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PLOTINUS AND GNOSTIC THAUMATURGY

Harold E. REMUS

*RÉSUMÉ. — L'analyse de l'attaque de Plotin contre la thaumaturgie gnostique (*Ennéades, *II, 9) le révèle comme un défenseur de la culture grecque, spécialement de la philosophie platonicienne, et d'un philosopher professionnel (par opposition au dilettantisme); les gnostiques sont en défaut sur ces trois plans. Cependant l'attaque de Plotin suggère en outre une tentative de se défaire de positions qui furent jadis proches de la sienne, ou encore de supprimer une tension continuelle dans sa propre pensée, voire les deux à la fois: la tension entre la cosmologie du* Timée *et la psychologie du* Phédon *et du* Phèdre. *Encore que Plotin compte les gnostiques parmi ses amis, il écrit sans espoir de les gagner à lui, mais plutôt à l'intention de ses disciples. Son attitude résignée est une reconnaissance implicite que ce qui est en litige entre les gnostiques et lui-même, ce ne sont pas simplement des questions ou des pratiques isolées, mais ce que les sociologues de la connaissance appellent des mondes sociaux et culturels.*

THOUGH PLOTINUS never explicitly refers to "gnostics" in the treatise commonly entitled *Against the Gnostics* (*Enn.* 2.9) [1], the treatise was understood by his first and subsequent editors as directed against them [2], and his description of the objects of his polemic accords with what are commonly regarded as general

1. A phrase like τοὺς ἤδη ἐγνωκότας (*Enn.* 2.9.15.22-23) may refer to persons who lay claim to special knowledge, i.e., gnostics. This is as close as Plotinus comes to using the label. 2.9.13.10, where Plotinus sets forth educated and harmonious gnosis (πεπαιδευμένης... καὶ ἐμμελοῦς γνώσεως) — i.e., traditional Greek gnosis — as a foil to gnostics' fear of the celestial spheres, may be an oblique reference to the gnostics' supposed gnosis. Throughout I cite the *Enneads* and Porphyry's *Vita* from P. Henry and H.-R. Schwyzer (eds.), *Plotini Opera*, Vol. 1, *Porphyrii Vita Plotini. Enneades I–III*, and Vol. 2, *Enneades IV-V. Plotiniana Arabica ad Codicum Fidem Anglice Vertit Geoffrey Lewis* (Museum Lessianum, Series Philosophica, 33, 34; Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, and Brussels: L'Édition Universelle, 1951, 1959).

2. PORPHYRY, *Vita Plot.* 16.11: βιβλίον ὅπερ Πρὸς τοὺς Γνωστικους ἐπεγραψάμεν. In referring to what is evidently *Enn.* 2.9. Porphyry describes it as directed against those who say that the maker of the cosmos and the cosmos itself are evil (*Vita Plot.* 24: πρὸς τοὺς κακὸν τὸν δημιουργὸν τοῦ κόσμου καὶ τὸν κδσυον κακὸν εἶναι λέγοντας), that is, against persons with "gnostic" traits.

gnostic characteristics. The treatise has received some attention [3], but Plotinus' argument specifically with gnostic thaumaturgy has not been examined closely. Such an examination leads to consideration of some basic issues (and tensions) in Plotinus' thought; it also illuminates his stance as a defender of Greek culture and is interesting from the standpoint of sociology of knowledge.

Plotinus' polemic takes its start from first-hand acquaintance with gnostics [4] and with gnostic writings [5]. He looks with scorn on what he labels the practice of magic (μαγεύειν) by gnostics — their use of chants, charms, enchantments, suasions, sounds, breathings, hissings [6]. He also ridicules the gnostics' claim that they free from disease by ridding the diseased, with a word (ἐξαιρεῖν λόγῳ), of the evil daemons which supposedly cause disease (*Enn.* 2.9.14.11–15). Such claims and practices Plotinus lumps with the feats performed by magicians which cause the masses to marvel [7].

