

Transcending desire: The shaping of Christian thought by classical ideals of restraint and transcendence

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DEDICATION

For my late father,

Ted Lynch

and

Triestino father Nino Sterle

—un abbraccio con tutta l'anima, per sempre.

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ABSTRACT

Transcending sexual desire in favour of spiritual goals, while valuing the latter above the former in terms of importance and virtue, is a defining feature of early Christian theology. Some biblical scholars interpret the body and divinity in early Christianity as integrative—sublimation of sexuality was seen as liberation from the prevailing ethos of the body, or a form of promotion of the spiritual within the human dimension. By contrast, the current research will attempt to demonstrate that the symbiosis of Platonism and dualistic thought shapes the concept of sublimation in early Christian writers in a powerful and consistent way; further, the residual legacy of this continues to guide Christian perceptions and concerns on human sexuality.

The purpose of this study then is to examine the philosophical and (to a lesser extent) the religious genealogy of this feature of early Western thought and theology.

Keywords

Ancient Philosophy, Aristotle, Augustine, Body, Corporeal, Dualism, Early Church, Mind, Neoplatonism, Plato, Presocratics, Sexuality, Spirit, Sublimation.

PREFACE

One of the philosophical ideas that was the foundation of my Christian education was that the appearance of Christ profoundly changed everything about the human outlook, about our worldview and about people themselves. This particular claim, made by my school head, seemed to have been made in a state of ignorance regarding everything that had come before c. 33 CE. As a teenage know-all this bothered me. I saw clearly, through my initial and rudimentary study of classics, that human thought and outlook was surprisingly similar both before and after Jesus Christ. In particular, the trial and death of Socrates struck me as having significant parallels to the death of Christ. I wondered how many other times this basic dynamic had occurred and recurred, not just in human history, but specifically in Western history.

I suppose my choice of topic stems from a basic attempt to reconcile what I was first taught with what I later learned, or perhaps even to prove that I was ‘right’ all those years ago. In the process, I found that I was both correct and incorrect in my first assumptions as a teenage scholar.

I wanted to examine the primary texts with fresh but grown-up eyes, and trace the evolution of a concept discernible within the primary texts. It is true that some additional historical information might have further informed the analysis, as might the addition of further secondary sources; however, it seemed to me that there was sufficient and readily accessible material in the primary texts themselves to support my central argument and approach, and that, moreover, concentrating on the texts themselves can still produce fresh interpretations.

Of course this approach presents problems and the main one is the usual one: the fact that we do not have a full range of texts from all the philosophers studied— before Plato, for instance, most of the writings that exist are in fragments. It is possible that ideas are misinterpreted, or, rather, that the degree of emphasis on certain ideas is misrepresented relative to the original intent of the authors. But that is a universal problem in scholarship. In my case, because I am tracing (and therefore emphasising and looking for) reference to a certain key concept, it is possible that I have fallen into the trap of over-representing and emphasising it. I can only plead that I have tried also to add context to the discussion by showing that the central ideas

in the research are integrated with reasonably well-known systems of thought, while being careful of the other trap of presenting a commonplace history of ideas.

Another problem is answering the modern challenge of those who value philosophy primarily for the ‘use’ that it has for us as humans—who deny the existence of an objective and absolute ‘truth’ and discount much of religious thought, with its orientation toward the spiritual, idealised world that transcends physical and temporal reality. Part of me imagines, for example, that even if a philosopher like Richard Rorty¹ thought favourably of any sort of ancient philosophy at all (he seems to have favoured the Epicureans, and possibly the Stoics) he would regard the whole of my research as useless, because it engages and traces the development of a view of philosophy that he does not endorse. Platonic thought—with its vast and prevailing effect on Western thought—has been perceived in its totality as misguided and sometimes downright harmful with regard to the viewpoints it engenders. Of course, my study is not an endorsement of sublimation, dualism, platonism or even religion, but merely an attempt to de-mystify, to show what I think went on.

This is where Rorty’s thinking and my own project might intersect. Rorty, following Wittgenstein, is cognisant of the power of language, and the words that create understanding. The ideas regarding sublimation—how it developed—are in my opinion fundamental to supplying an understanding of how Western thought developed, what it consists of, how we are influenced and inspired and limited by it. The ideas might not be important from a pragmatic sense in and of themselves but their effect on human thought, historically and in the present, is vitally important. Sublimation is a concept that we have all lived on at some level and to some degree but it is also the result of a specific refraction of ideas through social/historical events.

In the end any society is governed by sets of philosophical concepts that produce a way of thinking. If we grow up among them, and live with heritage and traditions, there is a tendency to think of them as universal or inevitable; we do not question why they are there, or how valid they are. But all concepts, all ideas, had to start somewhere. The idea that the ‘spirit’ is superior to the body, and that physical impulses should be tamed or managed or even

¹ I have taken the liberty of using Rorty as representative of a viewpoint. He is, I think, a toweringly authoritative representative.

eliminated for the overall development of the person is sublimation, and many of us recognise it as an element of religion. Ignoring the working of these ideas in human thought is not pragmatic because it simply keeps us from seeing something which has always been influential. At the same time, admitting the influence of dualism, sublimation, religious thought and refusing to disparage those concepts does not bind us to them, or set them up as an unchangeable image of truth. Rather, such a process is realistic and useful in that it allows us to decide objectively how much credence to give these ideas. Personally, the process has had this effect on me. Despite my prior assumptions concerning ancient philosophy and Christian theology, it was only when I traced elements of sublimation from their Presocratic incarnation, through the development of Christian thought and beyond, that I gained a sense of objectivity about these ideas. As a result, they seem both more and less powerful than before. An unseen world—its elevation above our own and the negotiation needed to attain it—is (I was most fascinated to learn) not a foregone conclusion and perhaps the product of a specific, subjective even, line of reasoning which is vulnerable to perversion and manipulation. Nonetheless it points at a world that is unseen, and which is emphatically proposed as more powerful and less temporal than what we see around us—and also intelligible. If the seen and unseen can be learned through each other it is wise to pay attention.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND

Early Christian theologians attempting an *intellectus fidei* that was not alien to their contemporary (Hellenistic) world were on familiar ground when they drew a close association between virtue and the transcendence of physical existence (Sobrinho, 1978:289). These core concepts clearly predate Christianity, although it may be argued that they have found particular emphasis in the various expressions of Christianity that have come into play throughout the past two thousand years.

Effectively, sublimation of the corporeal in favour of the spiritual, an ideal guided by beliefs about a duality between body and soul, has been implicated in Christian theology from its beginning, becoming a defining theme in the development of Western thought and culture (Patočka, 2002:1–15).

The ideal of transcending or sublimating sexual desire is not limited to Western culture, but the manner in which sublimation developed within Christianity is the result of a specific trajectory, set in motion in Classical times and receiving its strongest and most defining influence from the work of Plato and the Neoplatonists. Platonism's long and distinct lineage has therefore persisted, finding eloquent expression throughout the Christian era. The evolution of sublimation warrants re-examination in order to improve our understanding of an antimony that is inherent within Christian theology: the importance of the body and the desire to transcend all things corporeal.

1.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT

The concept of sublimation of the body is closely tied to a belief in dualism: in the absence of dualism, sublimation lacks a rational basis. If the body is to be sublimated, that body is a necessary starting point for an ultimately spiritual journey. The body has a clear role, yet one's attention must always be focused on overcoming the corporeal and its natural boundaries. Dualism in this context may be interpreted and has been explained as a particular

kind of Fall in which the inward spirit is trapped and unable to realise itself within material creation, or it may have a cosmological foundation: a temptation by the serpent or the attractive reflection of the lower world. It is ultimately the practice of sublimation sustained through philosophical speculation by which humans rediscover, or recollect, their true nature and proper place in the universe as an ideal expression of human sanctification.

It was an immense challenge for Early Church writers—immersed in traditions of thought and high-achieving cultures with intellectual and emotional resonance—to interpret dualism and its spiritual architecture in a new context. What happened in effect was that the existing philosophical framework was adapted and the work of sublimation continued to be given a transcendental horizon. However, the working out of concepts of rejection or denigration of the physical world in favour of the spiritual was frequently problematic, often to the extent of contradicting the charisms and humanistic impulses inherent in Christianity. Christian (and Jewish) emphasis on compassion existed in subtle opposition to the implications of dualism and the divided self, for the recorded teachings of Christ contained the imperative to look after the physical as well as the spiritual needs of others, with the implication that a state of spiritual grace results from physical acts of mercy. Additionally, the symbolic significance of the life of Christ suggested a merging or communion of the physical and the spiritual.

The Neoplatonist deity as a model was therefore adjusted in favour of an attentive and knowable divinity, with Christ as an intermediary between fallen humanity and the abstract Divine. But it was this capacity of Christ that made Christianity more accessible and meaningful than the wholly abstract concept of the Divine in Neoplatonist thought, especially when the earthly ministry of Jesus Christ and his example of loving existence on earth cut across the central thrust of radical dualism. That was precisely what troubled St Augustine, whose meditations on sublimation joined and settled Jesus Christ's teaching in the flesh and a transcendental horizon for the life of the spirit. Augustine's Christ, though, has a disembodied, Neoplatonist flavour and (in describing at length) his life struggles to overcome desire by a soul strengthened in belief, "Augustine pictures the soul ideally situated 'above', and therefore governing, the body which is 'subordinate' to it"—a standard dualist position (O'Connell, 1996:19).

There are and always have been ambiguities or paradoxes even at the heart of the Christian attachment to dualism. On the one hand, separation of body and soul or spirit and the supposed superiority of the immaterial spirit have been effectively *a priori* assumptions; but

on the other hand, premises such as the precise interpretation of the corporeality of Christ and the angels, and of transubstantiation, for example, have been the subject of strenuous debate. Deeply implicated in all this is the very fundamental notion of the resurrection of the body, which aligns with the importance of the body. It seems Christianity can neither entirely assimilate, nor quite divorce itself from, philosophical dualism and the practice of sublimation.

Two fundamental areas of inquiry arise:

- (1) The place of dualism and sublimation within the Christian worldview is still a fundamental question in our approach to theology in the modern era. For the purpose of this re-examination, it is useful to trace the origins of the concept, its evolution, and the reasons why it took hold. In doing so, a more precise understanding of the merits and difficulties of the concept of sexual sublimation may be reached. Subtle but disturbing contradictions within theology, as described above, may be examined and ultimately reconciled.
- (2) Accepting the intrinsic value of a corporeal existence without seeking to sublimate or overcome it allows us to make our peace with a great mystery. If we cannot cleanly divide the physical from the corporeal, we must reconcile them. What is to be their relationship? Is there a way to honour both even when we cannot wholly understand and prescribe the relationship between them? Does the foundation for such a revised view exist within the writings of the oldest, most influential philosophers and theologians?

The overarching research question is:

How does the current understanding of bodily sublimation in Western Christian thought relate to its pre-Christian antecedents? What are the similarities and differences between understandings of dualism and sublimation in antiquity and in present contexts?

Questions that arise from this are:

- i) What are the origins, and importance, of dualism in Western thought? How was the sublimation of the body conceptualised in early pre-Christian thought, particularly in Plato?

- ii) How did other pre-Christian views of sublimation manifest?
- iii) How did pre-Christian philosophical manifestations of dualism develop, particularly as they relate to a denigration of the corporeal and an elevation of the non-physical?
- iv) What was the influence of the value-laden concept of dualism on early Christian (and indeed some Jewish) theologies?
- v) What are the attitudes toward the body and spirit within Christian thought, the potential conflicts therein, and their possible resolutions?

1.3 JUSTIFICATION FOR THE RESEARCH

Sublimation and dualism have been discussed to some degree in the scholarly literature of recent decades. The fundamental theological tension between body and spirit, the mind and the corporeal, has been addressed in books including Cahill's *Sex, Gender and Christian Ethics* (1996), and *Psyche and Soma* (2000) by Wright and Potter. Book-length examinations of connections between Christian theology and Classical philosophy have been published in recent decades; There are of course general published histories of the concept of body-soul dualism. Obvious starting-points include Gilbert Ryle's *Concept of Mind* and Charles Taylor's *Sources of the Self*. But none of these considers the issues of sublimation and dualism as a central concern.

However, to suggest that there is a gap in the literature is one thing; to justify a thesis-length examination of these concepts relative to Christian theology is quite another. Is it the case that a study of the place of sublimation in various systems in philosophy, as this thesis proposes to do, has little interest, except peripherally, in the context of a reasonably well-known history of ideas? I do not believe this to be the case and I suggest that the reason for this gap, or lack of interest, is far more interesting and warrants—necessitates—discussion in some detail.

All too often, early Christianity, and with that its ascetic practices, is studied with enthusiasm by way of contemporary post-modernism with its accent of feminist and queer theory. This approach represented a theoretical shift in the study of sexuality and power relations in the early church that has produced an understanding of ascetic behaviour that sets its face firmly away from any serious search for early Christian motivations, subjectively expressed in the

rich and passionate writing in the period of the church's formation. Instead there is a fascination with celibacy and the sexuality of power-relations by which, it is argued, political and societal power structures were challenged by sexual abstinence. The research offers a sample of representative ideas in this genre in the following pages.

Michel Foucault, who is a source of many post-modernist streams, died in 1984 and left unfinished his multivolume *The History of Sexuality* with its influential thesis that in the sexual abstinence of Christians in the late Roman Empire is to be sought their subversive power. His thesis led to a whole genre of literature which leaves out the main features of sexual abstinence as part of a system of ascetic practices within a rich body of philosophical thought and mythological representation. Foucault proceeds in the opposite direction to valorise signification in the history of a discourse and culture within which modern, repressive sexuality is said to have come into existence in the first place. To cite an example of a meditation along these lines, Augustine's relationship with his male member "bears witness to the new type of relationship which Christianity established between sex and subjectivity" because "the main question is not, as it was in Artemidorus, the problem of penetration: it is the problem of erection." It is, in short, the erection rather than the inward work of the Holy Spirit that the self establishes in discourse, a "relationship of oneself to oneself" in a "permanent hermeneutics of oneself" (Foucault, 1999:186). Such reduction of ascetic practices to forms of onanism obscures Augustine's far weightier reflection on spirit over matter within a philosophical dialectic that framed the exercise of meditation in dualistic terms.

Scholarly and popular fascination with Christian sexual abstinence is certainly understandable. It was, after all, precisely that continence which most impressed and astonished St Augustine in his Christian teacher and inspiration, Ambrose. But it is equally worthwhile to note that celibacy is only one of many possible ascetic practices surely known to Augustine, given the radical dualism of his other teacher, Faustus, representing the Manichean challenge to Christianity. One can almost forget that Augustine was just as impressed by Ambrose reading the Scriptures silently as by his teacher's sexual abstinence. This research will be visiting a tradition of Greek philosophers for whom self-mastery and desire to deal with contending forces by means of specific spiritual exercises cast an influence on guiding figures in the Christian tradition. All these inhabit a space of liminality which is constitutive of who they are and which points to a God approached, if not reached, by earnest

spiritual exercise, with the deepest roots in the Greco-Roman philosophy of transcendence, to the world of light and fullness, or *pleroma*. This research tries to show that it was this exercise of sublimation which the church could not do without, at least in its formation, and possibly even today.

This tradition is exemplified in the well-known fourth-century *Life of Anthony* written by Athanasius (Brennan, 1985:209–227). The young Anthony visits various men of virtue and considers the particular traits of each. In everyone, he marks their love for Christ and care for each other. Having been spiritually filled in this manner, he returns home impressed. This is the kind of community and meditation practices that the research suggests is encountered many times among early Christian communities and that informs the spirit in which sublimation has its proper place.

By contrast, social theories of power characteristic of many recent studies contend that individuals and social groups, early Christian communities not excluded, create and employ ideological complexes to structure reality in agreement with the dominant social structure, or devise through their ideology a new worldview that challenges the dominant social structure. It is often explained that at a very late period of the failing Roman Empire, beginning in the early fourth century, substantial numbers of Christians suddenly abandoned their old society and withdrew into a singular pursuit of a spiritual existence. James Goehring calls it appropriately the “Big Bang Theory” of monasticism (Goehring, 1992:235), a time when ascetic figures became advisors for spiritual matters, arbiters over local disputes in the absence of civil authorities, local healers and so on. Christianity, some have argued, created its own perfectly independent worldview, which included an ascetic ideology, in order to inaugurate its own dominance within the Roman Empire. Asceticism, now justified by Christian theology, gave men and women the ability to resist social demands of marriage and children, and challenged the right of society to assert its demands upon the individual. Peter Brown, a follower of Foucault, sees this Christian theology that emphasised individual and personal association with the divine through Christ (through sublimation of desire or celibacy) as a direct challenge to the Roman social structure. For Brown, the embrace of celibacy by Christians in the first two or three centuries of the Common Era is the true source of a drawn-out process by which Christianity slowly took over as the dominant social structure in late antiquity, from the fourth century through to the sixth, when in Christianity leadership roles were slowly transferred to local holy men and women in the faltering empire. The late

antique holy man was thus, in this view, a liminal figure outside the social structure, able to enact change by resolving political and civil disputes (Brown, 1971:80–101). In the same vein, for Richard Valantasis, the most important role of asceticism is to foster a social change through a reinvention of a worldview that is wholly post-modern. “Asceticism“, he maintains, “may be defined as performances within a dominant social environment intended to inaugurate a new subjectivity, different social relations, and an alternative symbolic universe” (Valantasis,1995:800). In short, to use the terminology of post-modernism, asceticism is transgressive of the social order as a political weapon, especially in sexual matters.

This reframing has intensified in recent years and the examples are diverse and novel: scholars of Christianity and late antiquity, for instance, may find troubling the idea of a Christian hagiography of sanctity and sublimation recast as “queer erotic arts” when Virginia Burrus describes their “exuberant eroticism” (Burrus, 2010:1). She advances an argument, often cited, that transgressive sexuality, even in the form of radical elimination of sex, brings into being the “counterpleasures” of sadism, masochism, and *askesis* that shake “the constraining and often violently oppressive structures of familial, civic, and imperial domination” (2010:161). Burrus proposes that “there arises within Christianity a distinctive *ars erotica* that does not so much predate as effectively resist and evade the *scientia sexualis* that likewise emerges (derivatively) in late antiquity and eventually culminates in the production of a modern, western regime of ‘sexuality’” (2010:3).

Elizabeth A. Livingstone (1997:463–466), under a title which is a model of tentativeness, warns that the area of ascetic practices in early Christianity presents “methodological minefields”. Her contribution is avowedly speculative, and, at first, unremarkable: Christians were “visionary elite” constituting a late Empire “counter-culture” characterised by a rejection of all earthly things, a *contemptus mundi* from which rises the ascetic stream of the church before the fifth century. She cautions:

But it is not advanced as an all-encompassing thesis that can explain ancient Christianity as a simple and single phenomenon; it is offered as an ‘interpretive key’ that can provide the methodological framework that can account for, not gloss over, the diversity and the development, the conflicts, shifts and complexity that was Christianity at least until the fifth century (1997:466).

Livingstone's caution is worth noting positively, though her professed "comparative sociological-historical method" presents ascetism almost as a social programme without content that could account for its emotional resonance.

More recently, it is again the question of sexuality that has served as the necessary 'interpretive key' and the content of ascetic practices. Elizabeth Castelli's article "Virginity and Its Meaning for Women's Sexuality in Early Christianity" suggests that maintaining celibacy even within marriage would serve as a lever of power in a society which gives few other means for women to exercise authority and earn social respect. Paradoxically, it is also proposed that the ascetic life for all its rigours may have offered Christian women the possibility of great honour outside conventional gender-based roles as they existed in the Hellenistic world within the traditional setting of marriage (Castelli, 1986:61–88).

In commenting on the working out of ascetic ideas for women in the Hellenistic world, Kathy Gaca explicitly challenges the view that Christianity at its foundation owes anything to Greek philosophy. Her aim, openly proclaimed, is "to give the Septuagint its due" (Gaca, 2003:8). Specifically, she situates Christianity as a breach with Hellenistic philosophical tradition in favour of a one-dimensional, uncompromising Hebrew tradition against fornication as employed by Paul.

What is missing in almost all of these representative analyses is the self-perception of those who followed the path of sexual chastity: this can be seen very clearly in the anecdotes of the desert fathers found in the *Apothegmata Patrum*, which depict the ascetic life as one of wrestling with self and demons, engaging in hard labour, enduring hunger, reading scripture and battling temptation of all kinds, among which sexual desire, while prominent, is not exceptional. There seems not to be found in these accounts any social or political concerns whatever, but rather a level of sublimation as practice (*askesis*) leading to a self-mastery that would ultimately assist in the transformation of their soul into a sanctified being.

At issue are the goals for sublimation, whether as a passion for the transcendent experience, or else a means of gaining power through a new role within the structures of Christianity to escape repressive and dominant patriarchal structures. Current theories valorise the latter, this thesis the former.

What exactly does it mean to be an ascetic in the late period of the Roman Empire when not working for its subversion or practicing sexual chastity? Arguably the question has not been adequately answered because it does not sit well with contemporary interests and presuppositions. It requires reflection on early Christians as located in an old and respectable philosophical tradition, rising by the exercise of sublimation in the most varied areas of desire above the cares and worries of this world, and also above its pleasures and delights. The tradition of valuing the contemplation of higher things, warmly recommended in philosophy from Plato onward, was a necessary component of early Christian philosophy.

As an example, Origen's *On First Principles* provides a cosmology in which sexual austerity and the fate of the Roman Empire played no role though it is characteristic of the literature of the time. Origen regarded all human desire, not just sexual or even physical, as derived from a divine Eros before the physical universe came into being when all spiritual creatures joined together as one community absorbed in the intense contemplation of God.

Our whole life, in Origen's view, is an attempt to return to that primordial, expansive, infinite love. This is the concept of human anthropology that is generally named Neoplatonist. In fact, it has deep roots in the dualistic philosophical currents of Greek and Roman thought and supplies a basis for sublimation as an exercise of transcendence that seems much less distorted and impoverished than the current valorisation of Christian ascetics of the early church as sexual mavericks and outsiders in an empire that was seemingly shaken to its foundations by Christians abstaining from sex and bruising their bodies to pleasure their soul.

The gap in the literature, which this research proposes to address, arises in large part because of the very authority and innovation of many scholars who followed Foucault into areas of early Christianity to address themes like the subversive power of unconventional sexual expressions on issues such as gender, family, politics, economics and religion. The complexity and breadth of these feminist and post-modernist studies is such that the range of issues discussed, their oddity at times, and the difficulty in integrating them with the perspective advanced in this research represents the danger of undervaluing a philosophical strategy that has survived many political changes and intellectual fashions, and that serves to anchor religious faith regardless of contingent, historical variables and perhaps even contemporary obsessions. This lineage of philosophical dualism and the practice of sublimation has a dimension that belongs to the irreversible trajectory of historical time; it found its way to the heart of Christian existence and it remains an issue worth exploring.

1.4 AIM AND OBJECTIVES

1.4.1 Aim

The aim of this thesis is to trace the influence of dualism and the development of the concept of sublimation in Christian thought, by examining its antecedents in pre-Christian philosophy and its profound effect in bringing the drama of an inward struggle for Christ to the Early Church, an influence that reaches to our time.

1.4.2 Objectives

The objectives of this research are as follows.

- i) To gain an understanding of the origins and the importance of dualism in Western thought.
- ii) To gain an understanding of the concept of the sublimation of the body in Pre-Christian thought.
- iii) To trace pre-Christian philosophical manifestations of dualism, particularly as they relate to a denigration of the corporeal and an elevation of the non-physical.
- iv) To assess the influence of the value-laden concept of dualism on early Christian theology through a textual examination of early Christian writers.
- v) Finally, to arrive at an improved understanding of attitudes toward the body and spirit within Christian thought, the potential conflicts therein, and their possible resolution.

1.5 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

To the degree that religion (specifically Christianity) still exists and has relevance, key ideas in Classical philosophy still exist too. Religious ideas are sometimes retained as a basis for a worldview even by people who have consciously rejected religion or have ambivalent feelings

about religion.² Essentially, large elements or fragments of the concept of sublimation certainly exist through the persistence of religion, and these concepts would not exist without antecedent (“anterior”) ideas. The purpose of this research is to attempt an assessment or examination of philosophical and (to a smaller extent) the religious genealogy of sublimation in early Western thought and theology. The study does not ignore the political and cultural implications of sublimation in antiquity,³ but its primary focus is the link between sublimation of the body and the trajectories of spiritual development in early Western thought.

Modern anthropological thinking presents an analytical and disinterested view of religion—focusing on commonalities between religions, historical and social influences and, in general, the effects of religion on individuals and groups. The genesis of ancient ideology provides some substance to this line of thought. More specifically, as will be discussed in the thesis, the genesis and evolution of ancient ideology show that a consistent set of ideas may fill subtly different roles and may be identified differently, sometimes as philosophy (which, at one point, intersected with science) and sometimes as religion. Generally speaking, when we look at the evolution from Presocratic philosophy to Platonism, Neoplatonism, and eventually Christianity, there is a smooth movement from philosophy/science through philosophy/ideology to theology (or, philosophy with a strong theological underpinning). The ideas are clearly related, but their roles in society and the individual psyche are likely to be very different.

At this stage it is well to discuss the general approach to this study (which is further elaborated in the methodology, justification and concept clarification sections of its introduction) in the light of other possible approaches. There is a supposition in this research, intensified in the course of its investigation, that there is a need, as far as possible, to remove the distortion of examining Christian faith in the Classical Philosophical period through the prism of post-modern concerns, exemplified by those that stem from a belief, badly substantiated, reductive, and deriving from Foucault, that structures of power are displaced by the sexual practices of abstinence of its growing Christian community; that this is the

² A practical example is the concept of ‘Catholic guilt’, which is essentially a persistent feeling of guilt for not living up to some ideal, or the belief that certain impulses (relating to corporeal appetites/drives) are ‘bad’ or less pure and virtuous than the repudiation of those drives.

content issue. The reluctance of this study to engage with aspects of modern and post-modern frameworks of scholarship may be viewed as a weakness in presentation, and one which requires attention at the outset.

The focus of this research is to attempt to lift the veil that inevitably separates us from the past, given the weight of contemporary concerns. That was done by narrowing the focus of research to 'sublimation' as it was understood in its own time, and as found in texts, avoiding speculation or projection of ideas originating in other contexts. The effect of this is to show early Christian communities and their thinkers as integrated with and consciously making use of hermeneutics or styles of interpretation that are far more within the stream of classical thought than that of the strictly Judaic tradition, still less that which reflects contemporary concerns. In this world it was Plato who is credited with the metaphysical architecture that makes distinct soul and body, the material world dragging down the soul, the resultant tension and its resolution through intelligible sublimation. By contrast, it can be argued that Heidegger's critique of the Cartesian ego and its subjectivity should, following Lacan, Derrida and Foucault frame any discussion of sublimation because of a specific suspicion that its real origins can be traced back to modern thought (manifested, among other things, in the importance awarded to sublimation in modern Freudian and Jungian psychoanalysis). In other words Heidegger's critique of the Cartesian ego and its subjectivity should, following Lacan, Derrida, Foucault and others indicate the true meaning of sublimation. This is a specific tradition of sublimation from which the study has taken pains to distance itself in its deployment of the term, preferring the anterior sublimation offered by Anzieu, discussed in the concept clarification section (1.7.2). The energy system proposed by Sigmund Freud in which inappropriate drives are displaced and therefore discharged by alternate means, as an artist may in expressing desire indirectly through artistic production (Ricoeur, 1970), led under various tendencies to an effort characteristic of Heidegger's followers to call for a displacement of the Cartesian ego and Enlightenment Humanism for causing all manner of distortions which post-modernism attempts to answer. It is that tendency which is at issue, though its more contemporary versions can be employed, such as Derrida or Ricoeur.

³ Examined by the major studies of Giulia Sissa, Paul Ludwig and David Halperin, among others: see bibliography.

As this study works hard to make distinct, we may still be looking backward from varied elaboration of these distinctions in Neo-Platonic and Gnostic philosophies to Plato's philosophy in which that employment of sublimation as a religious vehicle was not yet fully realised. That is why Plato should neither be ignored, nor overrepresented as the foundation of a tradition the research takes pains to trace. Again, the concern of this research is with the powerful philosophical appeal of early Christianity as a means of transcendence that is distinct from modern and post-modern concerns.

The research does consider the manifestation of the concepts it examines in modern religious thought and it is well to acknowledge here that the enormous philosophical and theological discontinuities brought about by modernism affect the relationship of tradition and modernity. This is a well established thematic approach in historical research but in this relationship neither direction, from modern to classical or classical to the modern, is of interest in a dissertation partly attempting to perceive, more accurately witness, the first centuries of Christianity's foundation from how it looked in the context of classical philosophy. Again the research is founded methodologically on the textual principle that the only sure way that we can accurately surmise how the thinking of distant past evolves is through a careful study of surviving texts. The continuity observations in this study are based on this methodology. It would be interesting of course to discuss thematic and typological comparisons between standard or mainstream modern discourses given the sustained investigation of classical philosophy in this research—for instance Heidegger's thesis that has metaphysics as Platonism's special contribution to thinking which tore Western civilisation away from living in the light of Being that the Ancient Greeks had enjoyed. Similarly one can comment on Nietzsche's "will to power" upending metaphysics creating thereby a "reversed Platonism" in which in the modern epoch the human cognitive subject becomes the grounding principle of beings in their intelligibility. That is a tradition of thought largely outside the method of this study (and the inclinations of its author) primarily because it does not often offer a vantage point to clarify observations on influences and outcomes when reading these texts. For example in chapter 2 there is the observation that based on the examined texts in this study *none* of the Presocratic philosophers appears to have admitted a clear concept of immaterial reality that would have permitted such a stark contrast between body and soul as Plato can make. Heidegger in this area seeks to return us to, in his terms, "uncover" a relationship which is not considered, that of the elusive Being that hides in nothingness (Harman, 2007). But comparing and contrasting the articulation of topic the in such

discourses inevitably ushers a discussion of the crisis of modernity (blamed on Plato!) leading to various post-modernist critiques. This is fascinating but results in an off-the-ground discussion when more obvious springboards for discussion are available: the philosophical crisis of our time and our anxieties when following Nietzsche, “God is dead”, together do not account in any obvious way for the anxieties of the post-Temple period of the Roman Empire and its Hellenistic culture, a time when the religion based on the ministry of Jesus Christ, beyond the assurances that other sects provided, reimagined not only a spiritual vehicle, sublimation, but also an elaborate philosophical foundation to the practice, as this research examines.

If there is a philosophical identity to be acknowledged that frames this research and its presentation of ideas around it, it may relate to the ideas Charles Taylor talks of at the conclusion of *Sources of the Self* after he has examined the geneology of our human consciousness and our notions of good. His description of his intention to ‘bring air back again into the half-collapsed lungs of the spirit’ through a rearticulation of buried sources of meaning (520) is a metaphor equal to any of Nietzsche’s. Taylor’s enormous project to transcend the cul-de-sacs of modern consciousness leads to a very interesting horizon which Augustine would have recognised and which acknowledges a continuity in the tradition/modernity discourse that has integrity..

There is a large element of hope. It is a hope that I see implicit in Judaeo-Christian theism (however terrible the record of its adherents in history), and in its central promise of a divine affirmation of the human, more total than humans can ever attain unaided. But to explain this properly would take another book. My aim in this Conclusion has only been to show how my picture of the modern identity can shape our view of the moral predicament of our time. (Taylor, 1989: 520).

1.6 METHODOLOGY

The focus upon dualism and bodily sublimation remains relevant to the modern context and intrinsically interesting to anyone with an awareness of body and spirit as distinct, yet

connected, entities. Some of the key literature to be used as the basis for the present research includes classical philosophical tracts by Plato and key Classical and early Christian writers, in addition to modern scholarly commentary regarding Plato's philosophical writings. Research into sublimation, dualism and their connections with the Christian church will be utilised and connections between early Christian thought and ancient philosophers will be explored in the literature.

The writings and philosophies are represented as follows:

- Presocratic philosophers (Empedocles, Heraclitus, Parmenides, Anaxagoras);
- Plato (*Symposium*, *Timaeus*, *Republic*, *Phaedrus*, *Phaedo*);
- Aristotle (“Aristotelian” Sublimation, Contrast with Platonic Ideas, Sublimation in Humans);
- Hellenistic philosophers (Epicureanism, Stoicism);
- Neoplatonism (Plotinus, Proclus, Iamblichus, Philo);
- The Early Church (St. Augustine, Origen, Gregory of Nyssa, Tertullian).

For the most part, the methodology consists of selecting pertinent texts to trace the history of the idea of sublimation, and analysing these selected texts primarily on the basis of their content and presentation of ideas. Historical and social observations will also be made where deemed significant with regard to an analysis of the texts. The methodology of the current study will follow the form of a narrative literature review—a critical analysis of a defined and limited selection of key texts relating to a specific topic or area of research (Ridley, 2013). A funnel-like approach to the literature will be taken—a consideration of the broadest context first and then working down to the more detailed and specific pieces of literature by individual writers. Maree (2009:13) supports the use of this “funnel” technique in narrowing broad background to sharp focus. The findings of this literature search and review will be presented in the form of a narrative literature review, drawing together themes relating to dualism, sublimation of the body, and broader theological and philosophical currents and developments in relation to the body and the spirit.

The focus and approach is primarily epistemological. The interest is less in proving or disproving the validity of various ideas under philosophical scrutiny, but in demonstrating their development, their origins, and their evolution. Simply stated, the research examines an idea—sublimation—which has had a considerable influence on the development of Western thought. The research seeks to demystify sublimation, showing ‘what it is’ by examining its evolution and, to some degree, its effects.

The epistemological perspective has narrowed the research focus to include only the development of Western thought, even though Eastern religions, shamanism and animism have much to contribute to the discussion of dualism and sublimation. Shamanism and Pythagorean thought are considered briefly in the context of their relationship with early Greek philosophy.

The scope of discussion is the evolution of a particular trajectory of thought, one that led to the creation of Western culture and still forms the backdrop to much of it. Linkages with diverse traditions of thought and practice are important, but warrant a separate analysis. In order to establish the contemporary relevance of sublimation as it was first formulated and to establish its coherence and continuity as theology over time, only the most salient aspects of the literature of sublimation will be discussed within the particular context of its historical appearance in different periods of time. Of necessity, this entails a process of stringent selection. The components studied are not always uniform in content or chronology: for example, the section on Plato starts with *Symposium*, as the most ‘world-affirming’ of the dialogues, and proceeds then in descending order of positiveness, through the *Timaeus* and the *Phaedrus*, to the *Phaedo*. This is not chronological, but there is some justification for it in terms of a presentation of central ideas. In general, however, the research presented tries to ensure all components are related to the broad divisions of expression of the idea of sublimation and its related concepts as they developed over time.

Because of the breadth of the subject matter the contextual (at times skeletal) framework supplied in many sections is based on standard authorities and these are indicated where necessary at the start of the section. Observations are based on the actual texts, and citations are limited to supporting detail or where distinctive viewpoints are discussed. The text is important: line numbers are cited in accordance with Classical line/section number protocols. Translations used vary a good deal. Translations have been chosen which appear best to bring out the insight and integrity of the original—the original text in these instances is usually

supplied in a footnote (sometimes this happens in reverse, when translations are relegated to a footnote because they are alternatives to my own translation or because the text is short). The translator used is indicated in square brackets.

1.7 CONCEPT CLARIFICATION

1.7.1 Duality of Spirit and Body

Transcending sexuality is intimately bound to a dialectic regarding the duality of mind and body, or body and spirit, that has been a dominant feature of Western philosophical discourse since Plato, and that has been expressed to some degree since the Presocratic era. This dialectic extends to theology, and, one might argue, reaches its fullest expression through Christian theology, but is not limited to it.

Although the concept of duality is almost universal, some interpretations of it differ substantially from the Christian notion. Dennis Bratcher (2013) supplies a serviceable general definition:

A dualistic view of reality understands there to be two (thus dualism) levels of existence. The top level (a logical metaphor, not a spatial term) is ultimate reality, and consists of ideas, such as truth, beauty, goodness, justice, perfection. In other words, the ultimate reality is non-corporeal, or non-physical. It is the level of spirit and deity. The lower level is the physical world in which we live. It is the opposite of ultimate reality, thus it is not real in the sense that it is not ultimate. It contains the imperfect physical manifestations of the ideas that exist in the perfect plane, so by definition it is characterised by falsehood, ugliness, evil, injustice, imperfection.

Bratcher's definition refers to a number of factors that impact the significance of sublimation. The most important factor is the distinction between an ideal or transcendent dimension of existence, and a lower level or mundane dimension. Such a conception leads to an implicit judgment essential to the development of sublimation: a higher level of existence is valued much more than the mundane, lower level of the material.

Dualism, whether it is metaphysical, epistemological or anthropological seems to be inherent in any discussion of Plato and in every aspect of dualism in his dialogues what is also apparent is Plato's supreme capacity to capture the strongly human intuition that human experience is more than the sum of its parts. This is critical to the dualism inherent in his philosophy whether he is discussing the tension between the ideal and its repository, between knowledge and belief, between soul and body. When examining the dualism of Plato, it can be difficult to gauge his commitment to it and he offers little in the way of ready-made working definitions. Sometimes he seems to talk of dualistic oppositions between body and soul; sometimes about dualistic models of the world, divided into corporeal and spiritual realms; and sometimes about a practice (philosophical, or ascetic) of turning away from the bodily realm towards the spiritual one. Modern re-evaluation of Plato's alleged dualism has become a recurring theme and often in the context of projecting ideas which originate in other contexts. Cynthia Hampton, for example reduces Plato's dualism to a representation of dualism—which Plato is subverting by using mediators like Diotima. This is in the context however of her attempt to reinterpret (in the sense of deconstructing) dualism as a product of “Western Cultures, dominated by white men” (Hampton, 1994:218). At another end of the interpretative spectrum D.C. Schindler's much more sensitive and penetrating analysis of Platonic concepts in *Republic* (2008) shows dualism more as a contrast than an opposition between transient images and the real, unchangeable, truth. Schindler's analysis however never disturbs (and does not seek to disturb) the sense that Plato is producing something new, something qualitatively different to antecedent thought: a transformative and philosophical encounter with dualism from which arises a philosophy, a cosmology establishing a hierarchy of matter and spirit, and the means of transcendence in human response to it.

Whether or not Plato is committed to dualism is not the ultimate concern of this research: it is clear that the most important part of his legacy is the elaboration of dualism credited to him—from many of the prolific dualisms that featured in the classical and early Christian era through to the literature that inspired the Neo-Platonic revival of the Renaissance. It is also clear that the death of Socrates as a consequence of the hostility of the Athenian Demos influences Plato's distrustful depiction of a world in opposition to a general principle of good established by Socrates and here perhaps is a key to evaluating Plato's commitment to dualism. It was shortly before the writing of *The Republic* around 390 B.C. that Plato sets out the idea most persuasively, though more as a philosophical search for truth than as a spiritual vehicle it became later. He writes in *Phaedo* (80a):

If the soul and the body are united, then nature orders the soul to rule and govern, and the body to obey and serve...

Now which of these two functions is akin to the divine and which to the mortal? Does not the divine appear to you to be that which naturally orders and rules, and the mortal to be that which is subject and servant?

There is little at face value to distinguish this from Bratcher's very competent definition quoted above, but in Plato's questioning there is not only dualism expressed as metaphysics and metaphor, but a call to overcome it by sacramental and practical effort. That the soul orders and rules the body which obeys and serves must of necessity involve more than an empty vessel being manipulated, but more, a practice that is a transformation. It is on this transformation that forms of ascetic thought in early Christianity are sighted and charted back to specific philosophical currents examined in this research, emerging in Plotinus and Philo in subtle and often beautiful forms that appear elsewhere in Origen and Augustine.

1.7.2 Sublimation

The section on methodology talked of the need to "demystify " the concept of sublimation and in attempting to present a coherent account of the context and perspectives around the term "sublimation" used throughout this research it must be revealed what this sublimation is. It is clear that sublimation relates to the nature of sexuality and the drama of a certain type of serious negotiation, sometimes confrontation with it. There is no great difference in the qualitative dimensions of ancient and modern perspectives here: the nature of sexuality and its evaluation is a theme of continuity: philosophers of the ancient world for instance would hardly take issue with Havelock Ellis's famous proposition that:

The sexual impulse is a force, to some extent an incalculable force, and the struggle of man to direct that force, when he and it are both constantly changing, and the conditions under which they move are also constantly changing, is, inevitably attended with peril... (Ellis,1938:305).

The idea of directing this force is most readily identified with Sigmund Freud's school in which instinctive energy, libido is restrained, transformed and raised to socially acceptable

satisfaction. But the true conceptual sources of the term “sublimation” so important in this study are the ideas of Friedrich Nietzsche (Chapman and Chapman-Santana, 1995:152) a debt which Freud never acknowledged (Cybulska, 2015:8). Freud was satisfied however to acknowledge the closest possible link between his psychoanalytic theory of personality development and the concept of the eros love in Plato’s philosophy, as an extract from his notes makes clear:

By coming to this decision, Psychoanalysis has let loose a storm of indignation, as though it had been guilty of an act of outrageous innovation. Yet it has done nothing original in taking love in this ‘wider’ sense. In its origin, function and relation to sexual love, the ‘Eros’ of the philosopher Plato coincides exactly with the love force, the libido of psychoanalysis (GP, 119, quoted in Cousineau, 1995).

The etiology of the thread of sublimation from classical philosophy to Freudian psychology, influenced by the ideas of Nietzsche, is not marked therefore by a stark degree of discontinuity: as Sandrine Berges (2001) confirms in her analysis of the continuities, Plato and Nietzsche have markedly similar viewpoints on human drives and emotions.

There are limitations though in using Freud’s sublimation as a hermeneutic for understanding a similar thread in classical philosophy and early Christianity. Plato does not use the term, nor do the early Christians and its position in psychoanalysis has never been secure (Gemes, 2009). That said, the concept is a defining theory of the self in modernity: it has been associated very powerfully and constantly with modalities of creativity, spiritual and moral development, abstraction, and mortality and so on. Elizabeth De Franceschi makes the association in the context of the creative act, and in doing so she provides another operational definition of the term:

La sublimation se rapporte à des activités humaines qui trouvent leur resort dans la pulsion sexuelle; or si les travaux artistiques, l’investigation intellectuelle prennent leur source dans Eros, ils sont le fruit d’une modification ou d’un détournement des pulsions sexuelles (De Franceschi, 2008:8).

But while it retains a certain similarity to a concept of sublimation recognisable to Plato and the early Christians, De Franceschi's elegant summation is difficult to map successfully to older or anterior conceptualisation because it ignores the existence of a transcendental telos for the erotic longing intrinsic in human nature. It is an understanding of sublimation that is humanistic in nature: although some more holistic aspects are present, they tend not to be integrated within a unified worldview.

However (as Freud and Nietzsche knew very well), it is possible to understand 'sublimation' as it was understood in its own time; it is possible to understand its lineage and impact without introducing the overlay of bridging the complexities of the very different viewpoints of classical philosophy and modern and postmodern theories of the self. Plato and Freud did quite different things with the concept of eros and thus the sublimation under consideration in this study is best described as 'anterior' or distanced from the concerns of modernism and the scientific discipline of psychoanalysis. The disillusioned former Lacanian, Didier Anzieu's description of sublimation conveys very well this 'anterior' sense in the definition of sublimation:

Ce terme s'est trouvé, par une dérivation métaphorique bien antérieure à la psychanalyse, transposé au domaine de la purification morale: la pulsion sexuelle s'épure de ses composantes biologiques liées à la reproduction de l'espèce pour viser des buts élevés dans l'ordre esthétique, intellectuel, religieux, c'est-à-dire des buts habituellement qualifiés de sublimes (Anzieu, 1979:11).

This use of sublimation allows for the discovery of antecedent patterns of thought in Greek philosophers and Church fathers. One can see that as the concept of sublimation developed during antiquity, its progress was accompanied by a value judgement that privileged the spirit over the body in terms of importance and that what is understood today as sublimation is the residual element of a concept that once made reality elementally dual. The research can identify other complexities in analysing the geneology of sublimation found in the tension between two strands in the overall tradition: first, what one might term 'positive' sublimation of the body, such as can be discerned in such texts as Plato's *Symposium* and *Timaeus*, as well as in Aristotle and the Stoics, where what is being sought is a disciplining of the body and its desires, but not outright rejection of corporeal existence; and secondly, a more negative,

rejectionist attitude to the body and the physical world, such as is derivable from such a text as Plato's *Phaedo*, and manifests itself particularly in the Gnostic tradition, and in certain strands of later Platonism, such as that of Numenius, as well as in much of early Christianity.

It is possible to assess how the extraordinary influence of the concept of sublimating the body and its desires has shaped Western thought, how durable an idea it is in part, perhaps, because it is such a malleable idea, with many applications. Sublimation has been used as a form of control, as an expression of abstract reason, and as a guideline. It has been, through the ages, powerfully associated with misogyny and with an aesthetic lifestyle; it shifts along with the consciousness of the age, changing and growing increasingly ambiguous, but preserved in some fundamental tenets of the human condition. The primary purpose of this study is to assess the philosophical and spiritual genealogy of the concept of sublimation in early Western thought and theology, tracing the concept's progression from its Presocratic antecedents through its philosophical development to evaluate (to a degree) its enduring social significance. Most modern religious documents—in particular those of the Roman Catholic Church—reveal that this concept of anterior sublimation has survived more or less intact from its presentation by early Christian theologians. It is wise however to acknowledge that Humanism has played a large role in smoothing over the rift of duality and in reframing its conceptual basis;⁴ therefore sublimation, in the context of an intrinsic duality, exists today only in reference to a Western concept of spirituality that has a diffuse significance and diminished role in the life of the individual and that despite the continuity of the concept, there is a great deal of variety and ambiguity in the manner in which sublimation is conceived and practised by our culture at large.

A simple visual image—that of the Cathedral situated in the centre of most Western cities—can serve to demonstrate the presence of this sublimation in modern thought. The high peaks, domes and (mostly gothic) spires of the cathedral's architecture direct the eye skyward despite the building's bulk, providing a visual expression of the sublime and humankind's attempt to transcend mortal existence in favour of the spiritual. In pre-modern eras, the Cathedral would have dominated the life of the city; its spires would have been visible and its bells audible from every part of the city. Today, cathedrals are likely to be dwarfed by the

⁴ This does not necessarily entail or procure a rejection of Christianity itself. Humanistic perfection is often viewed by Christian educationalists as a goal of Christian education.

taller and more substantial commercial and even residential structures surrounding them. In this new context, it is difficult to grasp the impact of the message they conveyed when they dominated the cityscape, even if the message itself remains intact today.

It is a relatively simple matter to demonstrate that the separation of body and mind, or body and spirit, as it manifested itself in the theology of the early Christians, had its foundations and antecedents in the distant past, in Presocratic philosophy and the subsequent development of Platonic ideals. The concept increases in complexity as the research observes and traces ways in which different perceptions of the duality between body and spirit evolved in their assorted and multifarious forms from these foundations. All the antecedents of dualism and the sublimation of the body, even those that were eventually discredited, influenced the Christian mind. This study of the development of an enduring concept is intended to enrich our understanding of it—and that will form a basis for assessing the legacy of the concept in the modern world and the Christian mind, and, perhaps, the link that has been shaped between both secular and religious thought and Classical philosophy.

CHAPTER 2

ORIGINS OF DUALISM IN WESTERN THOUGHT

In a sense—a diachronic sense—dualism has existed since the story of Adam and Eve, and is updated for each age. The consciousness of a basic sense of duality or dualism of body and spirit predates both Christianity and Platonism. This distinction is obvious, for example, in the opening lines of the *Iliad*, when the wrath of Achilles is said to send the souls of heroes to Hades but to make themselves (clearly meaning their bodies), into tit-bits for the dogs and birds of prey “...πολλὰς δ’ ἰφθίμους ψυχὰς Ἀΐδι προΐαψεν ἡρώων, αὐτοὺς δὲ ἐλώρια τεῦχε κύνεσσιν οἰωνοῖσιν τε πᾶσι.” The distinction is also evident in the works of Presocratic philosophers such as Heraclitus and Empedocles, and can be observed in vastly divergent world mythologies. Mind/body dualism should not be considered a Western innovation. Stone Age shamans definitively claimed the ability to reach the spirit world. If someone dreams vividly of a dead relative, and has not been taught philosophy and theology, it is natural to jump to the conclusion that the dead person lives on in a spirit world and has been present. Such beliefs are (very likely) innovations for the human race as distinct from other species. The real belief innovation could be that of the convinced atheist who believes that there is no spirit world ever anywhere, and that a living person’s ‘mind’ is merely a certain combination of nerves, nerve cell bodies, and brain synapses. Otherwise, assuming a difference between body and spirit/mind/soul/psyche is almost universal in time and space, and is not particular to the West (Howard, 2005:233) for there are many accounts of the negotiation between these dimensions, most often involving a setting apart or elevation of the spirit over the body. Brown (1959:157–58) memorably generalised:

The original sublimator, the historical ancestor of philosopher and prophet and poet, is the primitive shaman, with his techniques for ecstatic departure from the body, soul-levitation, soul-migration, and celestial navigation. The history of sublimation has yet to be written but ... it is evident that Platonism, and hence all Western philosophy, is civilized shamanism—a continuation of the shamanistic quest for a higher mode of being...

The works of Plato are the first *intelligible* accounts of the concept of sublimation in Western thought. In Plato are found the origins and eloquent explications of concepts that have had a profound effect on the development of Western thought as a whole, including Christianity, which conceptually owes a debt to Platonism and Neoplatonism for hypotheses relating to the emanation of divinity and good, and the importance of striving to perfect human nature by moving closer to the spiritual or the realm of pure reason through will and discipline.

This chapter incorporates a discussion of selected works of Plato, chosen for their relevance to the central concepts of dualism and sublimation. It begins with a small discussion of shamanic contributions to the evolution of the concepts. However, predating Plato and Aristotle, the Presocratic philosophers provide the root of both physical and metaphysical conceptualising. Often rejecting (or simply not considering) a value-laden differentiation between physical and spiritual reality, the Presocratic philosophers appeared conscious of both, and their work was undoubtedly the essential foundation for Plato's influential conception of the world.

2.1 ANTECEDENTS: SHAMANS AND PYTHAGOREANS

2.1.1 Shamans

Shamanism and shamanic thought are loose terms for a complex of religious phenomena which are a feature of different cultures and geographical regions but which are bound by distinctly uniform characteristics:

... a family of traditions whose practitioners focus on voluntarily entering altered states of consciousness in which they experience themselves, or their spirit(s), traveling to other realms at will and interacting with other entities in order to serve their community (Walsh, 1989:25).

The shamanic experience is characterised in most examples in the literature as a spiritual journey or mystical “flight”, and in more contemporary views of this experience as an out-of-body experience. Implicit in this is a spiritual dimension which can be encountered through trance techniques and a separation of the soul or spirit from the body. An important aspect for this study therefore is that the shamanic perspective has been related to the dualism that is found in Platonic thought:

Certainly, the idea that there is a soul and that it can leave the body to travel to other realms is an ancient and perennial one. Plato described the soul as “imprisoned in the body like an oyster in his shell.” Likewise, Socrates is quoted as saying that the mind only perceives absolute truths “when she takes leave of the body and has as little as possible to do with it, then she has no bodily sense or desire” (Walsh, 1989: 30).

