical growth is, for example). When applied to the intellect of the serious man, then, ἐνεργεία must be understood as an actuation or as a perduring state and not merely as a sporadic activity.
are many actions and states (e.g., reading, being brave, etc.) which do not require our awareness of them. Only when they are alone, however, are they pure, genuine and alive.

[25] Similarly, the serious man is fully actuated and genuinely living only when his life is itself gathered together into a unity and is not dispersed into perception.

The second and final portion of our key text, found in chapter eleven, now follows.

[26] If someone were to object that a man who is not aware of his theoretical or practical activity is not even alive, the objector would be failing to notice the presence of the good state in the man's inner reality, just as he would be failing to notice the man's life.

"[27] If they will not believe us, we shall ask them to take as their starting point a living and serious man and so to pursue the inquiry into the good state of his inner reality, and not to minimize his life and then to inquire if he has a good life, or to take away his humanity and then inquire about the good state of human inner reality, or to agree that the serious man has his attention directed inward and then look for him in external activities, still less to seek the object of his desire in outward things. [28] There would not be any possibility of the existence of the good state of one's inner reality if one said that outward things were to be desired and that the serious man desired them. [29] Granted, he would like all men to prosper and no one to be subject to any sort of
evil; but if this does not happen, his inner reality is in a good state even then. [30] But if anyone maintains that it will make the serious man absurd to suppose him wanting anything like this—for it is impossible that evils should not exist—, then the person who maintains this will obviously agree with us in directing the serious man's desire inwards."

Comments. In previous chapters of our thesis we pointed out that the chief characteristic of the serious man is the unity he achieves through contemplation and intuition. In this chapter the focus of our discussion will be the good state of his δαίμων or inner reality: his εὐδαιμονία.

Plotinus, unlike his opponents,5 starts with the serious man and asks whether his inner reality is in a good state as long as he is serious. Plotinus also asks what factors, if any, militate against the presence of this good state (#18). These questions, which are the concern of the treatise as a whole, come to greater focus in the passages which comprise our current key text.

What if the serious man is unconscious or is not acting according to his excellence6—can he even then be in a good

5Plotinus' opponents, primarily Epicureans and Stoics, maintained that the good state of one's inner reality consisted respectively either of pleasure or of living according to nature through reason. For further discussion of these positions see J. M. Rist, Epicurus: An Introduction (Cambridge: University Press, 1972); Cyril Bailey, The Greek Atomists and Epicurus (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1928); J. M. Rist, Stoic Philosophy (Cambridge: University Press, 1969); and Andreas Graeser, Plotinus and the Stoics: A Preliminary Study (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1972).

6We shall translate ἀρετή as "excellence" or "perfection"
state (?15)? Plotinus' answer is both clever and novel. To be unconscious or to be unaware of something does not automatically eliminate the object of which one happens to be unaware. For example, the man who does not know that he is healthy is healthy all the same. So too with the man who is wise: even if he does not know that he is wise, he will be no less wise as a result (?16).

But does wisdom not require awareness and consciousness of its presence? Furthermore, is not the good state of one's inner reality to be found only in actual wisdom (?17)? To these objections Plotinus answers that "the underlying reality of wisdom consists in the very being of wisdom, and this does (rather than "virtue"), because it refers primarily to the excellent state or perfection of the serious man's inner reality, not solely to his moral virtue. For Plotinus, as we shall shortly see, a serious man is good or achieves ἀρετή only by becoming unified within himself and with the One. This is not to say, however, that ἀρετή excludes entirely the notion of moral virtue. It is the serious man who alone has gained the true vision of reality by becoming unified within himself and with the One and who thus has the excellence of knowing how to treat his fellow men properly and fairly. In another treatise (I, 2 [19], ?), Plotinus describes the life of the serious man in terms of ἀρετή. There he points out that all excellences of the soul are related to intellect. The soul's sight directed toward intellect is wisdom, both theoretical and practical, which is the excellence belonging to the soul. All excellences are purifications in the sense that they are the results of a completed process of purifying unification. Thus, the serious man leaves everything behind in favor of the life of the gods, because he wants to become similar to them. Only in likeness to the gods—i.e., in unity with the One—can he achieve the purification or unity which characterizes seriousness.

not cease in someone who is asleep or, in some sense of the term, unconscious" (#18). What does this mean? The being and reality of the serious man is independent of his consciousness of it. It is in a constant state of actuation and is not affected by sleep (#18), sickness, or even magic. Only a part of the serious man will be unaware of this actuation (#19).

Similarly, when one undergoes physical growth it is only a part of him—the outer, less real part—which grows. But that is not what he really is. The truly real part of man is within: the intellect. He is the actuation of the intellect, so much so that when it is actuate he is actuate also (#20).

Plotinus notes in another treatise that it is man's disposition (i.e., what he has within—the good state of his inner reality) which makes his actions excellent. Thus it is possible for someone who is not active to have his inner reality in

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8 In IV, 4 (28), 43, lines 1-11, Plotinus also discusses whether the serious man can be affected by magic. He concludes that the soul or the rational part of the serious man cannot be affected by magic and other such distractions because they only affect his lower and irrational part. Therefore, IV, 4 presents essentially the same position as I, 4: the good state of the serious man's inner reality is not affected even if he is driven out of his senses by illness or magic arts. In short, the serious man is one who lives the life of Intellect. His "inner reality" or ὄνωμ is the One. But Nous and the One are far beyond the influence of magic. Likewise the truly real part of the serious man, since it is unified with Nous and the One, is not affected by magic. For further discussion of Plotinus and magic see E. R. Dodds, The Greeks and the Irrational (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1951), pp. 285-89; Philip Nelan, "Plotinus and Magic," Isis 44 (1953): 341-48; and A. H. Armstrong, "Was Plotinus a Magician?" Phronesis 1 (1955): 73-79.