Plotinus' argument against what he reports as the gnostics' view of the cause and cure of disease recalls the polemic, in the Hippocratic corpus, against the common view of epilepsy as a "sacred disease." Like the Hippocratic author, Plotinus argues that disease has readily discernible causes and need not be attributed to evil daemons; the cures of diseases demonstrate the same thing (*Enn.* 2.9.14.17–23). By various *reductiones ad absurdum* Plotinus demonstrates that the theory of demonic causation of disease and the gnostic view of its cure are logically unnecessary (2.4.14.23–25). Plotinus contrasts such muddled and arrogant thinking with "our" philosophy, with its straightforwardness, clarity, stability, and discretion, and its pursuit of a reverent rather than an arrogant disposition (τὸ σέμνον, οὐ τὸ αὐθαδες) (2.9.14.38–43). This philosophy is the standard by which to measure the views of others [8], such as gnostic teachings, which are, throughout, diametrically opposed to it [9]. In his polemic Plotinus demonstrates how his philosophy is employed to take the measure of gnostic "magic". To show the absurdity and arrogance of gnostic chants and the like Plotinus asks how sounds can affect incorporeal beings [10]. And what

3. For example, in the still useful study by Carl SCHMIDT, *Plotins Stellung zum Gnosticismus und kirchlichen Christentum* (Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur, 20/4; Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1901); Thomas WHITTAKER, *The Neo-Platonists: A Study in the History of Hellenism* (4th ed.; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1928; reprinted, Hildesheim: Olms, 1961), 82–87; J. M. RIST, *Plotinus: The Road to Reality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), see Index of Passages; R. T. WALLIS, *Neo-Platonism* (London: Duckworth, 1972), 12-13; and some of the studies cited below.

4. *Enn.* 2.9.10.3-4.

5. *Enn.* 2.9.14.36-37: Plotinus leaves it to his readers to investigate the gnostics' other views by reading (ἀναγινώσκουσιν; scil. τὰς γραφὰς αὐτῶν).

6. *Enn.* 2.9.14.4–8 (γοητείας καὶ θέλξεις καὶ πείσεις... καὶ ἤχους καὶ προσπνεύσεις καὶ σιγμοὺς τῆς φωνῆς καὶ τὰ ἄλλα, ὅσα ἐκεῖ μαγεύειν γέγραπται).

7. *Enn.* 2.9.14.15–17 (ἐπαγγελλόμενοι σεμνότεροι μὲν ἂν εἶναι δόξαιεν παρὰ τοῖς πολλοῖς, οἱ τὰς παρὰ τοῖς μάγοις δυνάμεις θαυμάζουσι).

8. *Enn.* 2.9.14.43 (τὰ δὲ ἄλλα τῷ τοιούτῳ παραβάλλειν).

9. *Enn.* 2.9.14.43-44 (ἐναντιώτατα... διὰ πάντων).

10. *Enn.* 2.9.14.8-9 (πῶς φωναῖς τὰ ἀσώματα;). Cf. *Enn.* 4.6.1 where Plotinus argues against theories of perception that posit a material impression of an external object on the soul.

presumption to address such chants to the higher powers with the intent of making them obey their (the gnostics') will (2.9.14.1–8)! To do so is to diminish the majesty of those powers (2.9.14.9–11). As a foil to such practices Plotinus puts forward the self-control and well-ordered life-style advocated by philosophers and, as already noted, the superior nature and goals of his philosophy (2.9.14.12-13).

Even as Platonic philosophy is the context that informs Plotinus' attack on gnostic "magic", so Greek culture is the context of that philosophy, and, like Celsus, Plotinus is a self-conscious representative of both. This self-consciousness is seen in Plotinus' assertion that the gnostics' thaumaturgical practices, while appealing to the masses, do not deceive persons schooled in Greek culture, of which Greek philosophy is the capstone [11]. It is seen also when Plotinus, like Celsus before him [12], assumes that that ancient culture and its authentic representatives, past and present, are superior to persons like the gnostics who, while clearly indebted to that culture, nonetheless ridicule and pervert it. Thus, while gnostics may correctly derive some of their teachings from Plato and other divine men of the past [13], the things they have taken from the ancients (τοῖς παλαιοῖς) have taken on some additions that are not fitting [14]. Such new teachings "have been found outside the truth [15]." Plotinus summarizes some of these points where the gnostics stand in opposition (ἐναντιοῦσθαι) to the ancients: "they introduce becomings and dissolutions of all kinds, find fault with the universe, censure the soul for its association with the body, criticize the one who directs the universe, identify the demiurge with Soul, and ascribe to the latter the same properties as those possessed by individual souls [16]". Even when the gnostics

11. *Enn.* 2.9.14.15–18 (τοὺς μέντοι εὖ φρονοῦντος οὐκ ἂν πείθοιεν; the rest of the text is given in n. 7 above).

12. See Carl ANDRESEN, *Logos und Nomos: Die Polemik des Kelsos wider das Christentum* (Arbeiten zur Kirchengeschichte, 30; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1955).