The quotation above implies a link in theory between shamanic thought, or at least as much as we know of it, and Platonic views of the duality of mind and body. It may prefigure Christian sublimation of the body and the belief that the spiritual is intrinsically more important than the physical or material world. The influence of shamanic views and practices is acknowledged from a variety of sources. In a note to his discussion of the contribution of the Neoplatonist Iamblichus, Leonard George (1999) suggests that: “the dichotomy of ancient philosopher and shaman is a false one. There is substantial evidence that the founders of the Western metaphysical tradition—Pythagoras, Parmenides, and Empedocles—were “philosophical shamans.”

Arguably, Greek myths such as those referring to Medea and Calypso touch on witchcraft and have shamanistic traces, as do the mystic and symbolic practices of Roman and Greek organised religion. It must be said, however, that these connections, even when made by authoritative commentators such as Eric Dodds (1951) and Mircea Eliade (1963) are highly speculative. Recently, Anna Kuznetsova (2014:37) has weighed against many of these assumptions on the basis that they may be anachronistic—or just wrong. She points out that Shamanism as yet lacks a governing theory and that the ethnographic data underlying the assumptions of Eliade, for example, are incomplete.

The connection between Shamanism and later religious thought is, however, made somewhat pertinent by the lesser known studies of shamanic initiation. Shamanic initiation is described in the literature as an extremely severe dissociation of body and spirit, and even destruction of the body or the conventional and mundane self in the search for spiritual understanding and knowledge. In the modern literature this severe duality and destruction of the mundane body or self is often discussed in psychological terms.

The initiatic crisis of the shaman in many ways resembles what is called schizophrenia. It also has features that are comparable to the journey of mythic heroes, to death-rebirth experiences in rites of passage, to the posthumous journey of the soul, to clinical death experiences and LSD experiences, and to what one can encounter in meditation practice (Halifax, 1990:54).

More contemporary views of shamanism also show the same pattern of body destruction and change (Bullard, 1989:162) and suggest (as do the studies quoted above) symbolic and possibly psychological interpretations of these radical experiences. They also point to the essential duality between the mundane and the transcendent spiritual body. Perhaps it is reasonable to hypothesise that shamanic initiation seeds the idea of the body as a 'burden to the soul', which was to become a keynote of much early Christian theology.

2.1.2 Plato and the Pythagoreans

The Orphic theogonies, whose origin and very existence is obscure (McGahey, 1994:20), underline the notion of the freeing of the soul from a bodily prison. This idea is preserved in Pythagoreanism and enhanced by Plato: Pythagoreanism identifies the good with the intellect and with harmony in the universe. Ultimately, as David Fideler (1989) expresses it:

For Pythagoras, the divine order is immanent in the cosmos, where it may be encountered; but Plato emphasized a transcendent metaphysic of forms or examples, only accessible to the purified intellect, divorced from the phenomena of nature. In either case, both Pythagoreanism and Platonism stressed an epistemology in which human beings can know the deep structure of the world because of the mind's essential kinship with its archetypal structure.

St Augustine's portrait of Plato makes explicit the link between Plato and the Pythagoreans,⁵ and the ideas expressed in *Timaeus*, for example, are consistent with what is known of Pythagoreanism. Knowing this gives insight into the context in which the concepts were generated, though uncertainty still remains regarding Plato's intention in presenting these concepts to his readers. It may seem attractive to assume that he intended to at least improve upon them but that assumption is most likely unwarranted (Sedley, 2003:317). However, knowing that Plato was influenced by the Pythagoreans, it may be helpful to view the content of some of Plato's work within the context of Pythagorean thought. The relevant aspects of Pythagorean thought would be:

- The engagement of the Pythagoreans in mathematics, mysticism and cosmology, believing that numbers are the true nature of all things, and that harmony (*harmonia*) was the key to rationality and goodness.
- Transmigration of souls, indicating that bod and soul were separate, but that both were involved in and subjected to a set pattern of motion.
- Pythagorean belief in an ultimate or universal 'substance of things', of which everything in the world was thought to be composed. This ultimate substance was an expression of boundlessness (*apeiron*) but its opposite, *peiron*, forms a counterpoint. Similarly, the boundless emptiness of the universe had an opposite—form. The interplay between emptiness and form, and between *peiron* and *apeiron*, gives rise to the universe and everything in it. Harmony is required to govern this interplay, and where harmony does not exist, struggle does. Moreover, harmony makes possible the creation of being, as it allows for the co-operation between form and emptiness, and limits and boundlessness. Stobaeus, a fifth-century transcriber of Classical Greek manuscripts, sums it up in the following manner:

⁵ *De Civitate Dei* Book VIII 4; Diogenes Laertius notes other important influences (D.L.3.8): “μίξιν τε ἐποίησατο τῶν τε Ἡρακλειτείων λόγων καὶ Πυθαγορικῶν καὶ Σωκρατικῶν· τὰ μὲν γὰρ αἰσθητὰ καθ’ Ἡράκλειτον, τὰ δὲ νοητὰ κατὰ Πυθαγόραν, τὰ δὲ πολιτικά κατὰ Σωκράτην ἐφιλοσόφει”.

Things that were alike and of the same kind had no need of harmony, but those that were unlike and not of the same kind and of unequal order—it was necessary for such things to have been locked together by harmony, if they are to be held together in an ordered universe (Diels & Kranz, 1951:406–419).⁶

These central Pythagorean tenets—which are consistent, for example, with corresponding ideas in *Timaeus* and *Symposium*—are a basis for certain rules of behaviour designed to bring humans to a greater state of harmony, and, consequently, to a higher rank in the eyes of the gods. One of these rules, for example, involves vegetarianism (even in relatively modern times, vegetarians were referred to as ‘Pythagoreans’).⁷ It is, however, easy to see how rules such as these, and the rationale behind them, support the sublimation of the corporeal found both in Plato and, later, in the writings of early and medieval Christian philosophers.

There is some evidence from Plato’s other work that he somewhat endorses the use of these ‘rules’ as a means of improving oneself and drawing closer to a divine harmony: in *Timaeus* for example, Plato discloses these Pythagorean concepts, and either weakly endorses them or does not challenge them (Burkert, 1960:159). *Gorgias* too (493A) describes a ‘wise man’, possibly a Pythagorean, who talks of the body as a ‘tomb’ for the soul. This idea is elsewhere in Plato, as is the notion that the function of this ‘tomb’ or ‘jar’ is to protect the soul, which eventually grows past it. The process of growth is facilitated by the rules of behaviour mentioned before, and when all these components are put together, the result is a system congruent, to a degree, with Christian notions concerning the sublimation of the body in favour of the soul. It also resonates with the portrait of Socrates found in *Symposium*—a person who can ignore food or drink, does not feel cold, and is impervious to sexual urges. Clearly Plato sees value in Pythagoreanism—enough value, perhaps, to present his readers in *Timaeus* with a dialogue that serves as little more than a frame for an essentially Pythagorean account of the creation of the world and its creatures.

⁶ Fragment 6: τὰ μὲν ὅν ὁμοῖα καὶ ὁμόφυλα ἁρμονίας οὐδὲν ἐπεδέοντο, τὰ δὲ ἀνόμοια μὴδὲ ὁμόφυλα μὴδὲ ἰσοταγῇ ἀνάγκη ταῖς τοιαύταις ἁρ-μονίαις συγκεκλεισθαι, οἷαι μέλλοντι ἐν κόσμῳ κατέ-χεσθαι.

And Philolaus, *Fragment 6*, Diels. Stobaeus i. 21. 460 (in Notes and Discussions) Robert Scon *Classical Philology*, Vol. 17, No. 4. (Oct., 1922), 353–356.

⁷ Francis Bacon’s “slender diet, green, nigh Pythagorean...doth produce long life”.

2.2 PRESOCRATIC PHILOSOPHERS

The contributions of the philosophers of the fifth and sixth centuries show that the practice of philosophy was thriving before Socrates, and that its goals were what might today be classified as scientific as well as philosophical. While separation of these categories of enquiry occurred many centuries later, there was originally an unquestioned congruence between the physical and metaphysical just as there was between the spiritual and physical. It can be argued that the emphasis on sublimation that eventually developed, slipstreaming on an opposition or duality between the physical and spiritual, was responsible for this breach. In dealing with the Presocratics the difficulty is that much of their contribution is fragmentary, and therefore open to various interpretations. Furthermore, several of these philosophers—for example, Empedocles and Heraclitus—wrote in verse or a type of stylised prose (Osborne, 1998:29) and their language was often figurative. As a result, a large part of their contribution resembles nothing so much as prophecy that can be interpreted in various ways. The challenge lies in balancing the need to discuss these relevant (seminal, in fact) ideas, while avoiding misinterpretation or fanciful interpretation. The approach taken for the purposes of this discussion is to keep close to the available text, interpreting the fragments in relation to one another wherever possible in order to make out the unity of the ideas.

Much of the Presocratics' contributions, dealing as they do with a contrast between mortal and immortal, individual and universal concerns, and the misconceptions that are a part of life on earth as opposed to the Truth of the eternal, are relevant to the discussion of sublimation. These philosophers appear to have held a resolute conviction that mortal life is only a small part of a total picture, and the work of each consists largely of an interpretation of the nature of this larger, metaphysical reality. The actual implication or promotion of sublimation of the corporeal in these texts is variable, however, and in some cases open to debate.

2.2.1 Empedocles

More fragments survive from Empedocles than from any other Presocratic philosopher, but there is a controversy regarding how they ought to be interpreted and arranged. Traditionally, it was assumed that Empedocles left two poems, *On Nature*, an account of physical existence, and *Purifications*, advice on religious and spiritual matters, but currently it is suggested that there may be only one poem (Osborne, 1987: 24–50). This reinforces the concept that the physical and spiritual are part of a single unified system, a concept that some of Empedocles' writing seems to corroborate.

Empedocles' cosmology is relevant to his content regarding sublimation. Empedocles' four irreducible elements—earth, air, fire and water—compose all matter in the universe and are alternately joined to and separated from one another by two opposing forces, which Empedocles refers to as love and strife. In a state of perfect love, everything is unified; in a state of strife, there is dissolution. The present world is the product of a state of flux between the two. A world 'like ours' is possible at two points of the cycle—increasing love or decreasing strife—but the cycle itself is eternal, inevitable and consistent (Waterfield, 2000:137). Empedocles uses this concept to describe, or prove even, immortality—although regarding sublimation, this presents a paradox. Immortality exists, according to Empedocles, but it is based on the fact that the physical elements, of which human beings are composed in their entirety, are immortal and perhaps divine.

The separation and joining of the four elements in various configurations is presented as an explanation for birth and death:

But when light is mingled with air in human form, or in form like the race of wild beasts or of plants or of birds, then men say that these things have come into being; and when they are separated, they call them evil fate; this is the established practice, and I myself also call it so in accordance with the custom [Burnet].⁸

The human misconception is to view things from the point of view of mortal (that is, temporary) existence. Taking the long view, Empedocles states that what is humanly known as death is not an "evil fate" (δυσδαίμονα πότμον) at all, because nothing dies; there is only a change of material form.

The process of unification brought about by the force Empedocles calls Love may be a mode of sublimation, in that it creates or approaches a transcendent, harmonious state associated

⁸ DK 31B9 οἱ δ' ὅτε μὲν κατὰ φῶτα μίγν' εἰς αἰθέρ' ἵκωνται] .ἢ κατὰ θηρῶν ἀγροτέρων γένος ἢ κατὰ θάμνων ἢ κατ' οἰωνῶν, τότε μὲν τὸ [λέγουσι] γενέσθαι· εὖτε δ' ἀποκρινθῶσι, τὰ δ' αὖ δυσδαίμονα πότμον· ἢ θέμις [οὐ] καλέουσι, νόμῳ δ' ἐπίφημι καὶ αὐτός
The William Ellery Leonard translation is: "But when in man, wild beast, or bird, or bush, These elements commingle and arrive. The realms of light, the thoughtless deem it 'birth'; When they dispart, 'tis 'doom of death'; and though Not this the Law, I too assent to use."

with the gods, but the movement from Love to Strife and back again is something over which humans have no absolute control. It occurs regardless of what is done or wanted, and it affects all being continuously. Therefore, the only virtue or wisdom lies in recognising that the process is taking place; this allows individuals to see beyond the appearance of mortality and the transient world. On the other hand, the principles Empedocles later presents in *Purifications* are resonant with some Pythagorean concepts, and are ways in which the corruption of the physical can be transcended. These latter concepts are almost a recipe for sublimation, while the earlier, physical theories have little connection with any notion of improvement, refinement, or the favouring of spiritual over corporeal.

The shift in thinking apparent in the fragments, particularly when Book 1 is compared to Book 2, is striking enough to be considered a contradiction rather than an evolution in thought. In Book 1, Empedocles implies that any elevation in being or consciousness is merely a matter of recognising the nature of reality and the immortality of all being; human beings have to realise that their experience of material reality is an illusion. It is quite likely that even their thoughts about the world have the same constitution as the world itself (Waterfield, 2000: 138). At first it seems that the only self-improvement Empedocles prescribes is the acquisition of knowledge about the universe. But later he not only expands upon this idea but, arguably, changes it; this is the nature of the contradiction that can be observed in his body of work. Perhaps it has its origins in the names that Empedocles assigns to the forces that unify and separate matter; ‘Love’ and ‘Strife’ (Φιλίη/Φιλότης and Νεῖκος) are value-laden concepts, though Empedocles makes it clear that each is integral to the workings of the universe. Despite implications to the contrary in Book 1, in Book 2 Empedocles appears to embrace a worldview in which Love and Good can be consciously chosen.

Living an earthly existence is framed as a punishment for Empedocles. He describes his reaction to being born on earth in the following way: “I wept and wailed, beholding the strange place” [Ellery].⁹ And, “From what large honour and what height of bliss am I here

⁹ DK 31 B118 κλαῦσά τε καὶ κώκυσα ἰδὼν ἀσυνήθεα χῶρον. “Je pleurai et je me lamentai quand je vis le pays, qui ne m’était pas familier” (Auguste Reymond).

fallen to move with mortal kind!” [Ellery].¹⁰ The wise person turns this into a quest for ‘purification’—a desire to associate oneself with the gods and with Love rather than with human existence and Strife. Empedocles does not specify that an immortal soul, distinct from the body, exists, but in many ways he is advocating sublimation of the corporeal in favour of something that has much more potential for closeness with the gods. He describes very clearly ascension to a god-like state. Robin Waterfield (2000:138) comments:

Although it is punishment for the incarnated soul to be banished and born on earth, it is possible to re-ascend the ladder of incarnation and eventually to become a god again ... Of course, given the circumstances, one could not hope to be united with the sphere of love in itself, since that is a thing of the past and the future, not of the present state of the world; but perhaps one could aspire to be united with the power of love that remains in the world.

All conscious measures taken with the intention of transcending Strife (evil) and uniting with Love (good) must ultimately be futile, as humans can have no hand in determining the degree of Love and Strife that exists and creates the ambient world at any given time. It is only on the level of human existence that one can “aspire to be united with the power of love that remains...” Through purification, it is possible to improve to such a point that one becomes an immortal, and does not have to contend with a mortal body anymore. The idea of transmigration of souls is both implicitly and explicitly included in this view. It is central in that it provides a rationale for one of Empedocles’ methods of purification—living as a vegetarian. Until the transcendent, god-like state, is reached, rebirth into all manner of mortal creatures is the pattern. Therefore, killing any animal, either for food or sacrifice, has negative ramifications. In the ancient world, this argument for vegetarianism would have been associated, presumably, with Pythagorean teachings and practices, and for the modern reader

¹⁰ DK 31 B119 ἐξ οἷς τιμῆς τε καὶ ὅσσου μήκεος ὄλβου ᾧδε [πρὸς τὸν θεόν] ἀναστρέφομαι μετὰ θνητοῖς. “De quels honneurs, de quelle hauteur de félicité suis-je tombé pour errer ici sur terre parmi les mortels!” (Auguste Reymond).

the argument is perhaps immediately resonant with some of the principles of Hinduism and Buddhism.¹¹

Regarding the nature of the soul in Empedocles, Robin Waterfield (2000:138) assumes that there is a soul, but not that it is necessarily immortal in the eternal sense. Waterfield speculates:

Perhaps Empedocles identified the soul with one or more of the elements, or perhaps he meant that the soul was relatively immortal, lasting as long as our universe lasted before being amalgamated into love's sphere or destroyed in the chaos of strife's separation.

In the fragments themselves, however, although there are references to spirits and to transformation of forms, there does not seem to be a specified separation of body and soul. Instead a consistency can be traced here with certain ideas of the Pythagoreans, in particular the concept that a person was soul—or, at least, that the soul was the most important part of the person. Aspects of *On Nature* seem to bear this out: Empedocles specifies that the four elements, which are eternal, are the gods (DK31 B6). If this is so, humans, as well as all other creatures and all matter, are composed of what is divine material. Humans are divine; the difference between a god and a mortal is the level of love or strife in the composition of each. Yet, if humans fail to follow the correct course of action, they are punished by descending into a series of states leading away from immortality.

2.2.2 Heraclitus

Heraclitus' gnomic book, fragments of which survive, was dedicated to the goddess Artemis and left in her temple, becoming accessible to the public and inspiring many visitors to

¹¹ Though of course there is indeed a tradition from the earliest period of Christianity, from such early scholars and fathers as Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Tertullian and John Chrysostom, continuing through Basil the Great's order, Trappist monks and many modern Christians, who consider vegetarianism to be the more consistent ethic with respect to the spirit of Christ's teachings than the eating of meat, often as part of a programme of abstinence. For Church Fathers such as Chrysostom, Jerome, and Cassian, diet was particularly relevant to the goal of embodying the Edenic state, because they considered the original sin of Adam and Eve to be a type of gluttony (Berkman, 2004:174–190).

become Heraclitean disciples.¹² The work is obscure, as befits an author known as ‘the riddler’, in part because his writing contains many internal contradictions that are harbingers of the dialectic method (Davies, 1970:433; Chitwood, 1993:49–62).

Heraclitus is credited with developing the concept of Logos, which is interpreted in several ways as god, or word, or thought, but also in a metaphysical, even mystical sense as an account of the universe. Edward Miller (1981: 175–76) surveyed scholarly interpretations of the use of Logos and concludes:

A much stronger case can be presented for the cosmic/metaphysical interpretation of Heraclitus’ Logos (“Reason”) than has sometimes been thought, and this interpretation is now maintained virtually by all Presocratic scholars, Barnes being a notable exception ... there are ... also good grounds for the interpretation of the Heraclitean Logos as “Word,” but now understood as an inspired and prophetic Word, and viewed in immediate relation to Heraclitus’ doctrine of a cosmic and metaphysical Law—it is the proclamation of that Law. Despite superficial similarities, this Logos of Heraclitus stands in no direct connection with that of the Fourth Gospel.

Whichever it is (and it may be all of these) Logos is a universal and unifying force that works through everyone and everything in the universe, which is, in turn, continually in a state of flux. There may also be an individual logos within each person and through which each person is connected to the universal Logos. Wisdom seems to consist of being able to understand and relate to this Logos (Fattal, 1986: 142–52; Lagrange, 1923:96–107).¹³ On the other hand, elsewhere, Heraclitus makes reference to the fact that wisdom entails acquainting oneself with a great many particulars: “χρὴ εὖ μάλα πολλῶν ἱστορας φιλοσόφους ἄνδρας εἶναι”(DK 35). Many Heraclitean fragments are devoted to exploring and defining the state of

¹² Laertius, IX. 6 “ἀνέθηκε δ’ αὐτὸ εἰς τὸ τῆς Ἀρτέμιδος ἱερόν...” According to Laertius, Socrates was given a copy to read, and made the well-known, typically Socratic comment about needing a Delian diver to get to the bottom of Heraclitus: “τί δοκεῖ;” τὸν δὲ φάναι, “ἃ μὲν συνῆκα, γενναῖα οἶμαι δὲ καὶ ἃ μὴ συνῆκα· πλὴν Δηλίου γέ τινος δεῖται κολυμβητοῦ.” Laertius, II. 22.

flux or continuous change; unlike Empedocles, Heraclitus does not specify that flux is cyclical or that there is any regular movement between states (Brecht, 1941:1–2).

Several fragments of Heraclitus’ writing are of interest. These address the nature of the soul and its relative importance to the body. They are listed below (translated by William Harris):

You could not discover the limits of soul, even if you traveled by every path in order to do so; such is the depth of its meaning (*Fragment 45*).¹⁴

Soul is the vaporisation out of which everything else is composed; moreover it is the least corporeal of things and is in ceaseless flux, for the moving world can only be known by what is in motion (*Aristotle De Anima: 405a 16*).¹⁵

It is death to souls to become water, and it is death to water to become earth. Conversely, water comes into existence out of earth, and souls out of water (*Fragment 36*).¹⁶

Corpses are more fit to be thrown out than dung (*Fragment 96*).¹⁷

In the extracts above, Heraclitus, unlike Empedocles, puts distance between body and soul; moreover, Fragment 96 implies that the soul is the more valuable component of the human being, as the body is worthless without it. Fragment 45 deals with the mysterious and unknowable nature of the soul; Aristotle’s summary may carry the notion that there is a connection between soul and Logos, as ‘everything else’ is composed of the constantly

¹³ Cf. Proverbs 9:1

¹⁴ DK22 B45: ψυχῆς πείρατα ἰὼν οὐκ ἂν ἐξεύροιο πᾶσαν ἐπιπορευόμενος ὁδόν· οὕτω βαθὺν λόγον ἔχει.

¹⁵ [καὶ Ἡράκλειτος δὲ] ... τὴν ἀρχὴν εἶναι φησι ψυχὴν, εἵπερ τὴν ἀναθυμίασιν, ἐξ ἧς τὰλλα συνίστησιν· καὶ ἀσωματώτατόν τε καὶ ῥέον αἰεὶ τὸ δὲ κινούμενον κινουμένῳ γινώσκεισθαι.

¹⁶ DK22 B36: ψυχῆσιν θάνατος ὕδωρ γενέσθαι, ὕδατι δὲ θάνατος γῆν γενέσθαι, ἐκ γῆς δὲ ὕδωρ γίνεται, ἐξ ὕδατος δὲ ψυχή.

¹⁷ DK22 B96: νέκυες γὰρ κοπρίων ἐκβλητότεροι...

fluctuating soul, and similar statements are made elsewhere in relation to Logos. For example, Fragment 1 explains the nature of Logos in the following way:

Although this Logos is eternally valid, yet men are unable to understand it—not only before hearing it, but even after they have heard it for the first time. That is to say, although all things come to pass in accordance with this Logos, men seem to be quite without any experience of it—at least if they are judged in the light of such words and deeds as I am here setting forth [Harris].¹⁸

People seem unaware of the Logos that comprises and is driving all things, including themselves. Heraclitus says that without knowledge of it, wisdom is impossible, yet he never (at least, in the extant fragments) gives any encouragement or any indication that this gap in knowledge can be remedied. In many fragments he refers to the human condition as one in which sleep, a state in which one is unconscious of anything that is really important, is the norm.

Heraclitean fragments produce many conundrums—or at least can appear to do so. Heraclitus states in Fragment 35, quoted earlier, that philosophers must know a great many things, and in Fragment 55 that sight, hearing and learning are to be prized.¹⁹ He also states in Fragment 41 that wisdom is to know the blueprint “by which all things are guided through all things.”²⁰

The sense of this fragment seems to shift away from that of the previous two, which remain consistent with each other. If obtaining wisdom consists of acquainting oneself with particulars, it is logical that this is done through the physical senses. Yet somehow Fragment 41 seems to advocate transcending the physical in favour of the universal or spiritual. In a sense, this ambiguous fragment, which shows consistency with the fragments relevant to the soul (listed above), is stating that the particularities of physical existence must be discarded

¹⁸ DK22 B1 “τοῦ δὲ λόγου τοῦδ' ἐόντος αἰεὶ ἀξύνετοι γίνονται ἄνθρωποι καὶ πρόσθεν ἢ ἀκοῦσαι καὶ ἀκούσαντες τὸ πρῶτον· γινομένων γὰρ πάντων κατὰ τὸν λόγον τόνδε ἀπείροισιν εἰκόασιν πειρώμενοι καὶ ἐπέων καὶ ἔργων τοιούτων ὁκοίων ἐγὼ διηγέυμαι...”

¹⁹ DK22 B55: ὅσων ὄψις ἀκοή μάθησις, ταῦτα ἐγὼ προτιμέω : “Ce qu’on voit, ce qu’on entend, ce qu’on apprend, voilà ce que j’estime davantage” [Tannery].

²⁰ DK22 B41: εἶναι γὰρ ἐν τὸ σοφόν, ἐπίστασθαι γνώμην, ὅτι ἐκυβέρνησε πάντα διὰ πάντων.

(much like Heraclitus says a corpse should be) in favour of the transcendent, universal experience. On the basis of Fragment 41, and the others dealing directly with the soul, it appears that Heraclitus is advocating, if not sublimation of the body in favour of the soul, at least its equivalent—the sublimation of the physical experience in favour of the metaphysical or universal. This is advocated because the metaphysical, whether soul or Logos, is eternal, and to ignore it is to be like one who ‘sleeps’ even when he is physically awake, as Heraclitus states in Fragment 1.²¹ Clearly, the individual human experience (which is analogous, at least in some degree, to the individual human life) may be sublimated so that one might consciously partake of something much more profound and lasting.

The problem is that there are also many fragments that work against this simple interpretation, and some of these appear central to Heraclitus’ thought. The idea that wisdom can be attained through the physical senses does not seem quite to mesh with the assertion of the importance of soul or logos. It may be relevant to the topic at hand to attempt to unify an interpretation of these statements, and there is some justification for doing so in the remainder of the fragments. Any reconciliation would have to relate to the idea of flux, which is central to Heraclitean thought. Perhaps the most famous piece of Heraclitus’ wisdom is the declaration in Fragment 12, “ποταμοῖσι τοῖσιν αὐτοῖσιν ἐμβαίνουσιν...”; that is, because of flux, everything about the world is changing at every moment. To advocate seeking wisdom by examining details, or by looking at the evidence obtained from one’s physical senses, would seem the last thing to do in such a situation, and yet Heraclitus advocates that as well. It could be conjectured that the apparent contradiction shows that the eternal quality, the spirit/Logos, which unifies everything, is somehow connected to the ever-changing physical environment.²² This interpretation can be validated in a number of ways. First of all, Heraclitus was fond of self-contradictory statements, and believed that ultimate truth somehow lies in the contradiction.²³ The paradox cited above might fall under that category. Second, if Heraclitus

²¹ DK22 B1: ...τοὺς δὲ ἄλλους ἀνθρώπους λανθάνει ὁκόσα ἔγερθέντες ποιοῦσιν, ὅκωσπερ ὁκόσα εὖδοντες ἐπιλανθάνονται.

²² Bearing in mind Barnes’ warning about ambitious interpretation *à these*: “Heraclitus attracts exegetes as empty jampot wasps; and each new wasp discerns traces of his own favourite flavour.” Cohen quotes this in his lecture notes (Cohen, 2007) adding, “The reason for this is Heraclitus’s dark and aphoristic style. He loved to appear to contradict himself. Some of his doctrines sound incoherent and self-contradictory even if he did not perhaps intend them that way.”

²³ Cohen quoted in previous note. Cohen’s notes (*Unity of Opposites*) suggest that the ultimate truth for Heraclitus lies in a dynamic of opposites that maintain the unity and coherence of the world.

did believe that the eternal is in the transitory, he would not have been alone. Empedocles, for example, believed in a cyclic, constantly changing reality in which the eternal and irreducible elements take on transitory forms; therefore, they are mortal and immortal, eternal and changing, though the eternal nature of the elements is clearly more significant than their temporary forms. Finally, Heraclitus himself hints that truth is not always immediately apparent. What he says in Fragment 54 is: “ἄρμονίη ἀφανὴς φανερῆς κρείττων.” The hidden harmony is better than the obvious and thus the differentiation between hidden and apparent harmony shows a clear value judgment, and also implies that what is perceived as harmonious may be just the opposite, and vice versa. Thus, apparent change may mask something that is eternal, and because it is hidden, it may be difficult for individuals to perceive; using the physical senses to look for it might do the opposite of what is expected, and connect to spirit, Logos and the eternal. If, as Heraclitus implies, the eternal or divine is intimately connected with humans in their everyday lives, sublimation can take place without ascent.

2.2.3 Parmenides

Parmenides seems to both understand and attempt to improve upon the Heraclitean theory of flux or change as the only constant reality. He goes further, disputing Heraclitus' idea that the senses are the only reliable instrument for discovering the truth. According to Parmenides, reason—thought and logic—is more reliable than the senses. There is an ultimate truth for Parmenides and it is absolutely stable; on the other hand, people, by and large, are observably diverted by appearances and do not use reason. Duality is established between appearance and truth. However, the relationship between the ideas of Parmenides and sublimation is tenuous: Parmenides does not address the existence of an immortal soul, so the body/soul duality, if present, is implied rather than stated. At the same time, his insistence upon the unreliability of the senses discredits the corporeal in favour of something intangible and more reliable; in identifying this wisdom as coming from a deity, he is also creating a duality between mortal and immortal life, the immortal having more value.

Parmenides tends to include human existence, corporeal and non-corporeal, in the system he has laid out for nature. Therefore, just as things in nature are made up of a blending of opposites, so is the way of human thought and so is the process of reasoning. This implies that there is a wholeness of thought present at all times; even if one is not conscious of thinking about something, it is there, because of the opposition between presence and absence. That is,

all absent things or concepts are present in thought, and thought itself is an all-encompassing expression of unity. Parmenides writes:

Nevertheless, behold steadfastly all absent things as present to thy mind;
for thou canst not separate being in one place from contact with being in
another place; it is not scattered here and there through the universe, nor
is it compounded of parts [Fairbanks].²⁴

A perception of concepts as ‘scattered’ (σκιδνόμενον), which is common among those who rely on senses rather than reason, means that one is not thinking rationally. Rational thought is reflective of universal reality, and encompasses everything; it is transcendent. Realising that one’s thoughts encompass everything in existence, and can be reached through the use of reason, allows one to transcend the momentary or circumstantial and enter the eternal; this sounds consistent with the concept of sublimation, albeit a curious version of sublimation, implying that it is only by acknowledging and realising that one’s thoughts and being contain all manner of transitory things that one can transcend them. All things are present at once, and failing to see that this is so is a failure of rationality. Change and death (as well as creation) are illusions (Fr.8.1–5). In the final analysis, wisdom consists of only one thing, and Parmenides writes: (Fr.8.1–5) “One path only is left for us to speak of: that it is.” (Μόνος δ’ ἔτι μῦθος ὁδοῖο λείπεται ὥς ἔστιν.) Moreover, ‘it is’ always was and always will be:

On this path there are a multitude of indications that what-is, being ungenerated, is also imperishable, whole, of a single kind, immovable and complete. Nor was it once, nor will it be, since it is, now, all together, one and continuous [Gallup].²⁵

²⁴ Fr. 4. 1–4: Λεῦσσε δ’ ὅμως ἀπεόντα νόῳ παρέοντα βεβαίως· οὐ γὰρ ἀποτμήξει τὸ ἐὸν τοῦ ἐόντος ἔχεσθαι οὔτε σκιδνόμενον πάντῃ πάντως κατὰ κόσμον οὔτε συνιστάμενον.

Translations of Parmenides’ poem in English show great variety: they put different complexions on its compressed ideas: “καὶ τόπον ἀλλάσσειν διὰ τε χροῶ φανὸν ἀμείβειν” (VIII, 41).

²⁵ ταύτῃ δ’ ἐπὶ σήματ’ ἔασι πολλὰ μάλ’, ὥς ἀγένητον ἐὸν καὶ ἀνώλεθρόν ἐστιν, ἐστὶ γὰρ οὐλομελές τε καὶ ἀτρεμές ἡδ’ ἀτέλεστον· οὐδέ ποτ’ ἦν οὐδ’ ἔσται, ἐπεὶ νῦν ἐστὶν ὁμοῦ πᾶν.

2.2.4 Anaxagoras

The work of Anaxagoras is noted because he offers a simple and (to him) definitive account of the precise nature of the division between the physical and spiritual worlds. In particular, he seems to describe the nature and workings of the spiritual, albeit with an apparent lack of distinction between mind and soul. Anaxagoras says that mind (*νοῦς*) is powerful because it is pure; it contains no part of corporeal reality,²⁶ but has power over it: “All other things partake in a portion of everything, while *Nous* is infinite and self-ruled, and is mixed with nothing, but is alone, itself by itself” [Burnet].²⁷ Mind is also a lot more constant than matter, so Anaxagoras continues:

All mind is of like character, both the greater and the smaller. But nothing different is like anything else, but in whatever object there are the most, each single object is and was most distinctly these things [Fairbanks].²⁸

All mind, everywhere, is pure and is the same; a corollary is that the individual mind is of the same constitution and character as the universal mind that creates and governs. In contrast, physical reality is highly changeable, and therefore, presumably, unreliable. Anaxagoras does not specify, as such, a process of sublimation: in pointing out the nature of physical and non-physical reality, he does not explicitly state that one can or should strive for the latter, and he does not outline how this can be done. However, by describing the nature of mind and establishing the link—the similarity—between mind, individual and universal, he asserts that people have an element within them that is separate from, and superior to, the illusionary physical reality apparent through the senses.

²⁶ Elevation of ‘mind’ to a state where it might be more customary to see soul is something that likewise is encountered in the work of other Presocratics: the Heraclitean *Logos* is translatable as ‘mind’ (or sometimes ‘word’); Parmenides elevates reason above all else and equates it with the divine.

²⁷ DK B12: τὰ μὲν ἅλλα παντὸς μοῖραν μετέχει, νοῦς δὲ ἐστὶν ἄπειρον καὶ αὐτοκρατὴς καὶ μέμικται οὐδενὶ χρήματι, ἀλλὰ μόνος αὐτὸς ἐπ’ ἐωυτοῦ ἐστίν.

²⁸ DK B12: νοῦς δὲ πᾶς ὁμοίος ἐστὶ καὶ ὁ μείζων καὶ ὁ ἐλάττων. ἕτερον δὲ οὐδέν ἐστιν ὅμοιον οὐδενί, ἀλλ’ ὅτων πλεῖστα ἐνι, ταῦτα ἐνδηλότατα ἐν ἑκαστόν ἐστι καὶ ἦν.

2.2.5 Presocratics: Summation

The contribution of the Presocratics is, as has been noted, difficult to assess accurately, given the fragmented nature and lack of context of most of their writing. It is relevant nonetheless that these thinkers created the context within which Socrates and Plato proposed their own ideas. The basis for the idea of sublimation is almost universally present in the works of the Presocratic philosophers; even when they insist upon the continuity or unity between physical and metaphysical reality, a distinction between what is specific and temporary, and what is universal and eternal, can be discerned (Armstrong, Blumenthal & Markus, 1981:14). The superiority of the latter and human ability to attain or access it, an essential part of the rationale behind sublimation, then becomes almost a foregone conclusion. Thus the transcendence of truth over the concerns of the moment was not a novel idea in the Classical period. It had been explored by the Presocratic philosophers, and the Heraclitean concept of Logos, which is understood as both ‘word’ and ‘god’ is relevant. One of the fragments that has survived (by way of Plutarch) from Heraclitus’ writing deals directly with the transcendence of a true, abstract idea over physical considerations such as time: “Σίβυλλα δὲ μαινομένῳ στόματι καθ’ Ἡράκλειτον ἀγέλαστα καὶ ἀκαλλώπιστα καὶ ἀμύριστα φθεγγομένη χιλίων ἑτῶν ἐξικνεῖται τῇ φωνῇ διὰ τὸν θεόν.” John Burnet translated this as: “The Sibyl, with raving lips uttering things solemn, unadorned, and unembellished, reaches over a thousand years with her voice because of the god in her.”²⁹

The transcendence of God or Logos over physical reality is, therefore, a concept that was already well established. Polarisation between the two was a construct that was still in the future, relative to its predominance in later theology. Plato’s contribution was the introduction of sublimation of the body, and this is, perhaps, most clearly expressed in *Symposium*, *Timaeus* and *Republic*.

2.3 PLATO

The distinction or dualism between the spiritual forms of reality and the particulars of the sensible world was a crucial development in modern thought and philosophy. The ideas of death, the body and reincarnation in Plato’s thought all stem from the central division between ideal and real. In essence, the theory of Forms can be expressed as the real world

²⁹ Source: Plutarch, *de Pyth.* orac. 6.

which exists above or transcendent to the world of ordinary sense experience. Plato considered the soul to be ‘trapped’ within this world and yearning for release. This release occurs eventually through death and it is the work of the philosopher to *prepare* the soul for death. In other words, life is a preparation for death while the ‘good’ life is one that succeeds in moving away from the desires and instincts of the body. In his introduction to his translation of Plato’s *Symposium*, Benjamin Jowett (4) describes the importance of certain Platonic concepts as follows:

For in philosophy as in prophecy glimpses of the future may often be conveyed in words which could hardly have been understood or interpreted at the time when they were uttered ... which were wiser than the writer of them meant, and could not have been expressed by him if he had been interrogated about them.

This un-actualisation—the idea that Plato himself would not have been able to reveal adequately many of the concepts emanating from his work—is open to debate. Yet the idea that his body of work provides “glimpses of the future” is compelling. It may not be accurate to say that Plato, and the philosophers who based their work on his, formed Western thought, but it is undeniable that they transformed it. Until the emergence of modernism, a clear trajectory can be drawn from Platonic concepts of the soul, the Forms and non-physical truth and perfection. In a sense, it was Plato who took philosophical enquiry out of the physical realm, and who, furthermore, imposed value judgments on the physical as opposed to the spiritual—though, significantly, these did not include the setting up of a dichotomy between good and evil.³⁰ In doing so, Plato set the stage for the development of Western philosophy and theology. It has been argued that European civilisation in its entirety has, at its root, the care of the soul as conceived of by Plato and Aristotle (Patočka, 2002: 11–12). But even the most supra-historical exegesis does not see Plato predicting the ascension of Christian thought or the ways in which it would utilise his concepts. If Plato’s work does contain “glimpses of

³⁰ This concept will be discussed later in the chapter. Though good and evil with regard to love is suggested by Pausanias in *Symposium*, it is rejected in favour of Socrates’ version. The Neoplatonists reintroduce this notion, but it does not become dominant until medieval Christianity. Good versus evil is not, therefore, a concept inherent to sublimation of the body.

the future”, then it is because he managed to reach a level of abstraction that is universal and therefore timeless.

2.3.1 Symposium ³¹

Plato’s *Symposium* deals with transcending the corporeal in favour of the spiritual, and the transcendence is what Plato himself achieves through the level of abstraction present in the dialogue. This study tries to demonstrate that the narrative structure of the dialogue supports and strengthens this process of transcendence of the physical in favour of the sublime: a core concept is reached and defined that is universal in its application, and therefore able to persist, in one form or another, through further stages of Western thought.

2.3.1.1 Alcibiades

Paradoxically, it is Alcibiades’ account of his relations with Socrates (215a–222b) at the end of *Symposium* that serves as the reception to an analysis of the theme of sublimation of the body that is contained in the dialogue.

In the context of this dialogue and of the concept of the sublimation of the body, perhaps the most important aspect of this image of Socrates is the following: his favouring of the abstract over the corporeal makes him more desirable, not less, even among men, such as Alcibiades, who function primarily on a bodily level. His sublimation of the body is a quality that produces the highest and most concentrated erotic drive, as well as the highest intellectual admiration, and although the configuring of intense sexual attraction around the unattainable is nothing new, in the context of Socrates’ conceptual analysis of the nature of love, and taken at face value, it is proof that people in general have this goal—to sublimate the body in favour of the soul.

³¹ The narrative analysis of *Symposium* in this study draws considerably from the revised translation with notes of Guido Calogero, published in 2002 and most especially on the introduction to this translation by Angelica Taglia—see bibliography.

The clear and striking portrait of Socrates presented through the eyes of Alcibiades is the culmination of a steady movement away from the body that has been evident through elements of the narrative since its beginning. It is a party, and a celebration, but Socrates is not wholly present at the eating and drinking. He arrives after the food has been eaten, having spent time in a state of abstraction (175a–d). After the meal and the arrival of Socrates, the primacy of drinking is downshifted in favour of conversation and debate, though not wholly eschewed. The flute girl, whose function it is to minister to more than one of the senses,³² is sent away to play to the women. A group of men is left, in an elevated state, to sit and discuss the nature of love.

Another feature of this dialogue that seems superficial but is perhaps important is the fact that the concepts presented by Socrates come out through a circuitous, indirect route. Form follows meaning: by describing physical circumstances in great detail—creating the elements of a complex narrative and so on—and then negating its significance in comparison to the central message, Plato is reinforcing the idea that internal wisdom—the ‘soul’ of the dialogue, as it were—is more significant than the external structure. To put it more clearly, the reader is invited to regard all the various speakers—Apollodorus, Aristodemus, Phaedrus, Pausanias, Eryximachus, Aristophanes, Agathon, even Socrates himself—and all their various ideas about love as the layers of illusion which the truth transcends. This does not imply that there is no value inherent in these layers of illusion that collectively constitute more than half of the dialogue; the impression, rather, is that the truth is being chased or hunted down, and is found at last in Diotima’s version of love. Socrates’ contribution satisfies both the reader and the characters present at the symposium; because it is clearly ‘The Truth’ it invites no further debate. The conversation has been brought to that culmination by the presence of Socrates, but also by the process of pursuing truth, and though they are unable to explain it, each of the characters present has some inkling of the fact that it exists. This, as the study will try to show, is a perfect structural reflection of Socrates’/Diotima’s assessment of love, in which love is a force that compels a person, through the recurrent pursuit of beauty, to seek truth. Truth, when found, has little to do with the body, just as Socrates’ speech has little to do with the accounts of love contributed by the other speakers. Instead, the culmination of a search that began while rooted in the physical ultimately and naturally transcends it. The body and

³² The flute girl being perhaps a *ῥαίρα* or courtesan.

every physical or worldly impulse is thus sublimated. There is a smooth and, above all, progressive movement from the life of the body to that of the soul. The perfection that a person seeks is present only at the level of the soul, and although the impulse to seek it is universally present, even in worldly existence, finding it requires one to rise above physical concerns, drives and desires. Part of sublimation is therefore a type of subjugation.

Although *Symposium* can be analysed as something other than an inquiry into the nature of love, it is nevertheless important that an expression and analysis of love be both the starting point and the ending point (through Alcibiades' expression of love for the elusive Socrates) of the dialogue. There are two central ideas here. First, love is not an end in and of itself, but a motivator, which spurs humans on to the achievement of ever-greater experiential participation in beauty and truth, with regeneration or reproduction as its eventual goal. Second, this response to and participation in love, if pursued fruitfully, leads humans beyond the scope of physical existence and into the realm of non-physical perfection; in other words, it produces sublimation of the body. In this context, the accounts of love that precede Socrates' own are not to be ignored; from each is learnt something that must be overcome or perfected so that sublimation can be reached. Sublimation is not a process of elimination so much as it is a process of perfecting what is already there. Thus, something about the acquisition of perfection through love can be learned from each of the speakers.

2.3.1.2 *Phaedrus*

The crux of Phaedrus' argument is that love can be proven to be great in that it motivates people to be honourable, a vastly important consideration in ancient society. According to Phaedrus, a society built upon love is a sort of homoerotic Camelot.

Phaedrus does not speak of or seem aware of the possibility of sublimation, nor the distinction between body and soul, nor corporeal and spiritual existence. However, his argument in favour of the worship of love, his thoughts about virtue and honour, and, in particular, his assertion that the human race could be improved by valuing an inherent better nature, seem, superficially, not inconsistent with part of the process of sublimation. Phaedrus' account has a popular resonance, presumably for people of his day, and also, probably, for modern readers. An idyllic society based on love and innate honour is the material of many Utopian meditations. From Phaedrus the reader gets the vague impression of progression,

improvement or refinement based on love, but the notion that this constitutes the full function and capability of love is (in the context of the dialogue) unsatisfying.

2.3.1.3 Pausanias

Pausanias' account edges closer to the analysis of love that will be given by Socrates, though with several key alterations or omissions. There is the differentiation between body and soul, heaven and earth, common and sublime; and in this account the soul, the heavenly and the sublime are clearly favoured. The distinction between homosexual and heterosexual love, with the former being more of the soul and therefore superior, is something that is also found in Socrates' account; this seems to have been something of a conditioned belief among the aristocrats of Athens (Ludwig, 2002: 28–30). Moreover, an endorsement of spiritual love—love of the soul—over that of the body is made and justified. There is also a contrast between that which is changeable or temporary, and that which is lasting. The love of the soul—and virtue itself—is linked to the idea of immortality, something which is not transient. Earlier philosophers, such as Heraclitus, were also aware of this idea that some things are everlasting and unchanging; here it is linked to the human soul, and Socrates, later in the dialogue, refines the idea.

Pausanias' account is included in this section of the dialogue, as one of the rejected or inadequate analyses of love, but it does bear a likeness to the 'truth' revealed by Socrates later. However, given that the analysis of Pausanias, like those of the other speakers, represents a faulty or incomplete understanding of the issue at hand, it is instructive to examine some differences. First of all, the notion that there are two Aphrodites, or two types of love, is subsequently rejected, first by Eryximachus, the next speaker, and then by Socrates himself. Furthermore, Socrates does not appear to endorse the notion that love itself can be base or common; rather, it is the failure to follow the genuine impulses generated by love that constitutes baseness. Finally, and perhaps most significantly, Socrates does not glorify love itself; rather, his praise is reserved for the effects that love brings about.

The fact that Pausanias' account of love bears such a great superficial resemblance to Socrates' own, and yet is different, is worthy of emphasis. This study will examine Hellenistic and early Christian beliefs about sublimation, which in turn greatly influenced the medieval church and, therefore, European culture until early modern times, and it will be suggested that the polarisations of body and soul observed in Pausanias' speech produce large echoes. It is

important to realise, therefore, that this is an inaccurate representation of the ideas that Plato himself was communicating, and that Plato's concepts (as expressed by Socrates in the dialogue) comprise a far greater unity between body and soul even as the process of the sublimation of the body is clearly outlined. To state this more clearly, in this dialogue it is only Socrates' account that deals with sublimation as opposed to subjugation of the corporeal. The subtlety of this difference makes misunderstanding, in a wider context, not only possible but likely; presented with a polarisation between the common and the sublime, the virtuous and the wanton, or simply the good and the evil (all of which can be drawn from the accounts of either Pausanias or Socrates), it is simple to conclude that the reader is being invited to choose one over the other; moreover, there is little question as to which is preferable. To be sure, Pausanias assumes and implies that this choice has at least as much to do with one's innate inclination and character as it does with a conscious process of choosing. That is, he is descriptive rather than prescriptive, merely observing that some people act in one way and others in the opposite way, and attributing these differences, in part, to the existence and influence of the two Aphrodites. For the reader, however—if what Pausanias says is taken at face value—a choice is nevertheless presented. One can choose the body or the soul, the heavenly or the common Aphrodite. Socrates presents a different framework, in which the guiding concept is the incremental and, according to his analysis, natural progression from the common to the sublime. This process of refinement is sublimation, and this study will consider later whether the subsequent evolution of the concept, sometimes into theories more closely resembling that of Pausanias, constitutes devolution.

There is an additional aspect of Pausanias' account that ought to be highlighted, because it seems to echo the beliefs and values of the era and may be applied to Socrates' model of sublimation. It is an underlying fact regarding the love between an older man and a younger boy, accepted (even idealised) in Classical Greece, that the boy was not primarily motivated by sexual desire or eros—and it has been pointed out that Pausanias consciously avoids attributing eros to the beloved, in accordance with this pre-existing concept. Elsewhere, the love of the body as opposed to the soul is considered evil. Paul Ludwig, analysing the connection between eros and the ideal and principles of the polis, interprets the “nonreciprocity of desire” between the lover and beloved in Pausanias' view of love as follows: the boy “...lets the lover have his way because he wants something else: to be made virtuous” (Ludwig, 2002:30). Therefore, according to both Pausanias and the prevalent ethic of the day, the young man has wisdom and virtue in mind when he offers his body to a

middle-aged lover, and the sublimating of bodily needs or desires (presuming that these would be more likely to lead him into the arms of a woman or girl—or another young man) in favour of the soul is being played out within him as a function of that act. Since this concept was a commonly accepted one —Ludwig (2002:30) cites examples of this type of relationship depicted in the artwork of the day, for example—it seems a reasonable assumption that it constituted a basis for understanding the differing needs of the body and the soul among educated thinkers. It was not a new or unfamiliar idea, in other words, and this may account for the fact that the discussion of love in *Symposium* veers so swiftly into a discussion of the soul. Pausanias' views would have been fairly conventional and it will be fruitful therefore to examine where and how Socrates' views differ from the convention, because these differences would likely have weighed more heavily among readers who were Plato's contemporaries. Some of these differences have been mentioned already, and others will be dealt with subsequently.

2.3.1.4 *Eryximachus*

Eryximachus, the next speaker, disagrees with Pausanias' conclusions, although he concedes that the latter had begun his speech well (185e–188e). The big contrast between the two is this: Pausanias establishes and emphasises dichotomy and polarisations between the two types of love—the sacred and the common—but Eryximachus, observing this same dichotomy, sees both extremes as part of a unified whole. The greater the polarisation between the two, Eryximachus asserts, the greater the potential for harmony.