9 I, 5 (36), 10.
a good state, because actions do not produce goodness of themselves. It is the serious man who gets the benefit of goodness in his action, not from the fact that he acts nor from the circumstances of his action, but from what he has achieved: unity with the One or Good. Thus, his pleasure in the fact that, for example, his country is saved will be there even if it is a bad man who saves it. It is not the saving itself but one's own inner reality which causes the pleasure of its good state. To place the good state of one's inner reality in actions is to locate it in something outside excellence and the soul. The actuation of the soul lies in intellect and thought and this is the good state of one's inner reality.

Thus, the inner reality of the serious man is always in a good state precisely because it consists of his always actuate intellect, even though another part of him, his outer aspect, is not always aware of this actuation. A man's inner reality, then, is always actuate regardless of the state of his outer aspect. His other and outer aspect consists of the physical body and its sensory functions and is subject to various distractions such as sleep, unconsciousness, sickness, magic, and the like.¹⁰

¹⁰ In treatise I, 9 (16), lines 13 ff., Plotinus makes a similar point by asking us to imagine a man who is aware that he is beginning to go mad. Such a thing, he says, is not likely to happen to a serious man. Even if it should happen to him, however, the serious man will consider it as something inevitable but will not allow himself to be disturbed by it. In other words, his becoming mad will disturb only his outer aspects but not his inner reality which will remain unperturbed in its good state.
This outer and inferior part of man is often unaware of its counterpart's intellectual actuation and thus assumes that in the absence of such consciousness this actuation is likewise absent. But the inner and real part of man does not merely have the actuation of intellect: it actually is this actuation. The very nature and reality of the serious man is unity achieved through intellect.

We saw in earlier chapters of this thesis that unity, the hallmark of seriousness, is achieved through the intellect as it journeys upwards to the One. The inner reality of a serious man, then, will always be in a good state because his life is the life of intellect. And intellect has as its object and end the One or Good, with which it achieves unity through intuition. But in what does this intellectual life consist? What does the serious man do and how does he act, given this desire ultimately to achieve unity with the One? For an answer we must look to the portion of the key text found in chapter eleven (#22-26). There Plotinus again takes the serious man as his starting point and considers him as a whole being and not piecemeal as his opponents often did.

If we investigate in what the good state of the serious man's living inner reality consists, we shall find that his attention is directed inward and that external activities do not interest him. The inner life of intellect, characterized by a turning inward towards unity, is of utmost interest to

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11 See above, pp. 23 sqq. and pp. 40 sqq.
the serious man. It is folly to look for him in external activities or to seek the object of his contemplation or desire in outward things (#23). His inner reality achieves its good state through intellect, specifically through his contemplation of the levels of Soul and Nous (thereby leading him to unity within himself) and through intuition (thereby leading him to unity with the One or Good). This good state would not even be possible "if one said that outward things were to be desired and that the serious man desired them" (#24). 12

His good state does not prevent the serious man from wishing that all men (including himself) were prosperous and not subject to evil and suffering. But if these latter should be present, the good state of his inner reality will be unaffected. But would this not indicate that the serious man is essentially selfish and without compassion for his fellow man? Plotinus might respond as follows. The good state of the serious man's inner reality is not affected by the rise and fall of his neighbors' (or his own) good fortune precisely because such fluctuations belong to the outer aspect of man while the serious man's attention is turned inward to a region unaffected by fortune, sickness, magic, death and the like. Thus, while he would not deny himself or his fellow man any of the material

12Plotinus does not mean that the serious man would deny himself any reasonable comforts, but only that he knows their proper value and function and thus can appreciate them simply for what they are: necessary but ultimately worthless concerns of earthly life. See I, 4 (46), 16, lines 10 ff.; II, 9 (33), 9, lines 3-8; and I, 6 (1), lines 11-13.
comforts of life, the serious man's own life (i.e., his inner reality: the life of intellect) does not depend on such comforts for the maintenance of its good state (#26).¹³

**Conclusions.** In light of the key text just analyzed, what are the characteristics of the serious man? In previous chapters of our thesis we saw that the chief characteristic of the serious man is unity. This the serious man achieves with his intellect by its contemplative ascent through the levels of Soul and Nous to ultimate intuition of the One or Good. Thus, to be real is to be one.

In the present chapter of our thesis, however, we see that to be real is also to be good. Here the emphasis shifts from unity to goodness and excellence. In other words, this key text gives us more directly Plotinus' theory of morality, while earlier key texts gave us his ontology or, more accurately, *henology*. What is the significance of such a shift? We already know that the serious man is unified within himself and with the One. But what sort of unity is this? It is unity with the Good itself. The serious man, when he achieves this unity, has the good within himself: he is the good. The unity that the serious man has is identical with his goodness (it is

¹³Plotinus' point here is that only when man turns to the life of intellect, and thus comes to unity, does he become serious. In this way his inner reality comes to be in a good state. When he achieves seriousness and this good state, he is no longer subject to the distractions of everyday living which affect his outer half. He sees that they are neither truly real nor valuable. "His light burns within, like the light in a lantern when it is blowing hard outside with a great fury of wind and storm" (I, 4 [46], 8, lines 4-6).
the good state of his inner reality) because the Primal Reality, the One, with which he is unified, is also the Good, who also is the primal and emanative cause of his goodness. There is a difference, in other words, between man's own good (which he has as an immanent and constituent cause within him) and the Good or One, which is the (in some sense of the term) external cause of man's goodness. The Good or One, however, is not always "external" to man since a serious man can become unified with It through contemplation and intuition. To be serious, then, still means to be one, but now it also means to be good.