13. The gnostic's general dependence on Plato and other "divine men": Plato, *Enn.* 2.9.6.10-11 (ὅλως γὰρ τὰ μὲν αὐτοῖς παρὰ τοῦ Πλάτωνος εἴληπται); "divine men" (τοὺς θείους ἄνδρας, 2.9.6.36), designated as "those more ancient persons" (ἐκείνων ὡς παλαιοτέρων, 2.9.6.37), including Plato (2.9.6.42); cf. 2.9.6.5–7, the gnostics contrive neologisms to commend their own school (τῆς ἰδίας αἱρέσεως) to others as though they (the gnostics) had no connection with "the ancient Greek school" (τῆς ἀρχαίας Ἑλληνικῆς). Specifically the gnostics are dependent on Plato for their teachings on "ascents from the cave" (ἀναβάσεις ἐκ τοῦ σπηλαίου, 2.9.6.8-9); cf. Plato, *Rep.* 7.514Aff.), "the judgments and the rivers in Hades and transmigrations" (αἱ δίκαι καὶ οἱ ποταμοὶ οἱ ἐν Ἅιδου καὶ αἱ μετενσωματώσεις, 2.9.6.13; cf. Plato, *Phaed.* 111Dff.), "immortality of the soul, the noetic cosmos, the first deity, the necessity for the soul to escape association with the body, separation from the body, flight from becoming to being — these things are posited in Plato" (ταῦτα γὰρ κείμενα παρὰ τῷ Πλάτωνι, 2.9.6.39–42); the gnostics "have heard Plato many times blaming the body for the sorts of impediments it offers to the soul" (2.9.17.2-3); the plurality of noetic entitles (being, nous, demiurge, soul) in the gnostics' teaching derives from the *Timaeus* (*Enn.* 2.9.6.14–19; Plotinus cites from *Tim.* 39E 7–9).

14. *Enn.* 2.9.6.55–57 (τὰ δ' ὕστερον τούτοις παρ' ἐκείνων ληφθέντα, προσθήκας δέ τινας οὐδὲν προσηκούσας εἰληφότα).

15. *Enn.* 2.9.6.11-12 (ὅσα καινοτομοῦσιν... ταῦτα ἔξω τῆς ἀληθείας εὕρηται).

16. *Enn.* 2.9.6.58–62 (γενέσεις καὶ φθορὰς εἰσάγοντες παντελεῖς καὶ μεμφόμενοι τῷδε τῷ παντὶ καὶ τὴν πρὸς τὸ σῶμα κοινωνίαν τῇ ψυχῇ αἰτιώμενοι καὶ τὸν διοικοῦντα τόδε τὸ πᾶν ψέγοντες καὶ εἰς ταὐτὸν ἄγοντες τὸν δημιουργὸν τῇ ψυχῇ καὶ τὰ αὐτὰ πάθη διδόντες, ἅπερ καὶ τοῖς ἐν μέρει).

draw on Plato they misread him in constructing their cosmogony[17] and cosmology[18] and their teachings on soul[19] and the noetic realities[20]. The gnostics' assertion that the association of the soul with the body is not to the soul's advantage originated, not with them (2.9.7.2–4), but with Plato (2.9.17.1–4). They misread him, however, in simply hating the body (*ibid.*) rather than accepting the necessity of remaining in the body, living in houses prepared by a good sister soul[21] and learning to take off this bodily nature in thought in order to behold the noetic sphere[22]. And rather than viewing the visible cosmos as wicked and the celestial bodies as hostile[23], they should follow Plato (or Plotinus) in viewing this world as a beautiful image of the higher world[24] and the celestial bodies as beneficent deities[25].

Plotinus' annoyance with the gnostics is in part the annoyance of the professional philosopher with dilettantes who fail to carry premises and assertions through to their logical conclusions. If the gnostics don't perceive where the rashness of their cosmic pessimism leads (οὐδ' ὅπου τὸ θράσος αὐτοῦ τοῦτο χωρεῖ), Plotinus does, and

17. *Enn.* 2.9.4.2ff.: against the gnostic idea that the visible world resulted from the moral failure (σφαλεῖσαν) of soul, Plotinus argues that a soul that declined (ἔνευσε) would forget the things of the higher, noetic world (τῷ ἐπιλελῆσθαι δηλόντι τῶν ἐκεῖ); "if it forgot, how could it function as a craftsman, for whence does it fashion except from the things it beheld in that world?" (εἰ δὲ ἐπελάθετο, πῶς δημιουργεῖ; πόθεν γὰρ ποιεῖ ἢ ἐξ ὧν εἶδεν ἐκεῖ). The unspoken premise here is Plato's *Timaeus* where the demiurge fashions this world after the model of the living being (τὸ ζῷον; *Tim.* 30C-D; 39E). Similarly 2.9.6.24-25 (the gnostics give a false account of Plato's teaching on the way in which the world was fashioned).