Whence I infer that in music, in medicine, in all other things human as well as divine, both loves ought to be noted as far as may be, for they are both present [Jowett].³³

This is arguably the most curious account of love found anywhere in *Symposium*, even when one takes into account the version of Aristophanes, which is to follow. It does not readily appear to conform or even relate to any of the other versions of love contained in the dialogue, with the exception of Socrates' account (which is thematically related to all the

³³ 187e: καὶ ἐν μουσικῇ δὴ καὶ ἐν ἰατρικῇ καὶ ἐν τοῖς ἄλλοις πᾶσι καὶ τοῖς ἀνθρωπείοις καὶ τοῖς θείοις, καθ' ὅσον παρείκει, φυλακτέον ἐκάτερον τὸν ἔρωτα· ἔνεστον [188a] γάρ.

others). It does, however, bear a strong relation to Presocratic thought, which sought a material principle of all being, thus negating the distinction between the physical and the non-physical. Parmenides, furthermore, wrote of opposing forces that create a harmonious whole. This is 'love' according to a different paradigm—one that is, seemingly, pre-Classical. To Classical thinkers, it might have been familiar in that context as an older philosophy. To modern Western readers, Eryximachus' version of love is perhaps eccentric, while Pausanias' account is easily internalised, even familiar. But the analysis of Eryximachus does not fit easily into any paradigm regarding love, virtue, divinity and the soul that has made its way into modern times via Platonism and Christian theology. Its inclusion here is significant. It is, furthermore, necessary background for the principle of sublimation that Socrates subsequently describes. If the sacred and the common (and the spiritual and the corporeal) co-exist in all things, then the notion of a continuum between the two extremes becomes possible. But if, on the other hand, people and things are divided between one extreme and the other—belonging completely to either one or the other—and if the body and soul are similarly divided, sublimation of the body is either impossible or it involves an immediate, complete transformation. Within this latter context, the idea of sublimation veers swiftly into subjugation of the body—which is, as has already been mentioned, something of a devolution and a misinterpretation perhaps of Platonic concepts. It is, perhaps, difficult to distinguish between the two without a foundation in Presocratic theories regarding the union of opposites; this background is what Eryximachus' speech delivers. Therefore, as dissimilar as they may appear, Eryximachus' version of love provides some of the raw material for Socrates' own. But the personality (so to speak) of love itself is significantly different in the two accounts, and Socrates' account comprises a linear progression toward improvement and refinement which that of Eryximachus lacks. Harmony, for Eryximachus, is the goal; the two extremes hold each other in check, and a perfect or intractable tension between the two would be the ideal. This ideal, while not exactly static (given that shifts and adjustments are necessary to attain and maintain harmony), entails no upward movement or progression toward a more sublime form. Moreover, as mentioned before, no particular distinction is made between the physical and the spiritual; both appear to be variations within the same unity of existence. This, again, may be necessary background for Socrates' account; a smooth progression from the body to the soul cannot be said to occur if the two are essentially different or if a movement into the latter entails a sharp and immediate break with the former. If, however, the soul is present at all times and in all phases of life, and a movement toward it is accessible to all humans at all times, sublimation becomes a viable and relevant concept. Eryximachus'

speech, therefore, though it seems anomalous, is vital in order to understand the principles that Socrates draws out.

2.3.1.5 *Aristophanes*

If any form of sublimation can be inferred from Aristophanes' speech, it is due to supposition and deliberate abstraction. Furthermore, his notion that love compels individuals to look for their other halves is directly negated by Socrates' own account of Diotima's teachings.³⁴ Even so, the central idea of his speech—that each person has a soul-mate or ideal partner—is not easily dismissed. It is pervasive in popular culture today. A related concept is taught as part of Judaism, though an equivalent does not exist in Christianity.³⁵ There is an implication, as the term itself implies, that the search for a soul-mate transcends the physical realm. It is interesting, and perhaps a little perverse, that Aristophanes seems deliberately to avoid a suggestion of sublimation by basing the search for a partner, and the memory of primal wholeness, on the bodily form. At the same time, like the analysis of Eryximachus, this may merely indicate a seamless and fluid union between body and soul, which is not inconsistent with the account of Socrates.

2.3.1.6 *Agathon*

According to Agathon, Love is the fairest and best in himself, and the cause of what is fairest and best in all other things: [197c] “οὕτως ἐμοὶ δοκεῖ, ὦ Φαῖδρε, Ἔρως πρῶτος αὐτὸς ὢν κάλλιστος καὶ ἄριστος μετὰ τοῦτο τοῖς ἄλλοις ἄλλων τοιούτων αἴτιος εἶναι.” But as often occurs in *Symposium*, the account, while it is so rich in apparent similarities to that of Socrates, turns out to be inadequate compared with what follows. Socrates begins his speech (199c–212c) by summarising Agathon's account: Agathon has proposed that Love, being a type of quintessence of what is fairest and best, is instrumental in drawing out these qualities in humans. By following Love, therefore, people are inspired (for example, as Agathon mentions, towards ‘poesy’) and improved; Love makes those who follow it like

³⁴ Diotima says: [205d] “Καὶ λέγεται μὲν γέ τις, ἔφη, λόγος, ὡς οἱ ἂν τὸ ἥμισυ [205e] ἑαυτῶν ζητῶσιν, οὗτοι ἐρῶσιν· ὁ δ' ἐμὸς λόγος οὔτε ἡμίσεός φησιν εἶναι τὸν ἔρῳτα οὔτε ὅλου, ἐὰν μὴ τυγχάνῃ γέ που, ὦ ἑταῖρε, ἀγαθὸν ὄν.”

³⁵ This refers to the Jewish concept of “bashert”, or soul mate; according to the Talmud, each Jewish male is given a soul mate prior to conception, and subsequently finds this individual in the corporeal realm.

itself. Socrates proceeds to contradict this directly: love is not the embodiment of beauty; love is not even a god. Rather, love is the hunger for—in other words, the lack of—beauty. Using his characteristic dialectic method of questioning, Socrates demonstrates that it cannot be any other way: if there is a desire for something, there must also be a corresponding lack. Love lacks beauty, but is the desire for beauty; so, following love, lovers are led toward beauty. Furthermore, since “the good [is] also the beautiful”, love lacks and drives lovers toward the good as well [200c]: “...τάγαθὰ οὐ καὶ καλὰ δοκεῖ σοι εἶναι; Ἐμοιγε. Εἰ ἄρα ὁ Ἔρως τῶν καλῶν ἐνδεής ἐστι, τὰ δὲ ἀγαθὰ καλὰ, κἂν τῶν ἀγαθῶν ἐνδεής εἴη... [οὕτως ἐχέτω ὡς σὺ λέγεις].” Agathon’s aspirational rhetoric addresses neither love in all its forms nor the complex negotiation of its physical and spiritual expression.

2.3.1.7 *Socrates*

Although it consists of a familiar and characteristic type of reasoning, the opening section of Socrates’ speech seems to be designed to disorient the reader. Structurally, its dialectic interaction constitutes an interruption in the style of prose previously encountered, and this style is subsequently re-established once Socrates begins to recount Diotima’s teachings. One of the guiding premises of the entire dialogue—the idea that love is praiseworthy because of qualities that love itself possesses—is proven false. Finally, Socrates’ insistence that he is not an authority on the nature of love, and his subsequent recounting of Diotima’s teachings, is peculiar and dramatic. Socrates begins by insisting that the wisdom he is to impart does not come from him: when Agathon says (201c) “Εγώ, φάναι, ὦ Σώκρατες, σοὶ οὐκ ἂν δυναίμην ἀντιλέγειν”, Socrates carefully removes himself from the equation, responding: “Οὐ μὲν οὖν τῇ ἀληθείᾳ, φάναι, ὦ φιλούμενε Ἀγάθων, δύνασαι ἀντιλέγειν, ἐπεὶ Σωκράτει γε οὐδὲν χαλεπὸν”.

Taken in the context of what follows, this is more than a show of modesty; it is a central component of the account of love that Socrates presents. Socrates, being a mortal man, is “δυναίμην ἀντιλέγειν” because he is not absolute, unchanging or eternal; truth, on the other hand, is all of those things. These distinctions are important to the concept of sublimation. There must be a concept of truth (as well as of beauty, and the good)—perhaps a form, as described in *Republic*—that is beyond physical or mortal reality in order for sublimation of the body to be perceived as a movement toward, rather than away from, what is most vital. The opening sequence of Socrates’ speech, as well as reframing the nature of love, begins to establish this essential distinction between the mortal and the eternal.

If the insistence of Socrates upon his own ignorance is a little awkward, because of the contrast it provides with the others' belief in his wisdom, the identity of his teacher is perhaps an even more radical departure from contemporary assumptions. Thus far in *Symposium*, views regarding the inferiority of women have been well rehearsed. According to most of the accounts of love in *Symposium*, what happens between a man and a woman is of the body, and therefore inferior to the love between men, an assumption amplified by the discussion of the love between ἐρῶστίης and ἐρώμενος in romantic and idealised terms.³⁶ A little later, Socrates himself will state that spiritual conception and regeneration, which produce wisdom, virtue and art, is superior to the physical counterpart that occurs between a man and woman, producing a child. Despite all of this 'evidence' of women's inferiority, however, the speaker whose words are at the centre of all the many layers of dialogue presented here is a woman. She is a wise woman with significant credentials, having, according to Socrates, "delayed" a plague in Athens by ten years.³⁷ Ekaterini Douka-Kabitoglou (1990:77) sees the use of a prophetess as a means for Plato to "[re-establish] the bond between eros and woman, representing the feminine as an essential factor—or intermediary—in the experiential contact with divinity". This type of supposition is processed and refined in David Halperin's well-known analysis "Why is Diotima a woman?". Halperin, (1990:113–153) smoothes out distinctions between the eros of Pausanias and that of Socrates/Diotima, suggesting a continuum of ideas between the two types of love.³⁸ For Halperin, Diotima as female is no more than an appropriation of feminine gender for the purposes of a figurative framework of the totality of love (beauty, reciprocity, and ultimately procreation) which the pederastic/philerastic eros of *Symposium*'s participants will not deliver as a metaphorical framework. But Daniel Boyarin (2006:13) largely discounts this:

The relationship between Socrates and Diotima models, as it were, the possibility of a purely spiritual eros between a man and a woman while

³⁶ The general status of women is discussed by R.E. Allen (1993:19), who summarises: "Upper class Athenian men turned for romance not to women, who were unavailable or ineligible, but to boys of their own class."

³⁷ 201d πρὸ τοῦ λοιμοῦ δέκα ἔτη ἀναβολὴν ἐποίησε τῆς νόσου.

³⁸ For example, according to Halperin (1990:139), Diotima's reference to pregnancy is "disembodied", turning 'pregnancy' into "a mere image of (male) spiritual labor, just as Socrates's male voice at once embodies and disembodies Diotima's female presence."

theorising that nonsexual eros as procreative in both its same-sex and other-sex (but always no-sex) versions.

The assessments of both Boyarin and Halperin shift from consideration of the importance of Diotima's gender to other concerns, but Boyarin maintains a crucial point that the Diotima dialogue is bringing out a "binary opposition" (2006:13) between the eros of *Symposium*'s eulogisers and all non-celibate love.

Boyarin qualifies another point of Halperin's. Halperin (1990:124) finds attractive and reasonable a suggestion that Plato devised Diotima as literary surrogate for the historic courtesan and teacher of rhetoric, Aspasia, but for Boyarin (2006:8):

The analogy (or better, homology) in the realm of erotics is only too clear. Aspasia can teach only the false use of language, just as she would have been able to teach the lower erotics that pursue pleasure, procreation, and political power, while Diotima can teach true erotics, because her sexuality is entirely out of all these realms.

Thus Diotima's persona and words, which come to the reader third or fourth-hand (as mentioned before) represent radical, authoritative 'truth' and they become the focus and the culmination of the entire dialogue.³⁹

Socrates' account of Diotima's teachings (201d–212a) presents a sort of blueprint for the process of sublimation, just as all the former accounts do not.⁴⁰ Viewed in this light, it becomes clear that the former accounts of love and its effect on humanity fall into one of two camps: there are those that search for wholeness or balance without any real consciousness of

³⁹ It may also be valid to suggest that the fact that Diotima's words come from a speaker who is not physically present as part of the gathering reverses somewhat the emphasis on personalities that had previously been established.

⁴⁰ This also applies to the account of Alcibiades. Susan Levin and Justina Gregory (1998:407) write: "If we consider Alcibiades' encomium in the light of the speech that preceded it, it becomes evident that Plato wishes to contrast the Eros of Diotima's ideal lover—which never terminates in individuals and in any case moves quickly beyond them—with forms of Eros that give pride of place to our attachments to individuals as individuals".

the possibility of linear ascent to a higher state, and there are those that invite the reader to choose the sublime over the corporeal, as if both options were available to humans at any time. The fact that the sublime cannot simply and instantly be chosen, but that it is, rather, a process that one might choose to undertake, is connected intimately with Socrates' assertion that love is not a god. Although Socrates does speak of the gods, the account itself reveals a subtle inconsistency between his understanding of love and theism itself—one which Christian philosophers struggled to overcome or perhaps resolved, depending on one's point of view, but which may account in large part for the form of the concept of sublimation that eventually developed. There is a search for the spiritual, and a striving to reach a spiritual state, that takes place within the human psyche, but calling love a god, or basing spirituality on a belief in the gods (or, later, God) externalises it; the location, so to speak, of the spiritual and the sublime becomes not the individual but the god. This is an incentive to worship the god, but it does not provide a means of refining one's own being to the point that sublimation occurs. Moreover, as previous accounts show, externalising the spiritual in this manner sets the stage for value judgments that polarise the gods and humans, sublime and common, body and spirit. It is not necessarily true that by praising God or the gods one denigrates what is human, but it is true in some cases. Part of what is significant about the analysis of Socrates is that it cannot logically be used as a basis for denigrating the corporeal. There is a movement past dichotomy, and it likewise surpasses the type of wholeness resulting from a harmony of opposites that Eryximachus and the Presocratic philosophers speak of. Love is put in place as an intermediary between opposing extremes, such as ignorance and knowledge. Not a god itself, love can also be seen as an intermediary between humans and gods. Moreover, love, Socrates establishes, is universal; all human beings are motivated by love, though they may not recognise all aspects of it as what they are accustomed to call love. In ordinary and concise terms, Socrates establishes the relationship between humans and the divine; first, there is a hunger for the divine that is universal among humans; second, this desire takes a multitude of forms, but it is always the same impulse, and third, love likewise provides humans with the means of fulfilling this desire. It remains to be demonstrated how it occurs, and Socrates proceeds to do this by bringing out a parallel between the corporeal and the spiritual. In terms of the physical body, the objective of love is conception and generation. That much is easy enough to observe, although, as Socrates himself grants (207a–c), it is an impulse common to animals as well as humans. This principle of love—seeking beauty and culminating in regeneration—is common to all living things, but humankind has the capacity to experience it on a spiritual level. Thus, the objective of love, according to Socrates,

permeates both physical and spiritual being; conception and generation is an “immortal principle in a mortal creature”.⁴¹

In the realm of physical being, the impulse is played out through physical regeneration, which, it can be argued, leads one on to one form of immortality—the fact that human beings live on, so to speak, through their children. Next, Socrates makes a leap beyond what is well known and readily observable in nature, but the association with physical reality seems to strengthen the argument. Just as the impulse toward regeneration is the objective of love on a physical level, a type of regeneration—a “birth in beauty”⁴²—takes place on the level of the soul, and is likewise made possible by love, which consistently leads humans toward a desire for what is good and beautiful. Thus, while love might lead anyone to desire the beauty that culminates in physical regeneration, individuals who have the capacity for wisdom come to experience this same desire for beauty on a level that transcends the physical. This culminates in conception and regeneration through the soul, rather than through the body; the ‘children’ conceived in this manner include poetry, temperance, justice, and other virtues (209 a–e).

Finally, Socrates asserts that the ‘conception’ that takes place in the soul is superior to the conception of human children. The assertion is well reasoned; its reasoning—the reasoning behind Socrates’ entire account of love—is based on the existence of an ultimate form of beauty. The terms in which this is described make it clear that any movement toward this form is automatically a refinement or improvement, while any movement away from it is automatically counter to the universal desire for what is beautiful. Socrates describes: “...Beauty absolute, separate, simple, and everlasting, which without diminution and without increase, or any change, is imparted to the ever-growing and perishing beauties of all other things” [Jowett].⁴³

Because humans do, demonstrably, harbour a desire for the beauty that is described in this passage, Socrates in the context of the dialogue proves that this ideal form is the ultimate

⁴¹ 206c: καὶ τοῦτο ἐν θνητῷ ὄντι τῷ ζῳῷ ἀθάνατον ἔνεστιν, ἡ κύησις καὶ ἡ γέννησις

⁴² 206e: ἔστιν γάρ, ὦ Σώκρατες, ἔφη, οὐ τοῦ καλοῦ ὁ ἔρως, ὡς σὺ οἶει. Ἀλλὰ τί μήν; Τῆς γεννήσεως καὶ τοῦ τόκου ἐν τῷ καλῷ.

⁴³ 211e: ἀλλ’ αὐτὸ καθ’ αὐτὸ μεθ’ αὐτοῦ μονοειδὲς αἰεὶ ὄν, τὰ δὲ ἄλλα πάντα καλὰ ἐκείνου μετέχοντα τρόπον τινὰ τοιοῦτον, οἷον γιγνομένων τε τῶν ἄλλων καὶ ἀπολλυμένων μηδὲν ἐκεῖνο μήτε τι πλεον μήτε ἔλαττον γίγνεσθαι μηδὲ πάσχειν μηδέν.

objective of the universally experienced love. Because it is everlasting and unchanging, it must be of the spirit rather than of the body. Thus, a movement away from the concerns of the body and toward those of the spirit must logically be a universal objective, because that is what draws closer to what everyone desires. While people may vary in their capacity to achieve this sublimation of the body, all strive to achieve it, once desire is correctly understood.

Needless to say, the problem of finding a definition of something, or the “paradox of enquiry”, applies to much of this. The argument from which Socrates would not deviate is that we all want to perfect our souls and consequently if we could know what the virtues are, we would all make an effort to obtain them. In fact, every single one of the virtues, bravery not excluded, depends on knowledge, for if humans act wrongly or badly, that behaviour is due to their ignorance of the comprehensive knowledge of what is and is not good for a human being. Thus, if a person has this single wisdom, all virtues follow automatically. Ed Fraser (2016) points out:

The problem is, how do you find something, such as virtue, when you don't know what it is you're looking for? If you already know what it is, then you don't need to find it; but if you don't know what it is, how will you know when you have found it?

But it was the nature of this form—an ideal and everlasting non-physical entity which is nevertheless expressed through the corporeal as well as the spiritual—and not any paradox that engaged the interest of philosophers for centuries to come, though it can be argued that subsequent versions of this simple yet powerful concept constitute a devolution rather than a refinement of the idea.

The somewhat complex format of this dialogue, in which concepts are handed down to the reader through many speakers, elegantly demonstrates the distinction between physical circumstance and unchanging truth; moreover, the reader is shown how to work through the former to arrive at the latter. The everlasting and unchanging ‘beauty absolute’ is shown to be the culmination and objective of humankind’s striving, but at the same time it is shown to be present in every aspect of life. Thus sublimation of the body in favour of the soul or spirit

does not entail a negation or rejection of the former, but a natural and linear progression through it and past it.

2.3.2 Timaeus

Timaeus discusses the origin of the world—from the universe to the human being— assuming the work of a single creator (Feibleman, 1971:54).⁴⁴ It is a somewhat atypical dialogue—often misread or misunderstood⁴⁵—but *Timaeus* nonetheless provides a rich and distinctive summary of the structure, creation and workings of the soul and its relation to the body, which are inextricably linked to the workings of the immortal in the universe. These are ideas that found ready application in early Christian theology. *Timaeus* profoundly influenced the Neoplatonists and the Gnostics, and made its way into early Christian theology—St. Augustine, for example, makes an affirmative reference to the ideas expressed in *Timaeus*.⁴⁶ Jowett points out, however, that the influence of *Timaeus* on later theology was burdened with misunderstanding: “In the supposed depths of this dialogue the Neoplatonists found hidden meanings and connections with the Jewish and Christian scriptures, and out of them elicited doctrines quite at variance with the spirit of Plato.” On the other hand, it can be supposed that reinterpretation of texts is a common by-product of the evolution of theology, as ideas are

⁴⁴ David Sedley (1999:317) summarises the scope of *Timaeus*: “The *Timaeus* is Plato’s great attempt to show how the world can only be understood if viewed as the product of divine intelligence. What emerges from it is that the human soul’s capacity to pattern itself after a divine mind is far from accidental, but directly reflects the soul’s own nature and origin and the teleological structure of the world as a whole.”

⁴⁵ George Vlastos (Vlastos & Graham, 1995:259): “[The *Timaeus*] is ‘esoteric’ philosophy, the private discourse of like-minded philosophers ... [opening up] the really tough questions of theodicy.” Benjamin Jowett, opening his introduction to his translation of *Timaeus*, calls it the “most obscure and repulsive [Platonic dialogue] from the point of view of the modern reader,” but the one which nevertheless has had “the greatest influence over the ancient and medieval world” (1892:467).

⁴⁶ *De Civitate Dei* VII, 11: Mirantur autem quidam nobis in Christi gratia sociati, cum audiunt uel legunt Platonem de Deo ista sensisse, quae multum congruere ueritati nostrae religionis agnoscunt...in Timaeo autem Plato, quem librum de mundi constitutione conscripsit, Deum dicit in illo opere terram primo ignemque iunxisse. Manifestum est autem, quod igni tribuat caeli locum: habet ergo haec sententia quandam illius similitudinem, qua dictum est: In principio fecit Deus caelum et terram. Deinde ille duo media, quibus interpositis sibimet haec extrema copularentur, aquam dicit et aerem; unde putatur sic intellexisse quod scriptum est: spiritus Dei superferebatur super aquam. Parum quippe adtendens quo more soleat illa scriptura appellare spiritum Dei, quoniam et aer spiritus dicitur, quattuor opinatus elementa loco illo commemorata uideri potest. Deinde quod Plato dicit amatorem Dei esse philosophum, nihil sic illis sacris litteris flagrat...

‘recycled’, so to speak, and find expression within the context of different worldviews. Neoplatonism illustrates just how conveniently Platonic terms yield to Christian reading. The symbolic system of references comes about from the need to join spirit at its highest and most disembodied levels. Material objects might change and decay but the Form of an object is eternal and unchanging reality to which we have access by various exercises, all of them symbolically recreating on earth what exists in perfection in Heaven.

2.3.2.1 *Structure of Timaeus*

The straightforward narrative structure of *Timaeus* frames a set of ideas that are complex, sometimes difficult to follow, and, as Jowett states, “obscure”. In the narrative, the characters assemble to continue a discussion they had begun the previous day. Socrates briefly introduces the topic for discussion, bringing the reader up to date, so to speak. The ideas expressed have a basic similarity—even a continuity—with those expressed in *Republic*, and the reference in *Timaeus* to a previous discussion refers very likely to *Republic*.⁴⁷ *Timaeus* was written after *Republic*,⁴⁸ and the concept of the soul that it discusses is similar or the same as that which Socrates lays out in the earlier dialogue. For instance, Socrates reminds his companions of the importance of the various social functions in an ideal state. These are, in turn, related to the components of the soul, the expression of morality being dependent upon separate components of the soul working in harmony with one another, the idea being that they correspond to a larger macrocosm (the *Republic*, for example) and that, at every level, harmony and balance are necessary conditions for morality. This explains why, in *Republic*, the specific structure of the state is vital to the moral existence of its citizens. It is most important, perhaps, that this introductory section establishes a relationship—an affinity—between the ideas dealt with in *Republic* and the essentially Pythagorean concepts that *Timaeus* proposes. While this may not be a straightforward endorsement, on Plato’s part, of Pythagorean ideas, it is at least an acknowledgement of a sort of continuum with regard to the

⁴⁷ For Alfred Edward Taylor (1928:3) the opening of *Timaeus* (17c1–19c2) is a recapitulation of a great part of *Republic*.

⁴⁸ *Republic* belongs to Plato’s middle period, while *Timaeus* is thought to be one of the last works written (Kraut, 1992:90–121) and this is confirmed by a recent very clear classification (Smith and Brickhouse, 2009). Alfred Edward Taylor detailed the continuity of ideas discussed in *Timaeus* and *Republic*. The divergence is stylistic (1928:3): “we no longer have that approximation to the tone of well-bred conversation, which is so characteristic of the *Gorgias*, *Phaedo*, *Republic*; we are getting something much more like a formal treatise or essay.” Taylor’s *terminus a quo* is 360 BC; his *terminus ad quem* is 347 BC (1928:3–10).

concepts. These considerations, and the lack of a dialectical framework in the dialogue, may indicate that the ideas of *Timaeus* are, at least in part, to be presented for deliberation as valid *a priori*.⁴⁹

The speaker Timaeus proceeds chronologically, eventually covering the creation of all things, including the human body and soul. He explains all things, including humankind, using a type of physics as his basis. Thus, there is a connection between humans and the universe, and between the spiritual and the corporeal, that is not merely figurative. Everything, in short, is an expression of a set of universal laws, and this apparently has the great advantage of rendering intangibles (such as the soul or moral sense) knowable and definable, as they would not otherwise be. Although the scope is different, this is consistent with the view of the soul and of society that Plato presents in *Republic*. The universe, society, and the human soul are all equally knowable because there is no breach between them; they are not merely analogous to one another, but of the same substance and subject to the same universal laws. In the version of creation presented here, the only being or force that is distinct from this version of natural law is the creator, ὁ δημιουργός.

A notion of perfection that has some similarity to Plato's forms permeates this creation story. What is eternal and unchangeable is necessarily perfect, but copies based on what has already been created follow this original perfection, and these are not flawless or eternal. Timaeus relates:

The work of the creator, whenever he looks to the unchangeable and fashions the form and nature of his work after an unchangeable pattern, must necessarily be made fair and perfect; but when he looks to the created only, and uses a created pattern, it is not fair or perfect.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ Benjamin Jowett's opinion on these enquiries was, typically, decided and is worth quoting: "a greater danger with modern interpreters of Plato is the tendency to regard the *Timaeus* as the centre of his system" (1892:469). Jowett's opposing view was that *Timaeus* does not represent Plato's own ideas at all, but a distinct school of thought (Jowett, 1892:471).

⁵⁰ ὅτου μὲν οὖν ἂν ὁ δημιουργὸς πρὸς τὸ κατὰ ταῦτα ἔχον βλέπων αἰεὶ τοιούτῳ τινὶ προσχρῶμενος παραδείγματι, τὴν ιδέαν καὶ δύναμιν αὐτοῦ ἀπεργάζεται, καλὸν ἐξ ἀνάγκης οὕτως ἀποτελεῖσθαι πᾶν· [28b] οὗ δ' ἂν εἰς γεγονότος, γεννητῷ παραδείγματι προσχρῶμενος, οὐ καλόν.

With regard to later descriptions of the soul in this dialogue, both the notion of a pre-existing perfection and the deviation from it are important. In particular, for sublimation (in the sense that it refers to improvement or refinement) to appear feasible, a concept of absolute perfection must exist (33a–33b). Not only is the world perfect, but “perfect and complete, with no elements left over, and it would not age or deteriorate”, unless the motions of the world and of living creatures (specifically humans) fail to harmonise. The stage is set for sublimation, because perfection is central to the nature and creation of the world, and human improvement can bring it about.

The account of how all things function and are organised unfolds. Correlations are drawn between physical functions and what might be considered as abstract or intangible qualities, such as reasoning and morality. Timaeus begins by describing the creation of the universe at the hands of the creator or Demiurge, moving smoothly into the creation of the body, and afterwards the soul, the world, and finally into the creation of living creatures, of which there are four types: ‘heavenly gods’, ‘winged things’, ‘water creatures’, and ‘creatures of the land’.⁵¹ The gods, in turn, are instructed by the Demiurge to make mortal creatures, though their immortal souls are made by the creator of the universe and originally inhabit the various stars in the sky, to be born and live according to the “nature of the universe and ... the laws of destiny”.⁵²

The immortality of the soul, and the fact that it is created by the Demiurge while corporeal being is created by the lesser gods, is important. It establishes the idea that the human souls transcend, and originally existed independently not only of the body, but of all earth-based, corporeal reality. The concept that human beings were originally not of this earth but inhabiting the stars suggests that humans have the right, the capacity, and even the responsibility to strive for the perfection of the heavens. The idea of transmigration of souls, or reincarnation, is also addressed here, along with the promise of an eventual return to the original perfection (42b): “He who lived well during his appointed time was to return and

⁵¹ εἰσὶν δὴ τέτταρες, μία μὲν οὐράνιον θεῶν γένος, [40a] ἄλλη δὲ πτηνὸν καὶ ἀεροπόρον, τρίτη δὲ ἔνυδρον εἶδος, πεζὸν δὲ καὶ χερσαῖον τέταρτον.

⁵² 41e τὴν τοῦ παντὸς φύσιν ἔδειξεν, νόμους τε τοὺς εἰμαρμένους εἶπεν αὐταῖς

dwell in his native star” [Jowett].⁵³ Those who fail in the process of sublimation, however, degenerate (42 b–c):

But if he failed in attaining this, at the second birth he would pass into a woman, and if, when in that state of being, he did not desist from evil, he would continually be changed into some brute who resembled him in the evil nature which he had acquired [Jowett].⁵⁴

In this creation story, the body is created after the soul, and the soul inhabits it. Subject to the laws of nature, bodies are referred to as ‘instruments of time’ (42a1)⁵⁵—that is, unlike the soul, they are not immortal or eternal. There is simultaneously a distinction and interplay between these physical and spiritual components of reality. The argument is that spiritual components of being are no less ‘real’ because they happen to be abstract; they are a consistent and readily observable function of how the universe works, and how it always must work. There is absolutely no ambiguity regarding any of these functions, the idea being that any ambiguity experienced by individuals is a result of human misunderstanding of universal law. In fact, in Plato’s view, the world of Becoming is the physical world we perceive through our senses, always in movement, always changing, a place where we are easily deceived by our fallibility founded on corporeality, as distinct from the world of Being, of forms or ideas, absolute, independent, and transcendent. Some may see it as the unchanging core of the turning world, as did the poet T.S. Eliot in his Neoplatonic meditations.⁵⁶

⁵³ καὶ ὁ μὲν εὖ τὸν προσήκοντα χρόνον βιούς, πάλιν εἰς τὴν τοῦ συννόμου πορευθεὶς οἴκησιν ἄστρου.

⁵⁴ σφαλεῖς δὲ τούτων εἰς γυναικὸς φύσιν ἐν τῇ δευτέρᾳ γενέσει μεταβαλοῖ [42c] μὴ πανόμενός τε ἐν τούτοις ἔτι κακίας, τρόπον ὃν κακύνοιτο, κατὰ τὴν ὁμοιότητα τῆς τοῦ τρόπου γενέσεως εἰς τινὰ τοιαύτην ἀεὶ μεταβαλοῖ θήρειον φύσιν...

⁵⁵ ὄργανα χρόνων.

⁵⁶ In “Burnt Norton” from the Four Quartets:

“At the still point of the turning world. Neither flesh nor fleshless, Neither from nor towards; at the still point, there the dance is, But neither arrest nor movement. And do not call it fixity. Where past and future are gathered. Neither movement from nor towards, Neither ascent nor decline. Except for the point, the still point, There would be no dance, and there is only the dance. I can only say, there we have been: but I cannot say where. And I cannot say, how long, for that is to place it in time. The inner freedom from the practical desire, The release from action and suffering, release from the inner And the outer compulsion, yet surrounded By a grace of sense, a white light still and moving...”

Timaeus ends with a description of humanity and other earthly creatures; again, just as there is no discontinuity between the concept of the world and that of humanity, there is likewise no breach between the formation of humans and that of animals. That does not indicate that humans are not intrinsically superior to animals; the physical form of animals compared with that of humans is invested with meaning that offers positive ‘proof’ of human superiority: there are also superior and inferior animals, and the proof, again, is in their physical forms. These ideas regarding the relative superiority or inferiority of life forms have been a particularly persistent feature of Western thought.

Timaeus does not go so far as to propose a great chain of being, but he does provide the materials for the formation of one.⁵⁷ Overall, he offers a unified explanation for physical, societal and moral problems, all them dependent upon a set of motions and their harmony or lack thereof.

Timaeus’ message is harmony and balance, rather than sublimation of the body in favour of the soul. It can be observed, as in *Symposium*, that there is no absolute division between body and soul that would provide a capacity to rank and choose one over the other. Both are, so to speak, part of the same continuum of reality. On the other hand, good and evil do exist, and are not part of the same continuum; simply stated, it is ‘good’ when one adheres to the harmony of the universal law, and ‘bad’ is created when one does not. The two are not, then, so much a dichotomy as they are a presence or lack of knowledge and rationality. Evil is a by-product of a lack of harmony.

That is not to say that Timaeus does not in some way advocate the sublimation of the body, or, at least, that his concepts cannot be used as a rationale for advocating sublimation (as they have been). Timaeus supplies the tools needed to achieve sublimation, which would be, if not impossible, at least much harder to truly comprehend without an overview of sorts of how everything works together. Having comprehended this account, a movement toward sublimation of the body becomes, to some degree, automatic. If the body and soul are of the

⁵⁷ The Demiurge creates the sensible world modelled on the intelligible one (27d–29c). “He cannot fail to generate things in that way since ... his very nature is to desire that all things approach as closely as possible to himself (29d–30a) ... Thus God becomes at once the logical and ontological foundation of the world’s multiplicity and variety” (Wiener, 1973:326). Lovejoy (2009: 45–51) says something similar.

same substance, the possibility of sublimation is almost guaranteed, and if the elements that prevent sublimation are the same ones that produce pain and struggle, the acceptance of sublimation as a goal is assured.

The implication, in this work, that the spiritual is superior to the corporeal is readily apparent. First of all, it is explicitly stated that while the Demiurge created the Divine or immortal himself, he did not create the mortal creature, perhaps because such a thing was too foreign to his own nature, and too easily corruptible (69c–70a):

Now of the divine, he [the Demiurge or God] himself was the creator, but the creation of the mortal he committed to his offspring. And they, imitating him, received from him the immortal principle of the soul, and around this they proceeded to fashion a mortal body, and made it to be the vehicle of the soul, and constructed within the body a soul of another nature which was mortal, subject to terrible and irresistible affections—first of all, pleasure, the greatest incitement to evil; then, pain, which deters from good; also rashness and fear, two foolish counselors, anger hard to be appeased, and hope easily led astray—these they mingled with irrational sense and with all-daring love according to necessary laws, and so framed man [Jowett].⁵⁸

⁵⁸ καὶ τῶν μὲν θείων αὐτὸς γίγνεται δημιουργός, τῶν δὲ θνητῶν τὴν γένεσιν τοῖς ἑαυτοῦ γεννήμασιν δημιουργεῖν προσέταξεν. οἱ δὲ μιμούμενοι, παραλαβόντες ἀοχὴν ψυχῆς ἀθάνατον, τὸ μετὰ τοῦτο θνητὸν σῶμα αὐτῇ περιετόρνενυσαν ὄχημά τε πᾶν τὸ σῶμα ἔδοσαν ἄλλο τε εἶδος ἐν αὐτῷ ψυχῆς προσωκοδόμουν τὸ θνητόν, δεινὰ καὶ ἀναγκαῖα ἐν ἑαυτῷ παθήματα ἔχον, [69d] πρῶτον μὲν ἡδονήν, μέγιστον κακοῦ δέλεαρ, ἔπειτα λύπας, ἀγαθῶν φυγὰς, ἔτι δ' αὖ θάρρος καὶ φόβον, ἄφρονε συμβούλῳ, θυμὸν δὲ δυσπαραμύθητον, ἐλπίδα δ' εὐπαράγωγον· αἰσθήσει δὲ ἀλόγῳ καὶ ἐπιχειρητῇ παντὸς ἔρωτι συγκερασάμενοι ταῦτα, ἀναγκαίως τὸ θνητὸν γένος συνέθεσαν.

The passage quoted above yields important ideas: the notion of a mortal as well as an immortal soul is curious; it seems to offer opportunities in later doctrines via Neoplatonism to join the corporeal and the spiritual through Jesus Christ who participates in both natures of material and divine. There are other relevant ideas: first, the ἀρχή/ ψυχῆς comes only from the Demiurge, while the mortal body is a later, and presumably less pure, invention. Second, the body has a purpose and a usefulness as a “vehicle” (ὄχημα) of the soul, but this comes at a cost. Having a body removes humans from the state in which they began, and makes them subject to corrupting influences. The body is corruptible, while the spirit is not. Finally, “terrible and unavoidable conditions” (δεινὰ καὶ ἀναγκαῖα παθήματα) affect mortal nature. It is significant that these aspects of the human condition are presented in seemingly opposite pairs, the underlying message being that pleasure and pain, as well as anger and hope, all have a capacity to lead humans astray. Thus, all human emotions are suspect, not merely the ones that are recognisable as negative. The dichotomy between good and evil is also established here, but all the emotions listed are equally likely to lead one away from the good and toward the evil. The body, and existence in the body, may not be evil in and of itself—it is existentially necessary—but any force emanating from the body or the mortal side of being nudges humans to a move away from the good and toward the evil. It is these contradictory forces and drives, “mingled with irrational sense and with all-daring love” (αἰσθήσει δὲ ἀλόγῳ καὶ ἐπιχειρητῇ παντὸς ἔρωτι συγκερασάμενοι ταῦτα) [Jowett]⁵⁹ that make up the human being, who functions according to the ‘necessary laws’ of motion and time outlined elsewhere in Timaeus’ speech.

Timaeus also provides an explanation of the mortal and immortal soul that is consistent with Plato’s notion of the tripartite soul outlined in *Republic*. The notion is effectively foreign to modern readers, most of whom were, presumably, (at least until recently) acquainted with the idea that the soul is by definition immortal, and that it holds the potential (usually unrealised) for absolute goodness. Perhaps the simplest explanation for this difference in terminology regarding what the soul is or means relates to the fact that until modern times, the notion of the soul was, in part, what would be termed psychology. For example, Plato’s notion of the tripartite soul explains the various human drives, virtues, and vices; it has at least a superficial similarity to Freud’s notion of id, ego and superego. While there was clearly an understanding of the psyche in the Classical era, there was no notion of psychology, so every non-physical

⁵⁹ Taylor translates “dare-devil lust” (1928:500).

function could potentially be ascribed to the soul. Because humans often act in ways that are neither virtuous nor rational, there was an effort to categorise human behaviour, distancing those behaviours and impulses from those deemed rational and right. Thus, the breaking down of the soul into components was a logical development, as was the notion, put forward by *Timaeus*, that the soul has both mortal and immortal components. Moreover, according to *Timaeus*, the separation between these components is so marked that they occupy different parts of the body as living quarters and there is also a hierarchy of sorts apparent in this organisation (69d–70b). The immortal soul forms the ἀκρόπολις and resides in the head, the seat of wisdom and rationality; the ‘good’ part of the mortal soul, which is endowed with courage and passion is in the chest, (τὸ μετέχον οὖν τῆς ψυχῆς ἀνδρείας καὶ θυμοῦ, ... ἐν δὴ τοῖς στήθεσιν καὶ τῷ καλουμένῳ θώρακι) while the lowest and most corruptible part of the soul is below the midriff. The difference in value between these components of the soul is apparent, the best scenario being that humans adhere to the commands of the head and ignore those of the lower regions, which may not be evil in and of themselves, but are extremely problematic given the likelihood that they will be corrupted. Thought and rationality are situated higher than passion or courage, and are both paths toward the immortal and, when uncorrupted by lower drives, are immortal in and of themselves. Courage and passion mediate between the upper and lower regions, and create a channel through which one can be led toward the life of the soul as opposed to the body. In other words, through courage and passion humans can be led toward recognition of rationality that may be tantamount to sublimation. Finally, just as a schematic for compartmentalising the various drives (and the various parts of the soul) is deemed important to their harmonious co-existence and their proper placement on the hierarchy, there is also an implicit value judgment placed on relative degrees of physical height or lowness. The appetitive drives, for example, are low in terms of their value and are also centred in a lower part of the body (70d–e).⁶⁰ By the same token, the human soul originated in the stars, which are high in the sky. The process of incarnation, or embodiment in a human vehicle, is thus by its nature a ‘comedown’. Therefore, it is better to be a pure soul; it is better to be immortal; it is better to be rational and cleave to the higher—and superior—part of the soul or psyche. In the hierarchical landscape of *Timaeus* appetites that move a person’s centre of consciousness lower naturally constitute a movement away

⁶⁰ Taylor notes that the sexual drives are not specified in this passage because it deals with the “first mortal generation, for whom no distinction of sex has been made. In later generations it would be

from goodness, as does being mortal, as does incarnation itself. Furthermore, because *Timaeus* relates the creation of the universe as a process that is inseparable from the creation of every other type of being, including that of humanity, clearly the same notions of relatively greater or lesser virtue are consistent everywhere throughout this unified system. If humans are encouraged to be rational and to move away from being influenced by appetites, the movement is an upward one, which, as it continues, becomes a movement away from earth and the body, entailing a sublimation of the body.

The virtue of being human, according to the system described here, is that sublimation is possible, though never guaranteed. The fact that humans have only two legs and walk upright is interpreted as evidence that humans have room within for the presence of both a higher and lower (or mortal and immortal) nature, and that their heads, held as high as possible away from the earth and from corruption, are capable of housing an immortal component of the soul. This is not the case with the lower animals, as *Timaeus* explains. There is, moreover, a danger that human beings will become like the lower animals if they do not cultivate and obey the part of their nature that is superior, higher and immortal (91b–92a). Thus humans, with only two feet, are necessarily superior to any animal, but the fact that they need any feet at all to be bound to the earth is further evidence of their corruptibility. Furthermore, earth comes to be associated with, if not evil, at least the possibility of evil, while the parallel notion that the heavens or the sky are free of evil and therefore superior is implied. On the other hand, fish, being lower even than the surface of the earth, are most degenerate of all: “Their makers thought them unfit to breathe pure clean air, and made them inhale water, into whose turbid depths they plunged them” [Jowett].⁶¹ Underwater life is a long way from the stars that were humankind’s original home, and it is noteworthy that humans potentially inhabit the whole range, from fish to stars, and that the distinction made between the various gradations seems to be dependent on intelligence, a function of the rationality that is a characteristic of the immortal part of the soul.⁶² The danger of degeneration implies the possibility of improvement and movement up the ladder of being—in other words, sublimation.

the part of the body of which *Timaeus* has said nothing, that which lies below the ὀμφαλός, which would be the special region of the ἀφροδίσια” (1928: 505–506).

⁶¹ 92 a7–c1: ἀλλ’ ἀντὶ λεπτῆς καὶ καθαρᾶς ἀναπνοῆς ἀέρος εἰς ὕδατος θολερὰν καὶ βαθεῖαν ἔωσαν ἀνάπνευσιν.

⁶² Taylor’s reading (1928: 642–644) of all these allusions (91d6–e1; 91e2–92a7; 92a7–c1) as playful, burlesque even, does not alter the contours of their presentation so as to remove the sense.

Timaeus' hierarchical compartmentalising of the soul is similar to Platonic notions of the soul found elsewhere (such as the tripartite soul in *Republic*). However, this particular categorising of good and evil—where the sky and things that are higher are better than things that are lower—is not, generally speaking, present in other Platonic works, and so, it may be assumed, it is a Pythagorean rather than a Platonic concept. The notion that animals which are low to the ground or closely connected to the earth are morally lower is also a Christian idea, though presumably having many legs is still superior to having none at all. In the Bible story related in Genesis, the serpent is punished for his part in corrupting Eve by being made to crawl on his belly on the earth, the ultimately demeaning and corrupt state.

In the context of both Christian doctrine and the account of Timaeus, birds are problematic, because they dwell in the sky but are not, however, to be considered sublimated beings or superior in any way. A point must be made of disassociating them from the prevailing notion that height confers virtue, goodness, wisdom and immortality. Birds can be spatially high but not sublime: like land animals and fish, they are a cautionary tale of sorts. In this context (91d–e) there is a warning that being interested in the heavens (μετεωρολογικός) from a mortal perspective is not sufficient, and does not lead to sublimation. Though the notion of spatial height is important to the system of being that Timaeus relates, it is not sufficient or complete. Being visible, and therefore physical, it is far from being the only reference point or foundation that is required. By describing the formation of birds in this manner, Timaeus implies that sublimation cannot be undertaken in the physical sphere despite the continuity between the physical and the intangible. Sublimation is more than physical ascension; otherwise, birds would be the wisest and most enlightened creatures of all, rather than the silliest. It is interesting, moreover, that these empty-headed star-gazers are considered ἄκακοι, indicating that there cannot be any corruption involved in looking to the heavens or to spatial height, but that if it is approached from a 'visual' basis, it will be empty and futile. Finally, the men who became birds are described as κούφοι, and it may be assumed that this is more than a synonym for stupidity. The head is where reason and the immortal soul dwell, and if a person is empty-headed, he lacks these essential components even in the absence of corruption and the presence of spatial or physical ascension. In short, while the description of birds may appear to be superficially comic, it is a vital component of Timaeus' account of how all things function.

The tackling of this subject matter is ambitious and comprehensive, particularly given the straightforward narrative format. In the end *Timaeus* contains some of Plato's clearest statements on questions concerning science and psychology. Of still more interest is the fact that *Timaeus* presents the reader with a particularly clear and distinct picture of the soul, the realisation, as Paul Friedländer puts it (1958:201), of the *Idea* (his italics) of the Good in creation, and a rationale for sublimation that was easily incorporated (and reinterpreted) in medieval theology,⁶³ providing a vital component of a theory of the soul and sublimation of the body.

Regarding this reinterpretation, it must be said that the connection between the ascetic practices of the early Christian communities and Plato's *Timaeus* is often very subtle. After all, Plato does stress the co-dependence of the body and mind, urging the overly mental individual to train in the gymnasium just as the overly physical is urged to take on abstract thinking or philosophy. Later theologians such as Theodoret of Cyrrhus took athletic training as *askesis* from Plato and redirected it from fine-tuning of the body to the denial of pleasure to the body, especially carnal satisfaction. Niketas Siniossoglou (2008:130) writes, "His [Theodoret's] reading inadvertently results in a treatment of the body negating elements in Plato independently of Timaeus' belief that each man should align and harmonise himself with nature and the universe." But that does not change the fact that very often it is by misreading that a text has its greatest influence. The critic Harold Bloom in his *Anxiety of Influence* insists that it is by a deliberate misreading (which he calls "misprison") that strong writers carve a path for themselves while employing in their own way the ideas of their predecessors (Bloom, 1997). Theodoret may not be accurate about how Plato understood *askesis*, but at stake is his appreciation of the term within Christian thought apparently grounded in Plato and thereby gaining greater influence and respectability.

⁶³ Taylor (1928: 2–3) summarises the direct transmission of *Timaeus*. "In the 'Middle Ages' the chief source ... [apart from the polemical references in Aristotle] from which Platonism was known to the Western world was the Latin version of the first two-thirds of the dialogue by Chalcidius... This explains why Platonism means to the great schoolmen of the thirteenth century principally the *Timaeus*... [And we might add, the *Phaedo*, a dialogue referred to with exceptional frequency by Aristotle] ... and why it is so largely the real or supposed teachings of our dialogue which determine the character of the renewed 'Platonism' of the age of the 'revival of learning'."

2.3.3 The Republic

Alexander Nehamas' memorable introduction to *Republic* (1999:316–7) postulates that a shift in worldview at a fundamental level has occurred because of *Republic* and its ideas. Yet he acknowledges that many of the doctrines espoused in *Republic* do not now find wide acceptance, particularly in Western societies, and that the culmination of *Republic*'s exploration of the nature of the soul, the human condition, and political organisation turns out to be an idealised benevolent dictatorship, in which people are divided hierarchically according to their nature and given specific roles: those deemed most fit to rule are the leaders. Nonetheless the interconnected issues raised by *Republic* on the way are what distinguishes it as a philosophical document.

Moral theory, metaphysics, epistemology, theory of education, political and social philosophy, philosophy of science, psychology, and aesthetics are all established here, for the first time, as aspects of a single enterprise. None of these subjects is more central to the *Republic* than any other. The work's real topic is the enterprise they constitute as a whole. That enterprise is philosophy (Nehamas, 1999: 317.)

Republic then, deals with spiritual and metaphysical concepts which have a direct bearing on the area of sublimation, and these are inextricably connected to a larger purpose of Plato's, which is to describe the ideal state. Moreover, many of the most important theories and allegories ever developed by Plato are described in *Republic*—the Forms, for example, and the tripartite soul. As in *Timaeus*, where the organisation and motion of things is consistent at all levels, the organisation of the state in *Republic* is roughly analogous to the three parts of the soul. Unlike *Timaeus*, this is a 'true' dialogue representing a wide range of Plato's own original and characteristic ideas, and the dialectic method is employed throughout.

Only the elements in *Republic* that can be related directly to the soul and to the sublimation of the corporeal will be considered in this study. Regarding the influence of these ideas, the fact that this dialogue, along with the vast majority of Plato's works, was 'lost' to Europe until after the Middle Ages means that its direct influence on the medieval concept of sublimation is difficult to gauge and may have been marginal. However, many of the concepts contained in *Republic* are significant contributions to the notion, for consideration perhaps *ad pondus*

omnium. Specifically, the concept of perfection (i.e., the Forms) as ultimate reality is reiterated here, the idea being that what is best and most beautiful is eternal and unchanging. It must be stressed again that this idea is vital to the concept of sublimating the corporeal, because it envisages real goals, beyond the realm of the corporeal. If sublimation of the body is a process to be undergone or a goal to be achieved, this model gives humans something beyond bodily concerns to strive for. It implies that notions of goodness and perfection are not arbitrary or changeable, but absolute, and therefore worthy and appropriate goals. Furthermore, as in *Timaeus*, the soul is divided into three parts, and this division is hierarchical. There is information on which human characteristics are superior and which are inferior, and this is also vital for a concept of sublimation. This hierarchical arrangement offers a path to follow. It is not stated or implied that everyone is capable of reaching the higher states of soul and being (it is suggested that not everybody is), but there is nevertheless an implicit encouragement to concentrate on those characteristics that are ‘highest’, because they lead toward a higher state of being—toward a sublimated self. This is consistent with the expression of hylomorphism found in Plato, where a higher source imparts form on underlying matter. Sublimation is already a participation in a higher state of being.

2.3.3.1 *The Allegory of the Cave*

The allegory of the cave, at the beginning of book 7, is one of Plato’s clearest expressions of the inferior nature of physical or worldly existence and the eternal nature of the Forms. The allegory is simple, memorable and powerful; it is also, in and of itself, an argument in favour of sublimation of the body. Moreover, Plato’s explanation of the allegory contains a virtual blueprint of sorts for the process of sublimation, in which he makes it abundantly clear that life is in every way superior when one gets beyond the imprisonment of physical reality. Plato’s cave dwellers then are limited not by what is real but by their own perceptions and experience. This amounts to a powerful and effective assertion that physical reality can be transcended: that senses are not the absolute authority on what exists and what physical existence means. Plato goes further by presenting a notion of what this ultimate reality might be. For the individuals living in the cave, one level of reality is the shapes that cast shadows on the wall in front of them: another entire world awaits them if they leave the cave and are able to see what is beyond—and human beings in general are similarly limited in respect of what can be seen and comprehended. Things observable in the physical world are nothing more than shadows, Plato asserts, and though they may bear a basic similarity to the ultimate reality, they are nothing more than an indication of the general shape and nature of the much

more real (metaphysical) forms. Unlike the individuals in the cave, whose reality lies in the physical world beyond the cave, ultimate reality lies in a state of being that transcends the physical. Plato's immediate point, then, is that the Forms are a state of reality that is more real than the physical objects observed. Physical reality should be questioned and can be transcended.

It is, moreover, a process of sublimation that Plato is describing here, not merely the rejection of material reality. This distinction is important, just as it is important to the allegory of the cave that the objects the bound men see on the cave wall are not completely unrelated to reality, but copies of things that are found outside the cave (514b–515a). The images projected on the cave wall could have been objects unrelated to the larger reality outside the cave, but it would not serve the allegory or the concept of sublimation. The fact that reflections of reality are seen means that the people in the cave are learning something about the nature of the larger world; the problem is that they could be seeing versions that are much more real. In this way, Plato describes the Forms as an ultimate reality which is not unrelated to ambient, day to day realities. Something about the Forms can be learned from observing the physical world, but the problem is that never enough is learnt. The notion of progression toward a deeper reality is important here. The progression described in the allegory—because it constitutes improvement and a movement beyond that which humans consider reality (that is, physical being)—amounts to sublimation.