But even though unity and goodness are one and the same state, they can be considered as two different aspects of that state. A man becomes serious by a purely intellectual process of contemplation and intuition. Before he can make this intellectual ascent to unity and seriousness, though, he must first detach himself from everything and everybody. Only by such detachment can he approach the Primal Reality. This is the picture we get when we examine seriousness in terms of unity.

There is also the aspect of goodness to be considered. When the serious man achieves unity he also becomes good—he achieves the good state of his inner reality. As such, this good state affords him the proper perspective with which to view and evaluate the people, things and events around him. Because he realizes that nothing better than this good state is possible, all of the triumphs, hardships, pleasures, and
pains of his earthly existence (while they do not become any more pleasurable or any less painful) are recognized as mere play and not serious matters at all.\textsuperscript{14}

The serious man realizes that the real man is other than his outward parts.\textsuperscript{15} Hence, any pursuit that involves them will only prove to be a distraction and a hindrance to the good state of his inner reality. But why does Plotinus devote so much time to discussing the good state if it is nothing more than the state of unity? He wants to show that when a man achieves seriousness, the concerns of this world will neither diminish nor enhance that good state.\textsuperscript{16} Secondly, Plotinus wants to point out that given that state, the serious man's attitude towards his fellow man will be very different from that of ordinary men. He will not be unsympathetic towards himself or remiss with respect to his own affairs. He will render to his friends all that he renders to himself and so will be the best of friends and intelligent as well.\textsuperscript{17}

\textsuperscript{14}Plotinus asks in I, 4 (46), 14 that "if something adds nothing to a state, how can its opposite take anything away?" In chapter 15, he notes that "to have more of them [i.e., the 'natural goods'] than others would be no help . . ."\textsuperscript{15}I, 4 (46), 14, lines 13-15.

\textsuperscript{16}The serious man "is not the composite of soul and body; separation from the body and the despising of its so-called goods makes this plain . . . [and] the good state of one's inner reality is life which is concerned with soul and is an actuation of soul"—I, 4 (46), 14, lines 1-7. For helpful remarks on the idea of man's separation from earthly concerns see Andrew Smith, Porphyry's Place in the Neoplatonic Tradition (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1974), p. 23.\textsuperscript{17}I, 4 (46), 15, lines 20 ff.
The single most significant service the serious man can perform for his neighbors is to help them achieve the same state of seriousness he himself enjoys. Accordingly, he will try to live an exemplary life so that those who are not yet serious might see and learn from him. Furthermore, he will share his insights and knowledge with them and thus help them achieve unity within themselves and ultimately with the One. Without compromising his own seriousness or his own good state, then, the serious man will help his fellow men to achieve the unity necessary for the true and good life.

But we must not assume that the life of the serious man is a mixture of good and bad, of the intellectual and the mundane. The common life of body and soul cannot constitute the good state of one's inner reality. The serious man takes as his good not the apparent goods of this world but the One or Good of the highest realm, with which he becomes unified. "He must hold on to this as his sole goal, and change his other circumstances as he changes his dwelling place . . . He must give to his bodily life as much as it needs and he can give; but he himself is other than it and . . . will abandon it in nature's good time." 18

Thus some things will contribute to the good state of his inner reality while others will only belong to that which is joined to him: his outer half or body. This he will put up with as long as he can, "like a musician with his lyre, as long

18 Ibid., Ch. 16, lines 13-20.
as he can use it; if he cannot use it he will change to another . . . yet the instrument was not given him at the beginning without good reason."\textsuperscript{19}

With this final remark a further question arises: What is the purpose and significance, if any, of man's presence and participation in bodily existence with its attendant pleasures and pains? In treatise I, 4, no answer to this question is offered. Our analysis of the next key text may offer some clarification of this point.

\textsuperscript{19}Ibid., Ch. 16, lines 21 ff.
CHAPTER V

ANALYSIS OF ENNEADS III, 2 (47), 15

We shall now examine our fourth key text, found in chapter fifteen of III, 2: "On Providence," which according to Porphyry is the forty-seventh treatise Plotinus wrote and thus belongs among his mature writings.¹ We shall begin by giving the key text in paraphrase and/or translation, followed by comments and conclusions.

[1] Having examined in previous chapters of this treatise the nature of individual things taken separately, Plotinus in chapter fifteen takes up the difficulties which come about from the intertwining and association among individual things in the visible universe. [2] The existence of hostilities among men and the daily struggle for survival among all living things makes one wonder whether the logos of this universe could have brought about and seemingly even condoned such a state of affairs. [3] The argument that everything is as good as it can be and that matter is to blame for all evils in the All is invalid if it is true that the logos caused the state of affairs

¹Porphyry, "On the Life of Plotinus," p. 25, lines 30-35. Treatises III, 2 and III, 3 (47 and 48 in Porphyry's chronological ordering) are Porphyry's divisions of what was originally a single long work on Providence. In our explication of the key text, however, we shall consider only relevant portions of III, 2.

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to be such as it is. [4] In this case the logos is the origin of all things, both those which are being brought into existence now and those which are already arranged together in ranks at the beginning.

[5] But why is it necessary that there be strife and death among living beings? Because in this way they are transformed into each other by coming alive as different beings. [6] There is no cruelty in such death because it is like the "death" of an actor on stage who changes his costume and comes on again in another role. [7] In real life the death of a man is nothing more than a changing or putting off of the body and is no more tragic than the actor's change of costume. [8] This change of living beings into one another is not as cruel as it might appear, for otherwise the All would be barren and without variety.