18. *Enn.* 2.9.4.22ff.: persons who find many vexatious things (πολλὰ... δυσχερῆ) in the visible world rate it too highly, thinking it should be the same as the noetic world rather than an image of it (εἰ ἀξοῦσι τὸν αὐτὸν εἶναι τῷ νοήτῳ, ἀλλὰ μὴ εἰκόνα ἐκείνου) — even so, what more beautiful image of that world (καλλίων εἰκὼν ἐκείνου) could there be than this one? (Cf. *Tim.* 29D-30B.)

19. *Enn.* 2.9.4.1-2: the gnostics' assertion that the soul made the world after it had shed its wings errs in referring this passage (Plato, *Phaedrus* 246C) to the soul of the All (ἡ τοῦ παντός) (rather than to individual souls). They err, too, in saying their own soul and that of the worst persons is divine (θείαν) but yet denying to the celestial bodies a share in the immortal soul (μὴ τῆς ἀθανάτου κεκοινωνηκέναι) (2.9.5.8–14).

20. *Enn.* 2.9.6.16–21: the gnostics, not understanding (οὐ συνέντες) Plato (*Tim.* 39E 7–9), interpret him as positing three nous's; they think, moreover, that, according to Plato (κατὰ Πλάτωνα), the purposing nous (τὸν δὲ διανούμενον) is the demiurge, although they are far from knowing who the demiurge is and frequently identify soul with the demiurge.

21. *Enn.* 2.9.18.14–16 (δεῖ δὲ μένειν μὲν ἐν οἴκοις σῶμα ἔχοντας κατασκευασθεῖσιν ἀπὸ ψυχῆς ἀδελφῆς ἀγαθῆς).

22. *Enn.* 2.9.17.4-5 (ἐχρῆν ταύτην περιελόντας τῇ διανοίᾳ ἰδεῖν τὸ λοιπόν, σφαῖραν νοητήν).

23. *Enn.* 2.9.15.21, nothing in this world is considered beautiful by gnostics (τούτων γὰρ οὐδὲν αὐτοῖς καλόν); 2.9.16.1-2, they despise the world and the gods and the other beautiful things in it (τὸ καταφρονῆσαι κόσμου καὶ θεῶν τῶν ἐν αὐτῷ καὶ τῶν ἄλλων καλῶν); 2.9.6.59, they find fault with the universe (text in n. 16 above); the celestial regions do not produce evil persons here below (2.9.8.34-35) and the cosmic spheres (ταῖς τοῦ κόσμου σφαίραις) are not to be feared, despite their fiery bodies (2.9.13.9ff.).

24. *Enn.* 2.9.4.22ff. (see n. 18 above).

25. Plotinus praises the celestial spheres for their beauty and for their contribution to the functioning of the All (*Enn.* 2.9.13.14–20; cf. Plato, *Tim.* 38C–E, where the celestial bodies perform their appointed tasks of marking off time), for their souls (*Enn.* 2.9.13.12-13; cf. *Tim.* 38E and *Laws* 10.898D), and for the reference that the stars' symmetry, good order, and form (εἶδος) have to their sources (*Enn.* 2.9.16.49–55; cf. *Laws*, where Plato infers to deity from the earth, sun, stars, and the ordering of seasons [10.886A] and from the orderly motion of the cosmos [10.896Dff.]).

demonstrates the untenability of such pessimism (2.9.13.1ff.) as well as of their cosmogony (2.9.12.33ff.), their view of the cure of disease (2.9.14.24–35), their denial of providence (2.9.16.14ff.), and their despising of the celestial bodies (2.9.16.1–14). It is persons unskilled in argumentation and ignorant of educated *gnosis*, i.e., Greek philosophical tradition, who would be fearful of the fiery spheres in the sky [26]. Their ignorance is shown also by their talk of virtue without defining it or ever having written on the subject and without explaining *how* one attains virtue (2.9.15.27ff.). It is seen also in their clumsy behavior in setting forth their teachings: rather than demonstrating these in a friendly, philosophical, and even-handed way (εὐμενῶς καὶ φιλοσόφως... δικαίως), they ridicule and insult those who differ with them (2.9.6.35ff.).