Plato carefully establishes that simply untying the people in the cave and directing them to look at the outside or exit the cave would not be effective. For one thing, in the allegory, the cave dwellers' eyes would not be strong enough to bear the light or real sunlight. Furthermore, they would lose their bearings and become bewildered by what they were seeing or refusing to see. Sudden immersion in the world outside the cave would be useless, and even harmful; the group would profit more by remaining inside the cave. Similarly, for humans generally, being thrust suddenly out of the world of physical reality into the metaphysical world of the forms would be useless or harmful. Nothing could be learnt from it. On the other hand, undergoing a process of sublimation of the body, in which human nature is gradually refined in such a way that physical reality is rejected in favour of the spiritual, might allow observation and comprehension of the reality of the Platonic Forms to take place. Plato describes the process required (516a–b):

Then there would be need of habituation, I take it, to enable him to see the things higher up. And at first he would most easily discern the shadows and, after that, the likenesses or reflections in water of men and other things, and later, the things themselves, and from these he would go on to contemplate the appearances in the heavens and heaven itself, more easily by night, looking at the light of the stars and the moon, than by day the sun and the sun's light [Jowett].⁶⁴

It is a process of education and habituation, and it occurs in stages. Plato's assertion that the first step is for a person to see things higher up (τὰ ἄνω ὄψεσθαι) is no accident, given the consistent notion (in Plato's work and elsewhere) that physical height shows a greater degree of enlightenment, perhaps because it entails movement above the physical or earthly. It is deemed helpful to first observe and discern shadows, because they allow one to become accustomed to the form. Finally, after all the stages have been completed, the cave dweller might go and look at actual reality, seeing it for what it is. One more component is significant here. Plato notes that a person who succeeds in leaving the cave first, and then coming back, will appear to be a cause for ridicule for the other cave-dwellers (γέλωτ' ἂν παράσχοι)⁶⁵ stumbling about and half-blinded by the light seen outside the cave, which makes it difficult to see what is going on in the cave home. Contemporaries may not appreciate the person who has achieved this type of enlightenment (like Socrates, for instance);⁶⁶ they might feel that he is foolish to renounce existing physicality. There is in turn a natural consequence for the unbound cave dweller: the experience of seeing what is outside the cave engenders dissatisfaction with the life that is lived in the cave, and all the elements of hierarchy that are practised inside the cave become meaningless. It is inevitably a transformative experience, one that it may be impossible to come back from (517 c): "... and do not be surprised that those who have attained to this height are not willing to occupy themselves with the affairs of

⁶⁴ Συνηθείας δὴ οἶμαι δέοιτ' ἄν, εἰ μέλλοι τὰ ἄνω ὄψεσθαι. καὶ πρῶτον μὲν τὰς σκιάς ἂν ῥᾶστα καθορῶ, καὶ μετὰ τοῦτο ἐν τοῖς ὕδασι τὰ τε τῶν ἀνθρώπων καὶ τὰ τῶν ἄλλων εἶδωλα, ὕστερον δὲ αὐτά· ἐκ δὲ τούτων τὰ ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ καὶ αὐτὸν τὸν οὐρανὸν νύκτωρ ἂν ῥᾶον θεάσαιτο, προσβλέπων τὸ τῶν [b.] ἀστρῶν τε καὶ σελήνης φῶς, ἢ μεθ' ἡμέραν τὸν ἥλιόν τε καὶ τὸ τοῦ ἡλίου.

⁶⁵ 517 a 2.

⁶⁶ Bruno Centrone (2000:779 n.11): "... quel che segue è una chiara allusione alla morte di Socrate."

men, but their souls ever feel the upward urge and the yearning for that sojourn above” [Jowett].⁶⁷

After the possibility of ascent to the regions beyond the cave becomes known, virtue is redefined to reflect the process of turning away from what is in the cave and toward the real light. In the cave this is a turning of the body away from the cave wall, whereas in actual human life it translates into a ‘turning’ of the soul (518 c):

... the true analogy for this indwelling power in the soul and the instrument whereby each of us apprehends is that of an eye that could not be converted to the light from the darkness except by turning the whole body. Even so this organ of knowledge must be turned around from the world of becoming together with the entire soul, like the scene-shifting periactus in the theater, until the soul is able to endure the contemplation of essence and the brightest region of being [Jowett].⁶⁸

This amounts to a definition of sublimation; before one can figuratively arise and ascend, a “turning” of the organ of knowledge must take place, so that one’s perspective changes. At this point, it becomes clear that this shifting of perspective is Plato’s primary purpose wherever his dialectic method is used. In the interest of rationality and of teaching others to see the truth beyond what is apparent, Plato shifts the interlocutor’s point of view, so that common objects and circumstances are aligned differently. The cave allegory is valuable in that it eloquently and clearly defines this purpose, as well as noting that a person who has left the cave and can eventually lead others, according to their own ability, out of it, is the one most fit to rule. In this way, the allegory is tied into Plato’s larger purpose in writing *Republic*—the furnishing of a description of the ideal state.

⁶⁷ καὶ μὴ θαυμάσης ὅτι οἱ ἐνταῦθα ἐλθόντες οὐκ ἐθέλουσιν τὰ τῶν ἀνθρώπων πράττειν, ἀλλ’ ἄνω αἰεὶ ἐπείγονται αὐτῶν αἱ ψυχαὶ διατρίβειν·

⁶⁸ Ὁ δέ γε νῦν λόγος, ἣν δ’ ἐγώ, σημαίνει ταύτην τὴν ἐνοῦσαν ἐκάστου δύναμιν ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ καὶ τὸ ὄργανον ᾧ καταμανθάνει ἕκαστος, οἷον εἰ ὄμμα μὴ δυνατόν ἦν ἄλλως ἢ σὺν ὅλῳ τῷ σώματι στρέφειν πρὸς τὸ φανὸν ἐκ τοῦ σκοτώδους, οὕτω σὺν ὅλῃ τῇ ψυχῇ ἐκ τοῦ γιγνομένου περιακτέον εἶναι, ἕως ἂν εἰς τὸ ὄν καὶ τοῦ ὄντος τὸ φανότατον δυνατὴ γένηται ἀνασχέσθαι θεωμένη·

In many ways, the allegory of the cave is one of the best descriptions of the passage into non-corporeal reality anywhere in Plato's work. It must be noted that the process is not precisely analysed as a total abandonment of the corporeal, which would involve a loss of the body (death). Plato is describing an alternate reality that can be experienced during life. Nevertheless, while the movement he describes is toward a deeper and more authentic experience of life on earth, it is also a movement away from what might be considered to be the perimeters of corporeal reality. It becomes apparent, also, that the reality he is describing is that of the Forms, Plato's concept of an eternal, unchanging, and perfect reality. The fact that it can (and should) be experienced prior to physical death shows that sublimation is a worthy goal for life on earth, and that turning away from the circumstances of daily corporeal life has ample—ultimate—rewards. The process of sublimation inbuilt in the allegory is characterised by ascent, as Friedländer (1958:225) asserts: "hierarchical ascent: the ascent of being and the ascent of knowledge, both exactly related to each other, but the former independent of the latter."

2.3.3.2 *The Line Analogy*

Plato's line analogy comes just before the cave analogy, where the light out of which the theory of emanation will arise is put in mythic form. It is also an apt expression of the corporeal and non-corporeal worlds and the business of passing from one to the other.⁶⁹ The (divided) line analogy presents the same information that the cave allegory subsequently demonstrates, but it is even more explicit regarding the stages of knowledge and how one can ascend to a higher state.

Plato visualises a line that is divided in the middle. On one side of the line the visible and substantial world exists, while on the other side of the line things are intelligible: τὸ τε τοῦ ὁρωμένου γένους καὶ τὸ τοῦ νοουμένου (509e). As is the case with the cave allegory, this introduces readers to the idea that the world observable through the senses is, at best, only half of what exists. Moreover, it is not the most important half; the invisible but intelligible world is the world of forms, and the source of all understanding and knowledge. Thus, according to Plato, if humans have knowledge of something observable in the physical world, it is only because the perfect and eternal Form of that object exists on the other side of the

⁶⁹ 509d – 513e.

line. Knowledge that originates in the forms is the highest form of knowledge, and lesser forms are arranged hierarchically, in descending order. After reason that comes from understanding of the Forms, understanding which depends on scientific or mathematical axioms is next, followed by belief, followed by imagination. This establishes an order that can be observed throughout the work: reason and true knowledge are the most desirable states, belief is inferior, and the work of artists and poets is based on imagination and therefore not to be relied upon. This analogy lays a detailed blueprint for sublimation; one can follow the path of ascension by progressing from one form of knowledge to another, and this can be achieved by pursuing various disciplines, always with the consciousness that not all people are created equal, so to speak, and that some people are more suited to some forms of knowledge than others. The overarching idea is that those who are not ruled by their own rationality (and do not have as strong a capacity for it) will, in the ideal Republic, be ruled by those who do—which will in turn improve the nature of not only the Republic as a political entity but of every individual in it. This calls to mind the way in which all things are integrated in the world system described in *Timaeus*. The ideal state is a reflection of the human soul, and as such, both are subject to the same improvement. Sublimation in society (once the rightful rulers, according to Plato, are set up in their proper places) is both analogous to and a precursor to sublimation in the individual, in the sense that sublimation means improvement or refinement as well as movement beyond the corporeal.

2.3.3.4 *Accounts of the Soul*

Republic also provides some of Plato's clearest and most evolved representations of the soul. The nature of the soul, as mentioned before, is relevant to the problem of sublimation, because it is necessary that a progression be demonstrated in order to prove that sublimation is possible. If the soul is to be credible as an instrument to take humans beyond the life of the body and toward ultimate truth, it is necessary for the structure of the soul to be represented as providing a means by which this can occur. As elsewhere, Plato solves this problem by presenting a soul that is divided into parts that are not equal to one another, but forming a hierarchy.

This is foreign language for many modern readers of Plato: equality and classlessness are not ideals in Plato and Plato never considered democracy to be the highest form of government but one of the lower, more fallible forms. By the same token, the idea that the body can or should be sublimated in favour of the soul on the basis of the perception that some human

drives and intellectual processes should always rule others, and that people who are properly oriented in this manner are intrinsically superior to those who are not, is not ontologically secure nowadays. However, for the early Christian or medieval mind, this type of idea was not the least bit countercultural: democracy was unknown in practice and the notion of social equality was not refined until much later. The idea that the human psyche has better and worse components was not counter-intuitive either. At the same time there is a difference—an incompatibility, even— between Platonic thought and the concerns of the Middle Ages. While Plato identifies rational inquiry as the highest and best activity one can engage in, for the early or medieval Christian European to embrace it would require a promise of its usefulness regarding the “longest life ... the one to be lived in the next world”. (Feibleman, 1971:191). Thus, Feibleman (191) notes, “The ignorance of Plato’s Dialogues in the Middle Ages was perhaps no accident. Platonism except for its rare practical aspects would not have been well received.”

But much of early medieval philosophy was dependent upon Platonism,⁷⁰ and the transformative element for the early Christians was the addition of the Christian God in place of the less individuated creator or Demiurge described by Plato. With this addition, the Platonic concepts handed down by the Neoplatonists fit serviceably within the hierarchy of practical considerations for the medieval European, including the importance of conversion of the heart for achieving sublimation. Therefore, although Plato’s ideas regarding the soul and sublimation would not have found acceptance or application among medieval readers, they nevertheless formed a foundation of sorts for many aspects of the medieval worldview. The structure of the soul, as outlined in *Republic* and elsewhere, is one of the clearest explanations of the possibility and the necessity of sublimation: just as the world outside the cave is manifestly more real and important than the world within, the immortal soul is presented as far more significant to mortals than the mortal body. For Plato, as for the medieval theologian, this is both elementary and absolutely essential; it is both the objective of life and its salvation.

True, the sense of anticipation as regards the future of the mortal body is differently expressed in the Jewish and Christian teaching of the resurrection of the body. The blowing of the shofar

⁷⁰ As noted in Feibleman (190), Etienne Gilson observes that “Plato was nowhere, but Platonism was everywhere during the Middle Ages.”

in Jewish tradition, with Elijah going door to door at Passover, testifies to the coming Messiah. The coming to earth of the New Jerusalem in physical form “as a bride arrayed for her husband” is the Christian response to the healing of all divisions, or need for sublimation for that matter. It is that which is awaited in a divided, fallen world where body and spirit are at war until that day of *sanctorum communionem, remissionem peccatorum, carnis resurrectionem et vitam aeternam*.

But that will be discussed later. Meanwhile, what Plato observes is that the soul itself cannot be one-faceted but must be complex enough to fulfill its purpose. Moreover, as mentioned before, the individual soul in Plato is part of a system in which each part represents the whole, so that the organisation of the soul is analogous to the organisation of the utopian State. The result is one of Plato’s most famous descriptions of the soul: that of the “tripartite soul”, also mentioned in *Timaeus*. Through a dialogue with Glaucon, in book 4, Socrates elicits certain readily observable truths regarding the human psyche: first, that appetites and desires exist, and are completely oriented toward their immediate objective, and second, that at times another internal force intervenes and prevents the acquisition of the object of desire. It is a great strength and distinctive characteristic of this and many other Platonic concepts that the starting point consists of phenomena that are uncontroversial and readily observable, and that one is led logically and incrementally toward the desired conclusion. In the passage dealing with the tripartite soul, Glaucon is first led to acknowledge that at least two parts of the soul must exist, because otherwise conflict with oneself would be impossible. Socrates cites the example of a person who is both attracted and repulsed by the sight of dead bodies to prove that the soul can be in conflict with itself, and that as a result the fulfilment of desires can be forgone even if there is no physical obstacle (439e). Usually, it is reason that intervenes, leading individuals away from the fulfilment of appetite and toward higher aspirations. Thus, the soul is divided into two parts, and Socrates/Plato subsequently adds a third, the “principle of high spirit”, τὸ θυμοειδές (441a2), on whose behalf reason is mediating. At the end of this analysis, Glaucon readily acknowledges (441 c4) that this configuration is to be found in the State and in the soul of each individual—that is, as mentioned before, the parts of the soul correspond perfectly to the different hierarchical positions that make up the ideal State. This model of the State is fortified by the fact that the human soul so perfectly reflects it, proving that the model of the State Plato proposes is the correct one for humans.

Again, the possibility of sublimation is provided for in that the parts of the soul are not equal, but arranged hierarchically, appetites being the lowest. Because appetites are most closely associated with physical, earthly reality, improvement and refinement (or sublimation) is achieved by and dependent upon reason's role in mitigating or eliminating physical urges in adherence to the higher functions of the soul. Physical reality is, again, subjugated in order to achieve sublimation. It is an important (though implicit) part of Plato's argument, however, that sublimation is the opposite of turning away from or against the self, though that is how it might be experienced, if one were aware only of the appetites. Still less is this consciousness of a better part of the individual soul displaced and ascribed to God rather than to an individual, so that sublimation comes to involve a type of liberation through self-abnegation. In Plato's theory, the objective of sublimation is consistent with an expression of true self, while the importance of the State rests, in part, in the acknowledgment that the higher consciousness is not equally present, developed or accessible in every person.

But Plato/ Socrates also acknowledges in book ten that the true and best nature of the soul may be unobservable on earth, as humanity's vision of the soul is marred by countless evils (611 d6). Plato's dialectic is needed to draw out realities that are obscured by physical reality using the metaphor of the sea god (611 e1–612 e5), whose true nature can hardly be made out by those who catch glimpses of him, because the original members of his body are broken off and mutilated and marred by the action of the waves. It is the soul's φιλο-σοφία⁷¹ that reveals its better nature. If people were free “to consider what it might be if it followed the superior principles unreservedly,” as Benjamin Jowett translates (ἐννοεῖν ... οἷα ἂν γένοιτο τῷ τοιούτῳ πᾶσα ἐπισπομένη), that is, to experience a sublime or sublimated reality, then the true characteristics of the immortal soul might be understood. The fact that this vision may not be readily available is not, for Plato, a reason to forgo making the attempt. The opposite is true: “follow[ing] the gleam” is the objective and goal of all human existence, as well as being the quintessential expression of the concept of sublimation.

Something else is in this passage (611–12)—poetry, a lyrical expression of the longing that seems to be part and parcel of the process of sublimation. Plato's despised poets—he rejected their *paideia* at any rate (Jaeger, 1961:48)—have always brought out the sense of following something of worth. Tennyson's Merlin, in *Idylls of the King*, for example: “There on the

border, Of boundless Ocean, And all but in Heaven, Hovers The Gleam... And, ere it vanishes, Over the margin, After it, follow it, Follow The Gleam.”

2.3.4 Phaedrus

Alexander Nehamas’ (2003:331) whimsical linking of the leave-taking of Odysseus with that of Socrates in *Phaedrus* is fruitful in bringing out a notable quality of the dialogue: “The whole of the *Phaedrus*, no less than Socrates or the magical place where its action takes place, is an unending source of enchantment, of unexpected situations, of puzzlement and speculation.” *Symposium* has a similar sense of playful reality and Benjamin Jowett links the two works more explicitly by discussing *Phaedrus* as a sort of companion piece to *Symposium*, having been written either immediately before or after.⁷²

As in *Symposium*, there is an elevation of the “spiritual and emotional ... into the ideal”, but with a difference, as Jowett (1970) points out in his Introduction to this dialogue. In *Symposium*, Jowett maintains, “mankind is described as looking forward” toward enlightenment and true expression; in *Phaedrus* it is “seeking to recover from a former state of existence.” There is the notion that souls were created perfect, and that sublimation and enlightenment are a return to perfection. Ranking of souls and of people according to their abilities is explained using the notion that some souls remember more than others, though every human soul has necessarily had some contemplation of its nature (249c–249d). There is a distinctly Platonic version of the notion of equality here; humans have an element of perfection somewhere in their being, but “ἀναμνησκεισθαι δὲ ἐκ τῶνδε ἐκεῖνα οὐ ῥᾶδιον ἀπάσῃ”—some human beings have trouble remembering, while others remember more readily. The potential memory of perfection, however, exists in everyone, and provides a rationalisation and an incentive for sublimation.

The notion that perfection is recollected is not a contradiction of the ideas expressed in *Symposium*, given that sublimation is seen as an intrinsically human capability in either case, and if it is accepted that humans came from a superior (or perfect) state, then moving forward

⁷¹ 611 e1.

⁷² Benjamin Jowett, Introduction to *Phaedrus*. “Both *Phaedrus* and *Symposium* are dated as ‘late transitional’ works, written after the *Republic* but before *Timaeus*...” (Plato, Jowett and Loomis, 1970:vii). This is far from definitive nowadays.

naturally does constitute recovering what was lost. The analogue is, in a sense, Socrates' method of teaching, where he does not so much impart new information as elicit or recover information already latent in his interlocutor's intellect. Another analogue is the notion of a state of perfection prior to birth and the quest in a human life for its repossession: a facet of many spiritual quests. And while it may be doubtful that the medieval Christian (and many modern Christians) would understand or accept the somewhat enigmatic account of the workings of the soul presented in *Phaedrus*, the notion of recollected perfection is far from alien to Christianity.

2.3.4.1 *Transmigration and the "Nine Sorts of Souls"*

The hierarchies of soul components and citizens in *Republic* are restrained when viewed alongside the ranking of people (again associated with the state or type of soul that they have) found in *Phaedrus*. It is made clear that souls pre-exist the body and have the potential for clear vision and knowledge, which the most superior type of soul really does achieve, in circling around the globe beyond the heavens (247b–d). As in *Republic*, reason is given a superior position as the κυβερνήτης ψυχῆς—“reason alone, the soul's pilot, can behold it, and all true knowledge is knowledge thereof” [Jowett].⁷³

But from then on there is degeneration. The second type of soul likewise ascends where it can view the world, but, unlike the first type of soul, it becomes “confounded” and cannot see clearly.⁷⁴ The other types of souls follow this trend, becoming increasingly confused; like the men in the cave allegory, they feed upon the food of appearance: τροφῇ δοξαστῇ χρῶνται,⁷⁵ becoming hopelessly confused regarding the nature of reality and of appearances. People with this type of soul express their lack of knowledge, inadvertently, through their choice of profession. In descending order, a list of positions in the human world is given, ranked relative to Plato's judgment of their access to true wisdom (248 d–e).

This ranking was, in part, a vehicle for Plato's denigration of the types of people he most disliked, such as Sophists and ‘imitative artists’. The serious and consistent message,

⁷³ ψυχῆς κυβερνήτη μόνῳ θεατῇ νῶ, περὶ ἣν τὸ τῆς ἀληθοῦς ἐπιστήμης γένος, τοῦτον ἔχει [247d] τὸν τόπον.

⁷⁴ 248 a: θορυβουμένη ὑπὸ τῶν ἵππων καὶ μόγισ καθορῶσα τὰ ὄντα.

⁷⁵ 248 b 7.

however, is the importance of wisdom and the pursuit of the philosophical life, which is presented as a sort of formula for sublimation and ascension. The soul that chooses the philosophical life in accordance with a set formula, “regains her wings”⁷⁶ and returns to the original state of perfection. This idea is consistent with the account of the transmigration of souls (culminating in a return to one’s native star) outlined in *Timaeus*,⁷⁷ as well as the idea of a heavenly reward promised in Christian theology.

2.3.5 Phaedo

Phaedo, outlining Socrates’ arguments and beliefs regarding the immortality of the soul and the dualism between body and soul as stated at the end of his life, sets out these concepts with remarkable clarity; moreover, the points of comparison between these concepts and both sublimation and Christian theology are plentiful and profound. With the exception of certain isolated (albeit important) points, such as Plato’s reference to the philosopher and the obvious absence of references to specific aspects of Christianity such as the Trinity, this account assimilates successfully with Christian theology—the similarity is quite profound, and appears to underscore the relationship between the two belief systems, and the fact that one stems almost directly from the other.⁷⁸

It is easy perhaps to be drawn to view this as the culmination of Socratic/Platonic ideas on the subject of the body/soul dualism, and, if it is viewed as an accurate reporting of a conversation taking place near the end of the philosopher’s life, that is exactly what it is, at least with regard to Socrates. It is an effective summation of Socrates’ views regarding the goals of the philosopher, and the superiority of the timeless, spiritual intangible qualities that are traditionally the philosopher’s quest. Death, to the philosopher, is no tragedy, but a cause for gladness, because only death and the complete repudiation of corporeal values allow the philosopher to achieve life’s purpose. Socrates, near death, gives his opinion on the matter just as he is about to attain this culmination of his life’s experiences.

⁷⁶ 249a: πτερωθεῖσαι.

⁷⁷ *Timaeus* 42 b5: πάλιν εἰς τὴν τοῦ συννόμου πορευθεὶς οἴκησιν ἄστρου.

⁷⁸ Sterling (2001:383), on the use of the noble death tradition of Socrates by Christian apologists; Roth (1992:20–30), on the interweaving of themes in *Phaedo* with Gregory of Nyssa’s *On the Soul and Resurrection*.

But viewed from another perspective, it is less clear that *Phaedo* is the culmination of all of Socrates' and Plato's ideas regarding the soul. To anyone with a background in Western thought and Christianity, the ideas are striking because of their similarity to the belief system that eventually followed. However, this is not the most intricate of Plato's dialogues; moreover, the reliability of the narrator is brought into question right at the beginning, and Socrates' words are delivered secondhand (or, from the perspective of the reader, third hand). Moreover, from the standpoint of logic and critical analysis, several arguments put forward by Socrates are rejected, although they are resonant with later beliefs regarding the nature of the soul and sublimation. The final argument is accepted, but may itself be open to criticism. All of these factors, and specifically the relative simplicity of the argument, diminish the significance which its similarity to future beliefs appears to suggest, while the difficulty with which Socrates' companions accept his beliefs regarding the survival of the soul suggests that these are unfamiliar concepts about which they are at least somewhat skeptical.

Historically, *Phaedo* had little direct influence on the development of Christian thought until at least the 12th century. However, as indicated elsewhere, the influence of the entire body of Platonic dialogues on the Neoplatonists, and the Neoplatonist influence on Christianity, has been well established.⁷⁹ *Phaedo*, while its influence may be less than one might initially assume, nevertheless has the merit of presenting ideas related to sublimation with clarity, as well as relating them to other arguments and assertions present in Plato's body of work. At the centre of a summation of the arguments presented in this dialogue is the idea that a duality between body and soul exists, and that the work of the philosopher is aimed at movement away from the body and from corporeal reality and closer to the life of the soul. If that is the case, Socrates argues, the philosopher has nothing to fear from death, and must welcome it, because death is the culmination of everything that the philosopher has worked for during a lifetime. In order to support his argument, Socrates logically demonstrates the eternal nature of the soul, and the fact that the soul itself cannot die. Moreover, he delineates a moral imperative, based on the underlying assumption that the philosopher's role and orientation is the highest of all human occupations, which states that things pertaining to the soul are better and more virtuous, whereas things pertaining to the body are morally inferior. This is more

⁷⁹ Murray (1998:123) says that the story of Socrates' death was well known in the early Christian world.

than just a basis for the sublimation argument; this train of thought defines sublimation in a particularly straightforward and cohesive form.

Dualism is addressed and summarised, with the differences between the soul and the body laid out as follows: whereas the body is seen, changing, mortal and dissoluble, the soul is part of unseen existence, and is unchanging, divine, and indissoluble.⁸⁰ These observations are predicated upon another: the fact that all of existence is, as can be observed, a system of opposites. As discussed elsewhere, this notion of the tension between opposites occurs before Plato, and was part of the worldviews of certain of the Presocratic philosophers, notably Heraclitus and Parmenides. Plato, however, applies it to the seen and unseen aspects of the world succinctly and with great clarity. Moreover, while the tension between opposites had always been linked to a form of dualism between seen and unseen worlds, Plato applies it directly to the soul and the body, again demonstrating that these elements of human life are definable and knowable because of their membership in an entire system of existence. Because all life is a system of opposites, Socrates tells Cebes, and because the opposites arise or are generated from one another, if death is generated from life, then life must be generated from death. This in itself proves, to Socrates, at least, the fact that souls persist after corporeal death and are later reborn. This technique of extrapolating a metaphysical truth from a series of physical observations about how the world works is familiar and had been reasonably well established by Socrates' time; again, it is strongly reminiscent of the observations put forward by the Presocratics. As elsewhere in his work, Plato's real contribution to the ideas put forward here is the value judgement that he ascribes to spiritual versus physical existence. His contribution is also the idealisation of the true philosopher, as seen consistently throughout his work, but perhaps most concisely defined in *Phaedo*. The philosopher, Socrates explains, is one whose entire work consists of moving closer toward death—away from the corporeal and toward a spiritual existence. In other words, the business of the philosopher is sublimation, and, as the philosopher operates at the highest level of human society, it is a worthwhile goal for all other people to become more like the philosopher. Sublimation is or ought to be a universal movement toward what is right and good, and the philosopher leads the way.

⁸⁰ 80 [b]. τάδε ἡμῖν συμβαίνει, τῷ μὲν θείῳ καὶ ἀθανάτῳ καὶ νοητῷ καὶ μονοειδεῖ καὶ ἀδιαλύτῳ καὶ αἰὲν ὡσαύτως κατὰ ταῦτα ἔχοντι ἑαυτῷ ὁμοιότατον εἶναι ψυχῇ, τῷ δὲ ἀνθρωπίνῳ καὶ θνητῷ καὶ πολυειδεῖ καὶ ἀνοήτῳ καὶ διαλυτῷ καὶ μηδέποτε κατὰ ταῦτα ἔχοντι ἑαυτῷ ὁμοιότατον αὖ εἶναι σῶμα...

Death, as Socrates explains, is the separation of the soul from the body. The philosopher, throughout a lifetime, always seeks to achieve such a separation. The philosopher is prohibited, by the authority of higher beings, to put an end to life; however, the incorporeal state is approached by renouncing physical pleasures such as eating, drinking, and the pleasures of love. This is not news to anyone familiar with the description of the philosopher, and of Socrates himself, in other dialogues such as *Symposium*. The philosopher is therefore an ascetic, working at “dissever[ing]” the soul from the body.⁸¹ There is information elsewhere (for example, in *Symposium* and *Republic*) that the philosopher also, by the same token, does not rely on evidence that comes from the senses, but on reason. There is a reference to this hierarchy of knowledge in *Phaedo*, too, where Socrates refers to “absolute justice” and “absolute truth” as things that cannot be observed in the bodily sense; to attain them, one must “[go] to each of them with the mind alone”.⁸² Because these ‘absolute’ qualities are the ultimate objects of human desire, there can be no satisfaction while the body still mediates between the soul and true knowledge.

2.3.5.1 *Phaedo: its relationship to Plato’s other works*

While the message is consistent with all other accounts of the philosopher’s orientation and role, there is something in the tone and to some degree the content that is less so. In *Symposium*, for example, it is demonstrated that the philosopher (Socrates himself) is the object of desire by virtue of his repudiation of worldly things. The discussion of love that ensues is an opportunity for Plato, through Socrates, to demonstrate that the ultimate aim of all human desire, all love and all striving for beauty, amounts to a movement toward an increasingly incorporeal existence. It is demonstrated that the movement toward sublimation is universal, or would be, if humans were free and able to adhere to their natural desires and orientation. These ideas are echoed in *Phaedo* as well. Socrates specifies that desire will never be satisfied while the soul is in the body, but with the mind alone. Yet the superiority of the mind is constantly stressed, and in so doing, Plato creates a system that is based not on continuity, as in *Symposium*, where the constant striving for beauty and love leads one to sublimation, but is, rather, a system in which there is a radical breach or discontinuity

⁸¹ 64e ἄρ’ οὖν πρῶτον μὲν ἐν τοῖς τοιούτοις δηλὸς ἐστὶν ὁ [65a] φιλόσοφος ἀπολύων ὅτι μάλιστα τὴν ψυχὴν ἀπὸ τῆς τοῦ σώματος κοινωνίας διαφερόντως τῶν ἄλλων ἀνθρώπων;

⁸² 65d φαμέν τι εἶναι δίκαιον αὐτὸ ἢ οὐδέν; ... καὶ αὖ καλὸν γέ τι καὶ ἀγαθόν; ... [65e] ἄρ’ οὖν ἐκεῖνος ἂν τοῦτο ποιήσειεν καθαρώτατα ὅστις ὅτι μάλιστα αὐτῇ τῇ διανοίᾳ ἴοι ἐφ’ ἑκάστων...

between the body and soul, and between physical and spiritual existence. It is, perhaps, even possible that the difference in this regard stems from the fact that Socrates is on the point of death in this dialogue, as opposed to the other, where he sees no imminent escape from earthly existence.

In *Phaedo*, the tone of the message is somehow less inclusive, and geared toward a rejection of the physical rather than an embracing of what is already at the centre of human desire. The welcoming of death is presented as a particular, even peculiar, characteristic of the philosopher, and the description of corporeal existence which follows is extreme in its negativity. The body is referred to as evil,⁸³ and the philosopher is always its enemy; additionally, the philosopher is the enemy of all things that are transitory and discernible through the senses. All of these keep the philosopher from a lifetime goal, and from the objective of a lifetime's striving, which is death. Overall, the concepts discussed are presented in such a way that they appear to be under the shadow of Socrates' own impending death, which he strenuously justifies. Socrates implies that it would be hypocritical for him to fear death, as his whole life has been spent in striving for it. This striving is seemingly synonymous with sublimation, death itself being the ultimate and the only true purification.

There is a duality within the dialogue itself. Initially, *Phaedo* describes the companions as *τοτὲ μὲν γελῶντες, ἐνίστε δὲ δακρύοντες*, when contemplating Socrates' death (59a). As the dialogue progresses, it becomes apparent that Socrates' friends feel fear and doubt related to his fate after death, leading to the necessity of proving that the soul survives. In the end, this is done with extreme simplicity; since the soul is the cause of life, it can never be dead, because that would constitute an unacceptable contradiction in terms. The notion of a life lived in accordance with these concepts, never straying from them, is transmitted perhaps more forcefully by the description of Socrates' personality and persona than by any single argument about the nature and persistence of the soul. If this is so, however, it is as much a paradox as the Christian notion that the incorporeal Word had to become flesh, and be born in earthly form, in order to teach humans about the spirit. In other words, the essence of Socrates' life and teaching, as presented by Plato, takes on the form and substance of a religious treatise—one that, despite its lack of a strong, central deity, was the foundation of a

⁸³ 66b ὅτι, ἕως ἂν τὸ σῶμα ἔχωμεν καὶ συμπεφυρμένη ᾗ ἡμῶν ἡ ψυχὴ μετὰ τοιούτου κακοῦ...

system of faith. Historically, it might be observed that Christian concepts constituted a sort of completion of Plato's ideas.

2.4 SUMMATION

Models of the soul and of the dualism between physical and spiritual existence and consciousness existed before Plato, and clearly influenced his own contemplation of the subject. Descriptions of the eternal and transcendent preoccupied the Presocratic philosophers, and while they do not exactly formulate dualism, at the same time they do not reject it; indeed, as the discussion of shamanic antecedents shows, a belief in the transcendence of the physical body and experience may be universal. Among the Presocratic philosophers, fragments from Empedocles and Pythagoras in particular tend to view physical existence as a 'burden' that can be overcome through purification. The corollary to such a worldview must be that an alignment with spiritual existence is superior and ought to be, in fact, a valid human goal. Plato incorporates and greatly expands upon that concept.

Though not altogether consistent, the representations of the soul found in Plato's body of work are arguably the finest and most complete arguments in favour of sublimation that have ever been conceived. While the influence of pre-existing philosophical systems is apparent in Plato's work, his contribution is nonetheless unique, and adds greatly to an understanding of how and why sublimation is a goal of human existence. In particular, the fact that sublimation and the parts of the soul are not presented as an isolated category of thought but as an integral part of any human system is impressive. Moreover, sublimation for Plato is not a rejection of the self but a movement toward a more authentic self; a concept that shifts somewhat once theology embodies truth in a separate being, as will be shown later in this study.

Any summary of Platonic and Socratic views of sublimation requires an acknowledgment of an ever-present irony in the persona of the teacher consistently described: Socrates seemingly attracted and repelled the human and social world around him in almost equal measure. Inverting that statement, however, it becomes simpler: Socrates himself was not attracted by the world at all—he was seemingly repelled by it—and this in itself is one of his distinguishing features. The study of Plato's work presented here begins with the image of Socrates as a person presented in contrast to his surroundings (at the Symposium), someone who is the object of others' desires (as recounted by Alcibiades) but who is himself without desire for physical love, and seemingly impervious to hunger, thirst, or physical discomfort.

The attraction that he holds for others is a conundrum which he solves, demonstrating that he, in his rejection of the physical world, is more closely in line with the universal hunger for beauty felt by everyone. The Socrates that the reader encounters in *Phaedo* appears to have solidified his own position, on the one hand, summarising his own life as a rejection of the physical world, and allying himself in this with philosophers in general, although, here as in all the dialogues, Socrates is presented as singular and peerless in his understanding of the workings of the universe.

But despite its clear representation of the life of the soul after death, and its assertion that it is the work of the philosopher to reject what is material, *Phaedo* is somehow more finite and less engaging than other dialogues, and this may be because of Socrates' disengagement from life as he approached his physical death. The desire that leads him forward into a sublimated state is alluded to, but not described. Moreover, it is something that appears to have set him apart from others, rather than being, as stated in *Symposium*, more of an expression of the desire that unites humanity. The fact that Socrates is being put to death is, in and of itself, testimony to the fact of his separation from society and the world, to the point that society ceases to tolerate him. The dialogue underlines this disparity by observing that the philosopher's stance on the rejection of life would be misunderstood and ridiculed by anyone else. It is understood consistently throughout the dialogues that the philosopher's position is one that is at odds with the behaviour of most people, but there is a subtle shift from the alienated Socrates who appears to be slightly contemptuous of the human world to the Socrates whose sublimated state makes him the object of love and longing, very close to the state that is the ultimate goal of universal desire.

Perhaps this merely speaks to the fact that the dialogues that make more reference to the human or material world—such as *Symposium*, being about love, or *Republic*, being about politics and the ideal governance of society—are more appealing and ultimately more meaningful to readers who are themselves rooted in and therefore aligned with the material world. Insofar as all of the Platonic dialogues talk about a form of sublimation, it is not, then, achievable through death; the earlier Socratic dialogues enrich the world even as they appear to reject it. It is somewhat later that life itself becomes an apparently insoluble problem, and that a sense of the need of the soul to be liberated from the body in order to be satisfied emerges—an idea which finds a full range of expression in Neoplatonism and early Christian

philosophy. Plato's earlier dialogues explore the material/spiritual duality in a way that promises to benefit humans in the social realm.

These considerations and subtle contradictions do not detract significantly from the influence of Plato's ideas on Western thought, although they may contribute to determining the course of that influence. To be clearer: the realm of thought that Platonic ideas later influenced was religious rather than political. There is, in Plato's work, a basis for rejecting what is worldly or corporeal, and looking beyond it to something pure and eternal. This orientation may even serve as a basis for vilifying the corporeal, and repressing or rejecting it entirely. Dualism is thus given another layer of significance, absent from the work of Socrates' predecessors as well as from many of Plato's most compelling works. This significance states or implies that what is most desirable is to leave the world behind completely, not to participate in an eternal harmony created by the tension between the physical and spiritual realities.

Socrates' own balance between participation in the world and repudiation of it ended when society condemned him, and he conspired in his own death (in that he had been offered the opportunity to escape, and rejected it). For a society to put a person to death is ostensibly the most potent expression of disparity and rejection—at least, until one considers Socrates' rationale for submitting to his sentence rather than escaping with his life. To escape, he explains, would be a rejection of the laws that had sheltered him during all his life. It would not be rational. Socrates' willingness to sacrifice his bodily existence for the principles of reason and consistency is, perhaps, his own potent demonstration of sublimation.

A change occurs in the nature and understanding of sublimation during the Classical era—one which may be viewed retroactively as a shift in direction, but which in fact originated as two parallel strands co-emerging from within the work of Plato. Accordingly, 'sublimation' itself has acquired two distinct, though nuanced, meanings. On the one hand, sublimation of the body and its desires can be viewed as a discipline and process of improvement; through sublimation, baser impulses are refined and improved as an individual's orientation and very perception become more finely honed. Thus, a person turns from appetite and passion and toward reason and philosophy; in some cases, turning from corporeal love toward a higher, more spiritual form. This is the type of sublimation that can be discerned in Plato's *Symposium* and *Timaeus*. Its lineage is in the Presocratic philosophies, although, as with many related concepts, Plato refined it. This is also the essence behind Plato's divided line analogy, covered in this chapter, whereas the corporeal and spiritual co-exist along a continuum but, as

such, all points of that continuum naturally must retain their importance. Nor did this conception of sublimation die out subsequently; it is clearly seen, for example, in the works of Aristotle and the Stoic philosophers, and indeed persists to this day in some interpretations of Christian theology which will be considered later.

However, simultaneously emerging through Plato's work is a version of sublimation that involves rejection of the physical body in favour of the superiority and superior importance of the spirit. There is an important distinction to be made between the value judgement that favours the importance of the spiritual, and the actual rejection of the corporeal, although it is possible to make an interpretation that the latter stems from the former. Movement away from identification with the body may take the form of transcending it, or forcing that transcendence by means of rejection. It is this latter version of sublimation that is present discernibly in Plato's *Phaedo*, as well as later strands of Platonism. This repudiation is also present, of course, in much of early Christian theology, arriving there via strands of later Platonism, for example, that of Numenius. Stark repudiation of the body is present in the Gnostic tradition as well. Consistently, this latter, rejectionist iteration of sublimation proved an attractive and powerful idea to proponents and adherents of certain strands of faith, and perhaps remains so to this day. In Christian theology and practice, it is worth noting that these two strands are not completely mutually exclusive—that is, it is possible to vacillate between one and the other as a matter of individual interpretation. However, it is worth noting the distinction of these two threads and what appears to be its origin, within the works of Plato.

CHAPTER 3

THE OTHER PRE-CHRISTIAN VIEWS OF DUALISM AND SUBLIMATION

3.1 INTRODUCTION AND DISCUSSION

The central purpose of this section of the research is to show how the schools of philosophical thought that developed prior to Christianity, with their idiosyncratic character and diversity, position themselves around the ideological frameworks of dualism and sublimation. The challenge of this chapter is to bring to the studies of currents that emerged in the early church an assessment of the complexity and interplay of ideas and influences in these distinctive views of metaphysics. This chapter will not concern itself very much with social scientific speculations on (for example) celibacy or shifting power discourses of Roman culture in its late period; instead its goal is to examine the spirit of an absorbing tradition of thought in which sublimation is a vehicle of considerable philosophical complexity. The advantage of retrieving and wrestling with this tradition is that it may allow us to reappropriate a certain liminality in the life of a firmly rooted church by understanding better the development of self-mastery as sublimation within its salvic philosophical foundations. In a sense, the lone Christian ascetic or a community of such persons may have been less subversive and defiant of the ancient world in their practices, but simply reinterpreting a tradition of philosophical communities that had gathered around philosophers like Plato, Epicurus, Philo and many others (Finn, 2009:12).

What is revealed is a reminder that sublimation does not necessarily mean denigration of the body and its senses and desires; nor is sublimation a derivation of Platonic or Neoplatonic thought—which is easy to forget, given the entrenchment of Neoplatonic ideals in early Christian thought. What is revealed also is a challenge in providing an assessment of the complexity and interplay of ideas and influences in these distinctive views of metaphysics. For example, Plato articulates the elevation of the Spirit above Matter as a goal of philosophy. Aristotle's view, in contrast, bears an uneasy relationship to the simple concept of sublimation predicated upon dualism, while it describes a similar or identical prescriptive action—in the case of humans, relating to a movement toward the divine essence internal in humans, through

contemplation. So Aristotle's theoretical framework is different, and arguably much more complex than Platonic dualism. The approach taken in this chapter is to review each of the relevant philosophical writers after Plato and assess their position on key questions rather than attempting to present an exhaustive thematic discussion. Inevitably, the compare-and-contrast dynamic is present but largely in the context of clarifying the ideas of the philosopher under discussion. The objective is to evaluate the *contribution* of prechristian philosophers to the concept of sublimation, beginning with Aristotle.

Aristotle points straightaway to a different context for sublimation and a metaphysical worldview that does not involve elaborated soul/body dualism. In exploring an observable lack of dualism in Aristotle, it may be tempting to minimise it in such a way that the repudiation of dualism is made to appear almost semantic, but there is of course an obvious distancing from the Platonic ideal. The influence of both philosophers is complex and shows divergence. In the later Western Catholic church St Thomas Aquinas supplants Augustine's Platonic-type dualism with, as Fiona Lynch (1982:132) puts it, "an emphasis on the more mellow notion of completion or perfection." But there is also a degree of synthesis. Dominic O'Meara (1991: Introduction, x) comments:

Although it might appear that Aristotelianism displaced Platonism in the later Middle Ages as a privileged philosophy in Christian thought, it did so as a philosophy enriched with fundamental Neoplatonic insights ... this presence [Neo-platonism] in recent times ... is far from losing its living appeal to Christian thinkers.

Therefore, in line with the objectives stated above, the chapter will try to concentrate on the specific contribution of Aristotle to these ideas rather than considering complex overlays at this stage. Note that Aristotle too considers sublimation in the context of a writer who has the capacity to provide an exceptionally comprehensive worldview, covering scientific, ethical,

metaphysical and artistic concerns. This worldview is well known and, in the interests of concision, examination of texts in Aristotle will be limited to areas less commonly known.⁸⁴

In contrast to Platonic and Christian ideals, Hellenistic philosophy is focused primarily on this life and its concerns, specifically, the desire to overcome human suffering. Martha Nussbaum (2013:13) calls the three principal schools of Hellenistic philosophy the “therapeutic” philosophies precisely for this reason. That is not to say that Hellenistic philosophy is divorced from the concept of sublimation. Even in Epicurean philosophy, reputedly associated with the pursuit of pleasure, the objective is not hedonism but a higher form of pleasure that comes from leading a peaceful and harmonious life, such as that lived by the gods. Stoicism venerates the human will as an instrument allowing humans to create a desirable life, the qualities of that life being more important than corporeal survival itself. For the Sceptics, reason predominated and allowed a type of navigation through human experience with equanimity. In short, each of these philosophies offers tools for examining and navigating life in part by sublimating baser desires to a more beneficial purpose. Each expresses ideas of sublimation largely without resorting to a denigration of the physical. That is an important contribution for this chapter to consider.

The interpretation and development of Plato’s concepts some six or seven hundred years after his death provided both a centralised focus and a starting point from which the Neoplatonists also developed a comprehensive and distinct worldview of their own. Platonic ideals found their way into Christian thought via Neoplatonism, which bears remarkable similarity to some Christian doctrine, lacking only a personalised deity. Nevertheless, the Neoplatonic divine, called simply the One, is understood to be the single source of all goodness. Corporeality places us further from the One; overcoming the corporeal brings us closer to it, and therefore closer to goodness—the ultimate objective of human existence. It is easy to see how such a conception of dualism, in which the immaterial divine is the source of all possible goodness and happiness, almost inevitably encompasses in the very idea of striving for or pursuit of the One or Divine a denigration of the corporeal. This is also a distinctive idea to consider, especially as the rather simple concept forms almost a competent core of what was to become a Christian view on sublimation and the supremacy of the spirit. Neoplatonism has a great

⁸⁴ The section on Aristotle draws on Frederick Copleston’s *A History of Philosophy*, seventy years old but still impressively authoritative, and on Martin Heidegger’s older, more difficult but

deal of consistency in its presentation of key concepts relevant to the research in question but these are embedded in a complex system of thought which is rarely studied in detail. Some explanation of the context of these ideas in the section on Neoplatonism is necessary therefore in drawing out the contribution of Neoplatonists to this research.

It is worth examining how the core concept also took on specific social and moral connotations, particularly in the context that the Christian tradition was to incorporate aspects of Judaism, which had pre-existing views on aspects of virtue and the proper relationship between genders and classes. The views of Philo included in this chapter are positioned in Judaism but influence Christianity, and interpret sublimation and dualism in such a way that the body, sexuality, and impurity are strongly associated with the female. This proved to be an association that has been difficult to dismiss, informing a fundamentally patriarchal and misogynistic worldview which also provides the idea that sublimation must involve suppression, or overcoming the body.

Finally, it is perhaps interesting and noteworthy that all of Plato's students subverted (or at least reframed) Plato's ideas, often very radically, so as to constitute a true departure from Platonic thought, while at the same time preserving and expanding upon the idea of sublimation in a way that sometimes echoes Plato. For these reasons, Aristotle's contribution to the concept of sublimation is noteworthy if not vital to the development of the concept and is a reasonable (and more or less chronological) starting point. The areas in which Aristotle's version of sublimation differs from that of Plato begin the discussion. Next the discussion focuses on the ways in which Aristotle's sublimation completes or complements his other theories; this is far more complex, as is the relationship and continuity, laid out by Aristotle, between human beings and the rest of creation.

3.2 "ARISTOTELIAN" SUBLIMATION

Insofar as sublimation means 'refinement', connoting a movement toward a more perfect and pure state, there is a great deal of correspondence between Aristotle's worldview and the concept of sublimation. It may be legitimate to suggest that a type of sublimation underlies much of Aristotle's work and is essential to his worldview in general. This applies to his views on ethics and metaphysics in particular. Moreover, the substance of what Aristotle has

to say about human sublimation appears to have common characteristics with concepts found in Plato. The broad Platonic concept is that the corporeal is sublimated in favour of the spiritual, in a movement away from material reality, and no such framework can truly be maintained without a belief in dualism. There is, therefore, to some degree a lack of continuity between what Aristotle has to say on the subject and the more common understanding of the idea. On the other hand, it is also true that Aristotle has a great deal to say on the subject of sublimation. His entire view of human fulfilment is based on the striving for something that is beyond ‘humanism’—something that is higher and more abstract than social virtue, for example, and that can be achieved only through philosophical contemplation. Furthermore, according to Aristotle, this striving for improvement is both inevitable and universal; everything in the universe is constantly improving itself through the principle of movement, and “striving for the fulfilment of its own nature” (McClelland, 1998: 56); this movement toward ‘refinement’ and improvement is the essence of sublimation. Moreover, Aristotle consciously includes humans, both body and soul, in his categorisation of ‘things in nature’; therefore, according to Aristotle, human beings, also, are constantly improving and moving toward the ‘fulfilment’ of their nature. Finally, as James Skeen points out, Aristotle’s philosophy is *not* primarily humanistic in nature, despite his mention of social and physical concerns in his analysis of human happiness and his judgement of human endeavours. That is, even while pointing out the achievements of humans, he suggests that, in order to be truly fulfilled, they must move beyond human concerns and embrace contemplation, because only by this means can improvement and fulfilment be reached (Skeen, 2003). Here Aristotle’s work differs radically from, for example, other materialists such as Epicurus. To Aristotle, as to Epicurus, everything is material, so the idea of transcending the material completely is both impossible and irrelevant. Knowledge, for Aristotle, must be obtained through information given by the senses, and this is consistent with a materialist view. On the other hand, Aristotle sees the human mind, soul, and intelligence leading one beyond material concerns, so that individuals cannot be truly happy or fulfil their purpose unless that impulse is fulfilled through the intellect:

... the function of man is to live a certain kind of life, and this activity implies a rational principle, and the function of a good man is the good and noble performance of these, and if any action is well performed it is performed in accord with the appropriate excellence: if this is the case,

then happiness turns out to be an activity of the soul in accordance with virtue [Burnet].⁸⁵

This is the essence of sublimation, but it differs from other accounts because Aristotle draws no real distinction between the process in objects and that in humans, and he does it all within a material universe.

3.2.1 Aristotle: contrast with Platonic Ideas

Aristotle's work was often thought of, understood, referred to, and conjoined with that of Plato from its beginning, and Lloyd Gerson (2005) has described the harmonisation and co-opting of Aristotelianism in the curricula of Neo-platonists.⁸⁶ Nonetheless the level of divergence between them is arguably stronger and more fascinating than any connection and convergence. Aristotle is, with qualifiers, universally considered to be a materialist⁸⁷ and Aristotelianism is characterised by a kind of teleological naturalism,⁸⁸ whereas Plato's philosophy centres on the intangible and incorporeal Forms, which transcend and supersede any material existence, even as they give it meaning. This is a profound difference, and is the factor that most strongly affects the course and focus of the body of work of these two philosophers, though there are other valid and potentially informative ways to categorise it. One might observe, for example, that the starting points are different regarding the two metaphysical systems described: Plato starts with and focuses on the abstract, but Aristotle does the opposite, focusing on the specific and categorising it, and allowing that to lead to less tangible qualities. There is also a difference in scope: as mentioned, Aristotle's work opens out to include many scientific and artistic disciplines. His emphasis on classification and categorisation of all things expands outward, and the 'motion' that creates them is a real focus

⁸⁵ *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1, 1098 a 13 ... εἰ δ' οὕτως, [ἀνθρώπου δὲ τίθεμεν ἔργον ζωὴν τινα, ταύτην δὲ ψυχῆς ἐνέργειαν καὶ πράξεις μετὰ λόγου, σπουδαίου δ' ἀνδρὸς εὖ ταῦτα καὶ (15) καλῶς, ἕκαστον δ' εὖ κατὰ τὴν οἰκίαν ἀρετὴν ἀποτελεῖται· εἰ δ' οὕτω,] τὸ ἀνθρώπινον ἀγαθὸν ψυχῆς ἐνέργεια γίνεται κατ' ἀρετὴν, εἰ δὲ πλείους αἱ ἀρεταί, κατὰ τὴν ἀρίστην καὶ τελειοτάτην.