Key Text III, 2 (47), 15

"[9] But since life as it is found in the All is a manifold, it makes all things and weaves them together in the life [it communicates] and does not cease from making beautiful and shapely living toys. [10] When men direct their weapons against each other, fighting in orderly ranks and playing in their war dances, their battles show that all human serious matters are children's games; they tell us that deaths are nothing terrible and that those who die in wars and battles anticipate only a little the death which comes in old age—they merely go away and come back quicker. [11] If their
property is taken away while they are still alive, they may recognise that it was not theirs before either and that its possession is a mockery to the robbers when they themselves are robbed by others. And for those who do not have it taken away, to have it is worse than being deprived of it.

"[12] We should be spectators of murders, all deaths, and the takings and sackings of cities as if they were on the stages of theatres and were all changes of scenery and costume and acted wailings and weepings. [13] For in the events of our life here it is not the soul within but the outside shadow of man which cries and moans and carries on in every sort of way as though on a stage which is the whole earth, where men have in many places set up their stages. [14] Doings like these belong to a man who knows how to live only the lower and external life and is not aware that he is playing in his tears, even when they are serious tears. For only the serious part of man can treat serious affairs seriously; the rest of man is a toy. [15] But toys, too, are taken seriously by those who do not know how to be serious and are toys themselves. If anyone joins in their play and suffers their sort of sufferings, he should realize that he has fallen into a children's game and put off his play costume. [16] Even if Socrates plays sometimes, it is by the outer Socrates that he plays."

Comments. Before we can explicate this key text we must set it within its context by explaining three points that are discussed in other chapters of III, 2: the All, individual things and providence. For Plotinus, only an unintelligent
man would suggest that the being and structure of this universe (or All) came about and now is maintained by accident or chance rather than by providence (Ch. 1, 1-10).

But exactly how did this All come about and what role does providence play in it? The All was not made in time or from calculation. Its being and structure come from Nous which is logically prior to the All and which eternally brings the latter into existence through exemplary causality. The Nous, the true All, is the model according to which this lower All is produced through contemplation (Ch. 1, 22-27). \(^2\) Nous contemplates the One and the content of this contemplation is Soul. Soul then turns back to its immediate source, Nous, and contemplates it. \(^3\) The content of that contemplation is this lower All, which is a logos because it represents the higher reality on a lower level (Ch. 2, 35-42; Ch. 16, 10-17).

From the true All of Nous, which is one, this lower All has arisen. It consists of a multiplicity of both friendly and hostile parts. When taken together, however, these parts form a single harmonious whole in the same way that individual sounds when they are brought together form a beautiful melody (Ch. 2, 25-35). This All came to be not out of rational planning but out of the necessity that there be a second nature

\(^2\)See also II, 3 (52), 18, lines 9-22.

\(^3\)Plotinus does not mention Soul and speaks as though Nous directly makes the material universe. He speaks in this curious way because he wants to emphasize providence which, as the image of the true All of Nous, is more the doing of Nous than of Soul. See also above, Chapter 2, #19.
since the true All (Nous) was not of such a kind as to be the lowest level of reality (Ch. 2, 1-15; Ch. 3, 1-10). Therefore, Nous, as the object of Soul's contemplation, gives something of itself (i.e., logos) to matter and thus quietly makes all things by always being present among them (Ch. 4, 16-21). This presence of Nous in the All is providence. Because it is logos, then, providence actually is this All in its relationship to Nous (Ch. 2, 32-40).

The parts of this All (individual plants, animals, men and so on), if they are to have any meaning, must be understood not as individuals but as parts of a whole guided by providence (Chs. 14-15). In this perspective, then, the wars and conflicts within this All are to be regarded simply as the necessary elements for its proper functioning (Chs. 16-17).

We have seen that Providence is this All as it is related to Nous. Providence, therefore, is a logos insofar as it is Nous on a lower level. The parts of this All are well ordered individually and collectively because this All is ordered in conformity with the true All of Nous, which is one. With these points in mind we may now turn to our explication of the key text.

In treatise III, 2 Plotinus examines the role which providence plays in the All. He shows that all the events occurring in the All, even those which most men would regard as evil or unjust, are necessary for its balance and harmony. Only unintelligent men consider things individually and not as
parts of a unified whole and come to the conclusion that there is evil and injustice in the All (Ch. 1, 1-5). The serious man, on the other hand, looks at this All and sees it as a manifold which is populated by an endless variety of beautiful and shapely living toys (#9). But why should things be called "toys"? We have already pointed out that this All is only an imperfect reflection of the true All of Nous. Unlike its model, this All is not one but is divided into a multiplicity of conflicting and friendly parts (Ch. 1, 20-30; Ch. 2, 1-10). Each individual in this All, therefore, is merely a reflection of its more perfect counterpart in the true All and thus is less unified and less real. Now toys are copies or miniatures of real objects. As such they are less real and less important than the objects they imitate. 

Armstrong points out in a footnote to chapter fifteen of III, 2 that Plotinus might have in mind here the Platonic notion that man is God's toy. In Laws, VII, 803b-d, for example, Plato says that man's life does not deserve to be taken seriously, and yet we cannot help being in earnest. The proper thing is to show earnestness in a suitable way (i.e., keep our seriousness for serious things and not waste it on trifles). Therefore, only real play and real education are supremely serious for man. According to Plato, we must live this way since we are really only puppets with a trace of reality about us. Thus God is the real goal of all beneficent serious endeavor while man has been constructed as his toy. All of us, then, must fall into our role and spend life in making our play as perfect as possible.

Curiously enough Plato elsewhere says that "playfulness is sometimes a relief from seriousness" (Philebus, 30e). We shall soon see that such a position is quite different from Plotinus' own view that playfulness is never a desirable state for man because it deprives him of the unity characteristic of his true state. A man who is playful, then, is not truly real because he has not achieved this unity.

Elsewhere Plotinus points out that Soul does not pause
individual things in this All are only "beautiful and shapely living toys" means that, like children's toys, they are merely imitations of a greater reality, the true All of Nous.

Furthermore, when children play, they treat their toys seriously because, owing to their young and uninformed state, they mistake the miniature or imitation for the real object (e.g., they treat a doll as if it were a real person). And men who take events in this All (wars, death, suffering and so on) to be important act like children playing. Such events are no more serious than children's games because they are not concerned with what is truly valuable: the pursuits of intellect towards the achievement of unity (#10).

In addition, even death itself, whether it occurs on the battlefield or is caused by other factors, is not really important because it is merely a shedding of the body and thus is similar to an actor's change of costume (#5-8). Such costumes are necessary only for the actor's roles on stage but not for his day-to-day life. The loss of the body, then, is to be viewed as the loss of something that is not essential to the serious man, except insofar as his earthly existence is

for willing or planning because such procedure would not be an act of sheer nature but of applied art. But art is of later origin than Soul and produces only dim and feeble copies—toys—which are things of no great worth (IV, 3 [27], 10, lines 13-20). In still another treatise he evaluates the status of playthings in general: "some lovers worship earthly beauty and it is enough for them, but others, those who have recollected the archetype [i.e., those who are serious], venerate that higher beauty too, and do not treat this earthly beauty . . . with disrespect since they see in it the product and plaything of that other" (III, 5 [50], 1, lines 60-65).
concerned. Elsewhere Plotinus points out that, except for the
good state of his inner reality, everything else that the ser-
ious man has is just "something he wears; [and] you could not
call it part of him because he wears it without wanting to." The
same holds true for wealth and other personal possessions:
to have them is worse than being deprived of them (#11). Thus,
the body is a distraction and hindrance to the serious man's
real goal: unification within himself and with the One.

In general, then, we should look at death, war and other
such seemingly serious human concerns as though they were no
more real than children's games or the activities that take
place on the stage of a theatre: "all changes of scenery and

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6 I, 4 (46), 4, lines 14 ff. Also see ibid., ch. 16,
lines 10 ff. Because the serious man has the good state as
his only goal in life, he will change his circumstances as he
changes his dwelling place whenever it is to the advantage of
his good state to do so. And like a musician with a lyre, if
he can no longer use something profitably, he will change to
another.

7 The possession of stolen property by robbers becomes a
mockery when they themselves are later robbed (#11). Thus
providence preserves justice and equilibrium in the universe
even then because those who inflict injustices on others are
later punished by suffering similar injustices themselves.
This example is important because it illustrates that only the
serious man, because he has trained his intellect and thus un-
derstands the role of providence in the All, can look upon these
and similar "injustices" and conclude that they are merely play
and therefore do not contribute to unity.

8 See Plato, Phaedo, 64e, 65b-d, and 67d, where he argues
that the body is only a hindrance to the soul's search for re-
ality and truth. For Plotinus, "the true wakening is a true
getting up from the body, not with the body; . . . the true
rising is a rising altogether away from bodies which are of
the opposite nature to soul and opposed to it in reality" (III,
6 [26], 6, 71-75).
costume and acted wailings and weepings" (#12). In fact, the entire earth is like a stage upon which such human dramas ceaselessly unfold and are acted out.\(^9\) And on this earthly "stage," many stages are set up on which actors perform (#13).\(^10\) Therefore, just as we do not take as real what goes on during a play (e.g., when a character "dies" on stage, we do not think that he is really dead), so too we should not treat the seemingly important events of this earthly life as though they were truly real and serious. The everyday activities of man's earthly life are mere play because they do not contribute to the achievement of unity and therefore of seriousness.

But why should such events and activities be viewed in

\(^9\)Marcus Aurelius, writing a century earlier, makes a similar point when speaking of the praetor who has employed an actor and now dismisses him from the stage. "'But I have not finished the five acts, but only three of them.' Good, but in life the three acts are the whole drama. For what shall constitute a complete drama is determined by him who first caused its composition, and now its dissolution: but you are the cause of neither. Depart then serenely, for he who releases you is also serene" (Meditations, XII, 36). Likewise, Shakespeare, centuries after Plotinus, would repeat (Macbeth, Act 5, Scene 5) that "life's but a walking shadow; a poor player that struts and frets his hour upon the stage and then is heard no more."

\(^10\)The deaths and other tragedies that occur on stage are not to be taken seriously because they are not real and actual deaths. For the same reason actual deaths and sufferings are not to be taken seriously because they are not really tragic but merely a necessary part in the cycle of life. Plotinus points out elsewhere (III, 6 [26], 6, 69-80) that the body is "opposed [to soul] in respect of reality. [Its] . . . coming into being and flux and perishing, which does not belong to the nature of reality, are evidence of this."
this curious way? Because it is the serious man who views them. Only he understands that providence in the All is a life which quietly contains rationality and which, by setting its parts against each other and making them deficient, generates and maintains the conflicts between its various opposite elements. And it is this constant conflict which gives the All its structure and constitutes its very reality (Ch. 2, 25-32). To illustrate this we may consider a melody, which is achieved by bringing together heretofore distinct and apparently conflicting sounds into coherent harmony, or the plot of a play, where many conflicting characters and situations are brought into harmonious concord with one another for the sake of the completion of the story (Ch. 16, 30-45).