⁸⁶ For Gerson, 'a-platonism' in Aristotle is only found only in very specific areas (2005:45-46).

⁸⁷ Aristotle's viewpoint on the soul might not be accepted by a strict materialist: for instance, *De Anima*, 2 408b 20–29 considers the soul to be unaffected by non-fatal injury. Nonetheless Leonard Carrier (2006:253–266) has argued strongly against the views of Martha Nussbaum (and others) who hold that Aristotle cannot plausibly be seen to be a materialist.

of his study. Plato considers material reality only regarding the way in which it corresponds to and is created by the abstract ideal. Although it covers vast philosophical ground, the direction of Plato's work is not dependent on the examination and classification of many things, but on the abstract principles that are universal and that unite them. For all these reasons, it may not be too vast an oversimplification to say, in a general way, that Plato's work is primarily philosophical—truth is uncovered by mathematical reasoning—while Aristotle's is more inclusive of 'scientific' observation—empirical investigation is required to understand the natural world—although Aristotelianism contains strong elements of philosophy as it relates to metaphysics and ethics. The ways in which Aristotle's thought surrounding sublimation differs from that of Plato include, but are not limited to, Aristotle's materialism. Aristotle believed in a universe entirely rooted in physical existence, thus effectively negating the dualist notion that the material world is inferior to the spiritual, and that the eventual aim is to leave it behind: this despite the fact that Aristotle also recommends that humans not be satisfied with mastering material and social needs and ethics. There must be contemplation, an intellectual and spiritual virtue, to take one beyond that realm. Yet there is no framework of dualism put in place to separate the mind doing the contemplating and the material forms, which the mind is leaving behind. In a sense, no 'line' is crossed when one appears to leave behind concerns relating exclusively to the material or social world, in Aristotle's view. There is, instead, a consistency between this impulse on the part of humans, and the tendency of all things to move toward a fulfilment of their nature.

The second way in which Aristotle's thoughts on the matter diverge perceptibly from those of Plato is that, for Aristotle, there is no abstract quality or 'Form' that can be separated entirely from material objects. According to Aristotle, collecting and observing ever more diverse categories of material being, and deducing the forces at work on them, provides the best possible chance of being able to define sublimation. Moreover, for Aristotle, material reality is central to any abstract concept, and without the material being physically present, abstract concepts would become impossible to form. For Aristotle, there is no transcendence of material reality into the realm of abstract forms where that realm excludes the presence of that material reality. It is for this reason, too, that while Plato is moving toward the general—the ideal Form—in order to understand the specific, Aristotle is doing the opposite, gaining an understanding of the general through exposure to, and working with, that which is specific.

⁸⁸ Montalenti (1974:3–19) comments on the significant elements of vitalism in Aristotle.

This explains, also, in part, why Aristotle considers the material world to be so much more significant than Plato considers it to be, though always with the notion of sublimation or fulfilment of a thing's essential nature in mind. For Aristotle, if the nature of objects is not surmised from a physical observation of those objects through the senses, there is no other way to gather this knowledge. For Plato, physical observation through the senses is unreliable and misleading rather than merely incomplete. The views of Aristotle regarding this matter resemble those of the twentieth-century philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty, who argued that meaning is created in the moment of material creation, and cannot exist without it; Ponty illustrated this by observing that a painting loses all of its meaning if the canvas it is painted on is destroyed. No abstract ideal of what that painting was can persist in a meaningful way after its destruction, although it is also undeniable that intact paintings do convey an abstract meaning that stems from but is distinct from the physical object (Crowther, 1982:138–149). Aristotle says the same, in effect, regarding the relationship between abstraction and the material world. Both exist, but to negate the material is also to negate or even destroy the abstract. Therefore, sublimation according to Aristotle cannot involve a rejection of materialism even as one transcends the everyday appearance and manifestation of it.

All this can be summed up by saying that Aristotle's version of sublimation is essentially immanent, looking to objects immediately present to find higher meaning, while the Platonic version is essentially transcendent, looking beyond the material to the spiritual. According to Aristotle himself, his version of sublimation was a sort of correction of Plato's, as he judged that Plato had misunderstood the nature of reality and substituted for it the "process of knowing" (Skeen, 2003). For Aristotle, abstraction is a tool, leading one to an understanding of how things are. But for Plato, the abstract Forms are what defines the nature of reality, and they are wholly distinct from the physical world. Therefore, while both philosophers value contemplation as a means of sublimation among humans, Aristotle does so without having humans truly leave behind the physical world.

In fact, Aristotle's worldview incorporates a belief in the universal qualities of all matter, and this, according to the system he outlines, makes transformation possible. In the realm of inanimate objects, this led Aristotle toward a belief in alchemy, a process by which physical objects can change their form and assume increasing levels of physical purity. Comprehending a system in which this can take place is both an end and, in some ways, a justification for the contemplation of nature. A very small glimpse at the alchemy of Aristotle

also serves to clearly outline the differences between Plato's sharply dualist worldview and Aristotle's materialist one.

According to Aristotle, at the beginning there was an indeterminate material substance that he refers to as *prima materia*; there was not, as yet, any form organising it, and so the universe was in a state of chaos. When form rose out of chaos, it organised matter into four primary elements—earth, air, fire and water—each of which has its own definable characteristics or properties through which it can be identified. All the four elements rose out of the same matter, however, and would presumably descend into it again were it not for the continuous organising power of form.⁸⁹

Aristotle's principle of movement can produce a change in the qualities, or in the proportion of the qualities, which give matter their form. Because these qualities determine an object's elemental identity, and because all four elements are made of the same substance, a change in qualities resulting from movement can also result in a change in the elements themselves. Therefore, because of the underlying universality of matter, one substance can potentially change into another, or new substances, which previously did not exist, can arise. However, it is clear that this does not occur randomly, but according to naturally regulated patterns. Aristotle's focus of study is these patterns, because it was through them, he believed, that the most could be discovered regarding the ultimate nature of reality. One could conclude that Aristotle has for these patterns of movement and change the same regard that Plato has for the abstract and unchangeable Forms that create the backdrop for his worldview.

Finally, according to Aristotle, the force of organised movement through which the elements are created out of chaos, and through which the various objects are created through the elements, is identifiable with both creation and spirit. In this manner, Aristotle demonstrates that these metaphysical elements, while not exactly corporeal, are impossible to conceptualise

⁸⁹ This is all vastly simplified: Arnold Cohen, (1984:193–4) reviewed discussion on the fundamentals of the idea by Friedrich Solmsen and others; he recast the concept of Prima Material as substrate: "I suspect that the link between the acorn and the oak is not supposed to lie in the persistence of some numerically identical stuff, but in the persisting subjugation of stuff to a scheme of biological reorganization and development to a specific nature in the Aristotelian sense in which 'specific' is the adjectival form of 'species.'" He avoids "taking a position on the vexing question of whether, if Aristotle holds to a common matter for the four elements, he is committed to holding that elemental transformation is a case of mere alteration ... or is not so committed."

in the absence of material reality. This, again, is different from Plato's belief in the completely abstract and unchangeable Forms. Aristotle's concept of change as creation and spirit has a strong bearing on his interpretation of the divine, of 'soul', and of sublimation.

3.2.2 'God' in Aristotle's Worldview

Aristotle's version of 'God' is not one that could have survived to be incorporated in Christianity as the Neoplatonist concept of The One, based on Platonism, did and was. However, some discussion of God or a divine principle is almost inevitable in a discussion of sublimation. The concept represents the extreme end of the movement toward the good or spiritual. Although the concept of God in most frameworks is of a wholly spiritual or incorporeal being, discussion of the Godhead in no way disturbs Aristotle's belief in materialism. Aristotle's god is the principal cause of all things, but does not stand outside of material reality to assume that position. He is at the pinnacle, but still does not come from anywhere external to the system that is described. More specifically, Aristotle's version of God is that of the *nous* or divine mind, which is eternal, and whose contemplation is the driving force behind a motion that creates all things. This god is the culmination of Aristotle's contemplation of all material things and the motion that creates them; he is the cause behind all other causes, or, in a sense, the one cause whose motion causes the movement of everything else. It is the starting point of a system in which everything, including God, is material, and all matter is differentiated and classified as a result of the effects of motion. Within that system, motion or movement is the dynamic force, and all motion ultimately comes from a single source, that is, God.⁹⁰ It is unclear whether this Aristotelian god is personified or anthropomorphised to any degree at all; most likely not, (Barnes, 1995:104) and if not, that is in keeping with the other Greek and Hellenistic philosophers. The Neoplatonist 'One', for example, is not anthropomorphised, but the concept of The One is still in keeping with and applicable to later Christian concepts.

⁹⁰ Paraphrasing *Metaphysics* A, 1072, Kenny (1978:177) writes, "Aristotle is here saying that God is not a *raison d'être* whose good is being aimed at but a good whose attainment is the *raison d'être* of wisdom's commands."

3.2.3 Aristotle's Metaphysical Worldview and Sublimation

Aristotle has a great deal to say about the sublimation of all objects. He presents an organised system in which hierarchies exist, and everything moves toward a greater state of purity. Aristotle's 'God' must exist as the necessary culmination of all the systems described.

There is one way in which Aristotle's worldview differs profoundly from later (post 17th century) scientific viewpoints. Aristotle assumes there is a reason for everything in creation. These reasons can be discovered with reference to matter, motion, and the relationship to the entire system. It is here that the influence of Plato, as well as some Presocratic philosophers, can be seen: the universe 'makes sense' and fits together, leaving the contemplative mind with the task of figuring out the order of things. This viewpoint is a prerequisite for a belief in some form of sublimation. The assumption that things 'make sense' on a grander scale naturally leads to a belief in sublimation. If there is a unified system of forms of matter stemming from a certain source, and movement from one form to another as they exist along a hierarchy, sublimation is a simple movement toward, or back to, the source. However, it should also be noted that Aristotle is specific about his characterisation of different forms of matter, of which human beings are only one; moreover, he has more to say about sublimation in things than in people. His avocation of a contemplative life for humans heavily references sublimation. Given that everything in Aristotle's worldview exists as part of a unified system, there is the potential to extrapolate applications for human beings from his description of sublimation. Moreover, the reference to the importance of ethics and the contemplative life gives a reference point, or a direction in which to look, for lessons regarding sublimation for people. Here Aristotle appears to concur, more or less, with Plato: it is through contemplation that developing toward their own perfection occurs in humans.⁹¹ It is through that contemplation, and through references to sublimation in things, that insight can be gained regarding what that might mean and how it might manifest for the individual human being (Lockwood, 2014:219–223).

3.2.4 Aristotle: Hierarchy of Being and Soul

Aristotle does not acknowledge purely incorporeal being. Much like certain Hellenistic philosophers, Aristotle seems to view the soul as an aspect of corporeal nature, although there

⁹¹ *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book 10, discussed by Sim, 51–79.

is some ambiguity regarding this point.⁹² Aristotle's view of the soul is not like that of Plato or the Christian view, where the soul inhabits the body. Instead, according to Aristotle, the soul and the organic body, while distinct from each other, cannot exist without each other. In this matter, the organic body is distinct from that which has no potentiality for animation, such as a corpse. The body must be 'ensouled' in order to fulfill a function; the same is true regarding other aspects of the physical world. However, Aristotle never professes that the soul literally animates the body, merely that the soul provides the potential for animation—that is, for life. This view fits neatly within Aristotle's general theory of the nature of material reality—it is in some aspects indistinguishable from it. All material reality is made of two elements, matter and form. Matter is the substance itself, while form is more difficult to define. Form is not a separate 'thing' that can exist independently of matter; rather, it is the activating and organising force that gives matter its distinct characteristics or, in the case of living things, its animation.

Matter is not organic—having the potential for life—without the soul, but the soul cannot exist without the body. The fact that the two, though distinct, are inextricable shows that, while the soul perhaps cannot precisely be described as material, it is inextricable from something that *is* material, and is not thought of as existing outside this material framework.

Aristotle differentiates between body and soul in humans and in other beings or objects, and does so without compromising his materialist views. However, this necessitates a complex explanation in which the interaction of the body and soul, through observation, is characterised in terms of its functioning. In humans, it is Aristotle's philosophical view that every 'natural' or organic body contains life:

⁹² Barnes (1990:67) writes, "Souls are fulfilments of bodies. Hence souls cannot exist apart from bodies, any more than skills can exist apart from skilled men. Plato had held that souls pre-existed the birth and survived the death of those bodies they animated. Aristotle thought that was impossible. A soul is simply not the sort of thing that could survive. How could my skills, my temper or my character survive me?" But elsewhere Shields (2005) writes, "Some scholars seem content to characterise an Aristotelian soul as a set or sum of capacities, whereas Aristotle himself evidently demands a non-aggregative form of unity (*De Anima*, ii 3 414 b28–32, cf. iii 9 432 a–b6)."

... every natural body which has life in it is a substance in the sense of a composite. But since it is also a body having life, the body cannot be soul; the body is the subject, or matter, not what is attributed to it.⁹³

Therefore, Aristotle holds that the soul must be “substance in the sense of the form of the natural body having life potentially within it” [Hicks].⁹⁴ In other words, on the basis of this observation, the soul is substance—material—in that it is, of necessity and by definition, a component of an interaction through which matter is formed and through which it both changes and maintains its form. To state this more clearly, Aristotle’s view is that just as substance is actuality, the soul is the “actuality of the body” and is substance.

Regarding sublimation, this distinct and materialist view must be taken into account. Where sublimation is tantamount to improvement, refinement, or movement toward a state of greater perfection, it is consistent with the Aristotelian worldview. But, insofar as sublimation refers to the turning away from the material world and toward the soul, the application is less clear. Within this worldview, the material cannot be rejected and the soul cannot be conceptualised on its own. On the other hand, in correspondence with the concept that each object is striving for the fulfilment of its nature, a mindfulness of the nature and potentiality of one’s soul is tantamount to sublimation as it pertains to improvement or refinement. This also represents a turning toward soul or spirit albeit within a system in which soul is inseparable from body.

3.2.5 Sublimation in Humans

Aristotle’s worldview is somewhat prescriptive regarding human behaviour and endeavour; he lays out a definite course of action and a way of living that is aimed to promote virtue, happiness and fulfilment in humans. In this regard, there is what might be considered a psychological element in his philosophy. Aristotle outlines human needs—what human beings require so that their nature may be fulfilled—and he does so with a balance between elements that are corporeal and those that appear to go beyond this. According to Aristotle, humans need moral virtue, intellectual and spiritual virtues (achieved through philosophical

⁹³ *De Anima*, 2, 412a14–16: ὥστε πᾶν σῶμα φυσικὸν μετέχον ζωῆς οὐσία ἂν εἴη, οὐσία δ’ οὕτως ὡς συνθέτη... ἐπεὶ δ’ ἐστὶ καὶ σῶμα καὶ τοιόνδε, ζωὴν γὰρ ἔχον, οὐκ ἂν εἴη σῶμα ἢ ψυχὴ· οὐ γὰρ ἐστὶ τῶν καθ’ ὑποκειμένου τὸ σῶμα.

contemplation), money, and freedom from disease and accident—or good health (Skeen, 2003). Money and health relate to physical wellbeing, and moral virtue is social in nature. Spiritual and intellectual capital, however, is vital; this type of resource is what is needed to achieve a self-actualisation that is beyond worldly experience and is tantamount to a form of sublimation. It is also vital for human beings to flourish within this existence. ‘Flourishing’ in this manner and striving for excellence regarding the spiritual and intellectual virtues through contemplation is in total accordance with basic human desires. It should be noted that, in this particular aspect, Aristotle’s views do not differ greatly from those of Plato, who also conceived of a force leading on towards a consciousness that transcends worldly concerns. For Plato this culminates in an ability to transcend the corporeal entirely and experience the world of the universal and abstract Forms. For Aristotle, this final end is different, but he had also observed in *Nicomachean Ethics* 10,7, 1177b 29 that there is something in human nature that is divine: ἀλλ’ ἢ θεῖόν τι ἐν αὐτῷ ὑπάρχει. Within a worldview that incorporates a god but does not subscribe to dualism, this divine element is not defined as something that supersedes and transcends all material or corporeal existence, but is instead the extreme actualisation of it. It is immanent, at least potentially, in physical being, and may be reached fully through practice of the intellectual/spiritual virtues. In *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle writes:

We ... must, so far as we can, make ourselves *immortal*, and strain in every nerve to live in accordance with the best thing in us; for even if it be small in bulk, much more does it in power and worth surpass everything [Hicks].⁹⁵

This reference to the immortal addresses an element that Aristotle perceives within the human psyche (and, correspondingly, in other things in nature) which is metaphysical, though still a continuation of the trajectory toward actualisation that the human psyche and all elements of nature participate in as part of their essential drives. Only through philosophical

⁹⁴ *De Anima*, 2, 412a17–18: μᾶλλον δ’ ὥς ὑποκείμενον καὶ ὕλη. ἀναγκαῖον ἄρα τὴν ψυχὴν οὐσίαν εἶναι ὥς εἶδος σώματος φυσικοῦ δυνάμει ζωὴν ἔχοντος.

⁹⁵ *Nicomachean Ethics*, 10, 1177b 31 – 1178a 2. ἀλλ’ ἐφ’ ὅσον ἐνδέχεται ἀθανατίζειν καὶ πάντα ποιεῖν πρὸς τὸ ζῆν κατὰ τὸ κράτιστον τῶν ἐν αὐτῷ· εἰ γὰρ καὶ τῷ ὄγκῳ μικρόν ἐστι, [1178a] (1) δυνάμει καὶ τιμιότητι πολὺ μᾶλλον πάντων ὑπερέχει.

contemplation can one have knowledge of and appreciation for the eternal patterns of the universe that show the element of the divine in one's own metaphysical makeup.

3.2.6 Summation

Plato articulated the elevation of the spirit above matter as a goal of philosophy. Aristotle's view, in contrast, bears an uneasy relationship to the simple concept of sublimation predicated upon dualism. Aristotle describes a similar prescriptive action for movement toward the divine essence internal in humans, which is contemplation, but his theoretical framework is different, and arguably much more complex than Platonic dualism. His identification of movement as the divine element spurring on creation does not appear to allow for a transcendent spirituality or theology. There is the assurance that divinity is immanent, and sublimation is a movement that is undertaken in accordance with the ordinary and universal patterns that create all of reality. There is no ascension to a higher reality through sublimation. Sublimation moves human beings further into a conscious and seamless harmony with the rest of creation.

3.3 HELLENISTIC PHILOSOPHERS

In her study of Hellenistic philosophies (Nussbaum, 1996:13), Martha Nussbaum frames the three principal schools as 'therapeutic' philosophies, quoting from Epicurus and Chrysippus, to demonstrate that the treatment of human suffering is the primary aim of each philosophy. For this reason, they may appear to have little resonance with, for example, Christian thought on an abstract level, although the codes of behaviour supplied by these philosophies are not inconsistent with Christian doctrine. Hellenistic philosophies might correctly be classified as secular, given that the gods, if they exist at all within each philosophy, are peripheral. Consequently, none of these philosophies has much to say of faith, the gods, or the spiritual plane, although elements normally associated with religious or Platonic sublimation—governing one's appetites and desires, virtue, and even asceticism—do figure strongly.

The Stoics were, perhaps, the least dissonant from Platonic thought in suggesting that Reason should be the dominant driving force behind all human existence. Stoic philosophers insisted upon individual control over personal circumstances to the extent of advocating suicide under certain circumstances, where a death that is controlled by the individual is preferable, on a rational level, to a life that has become unacceptable or onerous, although the Stoics did emphasise methods of gaining control that are less drastic. The body/soul duality is present

but its orientation is different from that of Platonism and Christianity in various subtle but important ways.

Epicureanism focuses on the seeking of pleasure and avoidance of pain, but also stresses virtue and even self-restraint. Epicurus is further distinguished by his near-atheism; although he professed to believe in the gods, he also stated that they were unconcerned with humans and were broadly irrelevant to human life. Other Hellenistic philosophers may not have stated this idea quite so boldly, but the fact that their thought centres upon individual control of circumstances suggests it.

Scepticism paradoxically focuses both on the satisfaction and elimination of ‘animal’ needs; that is, happiness is thought to depend on their satisfaction, but for that reason, it is considered desirable to have as few of these animal needs as possible.

All Hellenistic philosophers, to one degree or another, advocate a type of behaviour that is by no means at odds with either Platonic or Christian concepts. The ‘pleasure’ that Epicurus felt was the goal of human existence was an elevated sort of pleasure, which could be reached by following the correct codes of behaviour. In Epicureanism and in the other Hellenistic philosophies, there may not be the goal of leaving behind the corporeal, but there is the goal of improving oneself to the point that appetites, desires, anxieties and fears no longer have a hold upon the individual. Insofar as sublimation signifies ‘improvement’, the concepts are consistent. Furthermore, Stoicism asserts that there are qualities more important than human life, and that earthly existence reasonably and voluntarily can be given up in favour of a greater sense of liberty. At the same time, the emphasis these philosophies place on the individual’s self-determined freedom and happiness seems to have little to do with the trajectory that philosophy and theology was to take in the centuries following the Hellenistic period. In one sense this element of Hellenistic thought was an impulse that went underground, so to speak, until fairly recently.

3.3.1 Epicureanism

Epicurean philosophy is one that is based on corporeal reality, and one which denies the survival of the soul after the body dies. Furthermore, it is not a philosophy that is based on rational enquiry—Epicurus distrusts reason, and puts his faith in the material senses. He

denies the existence of the Platonic forms. In fact, Shorey (1901:202) describes his “scorn” for Plato’s teaching generally.

All this can be considered a psychology, given that his stated purpose is to heal the human psyche by ending needless anxiety and pain. As well as defining the nature of reality, Epicurus outlines steps for the novice to follow in order to pursue pleasure and end pain. These have more to do with leading a virtuous and therefore tranquil existence than they do with hedonism; *hedonia* being one of the lower forms of Epicurean pleasure. Often the ascetic life is considered to be a sure provider of pleasure, so in practice, many of the deep divisions between the Platonic and Epicurean philosophies seem to diminish. Nevertheless, there are differences, in the types of happiness on offer, more than just a matter of semantics.

By the same token, an association between Epicureanism and sublimation can be made to a certain degree, though after that point, the association breaks down completely, the disparity being insurmountable. Insofar as sublimation means ‘improvement’ or ‘refinement’, the model of Epicurus is not inconsistent with that of Plato and those who succeeded him; specifically, Epicurus designates gradations of pleasure, and developing the ability to opt for ‘higher’, ‘civilised’ pleasures like friendship, for example, is a type of sublimation. Epicurus, however, regards the soul as corporeal; obviously, then, there is no possibility of transcending the corporeal, and no need to do so. This clearly divides Epicurean self-improvement from Platonic, Neoplatonist or Christian sublimation. Epicurean insistence that there is no survival of the soul after physical death, and that the gods, though they exist, have no effect on or interest in human life, deepens the division. On the other hand, Epicurus’ general statement that humans, free from anxiety and pain and embracing pleasure, can be as happy as the gods is simultaneously an expression of something that can be interpreted as sublimation and the rejection of a hierarchical chain of being. If humans can be as happy as gods when they embrace the higher gradations of pleasure, and if the physical senses are more reliable than rationality, the supposed superiority of human beings to other forms of life is called into question. As this research outlines so far, the body/soul duality and the hierarchical nature of life forms are the hallmarks of what developed into a consistent worldview incorporating the notion of sublimation.

Though the plan of life that Epicurus proposes is in various ways different from the Platonic concept of sublimation, in practical terms it is not; it focuses on self-improvement and a rejection of the baser drives of human physical nature in order to attain a state that is similar

to that of the gods. However, the steadfast insistence of Epicurus upon the corporeal soul and the lack of survival after death, as well as his reliance on physical sensation rather than reason, drives a wedge between these two philosophical outlooks. An even more significant disparity lies in the fact that Epicurus insists that the life of pleasure is not difficult to achieve: he considers primitive societies to have been more fortunate, in that they have experienced fewer distractions and misconceptions separating them from truth and pleasure. Thus, another basic tenet of the Platonic philosophies is reversed; evolution and progress lead one *away* from pleasure and enlightenment. In the end, if a concept of sublimation truly exists in this worldview, it is one that is utterly different from the Platonic or Christian ideals, and the appearance of facile similarities is deceptive.

3.3.2 The Sceptics

Scepticism is cerebral rather than spiritual. Its goal seems to be the discrediting of all facets of human knowledge. This gives Scepticism a rebellious flavour. Rational thought and dialectic methods can be weapons against any form of knowledge or belief. The connection with sublimation is tenuous. Sublimation depends on duality, and the rejection of one type of reality for another; Scepticism conforms to this view even less than Epicureanism or Stoicism. In Scepticism, the only duality is that which exists between illusory knowledge and the person dispelling the illusion. The philosophy is incompatible with sublimation. The two are in opposition. The analysis is complemented by the fact that a concern about virtue and ethics is absent from Scepticism.

3.3.3 Stoicism

It can be observed that Stoicism as a system both is and is not resonant with the concept of sublimation. On the one hand, this is a system of thought and living that venerates a god and creator, and advocates the sublimation of baser emotions and passions so that a person may live in adherence with God's law and God's nature—adherence to the extent that a dignified and honourable death is preferable to a life that is inconsistent with the Godhead's natural law.⁹⁶ On the other hand, the ultimate aim of Stoicism is a happy and harmonious existence.

⁹⁶ 'Natural law' is intimately connected with the Stoic concept of an immanent god. This is, perhaps, the key difference between Stoicism and Epicureanism, and it is also the reason why certain elements of Stoicism were attractive enough to the Christians to be incorporated into Christian theology, in some cases wholesale. The Stoic concept of God is that of *logos*. Logos

While the senses are subordinate to reason, as in Plato, there is little or no suggestion that the material world ought to be rejected or reviled.

In *Therapy of Desire*, Nussbaum openly favours Stoicism (above Epicureanism and Scepticism) as a useful and valid therapeutic philosophy. She comments that, “I believe that [the Stoics] have more adequate answers than do the other schools ... the Stoics have a high respect for each person’s active practical reasoning” (Nussbaum, 1996:317). She favours the Stoic analysis of emotions and their function in the human psyche. Nussbaum notes that the Stoic view of the origin of emotions is unusual. They are not a faculty of the soul, but internal reactions to external stimuli, and this lays out the path for moving beyond emotion. One must concentrate on cultivating the ability to ignore these external stimuli, concentrating instead on reason and the ways it reflects natural law. Many of the Stoic teachings focus on ignoring external stimuli to avoid reacting in an emotional manner. External factors are random and beyond a person’s control. A person’s reaction to externals is all that can be controlled. In a case where an emotional reaction cannot be avoided, the aim is to disregard it.

Removing desire and concentrating instead on one’s own will is tantamount to empowerment; to seek fulfillment by other means is futile, and the notion that human beings are controlled by anything other than individual will is an illusion. Epictetus writes:

In a word, neither death, nor exile, nor pain, nor anything of this kind, is the real cause of our doing or not doing any action, but our opinions and the decisions of our will [Long].⁹⁷

Without the framework of Stoic philosophy, this might imply a paradox; Epictetus specifies that not everything is within one’s power, but also states that the individual has the ultimate control. The resolution of the paradox lies in an implicit duality, though it does not correspond exactly with the familiar body/soul duality.

creates everything, and as everything stems from Logos and is a part of it, there is also an inherent harmony in all things. Therefore, when Stoic philosophers advocate following natural law, they are suggesting that people be aware of and follow a system that is completely resonant with human nature.

⁹⁷ *Discourses*, 1:11, 83–84. καὶ ἀπλῶς οὔτε θάνατος οὔτε φυγὴ οὔτε πόνος οὔτε ἄλλο τι τῶν τοιούτων αἰτίον ἐστὶ τοῦ πράττειν τι ἢ μὴ πράττειν ἡμᾶς, ἀλλ’ ὑπολήψεις καὶ δόγματα.

Perhaps the most significant way in which Stoicism differs from Platonic/Christian thought is that it is primarily concerned with the happiness of the individual. It is wise to ignore external circumstances and the emotions that they engender. A clear link is established between the desirable course of action and a godhead. God's nature defines that of the universe, so it is counterproductive and painful for humans to follow any other. "Where is the good? In the will. Where is the evil? In the will. Where is neither of them? In those things which are independent of the will" [Long].⁹⁸

By the same token, there is an assertion in Stoicism that the human being is master of his or her life and destiny—and herein is a subtle divergence between this viewpoint and that of Christianity, which insists upon the mastery of God. The contradiction is subtle, in that God is allied with self-mastery in the Stoic view, and according to Christianity, no liberation can occur except through God. However, it is the supremacy of and emphasis upon human autonomy that distinguishes the Stoic viewpoint. It is for this reason that suicide was acceptable to the Stoics, and in some cases it was considered the most rational and dignified response to an oppressive set of external circumstances. From various angles scholars have consistently argued that the early Christians accepted a variation of this Stoic feature in the form of martyrdom, where an individual Christian is willing to die—but not by one's own hand, and only in defence of a particular aspect of one's autonomy—for the right to worship one's god as one chooses. Catherine Edwards (2007:209) specifically links martyrdom to prevailing Roman ideas on suicide and comments on its continuities with existing Stoic cultural scripts, notably the death of Cato, and Nicola Denzey (2010:192), in a detailed account of the phenomenon and its scholarship underlines this: "Again and again, Christians looked not just to earlier Christians to set examples of 'right behavior,' but to the virtuous examples of Stoic martyrs." This linkage or blending of ideas is easy to understand because, as Everett Ferguson (1993:368) has commented memorably, "everything Stoicism had to say became common property."

An example of this apparent commonality is the general Stoic principle that anything that is created in nature is good, exemplified by the famous dictum of Epictetus, "I am formed by

⁹⁸ *Discourses*, 2:16, 1–2. Ποῦ τὸ ἀγαθόν; Ἐν προαιρέσει. Ποῦ τὸ κακόν; Ἐν προαιρέσει. Ποῦ τὸ οὐδέτερον; Ἐν τοῖς ἀπροαιρέτοις...

nature for my own good: I am not formed for my own evil.”⁹⁹ This underscores the principle that there could be no rejection of the material or corporeal world in Stoicism, given that these are manifestations of nature and therefore of God. Few Christians would argue with that but would not necessarily arrive at the conclusion that a principal duality is not between the spiritual and the corporeal, but between those things that can be controlled by the will and those that cannot. Ferguson (1993:368) observes:

Whatever the similarities in Christian and Stoical ethical thought and household maxims, these instructions are placed in such a fundamentally different worldview so as to give them a different significance ... for Stoicism ... the goal for humanity is self-liberation, and this goal is attainable. It did not know the redemptive love of a merciful god.

The intentional submission of the Christian martyr to death and suffering illustrates this perfectly. Both Stoic and Christian philosophers shared a framework of ideals about giving witness like Socrates to a type of liberation in death but the Christian martyr’s confidence in the salvation of redemptive love has no correspondence with, as Paul-Louis Landsberg has put it, the “frigid heroism of the ancient world” (Landsberg, 2015).

3.3.3.1 *Marcus Aurelius*

In the writings of Marcus Aurelius, the body/soul duality becomes more evident, but only insofar as he makes specific reference to the soul as the core of identity, which need not be influenced by external circumstances: “Outward things cannot touch the soul, not in the least degree; nor have they admission to the soul, nor can they turn or move the soul; but the soul turns and moves itself alone” [Hays].¹⁰⁰ On other occasions, Marcus Aurelius refers to this inviolable entity as τὸ ἡγεμονικόν, sometimes translated as ‘ruling faculty’ or ‘Mind’; if he is equating one with the other, that is not without precedent, as Greek philosophers frequently

⁹⁹ *Discourses*, 3:24, 83: ἐγὼ πρὸς τὰ ἀγαθὰ τὰ ἐμαυτοῦ πέφυκα, πρὸς κακὰ οὐ πέφυκα.

equated the two. The mind (soul) is free from any type of external influence except if, presumably through error, an individual does not choose to embrace that freedom: "The mind in itself wants nothing, unless it creates a want for itself; therefore it is both free from perturbation and unimpeded, if it does not perturb and impede itself" [Hays].¹⁰¹

The implication is that there is individual control over any response to the external circumstances that produce perturbation. Presumably, responding to these circumstances shows that emotion, an 'error' of the mind, has been allowed to interfere with one's equanimity (Ackeren, 2012:471), although not responding to these stimuli appears, in some cases, to be a simple matter of discipline and discernment. The ultimate aim of study and meditation was freedom; a direct expression of this concept of freedom and how it could be attained is described by Marcus Aurelius as follows:

Begin the morning by saying to thyself, I shall meet with the busybody, the ungrateful, arrogant, deceitful, envious, unsocial. All these things happen to them by reason of their ignorance of what is good and evil... I can neither be injured by any of them, for no one can fix on me what is ugly, nor can I be angry with my kinsman, nor hate him. For we are made for co-operation [Long].¹⁰²

The similarity between this teaching and Christian concepts of charity and forbearance seems evident, but here again the focus is quite different: there may be disinterested benevolence in this proposal but the real goal is individual happiness for the Stoic, not

¹⁰⁰ *Meditations*, 5:19, 1–4. Τὰ πράγματα αὐτὰ οὐδ' ὅπωςτιοῦν ψυχῆς ἄπτεται οὐδὲ ἔχει εἴσοδον πρὸς ψυχὴν οὐδὲ τρέψαι οὐδὲ κινῆσαι ψυχὴν δύναται, τρέπει δὲ καὶ κινεῖ αὐτὴ ἑαυτὴν μόνη...

¹⁰¹ *Meditations*, 7:16, 8–10. ἀπροσδεές ἐστιν ὅσον ἐφ' ἑαυτῷ τὸ ἡγεμονικόν, ἐὰν μὴ ἑαυτῷ ἔνδειαν ποιῇ· κατὰ ταῦτα δὲ καὶ ἀτάραχον καὶ ἀνεμπόδιτον, ἐὰν μὴ ἑαυτὸ ταράσσει καὶ ἐμποδίζει. The reference to *ταραχή* made in this passage is common; 'perturbation' is the word most frequently used to describe a state of mind in which the harmony of a life lived in accordance with natural law is breached.

¹⁰² *Meditations*, 2:1, 1–6. Ἐωθεν προλέγειν ἑαυτῷ συντεύξομαι περιέργῳ, ἀχαρίστῳ, ὑβριστῇ, δολερῷ, βασκάνῳ, ἀκοινωνήτῳ· πάντα ταῦτα συμβέβηκεν ἐκείνοις παρὰ τὴν ἀγνοίαν τῶν ἀγαθῶν καὶ κακῶν ... οὔτε βλαβῆναι ὑπὸ τινος αὐτῶν δύναμαι· αἰσχροῦ γὰρ με οὐδεὶς περιβαλεῖ· οὔτε ὀργίζεσθαι τῷ συγγενεῖ δύναμαι οὔτε ἀπέχθεσθαι αὐτῷ. γεγόναμεν γὰρ πρὸς συνεργίαν.

sanctity. However, for Christians, members of a mystical body whose head was Christ, benevolence had a different character. Ferguson (2003:369) writes:

Christians, ideally, act benevolently not merely in fulfilment of the obligation of a common kinship in the universe or even in God, but because they have learned self-sacrifice and active love from God in Christ. Self-respect, not love, was Stoicism's driving force.

With this Stoic equanimity comes, also, individual responsibility: because humans have control over how they are affected by external circumstances, it is also true that nothing external can be blamed for one's unhappiness or lack of equanimity:

If you are distressed by any external thing, it is not this thing which disturbs you, but your own judgment about it. And it is in your power to wipe out that judgment now [Long].¹⁰³

The philosophy sets out to provide ultimate empowerment, and the price is ultimate responsibility. Marcus Aurelius insists upon the power of the individual, and the connection between the individual and nature: "Nothing happens to any man which he is not framed by nature to bear" [Long].¹⁰⁴ Here as elsewhere, the parallel between the Stoic concept of nature (sometimes called simply the Universe) and the Christian God suggests a strong analogy even as the basic conception of life is very different. Marcus Aurelius addresses nature or the universe as a god of sorts directly:

Everything is right for me, which is right for you, O Universe. Nothing for me is too early or too late, which comes in due time for you. Everything is

¹⁰³ *Meditations*, 8:47, 1–2. Εἰ μὲν διὰ τι τῶν ἐκτὸς λυπῇ, οὐκ ἐκεῖνό σοι ἐνοχλεῖ, ἀλλὰ τὸ σὸν περὶ αὐτοῦ κρίμα, τοῦτο δὲ ἤδη ἐξαλειψαὶ ἐπὶ σοί ἐστιν.

¹⁰⁴ *Meditations*, 5:18, 1. Οὐδὲν οὐδενὶ συμβαίνει ὃ οὐχὶ ἐκεῖνο πέφυκε φέρειν. Cf. "No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it" (1 Corinthians 10:13).

fruit to me which your seasons bring, O Nature. From you are all things,
in you are all things, to you all things return [Long].¹⁰⁵

For the most part, however, Stoic reflections upon the divine nature are free of personification, making the concept malleable. At the same time, this means that the manifestations of nature can be experienced directly, once the individual is attuned to them. Moreover, there is no breach or distinction between the universal nature and individual nature:

Let there be freedom from perturbation with respect to the things which come from external causes, and in actions whose cause lies in yourself, be just; that is, let impulse and action terminate in social acts, for this is according to your nature [Long].¹⁰⁶

This does not, however, preclude the need for a ‘reverent’ interaction with nature, both individual and universal. More than once, Marcus Aurelius refers to the need to ‘reverently’ (θεοσεβῶς) accept one’s position in the universe, accepting those circumstances that are beyond an individual’s control:

Everywhere and at all times it is in your power to accept reverently your present condition, to behave justly to those about you, and to exert your skill to control your thoughts, that nothing shall steal into them without being well examined [Long].¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁵ *Meditations*, 4:22, 1–3. Πᾶν μοι συναρμόζει ὃ σοὶ εὐάρμοστόν ἐστιν, ὧς κόσμος· οὐδέν μοι πρόωρον οὐδὲ ὄψιμον ὃ σοὶ εὐκαιρον. πᾶν μοι καρπὸς ὃ φέρουσιν αἱ σαὶ ὥραι, ὧς φύσις· ἐκ σοῦ πάντα, ἐν σοὶ πάντα, εἰς σέ πάντα. ἐκεῖνος μὲν φησιν·

¹⁰⁶ *Meditations*, 9:31, 1–3. Ἀταραξία μὲν περὶ τὰ ἀπὸ τῆς ἐκτὸς αἰτίας συμβαίνοντα, δικαιοσύνης δὲ ἐν τοῖς παρὰ τὴν ἐκ σοῦ αἰτίαν ἐνεργουμένοις· τούτέστιν, ὁρμὴ καὶ πρᾶξις καταλήγουσα ἐπ’ αὐτὸ τὸ κοινωνικῶς πρᾶξαι ὡς τοῦτό σοι κατὰ φύσιν ὄν.

¹⁰⁷ *Meditations*, 7:55, 1–3. Πανταχοῦ καὶ διηλεκῶς ἐπὶ σοὶ ἐστι καὶ τῇ παρούσῃ συμβάσει θεοσεβῶς εὐαρεστεῖν καὶ τοῖς παροῦσιν ἀνθρώποις κατὰ δικαιοσύνην προσφέρεσθαι καὶ τῇ <παρ>ούσῃ φαντασίᾳ ἐμφιλοτεχνεῖν, ἵνα μή τι ἀκατάληπτον παρεισρῇ.

The point, in short, is to serenely accept the circumstances that one has no hand in determining—those set out by natural law and by external circumstances—and to focus energy and concentration on an all-important inner sense of control.

3.3.3.2 *Seneca*

While Marcus Aurelius takes as his primary aim the acquisition of a calm and peaceful existence over which the individual has the ultimate control, Seneca makes plentiful reference to the connection between this frame of mind and virtue or nobility. There is no contradiction between a peaceful existence and virtuous action, the link between justice and happiness being one that had already been established by the early Stoics. What is noble and virtuous consists of behaviour that is in accordance with natural law. When, as sometimes occurred, the Stoics came into conflict with civic law, their understanding of natural law would invariably prevail, regardless of sanctions. Seneca's own life is an example of this. He does not take issue with his punishment, relying on the circumstances he could control—mostly his belief in his own virtue.¹⁰⁸ Perhaps because his social and his position in the imperial court see-sawed at the whim of the Roman emperors, Seneca echoes Epictetus in his assertion that nothing of this world (that is, material) can be possessed by humans, and that it should not be counted upon or bonded to. This appears to include the body, which, after all, is perishable. Therefore, Seneca (*De Providentia*, 5.8) writes: “nos laeti ad omnia et fortes cogitemus nihil perire de nostro.” Nothing material would appear to be ‘de nostro’; the soul only fits that description. It seems, therefore, that the body/soul duality, generally not specified by the earlier Stoics, nor by the Hellenistic philosophers generally, has appeared.

Stoic concepts of mind and body appear closer to sublimation in the Platonic/ Christian sense, though still with the following difference: sublimation of the body in favour of the soul is, above all, of benefit to the individual. There is no indication that material reality is “evil” or

¹⁰⁸ When considering Seneca's stoic equanimity in the face of his own execution (assuming that ‘suicide’ ordered by the emperor can be considered execution) the commonplace association is with Socrates' acceptance of death, as documented in the *Apology* and *Crito*. In the *Apology*, Socrates states that his death is really no punishment at all, as nothing bad can happen to a good man. Despite the many differences among Socratic, Platonic and Stoic worldviews, Socrates' acceptance of death is in keeping with Stoic ideals. One could stretch the association further to include the Christian martyrs (their connection with Stoicism has already been discussed) illustrating a smooth evolution of ideals, with Stoicism at the centre.

even further from God, only that the reasonable mind distinguishes between what truly and permanently belongs to the person and what does not. While virtue may consist of the human capacity to recognise and act upon such distinctions, that is by no means the same as asserting that the material world itself is evil, or that it should be rejected simply on the grounds that it is material. Rather, virtue is wisdom, based on reason, and its acquisition and practice is of great psychological value to individuals, not forgetting that psychological health, even more than virtue, is the Stoic's goal:

The soul should know whither it is going and whence it came, what is good for it and what is evil, what it seeks and what it avoids, and what is that Reason which distinguishes between the desirable and the undesirable, and thereby tames the madness of our desires and calms the violence of our fears [Gumere].¹⁰⁹

Finally, like the other Stoics, Seneca (*Epistles*, 66.32) asserts the dominant position of reason as humankind's most reliable and therefore virtuous faculty: "nihil enim aliud est virtus quam recta ratio." In this way, the Stoics insist upon the individual capacity to distinguish what is reasonable and virtuous; the individual does not subscribe to a set of rules governing behaviour and thought, but rather learns to govern his own through reason. This is, perhaps, why meditation (being a way in which the individual can experience his or her own mind free from external distractions) plays an important role in Stoicism.

Seneca's life and work demonstrate the growing similarity between Stoic and Christian ethics and beliefs. The written correspondence of Seneca, the 'humanist saint' with St Paul—compelling forgeries, apparently, like the Hitler Diaries published by *Stern* in the 1980s—was convincing enough for Jerome and Augustine (*De Viris Illustribus* 12; *Epistle 153.4 Ad Macedonium*). Jerome, in particular, warmly endorsed the quasi-Christian fortitude of Seneca's life and death. Paul Berry (1999) has written an account of all this. Runar Thorsteinsson (2010:15) looked more specifically at the strong influence of Stoicism in the ethical advice for life in Christian community proposed by Paul, particularly in Romans 12—

¹⁰⁹ *Epistles*, 82. 6. (cognitio)... Sciat quo iturus sit, unde ortus, quod illi bonum, quod malum sit, quid petat, quid evitet, quae sit illa ratio quae adpetenda ac fugienda discernat, qua cupiditatum mansuescit insania, timorum saexitia conpescitur.

15. Paul's philosophical contemporaries were Stoic,¹¹⁰ and Thorsteinsson (2010:22–23) argues that Paul applies fundamental elements of Stoic ethics in his Christology, modifying Stoic terminology only very slightly. A critical example is Paul's λογικός, describing a Christian's relationship with God, which corresponds (within a different worldview) with the Stoics' adjectival noun λογικοί or humans possessing reason, and with God as λόγος. Thorsteinsson advances similar parallels or correspondences with Pauline concepts like worship. Seneca and Paul stress the transformative power in proper worship; for both Seneca and Paul, proper worship means striving to follow and imitate God, who epitomises goodness, but for Paul this begins with a spiritual transformation that takes place through the application of grace. Thorsteinsson consistently demonstrates that the terminology and metaphors employed by Paul and Seneca are much the same, whether they are discussing key human virtues, intrinsic human dignity and equality, community and love of one's neighbour, self-control and self-mastery. In respect of the latter category Thorsteinsson (2010:26) argues that Romans 12:1–6 corresponds directly with Stoic views of *sophrosyne*.

3.3.4 Summation

Regarding the development of early Christian thought, Epicureanism and Scepticism arguably have limited importance except as a counterpoint. In Platonic and in Christian thought, there is a trend towards polarisation between body and soul, and between pleasure and virtue. These are, to a great extent, the distinctions that create those philosophies, but Epicurus negates them by asserting that the soul is corporeal, virtue can be achieved through pursuing pleasure, and that the gods have little interest in or impact upon human happiness. Sublimation has no especial relevance or purpose in Epicureanism and none whatsoever in the world of the Sceptics.

Stoicism is very different. Interestingly, as its focus shifts finely from individual happiness to ethics or right action, its association with sublimation becomes more definite and distinct. The rejection of the material world, as outlined by the Stoics, may be much more to do with its fickle nature than with any notion of inherent evil; nevertheless, the conclusion is the same: everything that is truly valuable resides in the soul. The goal of personal happiness and peace exists, but the fact that life itself may need to be given up to attain it is not viewed as implying

¹¹⁰ Specifically, Seneca (c. 1–65 C.E.), Musonius Rufus (c. 25–100 C.E.), and Epictetus (c. 55–135 C.E.).

a paradox. Finally, although the concept of an idealised and transcendent non-physical reality (like the Platonic Forms, the Christian God or the Neoplatonist One) is absent from Stoicism, the belief in a universal natural law, and a system of ethics intimately allied with it, is often personified and idealised to the point that Stoicism comes to bear a resemblance to theism (even to monotheism). The long evolution of this philosophy is subtle; there are not, at first glance, many obvious differences between the beliefs and practices of the early Stoics and the later ones. Instead, what seems to have occurred is a delicate shift in focus. While Stoicism and Scepticism may have shared a common origin, and while Stoicism, like the other Hellenistic philosophies, began as a ‘therapeutic’ practice, the conclusion of the later Stoics that virtue is tantamount to freedom, and that it is necessarily aligned with a universal law that permeates all creation, gives it a close parallelism to Platonic and Christian beliefs. Troels Engberg-Pedersen (2010:4–8) describes the interplay and absorption of Stoicism with Platonism. Additionally, in their high regard for grounding gratification in constructive behaviour and sublimation of primitive impulses, Stoic ideals and practices could be accommodated in a developing Christian ethical vision.

The fact that Stoicism is less resonant with the later development of Western thought speaks to the manner in which Christian ideals eventually developed. It has often been stated that all Western thought, up until the modern era, was essentially Platonic, given the incorporation of Platonic concepts in Christianity (Whitehead, 1929:39). By contrast, it cannot be said that all Western thought is essentially Stoic. The development of early Christian thought tells much of the story; though Stoic ethics may have been instrumental in forming its early identity, concepts that are essentially Platonic took precedence in the end (Boys-Stones, 2001:v).

3.4 NEOPLATONISM

Neoplatonism adjusts and elaborates key aspects of Platonic thought, in particular those aspects concerned with the soul’s transcendence and spiritual development. The historical context of Neoplatonism is that of the heterodox and cosmopolitan later Roman Empire.¹¹¹

¹¹¹ That is from the period of Plotinus’ life and teachings (204–270 AD) ending with the closing of the Platonic Academy by Justinian in 529 AD. Much of this discussion draws on Professor Andrew Smith’s *Philosophy in Late Antiquity*, Professor Emanuele Severino’s *La filosofia dai Greci al Nostro Tempo*, the work of Professor John Dillon and Brian Arkins’ *Builders of my Soul*; the latter is a thematic consideration of W.B. Yeats’s subject matter which considers the central features of Neoplatonism in chapter II.

The varied body of thought that evolved had a syncretic quality, accommodating an array of existential ideas whose origins lay outside the Platonic academy. Nonetheless, it also had a certain internal coherence, undoubtedly due to the influence of key figures such as (most notably) Plotinus.

Plotinus is a central and defining figure of Neoplatonism and a summary of Plotinian ideas provides a serviceable overview of the concepts put forward by the Neoplatonists in general. The cardinal element of the Neoplatonist worldview is that good and life emanate from one source, which Plotinus called “The One”, and which was interpreted by the Christians as a monotheistic god despite several key inconsistencies among the various Neoplatonist and Christian worldviews. As The One is the source of good, evil is defined as the absence of good, much as darkness is the absence of light. This is a concept that had a great influence on early Christian theology, most notably through St Augustine, who adopted the idea, substituting the Christian God for The One of Neoplatonism.

The notion of sublimation as it has been outlined so far is more resonant with the notion of evil as the absence of good than with evil as an independent entity. While in the former instance the action required is positive—seeking the good and bringing oneself closer to it—in the latter case, the action required includes battling, as it were, a significant adversary. Early Christianity reflected the two viewpoints. Augustine made the connection with the former category (*Enchiridion*, 11) and Anthony Meredith (2012:122) argues that Plotinus provided Augustine with the intellectual scaffolding to develop this concept. Clement, however, writing to the Christian community in Corinth (51.1) speaks of an *antikeimenos* (in this context a personification of the devil) who has tempted the community to division.

The Neoplatonic concept of The One sets the stage for many other pervasive concepts in early Christian theology, including the Chain of Being, the rejection of the physical, and the eternal nature of the spiritual. Middle Eastern and Eastern origin religions felt the influence of Neoplatonism,¹¹² but its imprint is particularly distinct in Christianity.

¹¹² Al Farabi and Ibn-Sina, for example; and see R. Baine Harris’s 1981 *Neoplatonism and Indian Thought: Matter in Plotinus and Samkara* (New York: SUNY Press).

3.4.1 Plotinus

The principal concepts of Platonism as defined by Plotinus are cosmological as well as philosophical, accordant, in a sense, with those of the Presocratic philosophers. Plotinus appears to have concentrated on providing an explanation of right action, the place of humanity in the universe, and the interplay between the spiritual and physical, but he also offered a composite physical and metaphysical theory of the operation of the universe.

Plotinus is also credited with the concept of The One, which has much in common with the concept of an all-powerful monotheistic god, the principal difference being that The One is not personalised or anthropomorphised in any way. The concept has more in common with the principles of physics, though it is clearly metaphysical in nature. This melding of nature, philosophy and spirituality characterises the Neoplatonists as clearly as it does the other Hellenic and Hellenistic philosophers and (as will be discussed later) it is this precise framework of belief that provides a vehicle for the concept of sublimation. Here, sublimation is realised as a process of improvement or refinement, so it is important that the physical, metaphysical and spiritual exist as different gradations on a chain of being. As a result, the process of sublimation can be undertaken within the context of earthly existence. What Plotinus advocates is, ultimately, a rejection of the physical in order to gain a higher order of perfection. Much of Plotinus' written work is dedicated to providing a theoretical construct that supports the concept of sublimation, or perfecting one's being by moving closer to The One. This process of striving is simultaneously a process of sublimation.

Plotinus uses several analogies to describe emanation, the mechanism by which the energy of The One is spread throughout the universe. According to one such analogy, The One is a seed and the process of emanation is like the unfolding of a seed:

Every Kind must produce its next; it must unfold from some concentrated central principle as from a seed, and so advance to its term in the varied forms of sense... There is, besides, no principle that can prevent anything

from partaking, to the extent of its own individual receptivity, in the Nature of Good [MacKenna].¹¹³

Sublimation of the corporeal fits neatly into the framework provided here. The world of sense is the termination of the process, receiving the least proportion of the Good (which here seems roughly analogous to The One). Different things have different receptivity to the Good, so there is a hierarchy: things are more or less good according to receptivity and the degree to which they share in it. There is no lack of Good; the fault lies in one's failure to receive or access it. Improvement, refinement and sublimation are therefore always possible.

The emanation of Good from The One is also, according to Plotinus, something that occurs consistently according to a well laid-out system, one which involves and engages the body/soul duality, and ultimately transcends it.¹¹⁴ In the *Enneads*, described accurately by Kieran McGroarty (McGroarty, n.d.:27) as “a handbook designed to help one make a mystical ascent ... to help one make contact with The One”, Plotinus outlines ‘divine hierarchies’ or ‘hypostases’, which can be defined as gradations of being, as follows:

¹¹³ *Enn.*, 4.8.6. 1-3 εἴπερ ἐκάστη φύσει τοῦτο ἔνεστι τὸ μετ’ αὐτὴν ποιεῖν καὶ ἐξελίττεσθαι οἷον σπέρματος ἔκ τινος ἀμεροῦς ἀρχῆς εἰς τέλος τὸ αἰσθητὸν ἰούσης... Οὐ γὰρ δὴ ἦν ὁ ἐκώλυεν ὁτιοῦν ἄμοιρον εἶναι φύσεως ἀγαθοῦ, καθόσον ἕκαστον οἷόν τ’ ἦν μεταλαμβάνειν.

Ludovic Guymonat (1977:281) notes that emanation is not a creative process in the Christian/Hebrew sense but a process which unfolds outside time.

¹¹⁴ Guymonat (1977, 282): “L’uomo che partecipa del mundo naturale ha tuttavia la possibilità di rialire ai gradi superiori dell’essere; è come un esule, cui è concessa la via del ritorno. La sua ascesa lo porterà a identificarsi con la luce divina.”

With regard to the existence that is supremely perfect [i.e., The One], we must say it only produces the very greatest of the things that are found below it. But that which after it is the most perfect, the second principle, Intelligence (Nous). Intelligence contemplates the One and needs nothing but it. But the One has no need of Intelligence [i.e., being the Absolute Principle, it is totally self-sufficient]. The One which is superior to Intelligence produces Intelligence which is the best existence after the One, since it is superior to all other beings. The (World-) Soul is the Word (Logos) and a phase of the activity of Intelligence just as Intelligence is the logos and a phase of the activity of the One. But the logos of the Soul is obscure, being only an image of Intelligence. The Soul therefore directs herself to Intelligence, just as the latter, to be Intelligence, must contemplate the One [MacKenna].¹¹⁵

The basis of the concept of emanation is contained within this explanation of hypostases. Each element of this chain looks to the one above it, each being characterised by a desire for that higher stage. Several aspects of hypostases are noteworthy regarding the relationship between Plotinus' ideas and sublimation. First, the superior position that the Intelligence takes in this system or chain of being is significant, and appears to have been based on Plato.¹¹⁶ The Intelligence referred to here is a high-level, abstract intelligence (Plato might say it was based on contemplation of the Forms) that is so close to The One that it desires or requires nothing more. The distinction between The One and Nous that is made in the passage quoted above is enlightening. The One and Nous are close enough to each another so that it might, from a human perspective, engender confusion, particularly given the fact that The One is not usually

¹¹⁵ *Enn.*, 5.1.6. 40–49. Τί οὖν χρή περὶ τοῦ τελειο-τάτου λέγειν; Μηδὲν ἀπ' αὐτοῦ ἢ τὰ μέγιστα μετ' αὐτόν. (40) Μέγιστον δὲ μετ' αὐτόν νοῦς καὶ δεύτερον· καὶ γὰρ ὁρᾷ ὁ νοῦς ἐκείνον καὶ δεῖται αὐτοῦ μόνου· ἐκείνος δὲ τούτου οὐδέν· καὶ τὸ γεννώμενον ἀπὸ κρείττονος νοῦ νοῦν εἶναι, καὶ κρείττων ἀπάντων νοῦς, ὅτι τᾶλλα μετ' αὐτόν· οἷον καὶ ἡ ψυχὴ λόγος νοῦ καὶ ἐνέργεια τις, ὥσπερ αὐτὸς ἐκείνου. (45) Ἀλλὰ ψυχῆς μὲν ἀμυδρὸς ὁ λόγος—ὡς γὰρ εἶδωλον νοῦ—ταύτη καὶ εἰς νοῦν βλέπειν δεῖ· νοῦς δὲ ὡσαύτως πρὸς ἐκείνον, ἵνα ἦ νοῦς.

¹¹⁶ Although Plato refers to 'reason' rather than 'intelligence' as a transcendent human quality that has the ability to lead one beyond the limitations imposed by the senses, the use of the terms suggests that the concepts are very similar if not identical.

experienced directly from the viewpoint of earthly existence. But one means of distinguishing between the Nous and The One is simple and infallible: The One is that which absolutely has no need for anything else, while the Nous is characterised by its desire for The One.

Nous or Intelligence (alternatively referred to as Intellect or ‘Intellection’) is also called the Divine Mind,¹¹⁷ a perfected version of the individual mind that exists in all people. As both Plato and Plotinus outline, the individual human intelligence is a type of instrument that can allow one access to a portion of the Divine Mind. According to Plotinus, it is an essential intermediary step in accession to The One; in fact, most of the chain of being experiences The One through the Nous rather than directly. The distinction between the individual and the collective, set out in the passage quoted, is also discussed regarding Soul. As mentioned previously, it is noteworthy that the Soul is positioned below the Intelligence, only one stage above the inferior world of the senses—a fact which demonstrates that the Plotinian theory of hypostases has more in common with Platonic concepts than with Christian theology, despite its influence on the latter.

Plotinus observes that emotions, drives, virtues and vices must either be seated in the soul, or in the soul employing the body, or in some third entity deriving from both (*Enn.*,1,1.1). Plotinus goes on to speculate about the nature of this ‘third entity’, deducing that it must be either a blend of body and soul, or a “distinct form” that comes about because of the blending, but that is, in some way, greater than or at least distinct from the sum of its parts. This is, in essence, a summarisation and explanation of the human experience, wherein clearly certain elements transcend the body and the physical—but exactly how this occurs is less clear. Through a method of inquiry and deduction, Plotinus establishes the probable presence of an Essential Soul, which is distinct from the individual soul, though inextricably connected to it (*Enn.*,1,1.1). The Essential Soul is uninfluenced by earthly interactions or activities, but is constant and unchanging. The association between body and soul is intimate, but Plotinus specifies that it does not follow that the Essential Soul must share the body’s experiences: individuals do not themselves feel all the experiences of the tools with which they are

¹¹⁷ Andrews (2004:27) writes: “The Greek term *Nous* defies exact translation into English. The German *Geist* gives a more rounded impression than the English ‘mind’ or ‘intellect’ which suggest more the notion of discursive reason, which Plotinus locates at a lower level than the intuitive thought characteristic of what we will translate as ‘intellect’... Intellect is not simply an activity, it is a real existent...”

working (*Enn.*,1,1.3). The concept that the soul uses the body as a tool has already been established, along with the superiority of the soul. Earthly existence is, however, given meaning in that it is a unique product of the body/soul junction. But elsewhere Plotinus makes it clear, on both a personal and a theoretical level, that body and soul are not designed to be inseparable:

Often I have woken to myself out of the body, become detached from all else and entered into myself; and I have seen beauty of surpassing greatness, and have felt assured that then especially I belonged to the higher reality, engaged in the noblest life and identified with the Divine [MacKenna].¹¹⁸

If the human duality consists of body and soul, it is the soul which serves as the most immediate and intimate link with the divine. As will be noted later in this discussion, the soul itself is characterised by a desire or yearning to draw closer to the Good or The One.

Soul, according to this account, appears to be the non-physical principle that is an ever-present enliverer of all things, without which nothing could exist. Aside from serving as a connection to The One, the soul in humans also connects humans to everything else in the universe. Thus there is a lateral connection as well as the potential for sublimation, and a collective consciousness as well as the potential for a movement upward toward The One.

Soul's relationship to The One is perhaps the reason why Plotinus specifies that Soul is never fragmented or divided, despite its presence in multitudes of disparate things and beings. This is another way in which Soul is distinct from the body and the material world; it is only in the material world that fragmentation and separation can exist. The soul, therefore, is whole despite the fact that it is present in such a multitude of manifestations:

¹¹⁸ *Enn.*, 4.8.1. 1–6. Πολλάκις ἐγειρόμενος εἰς ἑμαυτὸν ἐκ τοῦ σώματος καὶ γινόμενος τῶν μὲν ἄλλων ἔξω, ἑμαυτοῦ δὲ εἴσω, θαυμαστὸν ἡλίκον ὄρων κάλλος, καὶ τῆς κρείττονος μοίρας πιστεύσας τότε μάλιστα εἶναι, ζῶν τε ἀρίστην ἐνεργήσας καὶ τῷ θείῳ εἰς ταὐτὸν γεγεννημένος.

Soul in its unity is not extended by fragmentation into bodies, but is entirely present where it is present, and omnipresent and undivided throughout the universe [MacKenna].¹¹⁹

Notably, this is true despite the fact that the individual soul also exists in humans. It is, therefore, insufficient to say that the individual soul remains connected to the universal or Essential Soul. Rather, if a distinction can be made between the individual and universal souls (remembering Plotinus' earlier suggestion that the former may be the result of a blending of body and soul), it remains true that the individual soul is the universal, rather than merely being connected to the universal. Soul itself is not the end of the process of sublimation that can be discerned in Plotinus' writing; more accurately, it is an intermediate point, a point of junction between the corporeal and the Intelligence or Divine Mind, which is itself much closer to the source of all things. Having Being, which emanates from The One as its unifying source, the entire universe is regarded as living, animated, as it were, by the universal or Essential Soul:

This universe is a single living being embracing all living beings within it, and possessing a single Soul that permeates all its parts to the degree of their participation in it. Every part of this sensible universe is fully participant in its material aspect, and in respect of soul, in the degree to which it shares in the World Soul [MacKenna].¹²⁰

Moreover, in view of the unification that occurs because of the presence of a shared World Soul, the universe is One much as the One itself is, despite the appearance of distance and disparity. This also indicates that the appearance of disparity, distance and difference—which are observed dependent upon the senses—is infinitely less reliable than the inner orientation that discerns the presence of the Soul. Regarding the unity of all things, Plotinus writes:

¹¹⁹ *Enn.*, 4.4.12. 20–23: τί δεῖ ἀπιστεῖν, εἰ ψυχὴ μὴ μία τέταται συμμεριζομένη, ἀλλὰ πανταχοῦ οὗ ἂν παρῇ πάρεστι καὶ ἔστι πανταχοῦ τοῦ παντός οὐ μεμερισμένη.

¹²⁰ *Enn.*, 4.4.32. 4–9: Πρῶτον τοίνυν θετέον ζῶον ἐν πάντα τὰ ζῶα τὰ ἐντὸς αὐτοῦ περιέχον τόδε τὸ πᾶν εἶναι, (5) ψυχὴν μίαν ἔχον εἰς πάντα αὐτοῦ μέρη, καθόσον ἐστὶν ἕκαστον αὐτοῦ μέρος· μέρος δὲ ἕκαστόν ἐστι τὸ ἐν τῷ παντὶ ἰσητῷ, κατὰ μὲν τὸ σῶμα καὶ πάντα, ὅσον δὲ καὶ ψυχῆς τοῦ παντός μετέχει, κατὰ τοσοῦτον καὶ ταύτη·

A sympathy pervades this single universe, like a single living creature, and the distant is near... Like parts lie not in contact but separated, with other parts between, yet by their likeness they feel sympathy ... and in a living and unified being there is no part so remote as not to be near, through the very nature that binds the living unity in sympathy [MacKenna].¹²¹

It follows, moreover, that the movement toward sublimation is, to a degree, a natural impulse, in that “Every begotten being longs for the being that begot it and loves it.”¹²² This reference to longing is present elsewhere. The One is the only level of being that does not experience longing or want, because there is nothing that it could possibly want. Nothing is lacking from it. The preceding passage, therefore, reinforces the idea that The One begets Being—everything else in the universe—and that a return to The One is, in part, the result of a natural and universal longing.

On the other hand, Plotinus does not imply that sublimation or a return to The One is easy, because it requires a rejection of the physical world, which is both an attraction and a distraction. Matter is ‘evil’, though only according to the definition established previously: ‘evil’ is like darkness, consisting of an absence or lack of The One; it is not an active or independently conceived impulse toward wrongdoing. Plotinus conceived of matter (and the corporeal, or the world of the senses) as evil, because it is the lowest level of hypostases, and the absence of what is essential. Plotinus writes that if evil exists, it exists in non-being: such is the whole world of sense and all experience of the senses (*Enn.*, 1,8.3). This also means that, because the senses show a world that appears to be real, the senses are inherently misleading. Plotinus refers to matter and observation of it as “an image and phantom of corporeal mass (εἶδωλον καὶ φάντασμα ὄγκου) ... Images of intelligible beings pass in and out of it (Τὰ δὲ εἰσιόντα καὶ ἐξιόντα τῶν ὄντων μμήματα) ... without cutting, as if through water, or like shapes floating through the void (δίεισιν οὐ τέμνοντα οἷον δι’ ὕδατος ἢ εἴ τις ἐν τῷ λεγομένῳ κενῷ μορφᾷς οἷον εἰσπέμποι)” [MacKenna].¹²³ Elsewhere he reiterates this, referring to matter as the essence of evil, a mere shadow in relation to real Being (*Enn.*, 1,8.2).

¹²¹ *Enn.*, 4,4.32. 13–14; 20–21. Συμπαθεὶς δὴ πᾶν τοῦτο τὸ ἓν, καὶ ὡς ζῶον ἓν, καὶ τὸ πόρρω δὴ ἐγγύς... ζῶου τε ὄντος καὶ εἰς ἓν τελούντος οὐδὲν οὕτω πόρρω τόπῳ, ὡς μὴ ἐγγύς εἶναι τῇ τοῦ ἑνὸς ζῶου πρὸς τὸ συμπαθεῖν φύσει.

¹²² *Enn.*, 5.1.6. 50. Ποθεῖ δὲ πᾶν τὸ γεννησάν καὶ τοῦτο ἀγαπᾷ...

¹²³ *Enn.*, 3.6.7. 13; 27–28; 31–33.

The notion of matter as a ‘shadow’ is strongly reminiscent of Plato’s Cave Allegory; by focusing on the sensate experience, therefore, humans are eternally following shadows, prevented from ever experiencing true reality. Sense perception, therefore, is to be profoundly mistrusted. Moreover, the body/soul duality is reinforced here, in that sense perception is rooted in and allied with the body and the part of the individual soul that is defined by its blending with the body:

Sense-perception belongs to the sleeping soul, the part of the soul immersed in body; and the true awakening is a rising up, not with the body, but from the body.... To rise up to very truth is altogether to depart from bodies. Corporeality is contrary to soul and essentially opposed to soul.¹²⁴

The emphasis of Plotinus is not on eternal life following death (notably, he does not write with conviction of its existence, although the notion does appear consistent with his other concepts) but on the ‘purification’ of one’s being within the context of human life. The Plotinian concept of purification is similar to, and may even be the same as, sublimation. Purification takes place when one ceases to be distracted by physical reality, turning away from it, and embracing the spiritual within oneself. Moreover, as outlined below, purification (which is in turn tantamount to understanding, grasping and rejoining The One) consists of turning away from everything associated with earthly existence, including one’s own individual identity: “To this end, you must set free your soul from all outward things and turn wholly within yourself, with no more leaning to what lies outside” [MacKenna].¹²⁵

It is noteworthy that the action required is not turning toward The One but turning wholly inwards—ἐπιστραφῆναι πρὸς τὸ εἶσω πάντα. While individual identity becomes superfluous, a mere distraction, it is also true that communion with the eternal or divine takes place within

¹²⁴ *Enn.*, 3.6.6. 69–72; 74–75. Καὶ γὰρ τὸ τῆς αἰσθήσεως ψυχῆς ἐστὶν εὐδούσης· ὅσον γὰρ ἐν σώματι (70) ψυχῆς, τοῦτο εὐδεῖ· ἢ δ’ ἀληθινὴ ἐργήγορσις ἀληθινὴ ἀπὸ σώματος, οὐ μετὰ σώματος, ἀνάστασις ... ἢ δ’ ἀληθῆς ὅλως ἀπὸ τῶν σωμάτων, ἃ τῆς φύσεως ὄντα τῆς ἐναντίας ψυχῇ τὸ ἐναντίον εἰς οὐσίαν ἔχει (75).

¹²⁵ *Enn.*, 4.9.7, 16–18. Εἰ δὲ τοῦτο, πάντων τῶν ἔξω ἀφεμένην δεῖ ἐπιστραφῆναι πρὸς τὸ εἶσω πάντα, μὴ πρὸς τι τῶν ἔξω κεκλίσθαι...

each individual. For this to be true, it must also be the case that a portion of the divine resides within each individual, and this is consistent with Plotinus' description of the soul.

Once purification or sublimation is achieved, individuals do not merely understand the nature of The One; rather, they become The One or, even more accurately, they realise that they are The One. The distinction between the individual and his or her source of being is, Plotinus shows, as illusory as matter itself. The process of sublimation is, in part, a process of dispelling all illusions, and separation from the divine is one of these. In a sense, therefore, the act of understanding (through reason or intellect) the nature of the divine automatically serves as a link to it. On the other hand, Plotinus also implies that this intimate link always exists, and merely requires knowledge of it so that it can be experienced.

The union with The One that is the objective of sublimation is also explained (*Enn.*, 5.5.7–8) as a union with God. Again, this is accomplished by looking within oneself, not outward to the higher stage of hypostasis (which would, in turn, be reversion, and would create distinct forms rather than dispelling the idea of difference and diversity). In order to create diverse forms, it seems one looks beyond the self; in order to dispel the illusion of diversity and re-establish unity, one looks within.

Porphry's biography of Plotinus records the last words of Plotinus to his students: "Strive to bring back the god in yourselves to the God in the All" (πειρᾶσθαι τὸν ἐν ὑμῖν θεὸν ἀνάγειν πρὸς τὸ ἐν τῷ παντὶ θεῖον).¹²⁶ The simplicity of these words (in contrast to the complexity of much of Plotinus' teaching) is notable. It is also true that this entreaty is, in some ways, the perfect summation of Plotinus' teachings. The entreaty to 'bring back' (ἀνάγειν)¹²⁷ the god in oneself to the All implies, as is supported elsewhere in Plotinus, that all life originates from the same divine source, and that getting in touch with the divine in the individual allows one to rejoin the universal divine that is the source of all things. This is also the essence of sublimation as laid out by Plotinus. Sublimation consists of a connection with the individual divine, through a rejection of material reality. Once this is accomplished, it almost automatically unites humanity with The One, the ultimate and transcendent reality. There is, therefore, both a strong motivation and a seeming inevitability that is ascribed to this process.

¹²⁶ Porphyry, *Life of Plotinus*, 2. 26–27.

¹²⁷ MacKenna (Plotinus and MacKenna, 1969: ciii) translates "give back".

The material world is nothing more than a distraction, and the work of humans on earth is to overcome it, and to reconnect with the eternal through individual being.

3.4.2 Iamblichus¹²⁸

The concepts of Iamblichus extend beyond those of Plotinus, Porphyry and others in his application of Pythagorean number-symbolism to existing Neoplatonist concepts (O'Meara, 1981:30–53). In her introduction to the text of *De Mysteriis*, Emma Clarke (Iamblichus *et al.*, 2003:xxv) notes in his key extant text the thread of his distinctive influence through the scholastic tradition of Platonism. Of most interest to this research is the belief of Iamblichus that salvation (identifiable in many ways with sublimation) was achievable not through philosophical contemplation alone but also through the practice of 'theurgy' or 'divine-making', a set of symbolically-based rituals designed to allow the soul to return to the divine. While a minority of highly advanced individuals was deemed capable of reuniting with the divine on the basis of contemplation alone, according to Iamblichus, most people need to employ a series of physical symbols designed to retrace the divine through the intervening layers of being.¹²⁹ The result, and the objective of human life, is consistent with that of the other Neoplatonist philosophers: corporeal existence would be transcended, the soul would be freed from the body, and the divine would be reached and rejoined. Iamblichus, like Plotinus and others, based his theology and cosmology on the concept of The One through which all being is created. Divergence between Iamblichus' view and that of Plotinus happens where evil is the focus of discussion; where Plotinus (and most of the other Neoplatonists) regarded

¹²⁸ The study of Iamblichus' background and beliefs in this chapter draws a good deal on John Dillon's "Iamblichus of Chalcis" (*Austeig und Niedergang der Römischen Welt Geschichte und kultur Roms im Spiegel der neuen Forshung*, II 36.2 [1987]:862–90).

¹²⁹ Leonard George (1999) captures the mystic dynamism of theurgy and its attendant symbols: "Iamblichus taught that the hallowed repertoire of pagan spiritual practices held potent means of stirring awareness. These methods work because they aren't inventions of the limited mind, but come from the side of divinity. He took a word from the Chaldean Oracles to denote these means of divine self-remembrance: *theurgy*. This term means 'divine activity'. Iamblichus contrasted theurgy with *theology*, or 'divine words'—talking about the Erotic cosmos isn't the same as living it. The Greek philosopher Thales said 'all things are full of gods'. The universe is stocked with objects that point to the mystery of the One. Our souls too harbour such reminders, in the form of images. Iamblichus' favourite word for these sacred cues was *synthemata*, a Greek term that literally means 'tokens' or 'signals'. *Synthemata* are witnesses of the gods' presence. They act as mirrors in which the soul's sacred element can view its own divinity. Iamblichus prescribed the rites and meditations of pagan religion as means of guiding the soul's attention to the *synthemata* around and within it."

evil as the privation of good, Iamblichus regarded it as a principle accidentally created when the finite (the material world) comes into conflict with the infinite. These two ideas are not entirely incompatible, given that what Iamblichus refers to as the finite world is already characterised by an absence of the good; however, Iamblichus includes at least a suggestion of an independent form of evil. More specifically, he refers to “evil daemons”, which can assume the appearance of gods and good daemons: τῶν ὑποκρινομένων τὴν τῶν θεῶν καὶ τῶν ἀγαθῶν δαιμόνων παρουσίαν (4.7.190). The same, he says, applies to truth and falsehood, and education is required to avoid being led astray.

The concept of emanation as outlined by Plotinus is discernible in Iamblichus, though barely—it is obscured by the presence of a multitude of gods and daemons, possessing to various degrees a corporeal or divine nature. Therefore, although there are higher and middle genera of gods (4.2.181: “guardians of judgment”—τὰ δὲ μέσα γένῃ κρίσεως ἔφορα τυγχάνει equipped to instruct humans, there are also daemons who are without judgment and must be commanded by a higher consciousness¹³⁰ as inferior natures. It is necessary for humans to learn how to deal with these various gods and daemons, and that, in part, is the purpose of both theurgy and philosophical education. According to Iamblichus, there are gods and daemons through whom such a connection can be made—divinities which partake, somewhat, of the corporeal world. On the other hand, the vast majority of humans have nothing to gain from the gods who are “entirely exempt from all human generation.”¹³¹ On the versatility of various styles of divine interactions to suit varieties of human types, Iamblichus concludes:

For those who are governed by the nature of the universe ... and employ the powers of nature, these should embrace a mode of worship adapted to nature, and to the bodies that are moved by nature, and should choose for this purpose appropriate places, air, matter, the powers of matter, bodies, and the habits of bodies, qualities, and proper motions, the mutations of things in generation, and other things connected with these, both in other

¹³⁰ 4.2. 183. διάνοια translated by Clarke (2003:207) as having a more generalised sense: “something like consciousness”.

¹³¹ 5.17. 222. παρὰ τῶν ἐξηρημένων παντάπασι θεῶν πάσης ἀνθρωπίνης γενέσεως.

parts of piety and in that part of it which pertains to sacrifice. But those who live conformably to intellect alone, and to the life of intellect, and are liberated from the bonds of nature, these should exercise in all the parts of theurgy the intellectual and incorporeal mode of worship [Taylor].¹³²

The conclusion illustrates a significant feature of the writing of Iamblichus. His thought can be viewed within the context of Platonic and other Neoplatonist works.¹³³ It is to a large degree consistent with them; moreover, Iamblichus focuses on a salvation that is identifiable as sublimation. But much of his work remains an anomaly. This may be because the body/soul duality, which is often the basis for sublimation, is not overly emphasised in Iamblichus. The distinction and the value judgment attached to it still exist, to a degree, but it does not follow that the corporeal ought to necessarily be rejected so that sublimation or salvation can be attained. Iamblichus presents a worldview in which the corporeal has value, and may sometimes be more pure (or a more direct pathway to purity) than the spiritual. The soul is still detained in the body, but cannot always be freed by contemplation, reason or rejection of the corporeal.

3.4.3 Proclus

Coleridge found in the *Platonic Theology* of Proclus the “most beautiful and orderly development of the philosophy which endeavours to explain all things by an analysis of consciousness, and builds up a world in the mind out of materials furnished by the mind itself.”¹³⁴

¹³² 5.18. 224–230. Οἱ μὲν γὰρ ἐπιτροπενόμενοι κατὰ τὴν τῶν ὅλων φύσιν, καὶ αὐτοὶ κατὰ φύσιν τὴν οἰκείαν ἑαυτῶν ζῶντες δυνάμεσιν τε τῆς φύσεως χρώμενοι, τὴν θρησκείαν ἐπιτηδεύουσι τῇ φύσει πρόσφορον καὶ τοῖς κινουμένοις ὑπὸ τῆς φύσεως σώμασι, τόπους τε καὶ ἀέρας καὶ ὕλην καὶ δυνάμεις τῆς ὕλης, καὶ σώματα καὶ τὰς περὶ τοῖς σώμασιν ἕξεις καὶ ποιότητας, κινήσεις τε τὰς προσηκούσας καὶ μεταβολὰς τῶν ἐν γενέσει, καὶ τὰλλα τὰ ἐχόμενα τούτων ἐπιτηδεύοντες ἐν τε τοῖς ἄλλοις τῆς εὐσεβείας μορίοις καὶ δὴ καὶ ἐν τῷ θνηπολικῷ μέρει. Οἱ δὲ κατὰ νοῦν μόνον καὶ τὴν τοῦ νοῦ ζωὴν τὸν βίον διάγοντες, τῶν δὲ τῆς φύσεως δεσμῶν ἀπολυθέντες, νοερὸν καὶ ἀσώματον ἱερατικῆς θεσμὸν διαμελετῶσι περὶ πάντα τῆς θεουρψίας τὰ μέρη.

¹³³ Clarke notes (2003:257) the distinction made in 5.18 223–224 between the mass of mortals and the few enlightened ones, which is consistent with Platonic ideas. However, the proposal of Iamblichus quoted above does not limit participation in meaningful worship just to theurgists.

¹³⁴ *Memorials of Coleorton II* quoted in Dodds (1963:xxiii). E.R. Dodds’ survey of the philosophical influence of Proclus provides the quotation “which may be of interest to students of English Literature”.

There is a large religious dimension to the work of Proclus: his biography by Marinus records his opposition to Christianity as an advocate of paganism and religious universalism. Wildberg (n.d.:20) explains:

Perhaps the most endearing aspect of Proclus' religious personality is the fact that he considered himself as guardian of all cults, a "hierophant of the entire world" (VP 19)—with the exception of Christianity of course.

Specifically, Proclus thought all the mystery religions had a common objective, one that is in line with the Neoplatonist concept of emanation and transcendence beyond material reality. Proclus is often considered to be the last influential pagan philosopher, the last in a line of thinkers which had begun almost a thousand years earlier with the Presocratic philosophers, from whom, in turn, Socrates and Plato had derived, in part, their concepts. The reason he is considered 'the last' has more to do with significant cultural shifts, and with cultural perspective, than anything else. A radical decrement in the pagan belief system had already begun in the lifetime of Proclus and the Olympian theology embedded in his writings would be little more than a (vastly popular and ubiquitous) *leitmotiv* (not original to Proclus) in the culture of Europe.¹³⁵

Two of Proclus' works are relevant to the discussion at hand: *Platonic Theology*, mentioned above, which outlines, as the title implies, a version of Platonic concepts, and *Elements of Theology*, a comprehensive work that is singular regarding its structure. *Elements of Theology*'s 211 propositions, each laid out in a simple sentence and each followed by a proof, are all the basic Neoplatonist concepts, similar to those outlined by Plotinus, though elaborated upon. The system that Proclus presents is more complex than that of Plotinus, but overall the two are entirely congruent. The observations concerning sublimation that have been made regarding Plotinus' theory of The One and Emanation can, by and large, be applied to Proclus' view as well. However, as the latter system is more complex, additional observations can be made.

Proclus' chain of being, like that of Plotinus, begins with The One; moreover, The One has the same significance in the system of Proclus. The first set of propositions in *Elements of*

Theology concerns the nature of The One; the first proposition's opening statement is: Πᾶν πλῆθος μετέχει πῇ τοῦ ἑνός. The proof of this proposition consists of a complex assertion of unity in the universe. Unless it is accepted that there is an infinite number of completely disparate things—infinite to a degree impossible to conceive—it must be accepted that there is some universal substance that is present in all things.

Elements of Theology goes on to explore other aspects of metaphysical reality stemming from The One. Subsequent propositions deal with the unity that pervades all being—proposition 8 identifying The One with The Good, the “First Good” being “beyond all beings” (πρώτως ἀγαθὸν ἐπέκεινά ἐστι τῶν ὄντων) and “superior to all things which in any way participate of good” (Πάντων τῶν ὁπωσοῦν τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ μετεχόντων ἡγείται τὸ πρώτως ἀγαθόν). Proclus involves elements that are lower than The One in the process of sublimation, though he makes it clear that it is their relationship with and participation in The One that allows them to influence the system. Proclus refers to this system in the opening section of *Platonic Theology* as a ‘golden chain’ of which deity is one extreme, and body the other; proposition 209 of *Elements of Theology* states that the soul ascends the chain by shedding materiality. Material reality occupies as low a position here as it does in the work of Plotinus. Incarnation in a body occurs when an individual soul is seduced by the material world, the latter being a distraction, which that soul must strive to overcome. The act of overcoming the influence of the material world is still identifiable as sublimation; the individual soul, being linked to the universal soul, is the key to improving one's position on the ‘golden chain’. It is significant that the soul is, in Proclus, identified with reason: the philosophical life, by teaching and encouraging the individual to embrace reason, leads to a connection with the spiritual and toward the source of all things.

Elsewhere in *Elements of Theology* Proclus outlines a hierarchy of gods that is absent from Plotinus. This is, to a certain degree, his own innovation. Proclus proposes intervening levels of divinity between The One and the soul, and he outlines these in great detail, albeit with some degree of contradiction. First of all, the act of creation, for Proclus, seemed to require an explanation beyond emanation itself. As a result, he identifies the divine Nous as a Demiurge or ‘creator god’. Even though The One is the source of everything, it does not consciously or deliberately create the universe; the Demiurge does this. The distinction seems necessary in

¹³⁵ Snell, (1982:40): “The Olympian gods were laid low by philosophy but they lived on in the arts.”

order to preserve the nature of The One that Proclus intends. The act of deliberate creation would necessitate a concept of The One which is more limited than that specified by Proclus; if The One is all things, it cannot be anthropomorphised in any way, because to do so would limit its nature.

In *Platonic Theology*, Proclus frames the discussion by referring to the preeminence of the One from which everything proceeds.¹³⁶ What follows is a further categorisation of the gods according to a detailed hierarchy: there are intelligible, intellectual, and mundane gods, each group characterised by its relative distance from the Good, which also determines the level of existence that they govern. Intellectual gods, identified as Saturn and Jupiter, are the highest level of deities; Saturn (βασιλεὺς τῶν νοερῶν θεῶν) “illuminates the pure and incorruptible nature of intellect, and establishing his own all-perfect power in his own summit of intellectuals, abides in, and at the same time proceeds from his father”.¹³⁷ Jupiter, likewise, “is said to bind his father [and] ... at the same time binds himself [to him]”.¹³⁸ In each case, the “father” that is mentioned may be assumed either to be identifiable with or to proceed directly from The One or the Good, as these gods themselves are only a step removed from The One. Through these gods, who have a demiurgic function, the Good emanates; Proclus specifies, for example, that Saturn καὶ προάγει μὲν τὰς τοῦ πατρὸς Οὐρανοῦ γονίμους δυνάμεις ἄχρι τῶν ἐσχάτων.¹³⁹ This is an effect that has already been seen; the highest power emanates the furthest, extending even to formless matter, the ‘last of things’. However, the creation of and influence over the various levels of existence is divided between the various types of gods, ‘mundane’ gods, and various divinities who give completion to the sensible world being assigned to the last order of deific progression (7.1). Here is a concept similar to the one laid out by Iamblichus, where the gods themselves retain varying proportions of spiritual and

¹³⁶ 2.6. 10–13. Διότι μὲν γὰρ ὑφίσταται πάντα καὶ πρόεισιν ἀπὸ τοῦ πρώτου, τὸ ἐν ἐπ’ αὐτὸ φέροντες αἴτιον ἐκεῖνο παντὸς πλήθους καὶ προόδου πάσης ἀποφαινόμεθα. Saffrey (1987) translates: “En effet, du fait que toutes choses existent et procèdent à partir du premier principe, si nous donnons à ce principe le nom d’Un, nous affirmons qu’il est cause de toute multiplicité et de toute procession”.

¹³⁷ 5.5. 2–6 [Taylor]. τὸ καθαρὸν καὶ ἀκήρατον τοῦ νοῦ καταλάμπων καὶ ἐν αὐτῇ τῇ τῶν νοερῶν ἀκρότητι τὴν ἑαυτοῦ παντελῆ δύναμιν ἰδρυσάμενος, μένων μὲν ἅμα καὶ προϊὼν ἐκ τοῦ πατρὸς.

¹³⁸ 5.5. 15–17 [Taylor]. δεσμειν τὸν πατέρα λέγεται, καὶ ταῦτα περὶ ἐκεῖνον αὐτὸς συνδέων αὐτόν.

¹³⁹ 5.5. 8–9. Taylor, 314, translates: “[Saturn] leads forth the prolific powers of his father Heaven as far as to the last of things.”

corporeal qualities. The One or the Good exists, seemingly, in all of them. As Proclus states in *Elements*, proposition 12, the Good is the most final of all ends and the centre of all desirable natures. The demiurgic capabilities of the various gods, therefore, are a way in which the Good spreads throughout the universe, and moreover, much as Iamblichus specifies in his descriptions of theurgy and various types of sacrifices, the presence of various types or levels of gods shows that reunion with the Good may be attained at least in part through corporeal channels. A wholesale rejection of the body in favour of the spiritual is not required, and may not even be possible, despite the fact that a clear duality exists and that the ultimate Good (The One) exists completely beyond corporeal reality.

3.4.4 Summation

It is difficult to disengage the concept of sublimation found in Neoplatonist metaphysics from the fact that Neoplatonism never truly reconciles its carefully defined distinction between physical and spiritual worlds. Armstrong (1981:195) describes the position in its ambiguity:

... we can sometimes detect a conflict ... between that attitude of respect for the visible worlds ... and the sharply other-worldly Pythagorean temper ... which regards embodiment as an evil, a falling below the highest.

But embodiment is a necessary evil for Neoplatonists (*Enn.*,4.8.3,4) and there is the possibility to transform this by looking beyond the physical to the next level, which is that of the gods, and learning what can be known of them through moral and intellectual development, according to Plotinus, and also through ritual and prayer, according to Proclus and Iamblichus at least.¹⁴⁰ Moreover, understanding (through philosophical contemplation) the entire conceptual system, the interplay between the physical and spiritual, and the nature of the ultimate source of all things allows refinement of one's nature by recognising and responding to the presence of the Good. "Tout néo-platonicien est un mystique" remarked Jean Trouillard (1984:2130), emphasizing that for the Neoplatonists any philosophical endeavour yearned for

¹⁴⁰ Although Proclus is not specific about this. Eric Dodds' commentary on the *Theological Elements* notes his "personal indifference to cult practices" (1951:260, note 2) presumably meaning that, as a religious universalist in the pagan sense, Proclus does not ultimately favour one form of religious ritual over others.

alignment and shared supra-intelligible consciousness on the part of the soul with an ineffable divinity named The One or “the Good”. In this sense the supreme Neoplatonist idealisation of The One approaches the apophatic vision of the God of Christian spiritual writers and was crucial in the formation of the most prominent and extraordinary Neoplatonist church father, St Augustine.

Contemporary discussion of the Neoplatonists has tended to focus to the greatest degree on their influence, and this influence emerges repeatedly in the history of Christian and secular Europe: even hostile Christian commentators acknowledged the best features of the Neoplatonist conceptual scheme. St Augustine embraced the Neoplatonist philosophy in his youth, retaining several key Neoplatonist concepts in his writings after his conversion, and Fra Savonarola (1901:165) summarised the general attitude many centuries later:

We must not despise the valuable portion of the old philosophy, but rather make use of it ourselves ... although it is not sufficient for salvation, it is often of great assistance to us in confuting the adversaries of the Faith.

The development of a standardised Christian theology of the body and its attendant ideas on corporeal sublimation will be examined shortly. But before this, in the context of this discussion of the contribution of Neoplatonism it is essential to consider the contribution of Philo of Alexandria. Philo’s thought represents the high point of synthesis between Greek and Jewish thought in the ancient world, with an immense influence on early Christian thinkers.

3.5 PHILO¹⁴¹

Philo’s life corresponds roughly with the years 25 BC to 40 AD, a defining epoch in history. Considered a Middle Platonist, his ideas were intended to be applicable primarily to Judaism but interestingly his imprint on Christian thought was greater (Keener, 2003:343–7). It is worth emphasising that Philo had little influence in the rabbinic tradition and arguably does not represent the Jewish perspectives on the body which are usually perceived as favourable, without a tendency toward sexual asceticism in other traditions such as Christianity (Eilberg-Schwartz, 1991:11). Philo’s views regarding sublimation took time to develop and crystallise:

¹⁴¹ On source texts used see introduction to the bibliography. Translated Armenian source text for Philo is derived from Borgen’s *Philo of Alexandria, an exegete for his time*.

they are apt to consider multiple viewpoints and sometimes to contradict aspects of his own writings (Cohn, 1892:26). Often this was because his allegories and theories were not binary or linear. For example, Philo's allegorical discussion of Adam was framed in terms of differences between the created man, the fashioned man and the fallen man. Adam could be seen, by Philo, to variously embody all these functions and structures as a variously spiritual and fleshly being (Kvam, Scheering and Ziegler, 1999:42). Philo's exegesis uses biblical figures like Adam as representations of human 'moral constituency', according to Laporte (1988:192). By showing these various facets of Adam's character, spirituality and humanity, Philo paints a portrait of the human race as comprising a combination of different biblical figures, types, and human predicaments. The result is often a rich, sometimes colourful, and diverse development of exegesis, apologetics and philosophy.

Philo advocates for a non-literal interpretation of the Hebrew Bible as it stood at the time of his writings—a literal interpretation could only be limited in nature. His biblical God then is a complex deity that can neither be reduced to the limitation of direct contact with the world (Frick, 1999:62) nor fully understood in human terms; his chief intermediary or demiurge is the *Logos* (Copleston, 1946:458–62). This mode of interpretation in and of itself privileges the spiritual over the corporeal, a value which characterises and influences most of his ideas. There are many examples of this in Philo: he discusses the story of Jacob wrestling an angel (Genesis 32) as an allegory of the ethical struggle between passion and reason, physicality and spirituality (Brakke, 2006:19). Allegorical struggles with demons associate victory with an overcoming of fallen-ness and the biblical figure who battles a demon achieves a higher state in relation to the fleshly and sensory world. In Genesis 32, Jacob becomes known as Israel after wrestling the fallen angel;¹⁴² “Jacob” is relegated to his “name of the flesh”, while “Israel” is his higher, spiritual name. The physicality of his wrestling with the demon is an interesting paradox, in that he achieves spiritual elevation through an act which is—at least metaphorically— physical.

¹⁴² Daniélou (1958:139), with Brakke (2006:19) following, mistranslate Israel as 'one who sees God' and if it were true it would have been interesting to consider the connection between renaming Jacob and his new spiritual achievement labelled in terms of sight, one of the senses. Daniélou links this with a direct quotation from Philo's *De Praemiis*, 51: “for after the active life of youth, the contemplative life of old age is the best and most sacred,” but he may have been thinking of the line which precedes it: τῷ δὲ δι' ἀσκήσεως περιποιησμένῳ φρόνησιν ὄρασις (49) referring to sight given to one who has trained in contemplation.

Philo's ideas encompass a strong expression of Platonic dualism—Daniel Boyarin (1993:4) describes the platonisation of much of contemporary Judaic thought of the time—and 'platonisation' here refers to the use of dualism in philosophical thought. This research has already examined the ideals of platonisation, where incorporeal reality is both more authentic and more important than its physical counterpart. In the context of an individual the spiritual self or the interior reality is more important and more genuine than the real physical self of the outer reality. In essence, dualism privileges the unseen over the seen and the body itself is sublimated to the spirit. Philo states quite clearly this understanding of dualism:

For our soul is very often set in motion by its own self after it has put off the whole burden of the body, and has escaped from the multitude of the outward senses; and very often too, even while it is still clothed in them. Therefore, by its own simple motion it has arrived at the comprehension of those things which are appreciable only by the intellect; and by the motion of the body, it has attained to an understanding of those things which are perceptible by the outward senses [Yonge].¹⁴³

3.5.1 Philo, Paul and gender

What springs from a discussion of dualism in Philo is distinctive; it reveals a sociocultural facet of dualism not considered thus far: its relationship with gender. Modern understanding of gender, particularly in the West, now typically advocates a spectrum-based approach, going beyond physical characteristics and binary sexual functions, and including categories or identities other than, beyond or between male and female. When gender is understood as a flexible cultural construction, gender itself can be seen as something of the non-physical, the spirit or the intangible world. Gender and biological sex therefore form another type of duality between the corporeal and the intangible, the lowly body and the elevated spirit. Before discussing the gender element, it should be noted that Paul and Philo do not interpret body/spirit dualism in the same way: for Paul, the creation and the body are fallen but

¹⁴³ *De Somniis* 1, 1.43–44. κινεῖται γὰρ ἡμῶν ἡ ψυχὴ πολλάκις μὲν ἐφ' ἑαυτῆς, ὅλον τὸν σωματικὸν ὄγκον ἐκδύσα καὶ τὸν τῶν αἰσθήσεων ὄχλον ἀποδράσα, πολλάκις δὲ καὶ ταῦτα ἐπαμπισσομένη. τὴν μὲν οὖν γυμνὴν κίνησιν αὐτῆς τὰ νοήσει μόνη καταληπτὰ ἔλαξε, τὴν δὲ μετὰ σώματος τὰ αἰσθητά.

ultimately redeemable; Philo's visible world, on the other hand, remains ontologically inferior (Schenck, 2005:75–6). For Boyarin, too, Paul's dualism is different from that of Philo, in relation to the body and gender relations (1993:5–6), because there is a place for the corporeal within Paul's strikingly original dualistic view:

For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. Here indeed we groan, and long to put on our heavenly dwelling, so that by putting it on we may not be found naked. For while we are still in this tent, we sigh with anxiety; not that we would be unclothed, but that we would be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life (Paul, 2 Corinthians: 5.1–4).

Paul's metaphor of the body as an "earthly tent" is certainly original but it is in line broadly with the standard dualism of the body and the spirit. However, Paul, unlike Philo, does not use negative language or summon negative images in relation to the human physical body. By referring to the body as a tent, Paul implies that the body is a shelter for the soul or the spirit, which is the God-given and elevated part of a human. The idea of the body as a tent is different from Philo's and Plato's idea of the body as a prison. A tent is thin, flexible and sheltering; the walls and bars of a prison are substantial, inflexible: they do not support that which is contained.

Unlike Philo, Paul did not advocate for such a complete sublimation of the body, and of sexual desire and function. Philo saw the path to spirituality as entailing as complete an escape from the body as possible; Paul saw the importance of retaining the social and cultural functions of the physical body, including sexual activity. For Paul, the difference lay in the purpose of sexual desire. Sexual desire should be functional, not hedonistic, according to Paul: "For you were called to freedom, brothers, only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh" (Galatians 5.13–17). In all of this Paul is arguably modifying Platonic dualism from a philosophical position to a theological one: Paul emphasises that mortal flesh and the immortal soul are often oppositional: "For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live" (Romans 8:13), but his meaning is that the spirit of the human is of greater value than the

flesh, and Paul puts his devaluing of the human body to use in de-emphasising racial and gender differences before God: “There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3.28). Paul, somewhat like Philo, appears to see a social and cultural function, and an inherent hierarchical structure in the physiological and biological differences between men and women, appealing, in the matter of headcovering and submission in 1 Corinthians 11, to arguments based on custom and nature. Keener (2016), however, sees this as Paul addressing a local cultural situation, and, as Paul Fiddes details, the submission is patterned on Christ’s own intentional submission to the will of his father (1986:377–8). Mutual love and kindness is the keynote of Paul’s advice in 1 Corinthians to married men and women, but Philo, while not advocating ill treatment on the part of the husband (*Hypothetica* 7.3), maintains that the keynote for wives is absolute servitude and obedience and all this confined within the house: οἰκουρία καὶ ἡ ἔνδον μονή (*Special Laws* 3, 168d). While Paul’s spiritual programme is for brothers and sisters in Christ, Philo allegorically considers an unusual spiritual-androgynous parity that men and women could achieve through sublimation of the body but with a very different outcome for women.

Philo’s imagining of a type of spiritual-androgynous parity is very interesting. Philo’s *On the Contemplative Life* holds up a specific Jewish community of his contemporaries—a religious sect—as a kind of ideal template for living a virtuous Jewish life (Kraemer, 1989:351–3). Philo’s writings regarding this community known as *Therapeutae* suggest that their practices of sung prayer and reflection represented a kind of non-sexual, non-physical union between the men and women of the community. The differences in their singing voices mirrored the differences in their physical, gendered composition. Through the union of their voices, with men’s and women’s voices distinguishable from one another in song, this ritual perhaps represents Philo’s idea of a perfect union between man and woman, in which the primal androgyne is honoured (Boyarín, 1993:11–12). The voice, although produced from physical parts of the body, can be understood as non-corporeal. Therefore, the union through singing is a non-physical union, and another way in which the physical self, the body and sexual desire are all sublimated, according to Philo.

Philo’s worldview does not forbid women from being creative actors in society. Moreover, Philo did not exclude women from agency in terms of culture and religion. However, there is a significant proviso on Philo’s allowing women to be involved in cultural and religious life:

the women of the *Therapeutae* community are mostly aged virgins who, like the men of the community, are renouncing normal participation in society as unprofitable (Feldman, 1993:132) but creating their autonomy and creativity in the spiritual sphere “predicated on renunciation of both sexuality and maternity” (Boyarin, 1993:12). To attain Philo’s ideal, non-corporeal state, a woman must therefore renounce her sexuality, and the biological function of bearing children. For Nicole Tilford, this, together with Philo’s explanation of Sarah’s womanhood in the Bible, is a triumph of the masculine: “the spiritually mature παρθένος has cast off its “womanly,” bestial nature and embraced the rational νοῦς. In doing so the soul has lost its status as a γυνή and has become male” (Tilford, 2013:37).

Philo’s state of religious and cultural equality between men and women only occurs when body and sexual desire are sublimated; under these conditions, women can be the equals of men in an androgynous spiritual realm that is free of sexual desire—but only in the context of effacing their womanhood.

Jean Laporte’s study (Laporte, 1988) of the meaning and implications of the doctrine of original sin shows how Origen’s diverse and nuanced understanding of the doctrine draws considerably from critical ideas in Philo. Laporte states Philo’s understanding of original sin to be “the inheritance of the human sinful condition” (1998:191) and it is centred, to a degree, on the idea of defilement (1998:193). For Philo, the experience of birth was in itself defiling of the person being born—in this way, original sin was communicated to the individual partly through the fleshly, physical experience that is necessarily central to the birthing process. Leviticus 12 is explicit about the uncleanness of birth, and advocated circumcision as a way of removing ‘the defilement inherited from the womb’ (Laporte, 1998:193). The prevailing early view of the womb, and by extension of womanhood, as somehow impure is clear in Leviticus and Philo’s discussions of birth and original sin. The male child needs to be circumcised so that he is not somehow “infected”, or made spiritually lesser, by the imagined connection of the foreskin to the womb. Philo explicitly differentiates between male and female children as William Loader specifies: “depicting the latter as inferior products of less worthy men or even vices” (2011:124) and Laporte’s study counsels that Early Judaism broadly held that birth itself, emanating from the same physiological part of a woman as menstruation, involved ‘impure blood’ (Laporte, 1998:193) that could be transmitted to the infant in the form of original sin. Philo’s ideas relating to the inherent lowliness or baseness of the human body then—and the female human body in particular—can be understood as the

grounding of his ideological connections between biologic function and original sin. Any valorisation of the female in Philo represents a total sublimation of the body, in terms of typical female experience in antiquity. Arguably this virgin-whore dichotomy, well-known in various branches of early religious thought, persists to some degree. Valenti (2009) discusses the so-called “purity myth” in modern America, in which the sexualisation of girls and women is intensified by the stigmatisation of female sexual experience.