Plotinus uses this analogy between an ordinary man and an actor on a stage, therefore, to illustrate that in man's day-to-day life it is not the soul within but only his outside shadow which cries, moans, suffers death and so on (#13-14). This outside shadow, the outer man, is like the actor's costume. It is not a vital part of one's personal being and is put on and off as the directions in the play indicate.

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11 This point is remarkably similar to the Heraclitean notion (Fragment #8) that "that which is in opposition is in concert, and from things that differ comes the most beautiful harmony" (Freeman, transl., Ancilla to the Presocratic Philosophers, p. 25). For Heraclitus the very reality of an individual thing depends on and is identical with the tension of opposites within it. For Plotinus it is the universe itself which becomes real and complete as the result of the harmonization of its various opposite elements.
Furthermore, just as the actor performs on the artificial setting of a stage (constructed to imitate the real world) and acts out the emotions proper to his role, so too man finds himself in this All (which is an imitation of the true All) as on a stage of sorts upon which he acts out his life.

For Plotinus, then, every man is composed of an outer aspect, concerned with the everyday pursuits of life, and an inner aspect, concerned only with the achievement of unity. To achieve this unity and, therefore, to become serious, he must develop the inner man and disregard the outer. As Plotinus points out elsewhere, man must try to become as good and perfect as he possibly can. It is this search for perfection which dominates the inner man. He will reach perfection and thus achieve seriousness only by disregarding the concerns of the outer man, who only lives among the distractions of the physical world.

Finally, if a philosopher such as Socrates sometimes plays, it is only the outer Socrates that does so. When Socrates plays he knows that he is playing, unlike those who

12 II, 9 (33), 9, lines 26 ff. In I, 2 Plotinus repeats what Plato (Theaetetus, 176b; Republic, 615b; Timaeus, 90a; Laws, 716c) and Aristotle (Nichomachean Ethics, II 775b2 ff.) had already said: the good for man is to attain likeness to God as far as he can. This is accomplished by the soul's ascent, through contemplation and intuition, to unity with the One, an ascent made possible by the fact that a part of the soul always remains on the higher level and therefore is never immersed in the activities of the physical world (see above, Chapter Two, #9). Plotinus makes similar points in II, 9 (33), 2; IV, 3 (27), 12; IV, 8 (6), 8; and V, 1 (10), 10; II, 2 (14), 2; I, 6 (1), 6 and 9; VI, 9 (9), 11; and VI, 2 (43), 11. For further discussion of this and related points, see Rist, Plotinus: The Road to Reality, pp. 154-168.
think they are serious when they play.\textsuperscript{13} We have already pointed out (Ch. 3, \#1) that even Plotinus himself played sometimes. His playing, however, was for the sake of something serious and occurred within a serious context.

Conclusions. Why should the problems and events of daily life seem so insignificant to the serious man? Because he has achieved unity with the One through contemplation and intuition and therefore understands the true nature of Providence in the All as the less perfect and less unified reflection of the true All of Nous. He knows that war, death and other such events are only happenings on the stage of life which hinder the achievement of man's proper end: seriousness through unity with the One. Such concerns are mere play and belong merely to the outer man.\textsuperscript{14} Therefore, only by refusing to be distracted with such playful activity can the real and inner part of man achieve unity and seriousness.\textsuperscript{15}

\textsuperscript{13}Socrates here is the opposite of Hercules who is concerned with the importance of his own achievements because he lives only the lower and outer life (IV, 3 [27], 27 and 32). Thus Hercules takes seriously what is merely playful. Socrates too, when he plays, plays as the outer Socrates. However, he always remembers that the real Socrates is inner and serious. For further clarification of these points, see Gerard J.P. O'Daly, Plotinus' Philosophy of the Self (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1973), pp. 26-29.

\textsuperscript{14}Plotinus makes a similar point when he argues against those who ascribe reality to bodies and put their faith in sense perception. They act "like people dreaming, who think that the things they see as real actually exist, when they are only dreams" (III, 6 [26], 6, lines 69-72).

\textsuperscript{15}To the question of what the serious man is, Plotinus answers in III, 4 (15), 6 that "he is the man who acts by his better part." He acts as the inner man would, since intellect is active in him. "He is, then, himself a spirit or on the level of a spirit and his guardian spirit is God."
CHAPTER VI

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Before we begin to draw forth conclusions regarding seriousness in Plotinus' ENNEADS, let us summarize what has gone before.

The serious man is he who is unified within himself and with the One. As a result, he has all that he needs within himself and has no need to turn to what is outside. Unlike the man of action, who must construct artifacts or utter sentences in order to be aware of what he is contemplating, the serious man, by contemplating Soul and NOUS and by intuiting the One, is already a vision with respect to himself and to all that is within him. In seriousness, therefore, we find that he who intuits (the serious man) and what is intuited (the one or Good) have become completely unified—the two are now one. For the serious man genuine fulfillment and true happiness consist in unification by means of his intelligence through intuition of its object, the One.¹

But if seriousness through unity is man's only and true end, why do so many men engage in play when the latter consists in manipulating thoughts, toying with ideas, speaking

¹See above, pp. 29-34.
paradoxically, and acting in ways that lead only to multiplicity and confusion? The answer is that they become so concerned with the events of daily life and with the needs of the body that they come to believe that reality and truth reside in these. Such men think they are really being serious when they worry over death, engage in wars, or pursue wealth and power. These actions, however, are mere play because they contribute nothing to the achievement of unity and seriousness.