3.5.2 Philo on the Body and Sexuality

Philo’s orientation toward the corporeal/spiritual dualism contains a strong favouring of the spiritual and the act of striving toward it. Philo strongly advocated sublimation of the sexual urge—also referred to in the literature as sexual restraint. This is predicated upon his belief and consistent argument that the body itself is “evil by nature” (Martin, 1995:30). When Philo contrasts the virtuous few with the morally inferior masses, he directly connects moral inferiority to the body and its cravings:

... for the acquisition and practice of virtue a single thing only, namely our understanding, is requisite: but the body not only fails to cooperate to this end, but is an actual hindrance; for we may almost make it an axiom that the business of wisdom is to become estranged from the body and its cravings: but for the enjoyment of evil it is necessary not only that the mind is in a certain condition, but also the power of perception and of speech, in fact the body; for all these the inferior man requires for the full satisfaction of his particular form of wickedness [Colson].¹⁴⁴

Curiously, Philo equates virtue with the singular, and evil-doing with the plural. In the simplest sense, this binary implies that relatively few people in the world are truly virtuous, the majority being “inferior” on moral grounds. To achieve virtuousness, Philo asserts, one thing is necessary, that is, estrangement from the body and its cravings, because participation

¹⁴⁴ *Allegorical Interpretations*, 1, 103–104b ‘δεύτερον δέ, ... εἰς ἀρετῆς ἀνά – ληψίν τε καὶ ξρησιν ἐνὸς μόνου δεῖ τοῦ λογισμοῦ· τὸ δὲ σῶμα οὐκ οἶον οὐ συνεργεῖ πρὸς τοῦτο, ἀλλὰ καὶ κωλυσιεργεῖ· σξεδὸν γὰρ σοφίας ἔργον τοῦτ’ ἐστίν, ἀλλοτριουῖσθαι πρὸς τὸ σῶμα καὶ τὰς ἐπιθυμίας αὐ – τοῦ.

in evil involves the use of mind and body, and various (plural) physical senses. In terms of sexual restraint, this can be interpreted as avoiding the body's cravings. The advocacy for sexual restraint is consistent with Philo's more generalised and specific belief that the body itself is one of the necessary components of evil or evil-doing: "in the pursuit of evil, several faculties are needed, soul, speech, senses, body, for wickedness employs all these in displaying itself",¹⁴⁵ [Colson].

Moreover, Philo equates the body and its passion not just with evil but, more specifically, with rebellion against God's plan for humans. This is apparent in Philo's discussion of the Egyptian people, who at the time were culturally and religiously alienated from the Jewish population of the region. Philo's criticisms of the Egyptian people are linked with his perception of their rebellion against God, via the body and its passions (Mendelson, 1988:117–122). Egypt is symbolically represented as the body and its passions (Pearce, 2007:87–9), which, for Philo, should be governed by the spiritually-seeking mind. The body and the attention paid to it pose a real threat to the mind and for Philo an individual's carnal desires and cravings cause mind degeneration by making it 'fleshly'; they "form realities which strongly threaten man on his journey towards the high goals for his life set up by God" (Wold, 2005:149). In this context Philo defines lust as an irrational pleasure in which the logic of the human mind is supplanted by the body's cravings. Restoration of this disordered state of being can occur if passions are overcome through self-mastery and will (Borgen, 1997:233). Accordingly, the human will to control bodily impulses is, at least potentially, superior and virtuous. In a discussion of Genesis (Gen 9:1–2 and Gen 1:28), Philo discusses human mastery over animals, indicating that the mastery of the spiritual and of the human will may be understood expansively:

εἰς δὲ ἀπόλαυσιν κακίας οὐ μόνον δεῖ πως ἔξειν τὸν νοῦν, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὴν αἴσθησιν καὶ τὸν λόγον καὶ τὸ σῶμα· ὁ γὰρ φαῦλος δεῖται τούτων ἀπάντων πρὸς ἐκπλήρωσιν τῆς ἰδίας κακίας·

¹⁴⁵ *Allegorical Interpretations*, 1, 104 '...ἔρεῖα ...'. περὶ δὲ κακίας πλείοσι, ψυξῇ, λόγῳ, αἰσθήσεσι, σώματι, διὰ πάντων γὰρ τούτων ἐμφαίνεται.

[God] desires that the souls of intelligent men increase in greatness and multitude (and) in the form of virtues, and fill the mind with its form ... and that they should dominate and rule over the earthly body and its senses, and strike terror and fear into beasts, which is the exercise of the will against evil, for evil is untamed and savage (Philo, QG, 3, 56. Translation from the Armenian text quoted in Borgen, 1997:234).

For Philo the reptile symbolises poisonous passion, obviously analogous to the iconography of the serpent in the Garden of Eden. He interprets the passages of Genesis relating to human mastery over the animal kingdom as allegories in relation to an ideal mastery of the reptilian, or animalistic, components of himself. Mankind is reptilian: “through every soul sense-pleasures and desires and grief and fear creep” (Philo, QG, 3, 56, M.142–43, translation from the Armenian text quoted in Borgen, 1997:235). The virtuous and wise person must strive to overcome this naturally reptilian nature, by sublimating the body, repressing its cravings for “sense-pleasures and desires”, and rising above the inherently evil corporeal self through the power and superiority of the mind.

Social behaviour and behavioural transgressions are guided by the general orientation of the body and mind outlined above. *Hypothetica* discusses the nature and rules of Jewish life; with regard to sexuality, it includes a narrative which strongly advises against any mitigation of penalties for breaking laws, devoting space and energy to discussion of penalties for general lack of virtue and specific transgressions in the realm of sexual relations. Philo presents Jewish law as particularly severe in the matter of punishing sexual crimes, outlining certain sexual crimes as punishable by death; these include pederasty, adultery, child rape, prostitution, or even thinking of or intending one of these crimes (D’Angelo, 2006:76). It is perhaps remarkable for a modern reader to see that among these punishable transgressions, many of which would be readily viewed as heinous even today, adultery is the biggest sexual iniquity of all: adultery corrupts not only the body, but also the person’s soul, and affects multiple families and by extension the entire city and society within which the adultery takes place, because of the implicit and explicit disruption and erosion of values (D’Angelo, 2006:77). In keeping with the general ethic of the day, Philo’s outlining of laws and punishments for sexual behaviour and transgressions is highly patriarchal and deeply misogynistic: wives are discussed as the husband’s property and the injury of adultery is

assumed to afflict the adulterer's husband, but not the co-adulterer's wife (*Special Laws*, 10, 52–63).

3.5.3 Philo: Summation

The research thus far is indicating that any exploration of religious thought and a socially-defined code of morality or ethics is inherently connected to the human body itself. A more thorough examination of the texts of this chapter has in part revealed a more holistic approach to understanding the human condition—which explains the body, mind and soul as functioning in a connected and co-dependent fashion and in some detail. Early Christian thought (and early Judaism) can be considered in the context of varying conceptualisations of the connections and relationships between the body, the mind and the soul or spirit in a religious or moral sense. Philo in a sense exemplifies this. At various times in his life, Philo's ideas in relation to sublimation may seem to have changed, or at least developed, to a point where they were contradictory to his earlier beliefs. Philo's constant consideration of the body, the spiritual, the fleshly, the heavenly, the cultural and the religious as different spheres meant that he could hold simultaneous, apparently oppositional, views on the same subject at the same time (Anderson, 2011:188; Worthington, 2011:169). His understanding of sublimation in a practical sense may, at any given time, have differed from his understanding of sublimation in a spiritual sense, whether for the same or different individuals, and whether in similar or different allegorical or practical circumstances. What emerges is that for Philo, questions of moral constituency were nuanced, and often specific to a location or situation. A strictly dualistic view of the world was insufficient to contain such diversity, so while Philo's basic approach is described by David Runia as a dualist composite of body and mind (Runia, quoted in Robertson, 1988:8), it is, David Robertson supplies: “a dualism ... nourished by a rich fund of ideas scriptural and philosophical about *logos*, the fount of speech and rationality” (1988:9). This very breadth of Philo's dualism enriched with systematic allegorising, apologetics and construct of the *Logos* is a seedbed of ideas for Clement and Origen. There is also in this legacy a sense of patriarchy which consistently applies the principle of privileging the male (Conway, 2003:473), while the female is “imperfect, subject, seen more as the passive than as the active partner.”¹⁴⁶ Interestingly this aspect of Philo's

¹⁴⁶ *Special Laws*, 1, 201: ...τὸ γὰρ θῆλυ ἀτελές, ὑπὲρκοον, ἐν τῷ πάσχειν μᾶλλον.

Judaeo-Platonism was never challenged by Christian writers in the early church. Instead, as the next chapter reveals, there is continuity in the exposition of the idea.

3.6 CONCLUSION

The Christian ascetics, who had aroused so much recent scholarly interest for their sexual abstinence and concealed eroticism under a post-modernist dispensation (discussed in the introduction to this research) have been revisited in this chapter from a different perspective. Instead of identity politics that looks backward to the early church, this chapter has studied Greek and Roman philosophical traditions which devised and set in a philosophical framework the practice of sublimation in various exercises that offer context for early Christians mastering the appetites and passions, leading a life of hard labor and constant prayer, enduring hunger, battling temptation, reading the scriptures and by means of a reputation for holiness fulfilling the role that philosophers had once played in their society.

Even in philosophies remote from the formulations of sublimation as a religious exercise and tending toward materialism, the dualistic details and the meditative exercises encountered in this chapter serve as a foundation for mind and spirit engagement with the body and the material world, out of which grew many identifiable beliefs and religious exercises of the Christian community as a whole. This chapter has witnessed the spiritual practices of the tripartite soul in Aristotle and its elaboration in what is called Neoplatonism after Plato's cosmology. Epicurean philosophy had in its alleged pursuit of pleasure a duality of greater pleasure that the mind selects. For Epicurus, the most pleasant life is one where we abstain from unnecessary desires and achieve an inner tranquility by choosing the good over the pursuit of physical pleasures like food, drink, and sex. That discrimination requires self-mastery, the ability to ignore external stimuli, will-power (also emphasised by the Stoics) and the use of reason—highly developed by the Skeptics to discriminate higher from lower and more vulgar pleasures that Epicureans discover by means of the senses that raise humans to the transcendental level of gods.

Each vehicle expresses ideas of sublimation largely without resorting to a denigration of the physical that is found later in Gnostic and Manichean writings. Marcus Aurelius' notebook, with its ritual daily recitations and philosophical work of meditation, joins what the individual identifies as within his or her power with natural law as an almost divine principle. This is a perfect example of what Plotinus and Plato had devised as a more elaborate cosmological

framework, dualistic in nature, which accounts for the flight of the soul caught in matter to the One above or the “flight of the alone to the Alone”. The cosmic drama of souls between two poles of matter and spirit negotiated in part by sublimation as a religious exercise exercised early Christianity (and its Gnostic challengers) very profoundly. And all these tensions or sometimes ambiguities play out dramatically in the writing of early Christian writers, which will be examined in the next chapter.

CHAPTER4

VALUE-LADEN DUALISM AND EARLY CHRISTIANITY

4.1 INTRODUCTION

In the fourth century CE, the official doctrine of the church sustained a well-developed, internally coherent system of belief that was poised to prevail over various dualist challenges from once powerful Platonist streams of thought and their many Gnostic and Manichean manifestations. A tangible milestone of this victory, often mentioned, is the closure in 529 CE of the Athenian Platonic Academy and the expulsion of its teachers to Persia, where Zoroaster and subsequently Mani had established their church rituals and theology on dualistic foundations (Watts, 2006:22; Chapter V). They left behind, however, structures of dualistic thought and practice in the heart of church doctrine, of which the most important was the sublimation of the corporeal (Brown and Strawn, 2012:14). The body was now perceived as the site of impurity and suffering, and sublimation served, in part, to raise the spirit to its proper place of purity and joy in a vertical ascent following its Fall into matter. But this was in sum a descent rather than the history of progressive redemption in Christian eschatology moving from first to last things horizontally and working its salvation in Christ in whom immanence and transcendence are joined.

That elevation of the spiritual person from the prison house of matter through ascetic practices has a central position in the emerging belief structure of the Christian church, but it can function dangerously as theory and practice on a dualistic foundation which was (with the exception of a type of apocalyptic dualism) foreign to Jewish thought and a challenge of considerable proportions to early Christianity.

This type of dualism effectively constituted scaffolding, supported by allegory and other metaphorical structures, to raise by sublimation and a framework of ascetic practices a spirit lost in matter from what is lower and contemptible to what is a higher. That need to master all things pertaining to the flesh and to ascend from the material plane is the objective basis of a form of ascetism that has, whatever the actual practices, a disdain, particularly in Gnosticism, for material life and a taming of the body to raise the spirit above its historical or

bodily existence. The specific cosmology or “science” that Greek philosophers employed as the foundation for their allegories, rites and meditative exercises could not help but influence all religious streams in their own time. They continue as a challenge to Christianity to our day, especially in the structural features of ascent from the lower material realm to the higher world of the spirit that constitute an alchemy, yoga, psychology or for that matter chemistry of these gnostic formulations.

The history of the Christian encounter with Gnosticism, while absorbing, is not a central component of this research; nevertheless, the influence, even in terms of Christian counter-argument or doctrinal solidification, of the Gnostic approach is of considerable value for an understanding of the later view of sublimation of the body. However, the sheer variety of competing Gnostic viewpoints and the fact that much of what is known of Gnosticism stems from material supplied by Iraneaus and other Christian critics precludes anything other than a glimpse at relevant elements in its systems. Even a glimpse is worthwhile, though.

4.2 CHRISTIANITY’S ENCOUNTER WITH THE GNOSTICS

Christianity had characteristically Jewish elements in its earliest years, with a resulting praxis that was in some aspects influenced by Jewish beliefs and modified to incorporate a new religious symbolism. Gnosticism was something quite different in scope and development but its peculiarity was that many of its followers often had mixed identities: many Gnostics were by origin Jews, Pagans, *or* Christians (Richards, 2007:510). In their beginnings Christianity and Gnosticism were intertwined to the extent that many Christian leaders believed that Gnosticism was a heretical form of Christianity (Scholer, 2006:438). This presents a very different background from the philosophical underpinnings considered so far, and unsurprisingly the result of the movement is something very different from other forms of influence.

Gnosticism relates well to the Platonic dualistic tradition and this raised tensions with the new Christianity, denying, on the face of it, the ontology of the message of Christ (Holroyd,1994:8). However, while Platonism and Neoplatonism saturate Gnostic thinking, Gnostics seemed to specialise in adopting some basic ideas of the Platonists only to move them far from their original context. For instance, the Gnostics abandoned the divinity of the Demiurge, which was never the intent of the Platonists. Even Valentinian Gnosticism, highly compatible with Neoplatonism in many respects, suggests that the Demiurge has evil

tendencies. Another significant divergence is in the area of human sexuality, where sexual activity is reasoned as standing somewhere between a flawed material practice and an evil one (Tite, 2004:580). While aspects of Gnostic thought here were not entirely dissonant with aspects of Platonic thought, its narrowness was impractical: according to the Neoplatonists, rejection of the physical world and sex to maintain existence would mean that all Gnostics should reject life as well (Tite, 2004:591) and with it a rational invention by the Demiurge as a means of prolonging existence.

Gnostic interaction with Christianity produced a similar distortive effect. Christianity and Gnosticism focus on similar messages but from different perspectives and it is these different viewpoints that shaped the rejection of Gnosticism by many early Christians, and made problematic the establishment of early Christian beliefs. As with Neoplatonism, there is interplay of influences, but it is the tension between the two belief systems that reveals the reach of the ideals expressed in each of them. The Gnostic interaction with the New Testament reveals these tensions easily enough. In 2 Corinthians Paul states that he has heard words “which it is not lawful for a man to utter”. Gnostics, especially Valentius, parsing carefully, used this passage as a support of their position that the Christian Bible is actually a Gnostic text, an exposition of the initiate and Gnostic master condition of developing Gnostic knowledge. In 1 Corinthians too, Paul suggests that a man should remain celibate, with marriage available only if celibacy is not practical for the individual. Gnostic beliefs about sexuality in general were not dissimilar.

The unfolding of the message of Jesus spoke to Gnostics: Jesus talked of the Temple being destroyed and rebuilt in three days and both Gnostics and Christians knew how to interpret this symbolically (Kripal, 2006:101). Gnostics suggested that this destruction of the mortal body and affirmation of the resurrected spirit coincided with Gnostic beliefs of attaining spiritual enlightenment by foregoing the material world (King, 2003:201) but Christians countered this by pointing out that Jesus was resurrected in flesh and spirit: if the material is not important then Jesus would never have resurrected in flesh and spirit but merely spirit (King, 2003:203). It was a strong argument, but it is actually the ebb and flow of the discussion that suggests the degree of influence that Gnostic thought had brought to bear on early Christianity.

Ultimately, there are many theological reasons, and possibly political and other reasons for the early Christian antagonism to Gnosticism, but it is essentially the severe dualistic rejection

of the material world and the body that is not accepted. Paul directly condemned the Gnostic teachings, emphasising that a wisdom and knowledge that comes from God does not concern itself with idle speculations, angelic visitations, fables, and an amoral lifestyle (Col. 2:8–23; 1 Tim. 1:4; 2 Tim. 2:16–19; Titus 1:10–16). He addresses the Gnostic influences in portions of Colossians as a direct threat to a salvic Christ and his sufficiency in all things: in overcoming the indulgences of the flesh the Gnostics teach a false philosophy, which denies the all-sufficiency and pre-eminence of Jesus Christ (Col. 2:8).

4.3 EARLY CHRISTIANITY AND COMPETING VALUES

There is, though, a sense of a deeper struggle in Paul’s condemnation of the Gnostics and it leads back to a reconsideration of what sublimation means. Although the introduction to this research mentioned that the term is most readily identified with Sigmund Freud and other schools, in which an instinctive energy or libido is restrained, transformed and raised to socially acceptable satisfaction, but in fact (pace Didier Anzieu, who does hint at an older, anterior sense) an alternative Gnostic “sublimation” may have been on offer. Nietzsche’s *Menschliches, Allzumenschliches* or *Human, All Too Human*, may offer a clue as to its character. Nietzsche introduces *die freien Geister* or “free spirits” who wander over the world having discovered there is no place for them at home, only to find alienation from what humans value, especially religion, as bonds which tie humans down with fetters of civilisation. The next section, “First and Last Things” sets out the classic Gnostic structure of duality (Nietzsche and Hollingdale, 1996:12):

Philosophical problems, in almost all their aspects, present themselves in the same interrogative formula now that they did two thousand years ago: how can a thing develop out of its antithesis? ... Both are simply sublimations in which the basic element seems almost evaporated and betrays its presence only to the keenest observation. All that we need and that could possibly be given us in the present state of development of the sciences is a chemistry of the moral, religious, aesthetic conceptions and feeling, as well as of those emotions which we experience in the affairs, great and small, of society and civilization, and which we are sensible of even in solitude. But what if this chemistry established the fact that, even

in *its* domain, the most magnificent results were attained with the basest and most despised ingredients? Would many feel disposed to continue such investigations? Mankind loves to put by the questions of its origin and beginning: must one not be almost inhuman in order to follow the opposite course?

In that spirit, and in the light of the research so far, we turn to the opposite course found in the encounter of the churches affiliated with rising Christianity in its historical mission as they meet a plurality of programmes of salvation and competing values involving a duality of gods and escape from matter.

These values were flourishing alongside early Christianity, and they had often a congenial, mutually reinforcing relationship. The phenomenon is strikingly represented in Origen in relation to Neoplatonism. Origen had in fact expressed strong hostility formally to dualism, and yet in *On First Principles* he casts the Trinity in descending order of power (very like Gnostic archons in fact) from the Father to the less powerful Son and still less powerful Holy Spirit, arguably a form of Plato's monad, dyad, and world-soul. In all this, instead of redemptive history working itself out in an irreversible past-to-future course of time, is found a Neoplatonist landscape of ahistorical descent and ascent of a single isolated soul, with the spiritual world of the Father on high having nothing to do with matter. In this sense the Father as a perfect disembodied unity of pure consciousness has as object of consciousness Christ the Son, the Logos, or Wisdom (*Sophia*) of God, the first emanation of the Father. The third and last principle of the divine triad is the Holy Spirit, unfolding as an emanation (characteristic of Gnostic creation myths) which "proceeds from the Son and is related to Him as the Son is related to the Father" (Tripolitis, 1978:78). This is the realm of a journey through ascending powers, Gnostic "archons", emanations of ineffable godhead as a kind of unity that joins the classic dualities of body and soul, earth and heaven, spirit and matter, all active limits of a spiritual journey growing out of a framework of dualistic theory and religious practice.

Origen (who will be discussed further in this chapter) is a perfect illustration of highly influential anterior ideas ebbing and flowing in the working out of Christian theology. Interestingly, other contemporary influences, such as Tertullian's insistence upon a more or less materialist reality, were of similar significance in their day but later dissipated in favour of a more dualistic viewpoint. One effect of this was that even while incarnation and the

resurrection of the body were being developed and standardised during the early councils a presupposition of duality was never far away (Willis, 2005:57). Basic precepts could be further defined and expanded upon, as St Augustine did, and particulars and other potentialities could be debated, but it was not until almost a thousand years later that the Council of Vienne (1311–1312) contained the proposition that the human soul, is “per se and essentially the form of the body”. Even so, Bévonet, (1924:158–9) many centuries later declared that the result of the Catholic purification of the *philosophica perennis* of Plato, Aristotle and the Neoplatonists was a church whose

teaching is absolute and noumenal ... her own clear system ... places a real distinction between matter, mind, grace, and God; she teaches what is lower in man must be fully controlled by what is higher, and is against complete self-realisation of the individual... If she is at times cruel to the body, it is only to be kind to the soul.

In terms of political and social context, the ending of a unified Roman Empire transformed the Western world into a landscape where the Christian Church held a primary role in society. Consequently, the central concepts of Christianity (along with their Platonic antecedents) quickly became some of the defining beliefs in Western culture. The lives and careers of most of the early church fathers illustrate the history of these ideas, and the philosophical development of four central church figures—Tertullian, Gregory of Nyssa, Origen and, centrally, St Augustine—provide a context for the development of the concept of sublimation in Christian theology, as well as the dissemination of that idea. What emerges is a struggle to understand the transformative power of faith in spiritual and physical dimensions and a possible resolution.

4.4 TERTULLIAN¹⁴⁷

Tertullian’s turbulent life and religious influence are not the subject of this research although aspects of these are illuminating. Tertullian’s main quarrel with both the ‘mainstream’

¹⁴⁷ Geoffrey Dunn’s *Tertullian* with its introduction and commentary has been a comprehensive source for this section as has Timothy Barnes’ *Tertullian: A Historical and Literary Study*.

Christians¹⁴⁸ and the Montanists concerned what he considered their lack of rigour in matters of faith, discipline, and the interpretation of sacred texts. Among his abundant treatises, *De Cultu Feminarum*, for instance, admonishes women to wear humble garb in recognition of their share in the “ignominy of Eve”, who (along with all women) was the “devil’s gateway” into the world.¹⁴⁹ His embracing of ascetic views was in and of itself indicative of a worldview in which the material world is a hindrance to achieving a state of holiness. The notion of sublimation is therefore present by implication, in that Tertullian advocates a movement toward a soul-based reality detached from the distraction of the corporeal, and a lifestyle that brings one closer to that ideal.

However, as was the case with other writers of the period, there were other forces at play which helped determine the Christian church’s doctrine, and which in turn had an influence on a theology that became entrenched, a little later, in the Church’s teaching. Although there is an emphasis on adherence to scriptural documents, much of Tertullian’s rigour and asceticism is also a result of his desire to draw a clear and divisive line between Hellenistic paganism and Christianity. Other early Christian writers such as Origen were freely incorporating the principles of Neoplatonism into the Christian worldview but Tertullian adamantly refused to do this. Tertullian completely rejected the melding of pagan and Christian concepts, drawing, on many occasions in his writing, a sharp division between the two. As a result, part of Tertullian’s legacy is the intensity of the alienation of pagan from Christian concepts, although it could be argued that even in the writings of Tertullian the influence of Platonism (via the Neoplatonists) never truly waned.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁸ Reference to ‘mainstream’ Christianity when speaking of this early developmental period is makeshift, because consensus was yet to be reached with regard to several key aspects of doctrine. However, the term is used to distinguish between what was to become the Christian—and later Catholic—church that Rome adopted, and the various Christian sects that would come to be considered heterodox or heretical because they departed from the doctrine Rome adopted. Montanists were, likewise, Christians, but several points set them apart from the ‘mainstream’.

¹⁴⁹ *De Cultu Feminarum* 1.2 : ... id quod de Eva trahit ... ignominiam dico primi delicti... Tu es diaboli ianua...

¹⁵⁰ Although Tertullian rejects the Neoplatonist notion of Emanation, there are similarities between his perception of the ‘essence’ of God and the Neoplatonist notion of Good or Godliness emanating from the One. God the Father is the perfect expression of the quality that the Son and the Holy Spirit share in as well; they are the same in that they partake of that quality, though they are different in terms of the proportion of that substance, and in their relationship to one another.

Tertullian's views regarding the nature of the body/soul dichotomy as it relates to the concept of sublimation include the notion of a corporeal soul, a concept not unknown to his contemporaries. Tertullian proposes rational justifications for the supposedly corporeal nature of the soul, pronouncing, for instance, that it could not otherwise leave the body: *Igitur corpus anima, quae nisi corporalis corpus non derelinquet* (*De Anima* 6. 6). Here as elsewhere, his evidence is scripture-based, as in the following justification:

In hell the soul of a certain man is tortured, punished in flames, suffering excruciating thirst, and imploring from the finger of a more fortunate soul, for his tongue, the relief of a drop of water. Do you consider that this end of the blessed poor man and the miserable rich man is imagined? In hell the soul of a certain man is in torment, punished in flames, suffering excruciating thirst, and imploring from the finger of a happier soul, for his tongue, the solace of a drop of water. Do you suppose that this end of the blessed poor man and the miserable rich man is only imaginary¹⁵¹

The quotation above illustrates a characteristic of Tertullian's writings: a literal interpretation of sacred texts, necessitating on many occasions a corporeal soul. Nevertheless, he draws a clear distinction between (and places a value judgment on) a spiritual and a material state of being. Things of this world are of a poorer quality and refinement compared with those of the spirit; and the corporeal is used, to a certain degree, *cacoethes carpendi*, to castigate the individual through divine punishment. More specifically, regarding the sublimation of the corporeal in favour of the spiritual, Tertullian's concepts straddle a fine line. His focus and conclusions are usually removed from and at variance with those of pre-Christian philosophers, and, as already mentioned, he rejected Hellenistic paganism, denying its influence on Christian scripture. Nonetheless, Tertullian's concept of body and soul echoes, in some ways, that of the Epicureans. For example, as seen above, he insists that there is no absolute immateriality; the soul, and even God himself, is 'corpus'. This is all similar to Epicurean conceptualising on the subject. Regarding sublimation, therefore, an absolute

¹⁵¹ *De Anima* 7. 1–2: *Dolet apud inferos anima cuiusdam et punitur in flamma et cruciatur in lingua et de digito animae felicioris implorat solacium roris. Imaginem existimas exitum illum pauperis laetantis et diuitis maerentis?*

rejection of the corporeal and the material is therefore neither possible nor entirely proper. But Tertullian subscribes to ideals of self-denial and discipline and these sit well with a certain view of sublimation. This extends to martyrdom and mortification: Tertullian, like the Stoics and like Plato, considered personal virtue, denial of earthly pleasures, and perseverance in that endeavour to be the essence of human improvement and the attainment of goodness. Nonetheless, unlike the Hellenistic philosophies, which arguably had the psychological purpose of allowing for the end of suffering, Tertullian's interpretation of Christianity insists upon the idea that God *intends* human suffering, and that, therefore, suffering neither can nor should be avoided. In the end, if the concept of sublimation that Tertullian espouses can be encapsulated, one might say that refinement through suffering is tantamount to sublimation in Tertullian's view.

It is with this concept in mind that Tertullian eventually came to reject Christianity for its lack of rigour—which can be read as a lack of insistence upon suffering as a means of purification. Tertullian held the view that Catholicism was primarily 'physical' whereas Montanism—professing (for example) that God can possess humans, and speak his word directly—was primarily 'spiritual'. This observation was made at a time when Tertullian already preferred the latter, and it may be interpreted that he did so because he thought the superior rigour of Montanism (and, some time later, Tertullianism) brought individuals further along the path of sublimation and therefore closer to God.

Tertullian was already middle-aged when he converted to Christianity and his pre-conversion views may be discernible only in the vehemence with which he attacks particular pagan philosophies in his ecclesiastical writings.¹⁵² Plato and the Neoplatonists are referred to as the *patriarchis haereticorum*.¹⁵³ The universe Tertullian espouses is corporeal (almost materialist), in which the human soul and even God himself has a measure of corporeality. As a result, it is impossible to reject the corporeal entirely, but only to achieve sublimation through cultivation of virtue and a strict adherence to God's laws. There were strict consequences of a failure to do so: the corporeal nature of the soul, for instance, ensured that

¹⁵² Tertullian (unlike, for example, Augustine) completely rejected the notion that Platonic ideals in particular and Greek philosophy in general could have any bearing at all on the Christian faith, as demonstrated by his famous posing of the question "What has Athens to do with Jerusalem?"

¹⁵³ *De Anima* 3.1 and 23.5: *Doleo bona fide Platonem omnium haereticorum condimentarium factum.*

it could be tortured, with a ghastliness immediately identifiable to the living, in hell.¹⁵⁴ Other characteristics of this version of the soul include the fact that it is not pre-existent, but a ‘new product’ with the birth of each individual; thus the pre-Christian idea of reincarnation is rejected.¹⁵⁵ This is, in part, an argument in favour of individual accountability; only one lifetime on earth occurs before the punishment or reward received after death, and during that lifetime the person is indistinguishable from his or her individual soul. The soul is inherently fallible, even sinful; it is in bondage to Satan, but at the same time it contains the seeds of good, enabling the individual to make a choice to improve.¹⁵⁶ “Good” entails a movement closer to God through adherence to his commands, which demand strict discipline and austerity. It may not be possible to reject corporeality altogether, but there is an emphasis on rejecting those things that feed the appetite in favour of those which feed the soul. In this way, the movement away from the material and toward the spiritual is consistent with other views of sublimation previously discussed, regardless of the fact that Tertullian’s version of physical theory does not support it.

In retrospect, it may appear that one of the most striking features of Tertullian’s contribution to Christian theology was his promotion of extreme asceticism and rigid adherence to a set of stern moral principles. However, it can be noted that other Christian fathers of that era also embraced similarly stringent measures, in part driven by a need to distance themselves and their faith from the pagan practices that still largely prevailed. The Neoplatonist concept of Emanation did find its way into Christian doctrine, most notably through the overwhelmingly influential works of St Augustine, but at its core Christianity, at least in the writings of the early Church fathers, was never about to blend with paganism. Critically it was noted for its overwhelming *agape* and care for the poor, but just as critically it distinguished itself through rigorous adherence to strict rules of behaviour, in the overall context of which Tertullian’s asceticism is not wholly out of place.

¹⁵⁴ *De Anima* 7.1 et seq. *Dolet apud inferos anima cuiusdam et punitur in flamma...*

¹⁵⁵ *De Anima* 25.9. *Cur autem et ueteres astrologi genituram hominis ab initio conceptus dirigebant, si non exinde et anima est, ad quam aequae pertinet, si quid est, flatus?* ¹⁵⁶ *De Anima* 41.3. *Sic pessimi et optimi quidam, et nihilominus unum omnes animae genus; sic et in pessimis aliquid boni et in optimis nonnihil pessimi.*

¹⁵⁶ *De Anima* 41.3. *Sic pessimi et optimi quidam, et nihilominus unum omnes animae genus; sic et in pessimis aliquid boni et in optimis nonnihil pessimi.*

4.5 ORIGEN

Origen almost succeeded in building a detailed Christian theological system with the mortar of compelling Neoplatonist ideas, although ‘Origenism’ did not persist past the early centuries of the Western Church.¹⁵⁷ Still, it may be argued that a synthesis of the two philosophical/theological systems reached its most complete form in the work of Origen, and in particular, in his seminal *On First Principles*.

On First Principles begins with an account of the Holy Trinity, which is consistent with the Neoplatonist concepts of The One and of Emanation, and which has significantly less in common with later Christian explanations of the Trinity. Just as the Neoplatonist system posits that all light or goodness emanates from The One, an entity absolutely complete unto itself and consisting of nothing but goodness, so Origen places God the Father in a parallel role. Moreover, it is relevant to the concept of sublimation, as it can be applied to Origen’s concepts, that God the Father is without a body—he is purely ‘spiritual mind’. This shows clearly that for Origen perfection has no share of corporeal existence. The other two ‘persons’ of God differ from God the Father in that they are somewhat less perfect, less unified, and somewhat allied with the corporeal world. Nevertheless, the Son and the Holy Spirit, being the first and second emanations of God the Father, are close to him in godliness. God the Son (also called *Logos* and *Sophia*) is the vehicle through which God the Father is able to exercise intellectual activity. The Holy Spirit is one more step removed from the absolute purity and wholeness of God the Father, and interacts with humanity and the corporeal world. This hierarchy shows that, although there is a loss of the ‘God quality’ with each emanation (given that no other entity has the purity of God the Father), emanation and the diffusion of the God quality are also necessary in order for the essence of God to permeate and act upon the corporeal world. Such interaction would not be possible—or, at least, would not be comprehensible—without the three persons of the Trinity. However, a value judgment is inherent in the description of this system; nothing else is as Good as the completely incorporeal existence of God the Father:

¹⁵⁷ Origenism was revived by the Renaissance humanists, however, and more recently it has been found that the Existentialist Christian theologian Nicolas Berdyaev acknowledged the influence of Origen (Scaringi, 2008:6).

The God and Father, who holds the universe together, is superior to every being that exists, for he imparts to each one from his own existence that which each one is; the Son, being less than the Father, is superior to rational creatures alone (for he is second to the Father); the Holy Spirit still less, and dwells within the saints alone. So that in this way the power of the Father is greater than that of the Son and that of the Holy Spirit, and that of the Son is more than that of the Holy Spirit, and in turn the power of the Holy Spirit exceeds that of every other holy being.¹⁵⁸

Because not everything in creation partakes equally of the good, and because corporeal reality exists, it is necessary for God's goodness to emanate through the vehicle of these other two persons of God, being less pure (though still vastly superior to any other entity, because they partake of God's essence to such a large degree) and are therefore able to interact with the corporeal world.

As is the case with the other Neoplatonists, Origen's worldview, headed by a being that represents perfect goodness and unity, presents a simple (almost familiar in the light of the research so far), basis for the concept of sublimation. The being of God emanates throughout creation, and those who partake of it more freely and completely are closer to God and therefore higher on the hierarchy that Origen presents. As God the Father is pure spirit, corporeal existence places one further from God. However, because God's essence emanates throughout creation, individuals have the chance to orient towards, and participate more fully in, the spiritual nature of God by sublimating the corporeal in favour of the spiritual. Faith is crucial here and philosophy, while it does not supplant faith, can be a valuable support. Origen's achievements here were spectacular. Joseph Trigg (2012:22) writes:

¹⁵⁸ Origen, *Fragmenta De Principiis*, Fragment 5. Ὅτι ὁ μὲν θεὸς καὶ πατὴρ συνέχων τὰ πάντα φθάνει εἰς ἕκαστον τῶν ὄντων, μεταδίδους ἑκάστῳ ἀπὸ τοῦ ἰδίου τὸ εἶναι ὅπερ ἐστίν, ἐλαττόνως δὲ παρὰ τὸν πατέρα ὁ υἱὸς φθάνων ἐπὶ μόνᾳ τὰ λογικά (δεῦ τερος γὰρ ἐστὶ τοῦ πατρὸς), ἔτι δὲ ἡττόνως τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον ἐπὶ μόνους τοὺς ἁγίους δικνούμενον· ὥστε κατὰ τοῦτο μείζων ἢ δύναμις τοῦ πατρὸς παρὰ τὸν υἱὸν καὶ τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον, πλείων δὲ ἢ τοῦ υἱοῦ παρὰ τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον, καὶ πάλιν διαφέρει οὐσα μᾶλλον τοῦ ἁγίου πνεύματος ἢ δύναμις παρὰ τὰ ἄλλα ἅγια

In establishing the church's rule of faith on a firm, rational basis, Origen effectively refuted the Gnostics, not by pointing out deficiencies in their systems, but by offering a coherent alternative. As he himself wrote, he also accomplished a still more important goal: "to outline the most conspicuous characteristics of the understanding of the Scriptures" by investigating precisely those doctrines.

Like the Platonists, Origen has a clear role for reason in bringing human beings out of a purely corporeal reality and closer to godliness and the spiritual. Origen's theology (as laid out in *On First Principles*) states that the first life created consisted of *logika* or rational beings who were close to God—much closer than later humans—and who engaged in continuous philosophical contemplation of the divine. God the Son, or the "soul of Christ" was the only being to remain in this higher state; the other *logika* fell from the sublime through an exercising (a misuse) of free will. This fall was also what necessitated the existence of bodies, the *logika* having been pure rational spirits, without any element of the corporeal, like God himself. The fall and its aftermath is referred to as a sort of second creation, the first having given rise to the pure, ethereal beings, with the second creation responsible for the existence of the entire material world. Thus, a dichotomy between the spiritual/rational/godlike and the corporeal is clearly established and the corporeal is inferior to all of these. Moreover, the notion that the spiritual and corporeal worlds were established through two separate creations deepens the division between them. However, the potential for sublimation on an individual and a collective level is established, as stated before, by the existence of emanation, and also because of the assertion that humans are fallen spiritual/rational beings. If humanity fell from that sublime state, the potential to return to it exists. Moreover, the means of doing so is implicit in the theology; rational contemplation of the divine brings one closer to that original state, whereas a preoccupation with material reality takes one further away from it, deepening the fall.

On the one hand, this framework bears an obvious similarity to both Platonic and Neoplatonist models; on the other hand, the figure of Christ is of paramount importance, Christ being demonstrative of what Origen calls 'theandric potentiality' (Moore, 2005:58). Christ, or God the Son, is the only example of a *logikon* who did not fall from grace, but remained close to God the Father. It is an important aspect of Origen's worldview that, although the fallen *logika* were acting out of a misuse of the free will that had been given

them, the ‘soul of Christ’ exercised the free will to choose the good and to remain close to God. Christ’s act of free will is considered supreme, in that he chose the thing that was ‘right’ and that was allied with his inherent nature. Finally, the fact that the soul of Christ did so shows that humans are potentially capable of doing the same. Proximity to God is, according to Origen, the most powerful drive or desire of all beings, and the fact that Christ made the correct choice, to remain close to God, demonstrates that it can be done despite the fall and despite the interference of the material. Origen believes in the ‘restoration of all beings’ (ἀποκατάστασις); there is no concept of a lasting hell in his theology. Instead there is a belief that salvation is possible and will eventually be achieved by all, with all beings returning to a state close to their original state. However, salvation does not appear to remove the need for a body, which the fall imposed, but when a soul is saved after death it acquires a resurrection body—described as ethereal (ἀϊθέριος), heavenly (οὐράνιος), or luminous (ἀγγοειδής)—terms which Origen uses interchangeably.¹⁵⁹

The similarities between Origenism and what was to become standard Christian dogma a century or so later are plentiful; in particular, the account of a fall from grace as a result of exercising (and misusing) free will is a prevalent idea in later Christian theology. However, Origen’s theology differs from that of later Christian writers regarding several key points which are relevant to the concept of sublimation. First, Origen’s worldview includes a version of reincarnation or transmigration of souls (metempsychosis) that was not incorporated into later Christian theology. This is in keeping with his views on sublimation and, particularly, the idea that everyone (every soul) will eventually reach the state of redemption and salvation. Sublimation and the movement towards a life of rational contemplation of divinity may require the individual soul to move through more than one human incarnation. By the same token, souls, according to Origen, pre-exist human life. Moreover, although human (corporeal) incarnations vary, each soul has a unique ‘soul body’ which persists throughout all incarnations and afterward. The mere fact that the soul and its ‘soul body’ is, according to Origen, so much more durable and more significant than the human body reinforces the split between corporeal and spiritual, with the spiritual being superior because it is more durable and because through it one can more closely approach the nature or God.

¹⁵⁹ Terms from Alan Scott, *Origen and the Life of the Stars* (1991:157).

Origen's concept of universalism, or universal salvation, is also one that did not persist in later Christian theology, although certain writers, such as Gregory of Nyssa, discuss the notion. Metempsychosis, for Origen, is a central component of universal salvation because he recognises that salvation (a notion that has significant overlap with sublimation, in that it is sublimation of the corporeal that brings one closer to God and to salvation) is not an easy process and that one lifetime may not be enough to achieve it. This also tacitly acknowledges the limitations of human (corporeal) existence: it separates the individual soul from godliness even as it provides, almost in spite of itself, the elements necessary for sublimation to occur. Time limits the completion of sublimation or salvation within a single lifetime. On the other hand, for Origen, the ineffable goodness of God shows that God would have been incapable of creating souls that cannot be saved. In other words, the potential for and drive toward sublimation and salvation exist in every soul, and once the limitation of time is removed by the belief in transmigration of souls, it is assumed that every soul will eventually follow its true nature and rejoin the state of godliness. Salvation extends even to beings that are evil, such as the demons (who were the *logika* that fell the furthest) and Satan. Origen's worldview includes a concept of evil, but not of absolute or lasting evil, because ultimately nothing in creation can resist the power of God's goodness. According to the Neoplatonist view, evil consists only of the absence of good (just as darkness is an absence of light), and emanation eventually dispels it. Origen echoes this view, but in a Christian context, and sublimation—leaving the material world behind—appears to be implicit in universal salvation. However, this concept did not persist in the theology of the Catholic Church and effectively many other aspects of Origen's legacy have been controversial. Henri Crousel (1989:178–9) gives a detailed account of the church's condemnation of the teachings of Origen in 553. Recently, Matthew Steenberg (2007) reflects the Orthodox viewpoint summarising the key objections:

While it is nearly impossible to believe that Origen saw himself as defending anything but Christian orthodoxy, it is yet more difficult still to admit that what he ended up portraying was orthodox in its message. In the end, the doctrine of Universal Salvation cannot be faithfully paired with the more patristic notions of free will or final judgement, even though Origen energetically defends both; for he described 'judgement' solely as a tool for teaching and thus removed from it any real sense of *justice*. He exaggerated the love of God to a degree that downplayed His

righteousness: two features which the Church has been insistent to bring *together* in its teachings, rather than to separate... Ultimately, his view of universal restoration took the concept of free will full-circle, and ended with its absence; for if all are to be restored to God, then the ‘choices’ one makes in life are really not choices at all—for the ultimate fruit of the decision is already determined by God.

4.6 GREGORY OF NYSSA ¹⁶⁰

Gregory of Nyssa’s major contributions to Christian theology include the definition of the Trinity as three ‘persons’ of the same substance—a conundrum for which several explanations were suggested, of which Gregory’s own is one—and a definition of God as ‘infinite’, together with an explanation of what that means. Furthermore, Gregory defined a progression through stages from ignorance to a unique explanation of the knowledge of God and what it entails. His theology includes the concept of *epektatis* or ‘constant progression’ toward virtue and godliness, the goal of which is eventual perfection, a state in which one may work toward the salvation of all. Gregory’s ‘stages’ are the concepts most relevant to the topic of bodily sublimation in favour of the soul, but other concepts, such as his explanation of the infinite nature of God, are likewise relevant, albeit peripherally. Gregory’s explanation of the Trinity, notwithstanding the fact that it is the contribution for which he is best known, does not relate directly to sublimation, except insofar as it relates to the ‘substance’ or nature of God, Gregory’s point being that God is of such undiluted goodness that there can be no real difference or distinction between beings which consist of the ‘God quality’, so to speak.

This notion of God as unlimited and indefinable profoundly affects the version of sublimation that can be extrapolated from Gregory’s concepts. A Christian viewpoint might see sublimation as an improvement, a refinement, and a movement toward increasing goodness and purity, the ultimate goodness being the essence of God. According to Platonist, Neoplatonist and some Christian concepts, the process of sublimation is undertaken in accordance to the higher human nature, and is ultimately fruitful. Although thinking may vary

¹⁶⁰ This section (which necessarily covers a good deal of ground in a very general way) leans very much on Sarah Coakley’s *Rethinking Gregory of Nyssa* and on several online Orthodox sources, notably OrthodoxWiki.org.

regarding the stages of sublimation or the precise form it takes, the constant is the implied belief that humans are capable of embarking upon and ultimately finishing the process. Here, Gregory distinguishes, adding considerable refinement. While Origen, for example, assumes that the progression toward increasing illumination is ongoing, for Gregory, the unlimited nature of God constitutes something that human beings can ultimately never know or approximate. Therefore, Gregory's stages of illumination (which are roughly analogous to sublimation) culminate in "divine darkness", the "darkness of the mind" in contemplation of the God who cannot be comprehended. The process of sublimation, which begins in darkness (the darkness of ignorance) moves through increasing spiritual illumination only to end ultimately in this "divine darkness", which represents humanity's closest connection to the divine nature of God (Kariatlis, 2012:109–111).

Thus, a life's journey through Gregory's stages may lead towards perfection and closeness to God but it is a journey whose goal may never, in a sense, truly be reached. Progress is constant, but the human and God remain distinct from each other, the ultimate stage in sublimation being something that the human soul cannot reach. This concept introduces a type of duality that is subtly different from the body/soul duality that defines most versions of sublimation discussed so far. In this case, the duality exists between the essence of God and that of humans: while humans may approach Godliness the true essence of God remains inaccessible, just as knowledge of God is not ultimately achievable by the human mind. The duality, therefore, is between God and us, but that does not diminish the drive or the necessity to move closer to godliness.¹⁶¹

4.7 THE TROUBLES OF ST AUGUSTINE AND THEIR LEGACY

It is difficult to summarise adequately Augustine's views on the theme of body/spirit and the process and requirement of sublimation, because his general viewpoint undergoes so many changes, and contains several diverse elements even after his conversion. Outler's introduction to Augustine's *Confessions* (1955:vi) refers to "lively tensions and massive prejudices in his heart and head" throughout his life. To begin with, it is accurate, even commonplace, to credit St Augustine with having reframed and to a degree reintegrated Neoplatonist views in a new and uniquely European Christianity where Augustine's

¹⁶¹ The felt paradox of this was described by many later Christian mystics, most notably Saint John of God.

distinctive but scripturally substantiated theology is central; in other words, if it were not for Augustine's contribution, it is less likely that concepts so strongly related to that of Emanation and the existence of immaterial and ideal forms would have formed such a central component of Christianity. At the same time, he does not identify himself as a Christian Neoplatonist, referring, in his writing, to the "falsehood of Plotinus" as opposed to the "Catholic truth."¹⁶² On the other hand, the Neoplatonist concept of an immaterial God and a viewpoint that all of creation, humankind included, partakes in varying degrees of the quality of Godliness (a concept bearing much relation to Emanation and stemming from it) appear in his theology. The principal distinction between truth and 'falsehood', according to Augustine, seems to be the presence of Christ as teacher and mediator. It is a thin oversimplification to state that Augustine's theological worldview consists of a Neoplatonist framework with the addition and central positioning of Christ, but that assessment nevertheless may have some merit. Even this simplified viewpoint requires an understanding of the full significance of Christ within the context of Augustine's theological framework. This is both profound and difficult to grasp fully, not least because the Christocentric nature of Augustine's worldview is not carried through in all of his ecclesiastic writing, some of which makes reference to and grants centrality to concepts such as original sin and predestination,¹⁶³ underlined concepts which appear to shrink the idea of Christ as a personal saviour of humanity.¹⁶⁴ Nonetheless, the presence and the centrality of Christ is the principal structural difference between Augustine's theology and the Neoplatonist worldview, so that Augustine's eventual stance has much less in common with the radically dualistic worldview of the Manicheans, his pre-conversion school of choice.

¹⁶² *Conf. 7.19.25: Ego autem aliquanto posterius didicisse me fateor ... quomodo catholica veritas a Photini falsitate dirimatur.*

¹⁶³ Augustinian predestination is the father of the Calvinistic idea of an irrevocable elect and reprobate; it was thorough-going, and a source of contention in his day (Kenny, 282–283). Interestingly, it does not seem to have persisted in its original sense in the Roman Catholic church: Boyer's 1939 manual for seminarians qualified: "Impossible est praedeterminationem requiri ad omnem actum bonum creaturae (413)...moving directly to concentrate on providence (420–21) "(ratio ordinis rerum in finem)...Providentiam ad omnia extendi docent omnes philosophi christiani".

¹⁶⁴ James E. Dittes (1965:132) writes: "Augustine put relatively little emphasis on the figure of Christ as a mediator or as a redemptive agent. In this, he stands in stark contrast, for example, to Luther. Augustine's relative slighting of the second, and also the third persons of the trinity is all the more notable, coming as it does in the aftermath of the church's struggle to define and preserve the concept of trinity. Christ's role is seen largely as a revelation, a manifestation of God."

Regarding the concept of sublimation, therefore, Augustine's perspective may appear deceptively simple. The most elementary approach to it would entail a comparison between Augustine's view and that of the Neoplatonists, wherein it would be pointed out that the concept of Emanation may be applied to Augustine's view of Christianity, the difference between it and the views of the Neoplatonists being the centrality of Christ as a mediator between God and humanity. Robert Crouse (2008: Chapter IV) comments: "As St. Augustine understood it, the spiritual impasse of paganism lay precisely in the evident impossibility of any genuine mediation between the divine and human spheres. Without that via, the blessed homeland must remain only a vision, never an habitation." However, there are elements of Augustine's views that may be applied to sublimation, and that are strongly informed by an imprint of, and reaction to, his former belief in the radical dualism of Manichean concepts. Augustine's *Confessions*, which is often misunderstood as being primarily an autobiography, offers a comprehensive picture of the evolution of Augustine's theology, an evolution in which a personal struggle to arrive at a system of belief meaningful enough to convert to a more focused existence figures strongly. In the conclusion of that struggle, and the outline of that Christian faith, elements of Augustine's former beliefs and personal struggle still persist, and many of these specifically influence the application of Augustine's theology to the concept of sublimation. In particular, Augustine's Manichaeism left its own deeply pessimistic mark. Peter Brown (1967:53) comments:

[Manichaeism] had enabled the young Augustine to disown, for a time, and at heavy cost, disquieting qualities which he would only later come to accept, both in his God and, one may suspect, in himself. These were the hard 'paternal' qualities associated with the omnipotent Father of Catholic belief: a Father capable of righteous anger, of inflicting punishment, His unique goodness separated by an unbridgeable gulf from his sons.