For many men, then, playfulness issues from a distinctive perspective on reality and becomes a way of life. They have jobs to do (e.g., soldiering, conducting business, farming). They pursue them faithfully and conscientiously and, as a result, think they are being serious. But, in the final analysis, all jobs (except that of the philosopher) are mere play because none of them helps man to achieve unity. To be truly serious, then, is to be unified and therefore non-playful.²

But in what precisely does this unity consist and how is it achieved? The unity discussed in this thesis is a gradual identification with the Primal Reality, the One or Good. A man achieves this only when his intellect completes its contemplative ascent through the levels of Soul and Nous and comes to intuition of the One. Since the One is the primal and, ultimately, the only reality, man himself becomes truly real only when unified with It. Thus to be real is to be One. Any item

²See above, pp. 35-43.
is real only because of its unity. Consequently, a fall into multiplicity is likewise a fall into unreality. This is Plotinus' most basic and far-reaching insight.³

This insight also has a dynamic aspect: whatever is truly real must by that very fact cause subsequent realities. Accordingly, what is one is not only real but also perfect and powerful. But whatever is perfect and powerful automatically and necessarily overflows and thereby produces another (but lesser) reality which depends upon and turns back to its cause with desire and love. To this extent the One, as the cause of all subsequent lesser reality and as the object of their desire, is also the ultimate Good.⁴

With these points in mind we may reformulate Plotinus' basic insight as follows: to be real not only means to be one but also to be good. What is totally simple and unified is also the Supreme Good. As the ultimate source of absolutely all else and as the universal goal of desire, the One is the Good. Whatever is one, then, is also good—good to others by producing them automatically and necessarily, and good for

³The following are some texts which suggest the primacy of unity: VI, 9 (9), 1; V, 5 (32), 5; VI, 6 (34), 1; and VI, 2 (43), 11.

⁴Plotinus expresses the dynamic aspect of reality by his doctrines of going forth and turning back (προοδος and ἐνεκ- αροφη). He frequently makes the following two points in the same text: what is perfect inevitably gives rise to products and, second, each product turns back to its source because of desire and love (See V, 4 [7], 1; V, 1 [10], 6 and 7; V, 2 [11], 1; II, 9 [33], 8; V, 3 [49], 11; V, 5 [32], 12; and VI, 7 [2], 20).
others as the object of their desire.\(^5\)

In this way Plotinus' ontological or henological perspective is simultaneously a theory of morality too. When the serious man achieves unity, he actually has the good within himself: he is the good. The unity in the serious man is identical with goodness (the unity is the good state of his inner reality) because the Primal Reality, the One, which unifies man, is also the Good, the primal and emanative cause of his goodness.\(^6\) Just as the One and the Good are identical, so too unity and goodness are one and the same state in man and consist of his seriousness.

We have already seen that a man achieves unity by purely intellectual means: contemplation and intuition. But practically he also achieves this unity by detaching himself from the concerns of the universe in which he lives. He is free from everything and everybody. With the achievement of the good state of his inner reality, the serious man has the proper perspective with which to view and to evaluate the people, things, and events around him. He knows that the real man is other than his outward parts. Hence, any pursuit that involves those outward parts will only prove to be a distraction from what is real.

\(^5\)For this and other points regarded as key elements in Plotinus’ philosophy, see Leo Sweeney, "Basic Principles in Plotinus' Philosophy," pp. 506-16.

\(^6\)Armstrong and others incorrectly translate \(δ\) σοφός as "the truly good and wise man" or "the good man" whereas its literal and most accurate meaning is "the serious man." Now the man who is serious is certainly both good and wise but his most essential characteristic is unity. He becomes serious, good, and wise only after he achieves unity within himself and with the One.
This, however, does not mean that the serious man has no regard for other persons. While it is true that he does not allow their everyday interests and activities (which are mere play) to overwhelm him, he does strive, insofar as he is able, to help others achieve the same state of seriousness he already enjoys. Accordingly, he tries to live an exemplary life so that those who are not yet serious might learn from him and thus come to unity themselves.  

The serious man, then, takes as good not the apparent goods of this world but the One or Good of the highest realm, with whom he becomes unified. This unity is his only goal. For it alone constitutes the good state of his inner reality, and everything else is secondary and ultimately unimportant. Thus, some things contribute to his good inner state while others only belong to his outer and inferior half, the body. To the latter he gives only what it needs to exist because he realizes that it makes no contribution to his seriousness and must be ignored and eventually discarded.

But why should the concerns of body and the events of

7As Armstrong points out in his preface to the Enneads, "the primary object of all Plotinus' philosophical activity is to bring his own soul and the souls of others by way of Intellect to union with the One" (Vol. 1, p. xxv). Plotinus' reputed last words seem to bear this out: "Try to bring back the god in you to the divine in the All!" (Porphyry, Life of Plotinus, ch. 2, lines 26-27).

8III, 4 (15), 2, lines 6-16. If man is to achieve salvation and purification he must "escape" to the upper world and rise to what is intelligible, to intellect and to God, the One.

9See above, pp. 49-60.
daily life seem so insignificant to the serious man? Because he has achieved unity with the One through contemplation and intuition and therefore understands the true nature of the All in which he lives. This, he sees, is merely a reflection of the true All of Nous and, as such, is less perfect, less unified and, therefore, less real. Thus the activities, problems, and events which occur in it are only imitations and thus are only as real as the actions and events on a stage. These are mere play and belong only to the outer part of man. Only by refusing to be distracted by such playful activity can the real part of man, the inner man, achieve unity and seriousness.10

Having delineated precisely what seriousness is in Plotinus' man, let us now evaluate its role and significance in Plotinus' philosophy.