It is noteworthy that, according to Augustine himself, he was a defender rather than a reformer of the Catholic faith; he has been called, also, an "essentially conservative genius" (Outler, 1955:v). These statements caution one not to regard Augustine as having somehow invented a new version of Christianity which incorporates the diverse influences already mentioned. Instead, everything that Augustine incorporates and promotes as part of his theological viewpoint is substantiated by Scripture and by the influences of a few earlier ecclesiastical writers, most notably St Ambrose (whom Augustine knew personally) and St

Paul. The asceticism of St Paul inspired Augustine and drew him forward in his quest to overcome the urges of appetite and the material world, which he considered essential to the attainment of enlightenment, peace and holiness. The attainment of these qualities, which may amount to sublimation or at least be analogous to the process of sublimation, does not entail a rejection or vilification of the material world, as dualism would indicate. Rather, the entire universe, material and incorporeal, is considered to have been created by God and therefore good, the only evil being weak and undisciplined human behaviour—behaviour which demonstrates, according to an analogy that Augustine uses, illness rather than good health (*sanitas*). Just as someone who is ill in body might reject good and healthy food, someone who is ill in spirit will reject right action and be unable to follow the word and will of God, much to his or her own sorrow and detriment (*Conf.* 7.16, 1).

Sublimation, therefore, according to Augustine, is the re-establishment of spiritual health, so that the good can be embraced while everything that is corrupt or unwholesome is rejected. It is in this establishment or re-establishment of health that Christ, the redeemer of humankind and the mediator between God and humanity, is necessary. Christ mediates and teaches humans a proper orientation within and communion with the material world. This world is created by God and therefore not to be rejected outright. When this world is considered and evaluated by the two other belief systems interpreted by Augustine—Manichean and Neoplatonist—their interpretation is inadequate. The dualism of the Manicheans was rejected on the grounds that a good God could not have created evil when creating everything. Neoplatonist Emanation, on the other hand, is partly incorporated into Augustine's theology, or at least allowed to influence it profoundly, but is ultimately rejected as a worldview because, among other things, it fails to address the mechanics of sublimation—that is, the Neoplatonist system fails sufficiently to take into account personal human weakness and the need for self-discipline. The challenge, then, inherent in sublimation and in good living is correct navigation through the temptations of the material world and alignment with the spiritual. Using more or less an analogue of the Platonic Forms, Augustine believed that the elements of wisdom, knowledge and correct behaviour are inherent in humanity, but

something else is required in order to unlock that inherent knowledge, and he identifies that ‘something’ with the person of Christ.¹⁶⁵

Most of Augustine’s theology appears to be centred on that simple yet challenging concept; however, as Albert Outler (among several other commentators) mentions in his introduction to *Confessions*, there are contradictions and difficulties inherent in this aspect of Augustine’s writing. According to Outler, Augustine is never “adequately Christocentric” to truly uphold or support the views that he describes, and that fact is demonstrated by other beliefs, such as a belief in predestination and the related conviction that most of humankind will be subject to “wholly just and appalling damnation” (1995:iv). Unless it is taken simply as a belief that most humans will not be able to achieve sublimation or to listen and attend to the voice of Christ within them, the view is at odds with Augustine’s principal message regarding sublimation—that it is an innate and accessible process dependent only upon one’s ability to listen to the voice of Christ within one’s soul, and through him to enter into communion with the divine. If there is predestination, then free will, if it exists, must be limited, and moreover, the teaching of Christ (or the ability to ‘hear’ it) is not then wholly universal, either. Moreover, if predestination determines who is ‘saved’ and who is not, the motivation for the individual to move toward sublimation diminishes; however, if one is convinced that alignment with Christ’s teachings and with right action is necessary to achieve any measure of happiness and peace, regardless of eventual damnation or reward, then the drive toward sublimation naturally remains, even with less reliable outcomes.

However, the confidence with which Augustine regards what he considers to be the only right course of action elsewhere appears to imply reliable ‘results’, and consequently the belief in predestination, which may appear to weaken the concept of sublimation, can be regarded as an inconsistency in Augustine’s ideas. When one considers the confidence and simplicity with which he refers to his eventual acceptance of Christian concepts, it is tempting to disregard entirely the concept of predestination and the belief that most of humanity will be subject to damnation, because those concepts simply do not mesh with the near inevitability with which it is implied that humans can and must ally themselves with Christ and his teachings as they

¹⁶⁵ John Watson (1907:332) points at the principal reason for Augustine’s shift away from Neoplatonism: Augustine came to see that the biblical God reveals in the Word (Jesus Christ) a complete manifestation of his inner being, not a subsidiary emanation.

navigate among their human and divine natures. By implication these are both the same, given Augustine's insistence upon the essential unity of the universe, God having created everything, material and incorporeal. The challenge, seemingly, is to 'order' things correctly, so that one's natural appetite for and draw toward the material world does not cause one to put the material above the spiritual.

But it is a mistake to state it as simply as that, ignoring Augustine's shifting theological viewpoint and deep psychological pessimism on the matter of corporeality. This is explored in an article by Ernesto Bonaiuti and Giorgio La Piana (1917:162) who identify a change in Augustine's early view of humankind from *mortales et ignari et carne subditi*¹⁶⁶ (a notion not dissimilar to the Neoplatonist concept of a soul imprisoned in a body) to one where humans are *concupiscentiae subditi*:

At first sight, it seems that the first and older opinion was more pessimistic than the second; but if we consider carefully we shall find that this is not true.... introducing into an organism ... the incessant trouble of corrupted sensuality, the sin, in the new attitude of the Augustinian thought, effaces at once the possibility of free will, which became slave of the [sic] evil."

4.7.1 De Magistro

It is natural, when considering Augustine, to concentrate on *Confessions*, where the concepts discussed above are indeed most clearly and comprehensively laid out. However, it is worthwhile noting there is a great deal of consistency between the views presented in that work and in several more concise works, notably *De Magistro*, which outlines Augustine's philosophy of education, but which is framed in a way that integrates the Platonic tradition. The noteworthy elements here (regarding both sublimation and the parallels with the concepts outlined in *Confessions*) are the similarities and continuities with Platonic and Neoplatonist concepts, particularly, in this case, the concept of the ideal Forms, as well as the assertion that accessing and following truth is natural and universal, knowledge existing already through

¹⁶⁶ From *De lib. arbit.* 111, 54.

Christ, in every human being. *De Magistro* illustrates Augustine's genius in using a familiar format to say something altogether new. It is written in the style of a Platonic dialogue, and it seeks to define the true nature of knowledge and learning with reference to external and internal, and physical and non-physical worlds. More specifically, the role of the teacher is defined as that of one who reminds the student of a deep and universal truth, making use of words as symbols that prompt the student to remember the knowledge that is within. Neither words nor teachers teach. Words are the external symbols of a deeper reality and the teacher who uses them is not imparting knowledge, but is bringing the student closer toward an awareness of what is already known. Thus, what is material or external serves a purpose, reflecting and leading towards internal and universal knowledge. The significant difference between this concept and that of the Platonic Forms is that Augustine identifies Christ as the real teacher who imparts knowledge from within the soul. This is a definition or description of Christ in his role as mediator or saviour of humankind, and it is extrapolated further in *Confessions*. It also defines the proper relationship between humankind (including those individuals who wish to teach others), the material world, and God. Augustine states (14, 46) that: "He alone teaches who when he spoke externally made us aware us that he lives within us".¹⁶⁷ In Christ, therefore, there is the joining and ordering of internal and external, material and spiritual realities. It is not by rejecting the material or the external that wisdom and sublimation are achieved, but rather by moving first through and then beyond these earthly tools, as they appear to be. The material world serves its purpose as a reflection and reminder of the internal truth, and evil, corruption, sickness or sin are connected with the substitution of the material for the spiritual. It is through Christ that this internal truth may be reached and learned.¹⁶⁸ This concept is reflected in Augustine's distinction between belief and understanding: the former is God-given, or taught directly by Christ and internally reached (though perhaps through external prompting); the latter makes reference to external or physical reality, and is a logical, perhaps evidence-based type of knowledge. Augustine insists upon the proper interrelation between the two; belief must come before knowledge, and must inform one's application of or striving for understanding. In that way, the two can complement each another.

¹⁶⁷ ...[utrum autem vera dicantur], eum docere solum, qui se intus habitare, cum foris loqueretur, admonuit.

¹⁶⁸ *De Magistro*, 12. Title: *Christus intus veritas docet*.

But if individuals attempt to put understanding before belief, the acquisition of knowledge will be faulty and probably shortcut by its own limitations. The proper alignment and prioritising of the two, and then the following of belief as a primary means of obtaining knowledge, superior to and taking precedence over understanding, is at least analogous to the concept of sublimation in Augustine, and may serve to define and explicate it in simple terms. Co-existence of the material and spiritual (external and internal) worlds; correct interaction between these worlds (wherein the spiritual/internal takes precedence); the potential for mistakes or misalignment of the two worlds (which would prove devastating in that it makes true knowledge impossible to attain), and the central position of Jesus as teacher, saviour or mediator between humanity and the divine (or, in this case, between humanity and true knowledge)—all these points, which are the basis of Augustine’s theology in general and his implied concept of sublimation in particular, are apparent, and amply though simply expressed, in this short work. Once again, the similarity between this system that Augustine presents and the Platonic or Neoplatonist worldview is striking, with the exception of the central role of Christ. It should be noted also that the role of Christ in Augustine’s worldview is an active one; Christ dynamically and personally interacts with humanity to effect salvation, and the proper and helpful use of human interactions (such as that of a teacher and student) is to clarify the teaching of Christ and to foster a closer alignment with it. This is the only way in which happiness, knowledge and fulfilment may be achieved.

These concepts are intact in *Confessions*, which also outlines, in dramatic chronological order, Augustine’s realisation of them, and the influence that earlier ideas may have had on his ordering of the universe according to a key Christocentric principle. What is this? On the face of it it is not especially removed from the underpinnings of the prior philosophies discussed in this research: never denying the importance of the material world but acknowledging the difficulty of navigating through it without corrupting oneself. The difference in Augustine is the near impossibility of doing so without direct intervention from Christ and an acquired or learned receptivity to his presence. What emerges in *Confessions* is how in this way a person’s unfolding history in the world and spiritual disengagement from it meet in Christ.

4.7.2 Confessions

In observing how the concepts outlined and developed by Augustine in his *Confessions* intersect with the concept of the sublimation of the corporeal, several closely related themes

spring to mind at once. The foremost of these is simply Augustine's life story as it unfolds in *Confessions*: his early preoccupation with physical things gradually transformed by a strengthening of the will, his conversion experience, and the reorientation of his being toward Christ and Christianity. Value judgments are embedded in the biographical aspect of the work. Augustine himself views his early preoccupation with the material world as an indication of his state of corruption: he yearned to be satisfied with the world: *exarsi enim aliquando satiari inferis in adulescentia* (2.1.1), and relationships with women (eventually, one in particular) were the avenue through which he most often sought physical or worldly satisfaction. On the recollection of his earlier life, he expresses the wish that the gifts of his life will be increased and perfected by God: ... *et augebuntur et perficientur quae dedisti mihi* (1.18.31); and that his spirit of enquiry is restrained from excess by a righteous fear of God: *sed illius [libera curiositas] fluxum haec [meticulosa necessitas] restringit legibus tuis, deus, ... revocantes nos ad te* (1.14.23). Thus, God stands between an individual and his or her physical appetites and excesses, but nothing can be achieved from this, the reader learns later, until the will of God is embraced and committed to. A clear value judgment suggestive of dualism is inherent in these views, and it only later becomes entirely clear that it is not the material world itself, but the immoderate desire for it to the exclusion of the spiritual, that is the problem. And, again, immoderate desire and corruption draw out an improper alignment of the spiritual to the physical.

This problem is presented right at the outset of the work, but not truly resolved until much later, following Augustine's conversion. At that stage, when he contrasts his beliefs with those he held as a Manichean, it is made clear that Augustine is not vilifying the physical world or even the enjoyment of it, but merely the formation of his priorities. At one point he writes, *et error meus erat deus meus* (4.7.12), indicating that his real mistake was to have put something else in the place which God ought to occupy. A little later, from the perspective acquired following his conversion, Augustine addresses his former self: *ut quid perversa [anima mea] sequeris carnem tuam? ipsa te sequatur conversam?* (4.11.17). The message is clear, both in the assertion that 'flesh' should follow 'soul', and in the identification of soul as 'you', a person's essential being. Augustine first makes it clear, in the next passage, that physical beings themselves are not to blame for corruption: "If physical objects please you, praise God for them, but turn back your love to their Creator, lest, in those things that please

you, you displease him “ (4.12.18).¹⁶⁹ The fault lies not on the physical things (*corpora*) but in the orientation toward them in exclusion of an orientation toward God. Physical things are never to be regarded as evil, as the Manicheans indicate, because the physical world comes from God and would not have been created were it not in order to fulfil some divine purpose. Augustine writes: *sed expecta: iucunda sunt etiam ista, habent non parvam dulcedinem suam; non facile ab eis praecidenda est intentio, quia turpe est ad ea rursum redire* (6.11.19). The first part of this statement is easy to interpret, indicating that the physical world ought not be totally abandoned in the quest for God, because, again, it comes from God and serves a purpose, and is therefore ‘not negligible’ in its importance and value. The second part of the statement, however (after *quia*), shows that the physical must eventually be left behind in favour of a more spiritual existence, and that this must take place in a certain manner so as not to be short-lived and inconclusive. Though inexplicit, this statement is meaningful regarding sublimation. It shows that, much as in Plato’s system as outlined in *Symposium* and elsewhere, for Augustine, moving through the physical is a stage in the attainment of real wisdom or communion with God. The two—the corporeal and the spiritual—are not entirely disparate systems, but again, the fault lies, perhaps, in attachment to the physical and in a resistance to moving past it and orienting to spiritual concerns. In his personal narrative, Augustine talks about the pain of being separated from his mistress (6.15.25), and this is, for a modern reader perhaps, an unsatisfactory aspect of the story, because he speaks of her with no reference to love, but as a physical attachment that it was necessary, though painful, for him to get rid of.¹⁷⁰ He does state that his heart was torn and hurt and bleeding—*while* it was attached.¹⁷¹ Emotional attachment is sited on the physical plane, along with other vices or weaknesses that must be discarded in the movement toward God. In this, one may speculate that Augustine was influenced by the asceticism of St Paul, and also of other earlier writers, who emphasised chastity and insisted upon the veiling of women. Of Augustine’s message as a whole, it might best be said that his assertion that the physical world is part of God’s

¹⁶⁹ ... *si placent corpora, deum ex illis lauda et in artificem eorum retorque amorem, ne in his quae tibi placent tu displiceas.*

¹⁷⁰ Brown, 1967: 61–62, writes: “Our curiosity about her is a very modern preoccupation, which Augustine and his cultivated friends would have found strange ... concubinage of this tyoe was a traditional feature of Roman life. Even the Catholic church was prepared to recognize it, provided that the couple remained faithful to one another.”

¹⁷¹ ... *cor, ubi adhaerebat, concisum et vulneratum mihi erat et trahebat sanguinem.*

creation and therefore not ‘evil’ (the only evil being human attachment to it) holds true but is often influenced by the intensity of his own struggle to overcome the power of the physical.

The earlier quote, *iucunda sunt ... non facile ab eis praecidenda est intentio ... turpe est ad ea rursum redire*, shows that there must be a regular progression beyond the physical. What precisely it would mean to ‘cut off’ the world does not appear to be substantiated in the text, but it might be assumed that Augustine is referring to an outright separation from the physical, such as that indicated by a dualist approach. Much of the progression of Augustine’s views consists of a distancing from dualism and from the teachings of the Manicheans. The comment *turpe est ad ea rursum redire* seems to be indicating that a false sublimation of sorts—a rejection of the material without the orientation toward God that should accompany it—is flimsy, and can have the desired effect only in the short term.

Augustine, unlike the Manicheans, makes humankind responsible for evil, or, at least, for choosing evil (or ‘suffering’ evil) through free will. By contrast, the Manichean worldview allows for a God who suffers evil. Rejecting this view, but not yet having finalised his own, Augustine acknowledges that the teachings of the Neoplatonists are valuable in allowing him to conceive of a God not bound by the crude materialism (7.9.13) of the Manicheans. For Augustine, this meant a conception of God more in line with the Neoplatonist One, in terms of the limitless quality, (*per immensa sine termine*—7.1.2) the immutability, and the format of a human body (*figura corporis humani*—7.1.1) that defines the reductionist view of God. Having contemplated God’s limitlessness, Augustine has another realisation: all things have value (*et manifestatum est mihi quoniam bona sunt quae corrumpuntur*—7.12.18) and, consequently, it is unhealthy to find fault with any part of creation (*non est sanitas eis quibus displicet aliquid creaturae tuae*—7.14.20). Augustine continues, explaining that dualism is a result of that particular unhealthiness, the inability to accept one type of reality and the desire to create distance from it. Sublimation, therefore, is not a simple matter of turning away from the material, or even from aspects of the material world commonly thought of as evil. Augustine insists upon personal responsibility in these matters; for instance, he asserts that even the viper and worm though perceived as evil, are in themselves God’s creations and therefore good, but that ‘we see things as we are’; a corrupted or wicked mind will perceive elements of creation as corrupt or wicked (7.16.22). To Augustine, they are not, and wickedness itself can only consist of one thing: a perversion of the will twisted away from goodness (*detortae [te deo] in infima voluntatis perversitatem*—7.6.22). However, although

things that are physical or carnal are not in themselves evil or wicked, the *consuetudo carnalis* can and does ‘tear away’ the soul from God’s will, and the corrupted body burdens the soul (*quoniam corpus quod corrumpitur adgravat animam*—7.17.23). Sublimation amounts to a removal of these carnal habits so that the soul can be liberated and can orient naturally toward God. The notion that this liberation can and must take place through Jesus Christ is a basic tenet of Augustine’s theology, and is (to reiterate) a singular element that separates his worldview from that of the Neoplatonists. Another key to Augustine’s eventual understanding of Christian concepts was the realisation that Christ was not just a wise man, and that his message is more than a rejection of worldly things. The concept of Christ as ‘word made flesh’ is highly meaningful to Augustine and because of it Augustine implies that it is Christ’s role to interact directly with the human psyche and thereby to orient the individual towards God and therefore away from corruption (7.18.24).

4.8 AUGUSTINIAN CONVERSION AND THE REALISATION OF SUBLIMATION

All this leads to Augustine’s account of his own conversion, which is dramatic and moving. It illustrates by example the fact that an intellectual understanding of the correct concepts is not enough, if one is to reorient one’s being toward God—in other words, if one is to achieve or work toward sublimation. Rather, it appears necessary for one to give up one’s will, almost to chance, and take direction from divinely-inspired teachings, as Augustine himself did. Just before his conversion, he struggled with his ‘carnal habit’, observing that *illud (cupiditas) placebat et vincebat* and he describes freedom from it as an awakening (VIII.v.12). Moreover, he observes that learning and education do not appear to help with this issue of orienting toward God, but that they may hold the person back, enervating and promoting worldliness: *Quid est hoc? ... surgunt indocti et caelum rapiunt, et nos cum doctrinis nostris sine corde, ecce ubi volutamur in carne et sanguine!* (8.8.19). This particular statement is, on the face of it, a departure from Platonic concepts, which stress reason and intellectual power as a pathway to the eternal Forms.

The Platonic concept of sublimation seems more active, engaging the intellect, while Augustine’s version leans on a type of submission, relying on surrender to Christ and dependent on the direct intercession of Christ on humankind’s behalf. The nature of Augustine’s actual conversion—he takes up and reads a randomly selected passage from St Paul, prompted by a child’s song overheard by chance—likewise shows a type of surrender.

For Augustine submits spontaneously to chance about the most important decision of his life (8.8.19) and, as he explains, the submissiveness in question is not to chance or fate, but rather to the belief that Christ, ‘word made flesh’, does influence the world of humankind directly, and that the only worthy action is to submit to this influence. Once that is done, health is established and it becomes possible for the individual to continue resisting physical temptation—not, again, out of a loathing for material reality, but because humankind’s proper orientation is toward God, in the manner that Christ teaches. In describing the working out of this in his own life Augustine outlines some specific views on physical pleasure that seem excessively scrupulous and introspective—for example, he states that he finds it wrong to take pleasure in the sound of singing if the sound gives one greater pleasure than the religious meaning of the words—but the view that humans are led, by Christ and through the physical world, into a state of sublimation holds true.

Speaking to his mother, St Monica, close to the time of her death, Augustine relates the following, masterfully translated by Albert Outler:

And when our conversation brought us to the point where the highest of physical sense and the most intense illumination of physical light seemed, in comparison with the sweetness of that life to come, not worthy of comparison, or even of mention, we lifted ourselves with a more ardent love toward the selfsame, and we gradually passed then all levels of bodily objects, and even through heaven itself... (9.10.24) [Outler].¹⁷²

This beautiful passage appears to be the description of a direct (and progressive) experience of sublimation, and if so, the use of the word *idipsum* (“selfsame”) is interesting and significant, though ambiguous;¹⁷³ it seems as though it might correspond with a heightened

¹⁷² ... cumque ad eum finem sermo perduceretur, ut carnalium sensuum delectatio quantalibet, in quantalibet luce corporea, prae illius vitae iucunditate non comparatione sed ne commemoratione quidem digna videretur, erigentes nos ardentiore affectu in idipsum, perambulavimus gradatim cuncta corporalia et ipsum caelum...

¹⁷³ R.S Pine-Coffin’s 1961 Penguin translation renders *idipsum* simply as “the eternal God”. Goulven Madec (1976:129–132) is more subtle: « L’*idipsum* est ‘l’expression typique de l’Être Divin’, comme dit Aimé Solignac, qui ajoute que la meilleure traduction française paraît ‘l’Être-même’. Je hazarde ‘l’Identique’... et je suppose qu’Augustin la tient de Porphyre. »

physical sense, identification with, or attunement to God. That notion also corresponds with the idea that nothing in the world God created is evil or corrupt, and every part of creation was put in place deliberately. If that is the case, the challenge of submitting to a type of mediation, through Christ, that will ensure proper interaction between the spiritual and physical, is prerequisite for sublimation.

It is not unreasonable to see the passage as a potent completion of, and answer to, the imagined trajectory of sublimation beautifully expressed in *Symposium* and refined and iterated in Neoplatonist and Gnostic writings. The great advantage that many of the varied manifestations of Classical philosophies had over early Christianity is to offer through their dualities of gods or through their various recipes for a good life, a workable vehicle for transcendence that challenged Christianity in its insistence on the unity of heaven and earth in Christ's redemptive work through history. The tension is arguably resolved in the end in the Christ of Augustine's experience and testimony. In Augustine's religious meditations, his material existence with all its joys, woes and sins is joined to intelligible transcendence through Christ, resolving and integrating in the end many of the challenges and contributions of these philosophies, and achieving a new proposition of wholeness that made the Church universal in its historical work of salvation in Christ.

CHAPTER 5

BODY AND SPIRIT WITHIN EARLY CHRISTIAN THOUGHT: CONFLICTS AND THEIR RESOLUTIONS?

The concept of sublimating the body developed alongside and in the heart of Western thought as it passed through the Classical period and the Hellenic-inspired philosophies that stemmed from it. It took root and found full expression in Christianity, the body of thought most responsible for shaping Western thought until the early modern era. Sublimation is not inevitably or inextricably a Christian concept, but it evolved, with a remarkable degree of continuity, through shifting conceptual frameworks and paradigms. Indeed, the interplay between the concept and the various frameworks within which it existed helped to form and define the notion of who or what a person is, what virtue is, and the nature of the ultimate goal of human existence. The working out of sublimation reveals that this ultimate goal is to move beyond the material world, and that virtue exists in the movement toward spirituality—toward a goodness or a deity itself.

On the other hand, as the assessment of the concept's evolution has demonstrated, arriving at this simple idea was complex and certainly not a foregone conclusion. That is to say, even when dualism had been established, the notion that one ought to move away from the material and toward the spiritual was not immediately or inevitably arrived at, but was the result of shifting frameworks, cultures and values—though in the case of the latter, it is difficult to determine clearly whether it was the values that guided the evolution of the concept, or the reverse. Most likely it was interplay between the two that counted.

To some degree this appears to have been an evolutionary progression, though, again, not inevitable in its outcome but the result of a specific trajectory of thought. However, something else becomes apparent when the evolution of the idea of sublimation is studied: the contributions of Plato altered the concept in such a fundamental and lasting way that the course of this evolution was never the same afterward. His philosophical concepts might be compared to a prism through which these basic 'building block' concepts were transformed, and then directed outward. What followed, then, was more or less a linear progression, but

one that was refracted or subtly redirected during the course of its existence. The ideas regarding sublimation that come after Plato are not all accordant with his, but they are all shaped and directed by his, so that it is apparent these concepts would have taken on a different nature or evolved along a different tangent were it not for Plato. The resulting trajectory is at once linear and the result of later shifting frameworks of thought.

The frameworks of thought discussed by this research, all relating in some way to sublimation, can be variously labelled, although in the Classical period these labels might have fallen under one general category—‘philosophy’. As the definition and scope of philosophy appear to have narrowed, it may be observed that the concepts covered relate to other thought frameworks such as physics (or cosmology, or simply ‘science’), metaphysics, and religion. Philosophy itself—relating to the technique of abstract reasoning—is a fourth. When the many distinct eras during which the concept of sublimation evolved are studied using key texts, it becomes apparent that there has rarely been a balance between these four frameworks, but that the influence of each has ebbed and flowed. Observing how this has occurred, it is practical to consider how the concept of sublimation has been nurtured and driven on by the force of these various frameworks and their interplay with one another.

Before the Classical period, the lack of separation between the four frameworks was perhaps the most distinguishing feature. It was during that Presocratic era that many of the concepts which were carried over to Plato and beyond were first formed. Though one can know relatively little of it, it was an important era regarding sublimation. Moreover, it is characterised primarily by a relative lack of differentiation of thought. There is no real breach between physics (science) and metaphysics, and both are considered to be the intellectual sustenance of philosophy. Religion does not take centre stage, but to the extent that it does appear, it is integrated with the other frameworks. That is, just as physical and metaphysical properties of the universe, and the knowledge of them, combine seamlessly to create cosmology, they also explain the nature and presence of the gods. The work of the Presocratic philosophers—the cosmologies put forward by Heraclitus, Parmenides and others, and their explication of this integrated system—provides the raw materials for what would one day become the concept of sublimation. For example, in Heraclitus is described a ‘hidden harmony’ that is more pervasive, unifying, and important than the observed world. Heraclitus advocates movement toward this ‘hidden harmony’ or Logos, and therefore away from the world of the senses; however, this remains distinct from a concept of ascension beyond the

physical. At most, Heraclitus promotes an awareness of that which is present—immanent even—though just beyond the realm of observation and knowledge. However, while both the presence of the metaphysical and an awareness of the underlying and unseen harmony of all things are suggestive of sublimation, any imperative to truly refine human nature so as to identify with the incorporeal is largely absent: there is no true drive toward sublimation. One of the reasons why the Presocratic worldview is so interesting and so relevant is that it encompasses all the ingredients, so to speak, for sublimation, while still remaining a world away from the concept as it eventually developed. Interestingly, this appears to be true even when the writer in question speaks directly of human improvement or purification, as, for example, Empedocles does. His recommendations regarding how human nature can be refined and improved are along the same lines as what might be thought of as sublimation—reminiscent of, for example, the asceticism of Socrates or, much later, of Tertullian or even Augustine.

In the first chapter, charting the initial development of dualism, Empedocles' ostensible ambiguity on that point was remarked on: on the one hand, he appears to advocate improvement, refinement, and a greater identification with love as opposed to strife; on the other hand, he shows that the interplay between love and strife, and, by implication, between the physical and metaphysical, is something that happens on its own, without human control, input or active participation. It is, therefore only in the interest of one's own happiness that commitment to the knowledge of the process, or even, for that matter, to purification, is worthwhile.

Perhaps it is the integrated nature of the frameworks through which the universe was viewed during that era that led to a problem or paradox in considering the role of sublimation. The existence of the metaphysical is established, and perhaps even taken for granted; human improvement and refinement is advocated, and the means by which it may be accomplished are laid out—and yet the concept of sublimation as it came to be incorporated into Christianity was simply impossible relative to this system of thought. The problem, perhaps, is that all of those frameworks mentioned earlier are too undifferentiated. There is almost no distinction made between, for example, science and religion. The physical and metaphysical are one and the same—both indicative of an underlying harmony. A figurative mapping of reality between these various elements had to be developed before sublimation could find a conceptual space.

This research has argued that Plato introduces a breach or leap by moulding the raw materials provided by the worldviews of earlier philosophers to form a system which acknowledges a teleological reason for existence and a deepening division between physics and metaphysics, and between philosophy and religion. This is a system within which the concept of sublimation became not only possible but, this research argues, inevitable. Part of Plato's contribution was simply to call attention to abstract reality and set it apart from the physical, even as the link between the two is emphasised—which in itself points to the fact that, within a more integrated worldview, that 'link' would have been less relevant, because there would have been no deep divisions between the tangible and the abstract in the first place.¹⁷⁴ Plato proposes the allegory of the cave, where the dichotomy between what is perceived and what is ultimately real is made abundantly clear, and the analogy of the divided line, where, again, there is a focus on the division between the visible and invisible worlds. The body of thought that preceded his however showed much more of a tendency to view all things as an undifferentiated, and often cyclical, whole. The latter viewpoint requires nothing other than awareness of this undifferentiated reality. The former, however, requires a great deal—the ability to discern between the two realities, and the ability to preferentially select the intangible or invisible reality. The necessity for these tasks, and for an individual's progression to a different and higher state, form the basis of sublimation.

The most crucial innovation, however, is the sharp division between the tangible and abstract that Plato imposes, and the almost inevitable value judgment that results. When there was no real breach between the tangible and the abstract, then one could not truly have greater value than the other; the only real value lay in recognising the nature of the system. Because all parts of it were equal in terms of value, and because, often, there was movement from state to state, that worldview might have been summed up deftly by using a circular or cyclical concept. Plato, on the other hand, introduces his 'divided line' metaphor, which shows the

¹⁷⁴ To define the progression more clearly, one might note that, for the Presocratics, there was some ambivalence regarding the idea of sublimating the body: on the one hand, it might have been acknowledged that intangible things were superior to that which could be seen; but on the other hand, both were vital components of a worldview where the tension or interplay between opposites was ultimately a creative force, and where physical and metaphysical were equal components of a unified, or potentially unified, universe. As the frameworks prevalent at this time imply, the movement toward transcending physical reality simply did not exist, and so sublimation, even if the concept had been fully developed at that time, could not truly gain a foothold, even though the raw ingredients, so to speak, were already available.

unreciprocated effect of the invisible on the visible. Sublimation might never have come about within a worldview epitomised by a circle, but with the introduction of the linear reality, it became an inevitability—once there was somewhere to go, so to speak, in linear fashion, the concern became getting there. This was the nature of change brought about by Plato, one which critically affected Western thought regarding the interplay between the physical and spiritual from that time forward. The subtlety of this paradigm shift explains many seeming inconsistencies or paradoxes—why, for example, the presence of teachings regarding ‘purification’, as found in the works of the Presocratic philosophers, are still not tantamount to sublimation in the Platonic, Neoplatonic or Christian sense. It explains, also, why one of the main messages derived from Plato—the message that was carried over, so to speak, to subsequent philosophical frameworks and even worldviews—was so distinct from that of the Presocratics, even though many elements of the worldview surrounding it were either similar or virtually the same. Having considered a fair sample of the works of the Presocratics, there is much that is familiar when one encounters it again in Plato, but the difference—the direction or focal point—is so different that the similarities are rendered insignificant.

This research has tried to show how varied, and yet how consistent, Plato’s ideas are. Plato’s contribution teaches that the physical world must be transcended in order for individuals to fulfill the potential that is within all human beings, because human nature leads toward this transcendence. Moreover, Plato paints a clear picture of exactly what it is that lies beyond the physical; his belief in ideal forms offers, among other things, a rationale for leaving behind the physical and an observable connection between what is transitory and what is ideal and eternal. In simple terms, it may be observed that Plato’s contribution to the concept of sublimation is that he shows not only ‘why’ but ‘how’, demonstrating that the incorporeal world is so much a part of human reality anyhow, that to turn away or to fail to pursue it is foolish. Moreover, he shows how this transcendence of the physical can be achieved and how human instincts, such as the instinct toward admiration and longing for beauty, point the way there constantly. In short, it is Plato who makes sublimation appear possible, desirable, and achievable by putting in place all the constructs necessary to bring the notion into human life. Plato succeeds in establishing this idea so firmly in philosophical thought that it persists for millennia; even when the ‘shape’ that the concept takes is altered somewhat, a smooth trajectory is traceable back to Plato’s writing. Platonic ideas were incorporated, with some

differences, into the work of the Neoplatonists; Neoplatonist concepts were imported almost in their entirety into Christian doctrine.

Nevertheless, the alteration in the shape of the idea merits some reflection. Plato's famous allegories—specifically, the cave and the divided line—have been discussed. They show two parallel worlds, one being a paler echo of, and influenced by, the other: any knowledge of the ambient world (the tangible world) can only really be achieved by knowing the intangible. This familiar concept is the foundation of Plato's concept of and argument in favour of sublimation. It is not so much that humans need to reject the physical world or corporeal reality; rather, they need to transcend it, because only by doing so can they truly know it. Everything in nature (human nature and nature as a whole) pulls humans toward knowledge of what lies on the invisible side of that divided line. To avoid it is to live a shallow life, with no real knowledge of or connection with anything else. The cave allegory further emphasises the difficulty of moving beyond tangible reality and the leadership role of those who do manage it. The value judgments that are made are based on the idea that it serves human nature and human knowledge to discover rationally the truth underlying what is all around. The final goal, in a sense, is wholeness. It is through knowledge of what is beyond the tangible or visible that the division inherent in the allegory of the cave and the divided line might eventually be dispelled, and reality may be experienced as an integrated whole. Sublimation—or 'ascension', as it is referred to in *Symposium*—or some form of transcendence is necessary in order for this integration to take place.

In one way, this is not different from Heraclitus' assertion that "the hidden harmony is greater than the apparent"—the difference being that Plato's system is described in much greater detail (or, perhaps, that more detailed descriptions survive). On the other hand, Plato also provides a detailed account of the nature of that 'hidden harmony' in his descriptions of the ideal Forms. Regarding the overall shape of the concept, it is significant that these Forms are multifarious. They correspond to everything that is present and perceptible in the visible world. Sublimation, in this system, amounts to improved knowledge and the ability to perceive this parallel, dual system. What prevents this system from being directly transferable to Christian theology is in part the definitive lack of a single source that is invested with all goodness.

This becomes apparent when the worldview expressed by Plato's divided line is compared with that of the Neoplatonists' emanation. The two systems are compatible to a certain degree; however, it is the innovations made by the Neoplatonists that made this idea so easily transferable to a monotheistic religious worldview. The existence of parallel worlds, to the Neoplatonists, pales in importance when compared to the one, simple principle that drives all things. Ultimately, everything stems not from a set of intangibles, like the Forms, but from a single source that is far too intangible to be composed of even the most idealised versions of physical objects. Because of that, there is no strong concept of parallel worlds or realities—knowing the individual nature of idealised Forms is less important than contemplation of The One, the ultimate source of everything, whose direct association with the physical objects surrounding human beings is qualitatively different from that of Plato's Forms. Knowing The One is almost more mystical than it is rational. In Plato, the rational prevails, but with ample space for the transcendent or mystic: this emphasis on rationality is less apparent with the Neoplatonists. Moreover, the Neoplatonist worldview based on the concept of emanation (notwithstanding certain sophisticated variations and details contributed by the various writers) is not difficult. One might say that it requires belief—faith, even—more than a detailed understanding (the logic of these writers is not easy to follow anyhow). Its configuration—all things emanating from a single source, and the concentration of the quality of that source becoming less as one moves further from it—is however an accessible concept. If Plato's Forms are imposed on or integrated with a system based on emanation, they would be intermediary—not The One, but closer to The One than tangible human reality, and therefore purer and more authentic. However, focusing directly on The One and building a system around that, rather than around the Forms, effectively transcends them. In this way, the need to gain knowledge of the ambient world as a precursor to sublimation is likewise potentially transcended. There is the potential to transcend science and philosophy in favour of something that is faith-, or belief-based—something very like religion.

When one considers the shift in frameworks that occurred between the Classical and Medieval worlds, that precise development is readily observable. In Classical thought, the physical and metaphysical realities tended to be encompassed by the practice of philosophy, with religion in a less prominent role (in that it did not drive or define thought or scholarship). In the Medieval world, observations about the physical and metaphysical were incorporated in religious thought. Moreover, the metaphysical began to take precedence over the physical (scientific), reflecting the predominance of the spirit over the body. Religion also took

precedence over philosophy, although much of philosophical thought and process was incorporated in religion, so the two evolved to a state that is in many respects inseparable. This constitutes a gradual but sizeable shift in terms of the frameworks discussed earlier, and the evolution of the concept of sublimation continued to maintain a complex interplay with these frameworks—on the one hand affected and shaped by them, and on the other hand, participating in or spurring on the shift. A concept of sublimation such as that introduced by the Neoplatonists—one in which what is ultimately ‘good’ is entirely abstract, demanding no interaction with the physical world—is well suited to inclusion in a system that is based on religious belief. Furthermore, belief in the concept provides a justification for forming and perpetuating such a system. Finally, the system itself perpetuates, promotes and further develops the idea of sublimation in a way that the philosophy of the Classical period, or an earlier one in which physics (science), metaphysics and philosophy were all valued equally and integrated with one another, could not have done.

As discussed previously, it was Plato who subtly and permanently refocused this thinking so as to make the development of the concept of sublimation possible. In Plato’s version of it, the physical and non-physical worlds reflect each other, and gaining knowledge of the Forms is a difficult and ultimately rewarding process, which must depend on learning what one can from the details of the physical world and then transcending it through reason. However, Plato’s version may also be viewed as a precursor to the understanding of sublimation that subsequently come about. Stated simply, Plato’s view still was not, nor could it be, religious in nature and focus. Moreover, Plato’s view does not lead to a full scale rejection of the physical.

Why, then, is the vital shift in thinking identified as having taken place with Plato rather than with the Neoplatonists? On the face of it, given the fact that it was the Neoplatonists’ idea of The One and emanation that was imported and incorporated into Christian theology, a case might be made for identifying that shift as the vital one in terms of the development of the concept of sublimation.¹⁷⁵

175 Arguably, Neoplatonist ideas could not have been developed independently of Platonic ones, but it is equally valid to argue that Plato’s views owe much to those of the Pythagoreans and other thinkers who came before him.

It was Plato who defined dualism in such a way that the value judgments associated with it became entrenched. Not only were the spiritual and the corporeal different and distinct from each other, but also the former was clearly superior to the latter, with no trace of doubt that it could be anything but superior. Plato incorporates earlier paradigms and applies himself to defining the nature of that larger context or ‘hidden harmony’, but in so doing, he alters the relationship between the opposites in such a way that a much more familiar version of dualism is created. This innovation (as opposed to the complexity of the system stemming from it) is relatively simple. Its effect, on the other hand, was far-reaching—so much so that it defined or determined the course of a culture’s mode of thought for a thousand years, to the extent that as late as 1929, Alfred North Whitehead (famously) characterises this mode of thought as consisting of “a series of footnotes to Plato. I do not mean the systematic scheme of thought which scholars have doubtfully extracted from his writings. I allude to the wealth of general ideas scattered through them” (Whitehead, 1929:39).

In discovering and defining *what could or must be done with* a universe in which reality is both tangible and abstract or spiritual, Plato sets human thought in a direction that eventually made the predominance of religious thought possible. His system was not religious in and of itself, but it was adaptable to religion. Once adopted, it almost necessitated further movement beyond the corporeal and into purely abstract reality.¹⁷⁶ Once this movement was made possible, moreover, it became desirable and the basis for an establishment of value. That is why concepts such as the Great Chain of Being are Platonic in nature, although there are suggestions of it before Plato’s time. The upward progression, away from the corporeal and toward the purely spiritual, is the direct result—and even the essence—of Plato’s innovation. Sublimation is at the centre of this progression.

The leaps or divisions between Platonic or even Neoplatonic thought and Christianity (for example, as defined by Augustine) were considerable. On a technical or factual basis, these divisions might be greater than those separating Plato himself from the philosophers preceding him. However, there is a factor connecting them that is arguably greater than any and all of those divisions. That factor is sublimation itself—a product of that innovation put in place by Plato.

The leap from Platonism to Neoplatonism has already been addressed. It may even be viewed as a combining of Platonic and earlier philosophies, though that is speculative. It may also be merely logical. If movement toward a more abstract reality is a movement from that which is lesser toward that which is superior, the most abstract reality must be the ‘best’ of all. It must be even further divorced than Plato’s Forms from anything resembling material reality. The One, therefore, is completely incorporeal, but is the source of all goodness and the ultimate manifestation and goal of sublimation. When one adds to that the notion that ‘goodness’ associated with The One and therefore the abstract affects everyone and is what everyone must strive for, emanation falls into place, so to speak. Things are ‘better’ or ‘worse’ according to what share of the abstract or The One they participate in—and this system engenders an almost ready-made conception of values and even ethics.

It is particularly interesting that the Neoplatonists’ conception of The One represents a state of abstraction, and a corresponding incentive for sublimation, that appears conceptually greater than that which was adopted as part of early Christian theology. The worldview that revolves around emanation and The One is in many ways the apex, and the fullest expression, of the striving beyond the corporeal and it is easy to be struck by the the influencing of Neoplatonism on early Christian ideas, the most important of which, perhaps, is the notion that all life and goodness stem from a single eternal source which exists far beyond the bounds of earthly reality, but which nevertheless affects everything. Movement toward the source of goodness constitutes improvement; tangible things take one away from the source, and for that reason they are considered to be contrary to goodness or virtue. Evil exists not as an independent entity, but as the absence or movement away from what is good—just as in the Christian system, it constitutes a movement away from God, while good is a movement toward God. In many aspects, elements of Early Christianity could be approximated by simply replacing The One with the Christian God, as strands of Neoplatonism and its Gnostic variants proposed.

Therefore, when Augustine, in his *Confessions*, recounts a spiritual epiphany he had while embracing the Neoplatonist philosophy, and then notes that this revelation was ultimately inadequate and a precursor to his embracing of Christianity, there is a temptation to assume

¹⁷⁶ Interestingly, Whitehead’s Process Philosophy, it could be argued, is a kind of modern Platonism, with a similar attention to the existence of “timeless entities”.

that these are the words of a convert comparing, perhaps unjustly, his new faith to the one he has discarded. The similarities appear much more striking than the differences. However, Augustine crucially asserts that the Neoplatonist system lacked a component in the linking of the 'good' and humanity, and that this component could be identified as Jesus Christ. The role and persona of Christ makes Christianity qualitatively different from its predecessors, and it is for precisely that reason that it may be viewed as a 'stepping back' from the ultimate Neoplatonist expression of venerating the abstract. In the doctrine of the Holy Trinity, Christ is no less God than the Father is; however, he appears to constitute a step away from the abstraction that defines God the Father. Even more telling is the gospel expression used to describe the coming of Christ in human form: 'the Word became flesh'. 'Word' might possibly be comparable, as a general concept, to the idea of *logos* first expressed by Heraclitus: the 'word' is a 'true account of the universe', the unifying and activating force that both describes and defines all things. However, if the 'word' becomes flesh, that is something new: God becomes embodied in humanity and lives among it; in a sense it constitutes a step away from everything that the sublimation of Plato strives to do. The limits of the core concept of sublimation are therefore embedded within the very central tenets of Christianity itself, which often appear to champion it and sublimation now occurs in the context of fundamentally different descriptions of perceived realities. This fact may form a basis for reconciling the body and the spirit within Christian doctrine.

The disembodied principle in Christianity never reconciles with that of Neoplatonism. For Augustine, Christ mediates between humans and God the Father; in that role, he is present on a spiritual level—within the soul of each person, the internal teacher who reveals the unity and harmony of God's universe. As is the case with Plato and the concept of the Forms, the knowledge that is gained internally, on an abstract level, is superior to that which is gained from observation of the outside world, which is nothing more than a poor reflection. Becoming attuned to that deeper reality is one of the aims of sublimation, and according to Augustine's view, it requires the intervention of Christ. In other words, a connection with corporeal reality is again required so that humankind may transcend it. This sums up, so to speak, not only the nature of sublimation, but also the nature of humanity. The human condition is rooted to flesh and cannot truly reject or even overcome it; perhaps the odd power of Christianity is in the concept of the 'word'—that eternal, limitless harmony that gives direction and meaning to all things in the universe—becoming flesh, and therefore part of humanity, with a sense of immanence that would be impossible without this intercession.

Thus, a sense of the importance of the corporeal exists even within the most fundamental Christian beliefs, distinguishing it from Neoplatonism, which had achieved the highest level of abstraction and it is in this acknowledgement of the body in addition to the soul that is a basis for their reconciliation.

It should also be noted that at least in this context the notion of sublimation in Christianity could be regarded as having reached a stasis, as it were, in its viewpoint on sublimation as an ideal and to have arrived at a form which, in spite of the naturalistic worldview now prevalent in Western society, continues to inform the Christian view of life. The first encyclical of Pope Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, for instance, is a conspicuous example of the relevance of the Classical dialectic on sublimation, illustrating, as it does, a historical continuum of ideas related to sublimation and dualism. *Deus Caritas Est* has been noted, in some quarters, for its grasp of contemporary concerns, but it consciously incorporates a much older rationale. Paulo Barbieri (2006) offers a striking summary of this defining dogmatic instrument—a document couched in the language of philosophical ontology— which captures the reach of its ideas:

In order to be complete, love cannot be just physical, but also spiritual. The Pope identifies that as agape, and the interaction of physical and ascendant love as the perfect balance. For this, he draws from humanist pillars, and not just obscure Catholic theologians: he quotes Aristophanes' speech in Plato's *Symposium*, Descartes' statements, and Dante's verses in the *Paradiso*. Both types of love are needed; they are two sides of the same coin. Thus, 'it is neither the spirit alone nor the body alone that loves: it is man, the person, a unified creature composed of body and soul, who loves. Only when both dimensions are truly united, does man attain his full stature. Only thus is love—eros—able to mature and attain its authentic grandeur.

Pope John Paul II's *Theology of the Body* proposes a somewhat similar interpretation of scriptural concepts from Genesis that seeks to define the relationship between the human body and soul. According to this interpretation, this is the plight of Adam in Genesis, and of

all humanity. The man exists in an uncomfortable state of solitude due to his corporeal nature and his awareness of his potential to unite with the spiritual or God Himself. Human existence is potentially a study in contradictions, for at the same time the man is “a body among bodies”. Participating in “the visible created world”, he is given dominion over the physical world, putting him in a different category from that of the “other living beings” (*animalia*) which he, under God’s supervision, names. In this position, he is singular and “alone” (6.3.152). However, as it becomes clear that the invisible determines mankind more than the visible, a solution is proposed that is fairly resonant with the interpretations of sublimation seen so far. The human corporeal nature becomes a source of pain because of what John Paul II refers to as a “fundamental disquiet” or an “internal imbalance” brought about by shame that causes one to feel as though he is the isolated “other.” This imbalance “reveals a specific difficulty in perceiving the human essentiality of one’s own body, leading to a rupture in “man’s original spiritual and somatic unity” (28.2.243–4). However, humans only achieve unity when the body is subordinated to the spirit as in the state of original innocence. The proper functioning between the body and spirit is for the body to “[draw] upon the power of the spirit” so that the individual might be “raised ... to the level of the image of God” (28.2.243–4). Any other placement of the body in relation to the spirit as an arbiter of human experience leads to disunity between the two, resulting in a disunity of the person. Sublimation is the only means by which human nature can exist in peace and fulfill itself. John Paul II’s modern (written from 1977 to 1980) account of the relationship between body and soul demonstrates that an earlier Christian viewpoint remains virtually intact (28.1 644):

We know from earlier analyses that the concupiscence of the flesh—and the corresponding sexual “desire” aroused by it—expresses itself with a specific drive in the sphere of somatic reactivity and further with a psycho-emotive arousal of the sexual impulse. In order to reach mastery over this drive and arousal, the personal subject must devote himself or herself to a progressive education in self-control of the will...

The importance of this is that in any assessment of the Western philosophy of bodily transcendence, it is still almost impossible to overestimate the power and pervasiveness of the influence of Christian ideas of human nature and spirit—and behind the hermeneutics of John Paul II is a wealth of religious and philosophical traditions based on concepts of duality.

The summary and concluding notes regarding the concept of the sublimation of the body have been limited in the sense that they have made no mention of the work of those philosophers whose concepts differed significantly from the trajectory described here. These do exist, as the preceding chapters have demonstrated; they include those whose worldview does not accept dualism, as Aristotle's does not, or those whose focus is of this world, and how one may achieve happiness, calm and equanimity. The power of the concept of sublimation was such that it, and the frameworks surrounding it, came to dominate. Divergent concepts, such as the psychological equanimity cultivated by the Hellenistic philosopher, or even Aristotle's theologically materialistic view which insists upon a material universe that can become knowable through observation and classification, were influential during their time; however, they did not, with the exception of Stoic ethical concepts, fit into the early Christian framework—one in which sought to make sense in the light of revelation of the physical and metaphysical worlds. It is interesting therefore that these divergent concepts—concepts which lead away from the concept of sublimation and its traceable elements into a different view of reality—are often what is re-examined today. A psychology-based view of how to live, rather than a striving toward what is spiritual and intangible, have defined Western culture for the past several centuries, precipitating a shift in conceptual frameworks that has produced something completely different from those previously discussed. The physical (transformed as scientific) and the philosophical (transformed as focused on consciousness or naturalism) predominate, with both religion and metaphysics existing in a non-essential and much diminished capacity. Accordingly, although the term 'sublimation' persists in modern psychology, it makes reference only to the subconscious and to learned and instinctive behaviours: sublimation becomes an involuntary process through which 'primitive' and 'libidinous' impulses that may not be socially acceptable are channelled into learned behaviours that are; these include creative and artistic tendencies. The things created by human talent and artistic ability may commonly be described as 'sublime', but the description carries no reference to the abstract or the divine. Nietzsche's wandering soul at least brings out a sense of longing in sublimation, something that Plato and St Augustine did not ignore.

But sublimation, insofar as it refers to improvement or refinement of oneself, is a concept that is alive and continues to inform a religious view of personal development; insofar as it challenges what may be learned through modern science and philosophy, it exists primarily in history and on the sidelines of current awareness. The fact that, for several thousand years, this concept has been central to human thought, personal development, and philosophy

demonstrates several things: the radical change in paradigms in the past few hundred years, the ability and willingness of human beings to believe in an intangible reality that underlies, reflects and guides that which they see around them, and, as Plato describes in *Symposium*, the pervasive and innate human striving for something that exists beyond physical boundaries.

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6.1 NOTE ON SOURCES CITED

For most Greek citations I have used the Greek texts cited in the Thesaurus Linguae Graecae online or scanned texts available in Mikros Apoplaus, Migne or the Elpenor portal: effectively scanned repositories of many of the texts referenced in 6.2. I have transcribed non-digitised Greek texts, words and phrases in SP-Ionic font. The Latin texts are usually taken from the CLCLT-6 (Centre Traditio Litterarum Occidentalium) repository or transcribed from sources cited in 6.2 below.

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