There are, as Emile Brehier has stated, two major questions with which Plotinus' writings seem to be concerned: first, the moral problem concerning the destiny of the soul and concerning the means of returning it to its proper state; second, the philosophical problem of the structure and rational explanation of reality. He also points out that the characteristic feature of Plotinus' system appears to be the close union of these two problems—indeed, such a union that it is impossible to know which is subordinate to the other.11 These two

10See above, pp. 63-72.

problems are so closely related, in fact, that the discovery of the principle of reality, which is the goal of philosophic research, is at the same time the end of the soul's journey toward the One, the fulfillment of man's true end, and the achievement of seriousness.

But how do we reach that true goal and, as Plotinus asks, "what art is there, what method or practice, which will take us up there where we must go? Where that is, that it is to the Good, the first principle, we can take as agreed upon and established by many demonstrations; and the demonstrations themselves were a kind of leading upon our way."\(^{12}\) What sort of person is to be led on this upward path? He must be one who sees and understands reality. Only the philosopher or the serious man can do this because "he is the one who is by nature ready to respond and . . . has begun to move to the higher world, and is only at a loss for someone to show him the way. So he must be shown and set free, with his own good will, he who has long been free by nature."\(^{13}\)

The philosopher or serious man is set free by his coming to understand that reality appears as a hierarchically ordered series of several levels, each of which depends on the preceding level for its power, unity and reality. Nature (which constitutes the formal factor in our All) is nothing more than the content of the contemplation of Soul, which is in turn the

\(^{12}\)I, 3 (20), 1, lines 1-7.
\(^{13}\)I, 3 (20), 3, lines 1-10.
content of the contemplation of Nous, which is caused by the One not through contemplation but through emanation. All reality, then, ultimately depends on the One.

Man, too, depends on the One for his reality. He becomes real and serious only by coming to unity with himself and with the One. His realization of the principle "to be real is to be one" and of all that this principle entails gives him a means to achieve unity and, therefore, seriousness. This he does through philosophy because only by using its method can he distinguish between good and bad, knowledge and opinion, seriousness and play. Only philosophy "stops wandering about the world of sense and settles down in the world of intellect, and there it occupies itself . . . feeding the soul in what Plato calls 'the plain of truth,' using his method of division to . . . determine the essential nature of each thing, and to find the primary kinds, and weaving together by the intellect all that issues from these primary kinds, until it has traversed the whole intelligible world; then it resolves again the structure of that world into its parts, and comes back to its starting point; and then, keeping quiet . . . it busies itself no more, but, having arrived, beholds the One."¹⁴

It is only the serious man, then, who by philosophy comes to understand that the many seemingly important activities and concerns of earthly life are mere play since true happiness and goodness consist only in unity with the One.

¹⁴I, 3 (20), 4, lines 7-25.
Let us conclude this thesis with a passage from Plotinus' first treatise, I, 6, "On Beauty." Its chapter seven is a most beautiful and moving description of ascent to, and eventual unity with, the Primal Reality: "So we must ascend again to the Good, which every soul desires. Anyone who has seen it knows what I mean when I say it is beautiful. It is desired as good, and the desire for it is directed to good, and the attainment of it is for those who go up to the higher world and are converted and strip off what we put on in our descent ... until, passing in the ascent all that is alien to the God, one sees alone That alone, simple, single, and pure, from which all depends and to which all look and are and live and think: for it is cause of life and mind and being." Plotinus also perceived that such attainment brought joy. "If anyone sees it, what passion will he feel, what longing in his desire to be united with it, what a shock of delight! ... he who has seen it glories in its beauty and is full of wonder and delight, enduring a shock which causes no hurt, loving with true passion and piercing longing; he laughs at all other loves and

15 Even though all the key texts on seriousness are found in rather late treatises, it is interesting to notice that even in his very first treatise Plotinus anticipated the upward path to unity and seriousness so accurately.

16 I, 6 (1), 7, lines 1-19. Although Plotinus himself might not have been sympathetic to the Christian viewpoint, his words here are reminiscent of Christ's remark that "if anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, take up his cross and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life shall lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake shall find it. For what benefit would it be to a man if he were to gain the whole world, but forfeit his soul?" (Matt. 16: 24-26).
despises what he thought beautiful before . . . Here the greatest, the ultimate contest is set before our souls; all our toil and trouble is for this, not to be left without a share in the best of visions. The man who attains this is blessed in seeing that 'blessed sight.' . . . For this he should give up the attainment of kingship and of rule over all earth and sea and sky, if only by leaving and overlooking them he can turn to That and see." 17

17 I, 6 (1), 7, lines 1-19 and 31-40.
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We shall employ the following abbreviations in our bibliography:


HS: Modern Schoolman.
PR: Philosophical Review.
GR: Gregorianum.
CQ: Classical Quarterly.
Ph: Phronesis.
RIP: Revue internationale de Philosophie.
RP: Revue Philosophique.
RPL: Revue Philosophique de Louvain.
RHM: Revue de Metaphysique et de Morale.
M: Memesyne.


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The thesis submitted by Roman Theodore Ciapalo has been read and approved by the following committee:

Fr. Leo Sweeney, S.J., Director
Adjunct Professor, Philosophy, Loyola

Fr. David Hassel, S.J.
Associate Professor, Philosophy, Loyola

The final copies have been examined by the director of the thesis and the signature which appears below verifies the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated and that the thesis is now given final approval by the Committee with reference to content and form.

The thesis is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Philosophy.

Aug. 14, 1977
Date

[Signature]
Director's Signature