In part, however, Plotinus' polemic against the gnostics may represent an effort to purge himself of positions that were once close to his own or to suppress a continuing tension in his own thought, or both. The tension is generally acknowledged by scholars [27]. In the formulation of Dodds and Armstrong, it is the tension between the cosmology of the *Timaeus* (with its affirmation of the visible cosmos as an admirable product of soul) and the psychology of the *Phaedo* and the *Phaedrus* (with their view of the soul's descent into human form as unfortunate, the result of the soul's loss of its "wings") [28]. Scholars who have attended to the chronological order of Plotinus' treatises and/or to a genetic study of his thought [29] see his attack on the gnostic view that arrogance and audacity (*tolma*) motivate the soul in its task of making [30] as a disowning of a view which he himself once held [31], which he found in Plato (*Enn.* 4.8.1), and which he had once tried to reconcile with the cosmogony of the *Timaeus* [32]. Plotinus moved, it seems, from ascribing the soul's descent to *tolma*, to rejection of that view and ascription of it to the gnostics, to a positive view of the descent [33]. "Whatever his earlier doubts, Plotinus emerges in the end as the upholder

26 *Enn.* 2.9.13.9-10 (τί γὰρ φοβερὸν ἔχουσιν αὗται, ὡς φοβοῦσι τοὺς ἀπείρους λόγων καὶ πεπαιδευμένης ἀνηκόους καὶ ἐμμελοῦς γνώσεως;).

27. See the scholars cited in E. R. DODDS, *Pagan and Christian in an Age of Anxiety: Some Aspects of Religious Experience from Marcus Aurelius to Constantine* (New York: Norton, 1970), 25, n. 1.

28. Cf. DODDS, *ibid.*, 25; A. H. ARMSTRONG, *The Cambridge History of Later Greek and Early Medieval Philosophy* (Cambridge University Press, 1967), 230.

29. Cf. the observations by H. C. Puech, R. Harder, and H. Dörrie in the discussion following the presentation by Puech, "Plotin et les gnostiques", in E. R. DODDS et al., *Les sources de Plotin: Dix exposés et discussions* (Entretiens sur l'Antiquité classique, 5; Geneva: Fondation Hardt, 1960), 183, 185, 190; DODDS, *Pagan and Christian*, 25-26; G. QUISPEL, "From Mythos to Logos", in his *Gnostic Studies I* (Publications de l'Institut historique et archéologique néerlandais de Stamboul, 34/1; Istanbul: Nederlands Historisch-Archeologisch Instituut in het Nabije Oosten, 1974), 160 (originally published in *Eranos Jahrbuch* 39 [1970]).

30. *Enn.* 2.9.11.21-22 (δι' ἀλαζονείαν καὶ τόλμαν ποιεῖ).

31. *Enn.* 4.7.13.11 (according to Porphyry, *Vita* 4.24-25, this treatise is the second in chronological order); 5.1.1.1–5 (chronologically the tenth treatise), where Plotinus says souls forget the father because of evil rooting in audacity, birth, the assertion of differentiation, and the desire to be self-possessing (ἡ τόλμα καὶ ἡ γένεσις καὶ ἡ πρώτη ἑτερότης καὶ τὸ βουληθῆναι δὲ ἑαυτῶν εἶναι); cf. 4.8.5.9-10 (chronologically the sixth treatise), where Plotinus says the soul's descent may be marred by undue zeal (προθυμίᾳ... πλείονι).

32. *Enn.* 4.8.5; cf. DODDS, *Pagan and Christian*, 25.

33. See the references cited in DODDS, *Pagan and Christian*, 25-26.

of Hellenic rationalism" [34], affirming the goodness of the visible cosmos and the culture predicated on that traditional Greek affirmation [35].

The gnostics' thaumaturgical claims and their view of the cause and cure of disease are only egregious aspects of what Plotinus sees as a threat to that culture. He defends it, as we have seen, against gnostic perversion and subversion. It is evident from the foregoing that such defense is a concern Plotinus shares with Celsus. And even as Celsus views Christians as an alien body in pagan society, so Plotinus finds in his gnostic opponents some of the same alienating traits adduced by Celsus in his polemic. The gnostics' pessimistic otherworldliness noted above and their absurd elitism and narcissism [36] set them apart from traditional pagan society, as do their disrespect for traditional deities [37], their abdication of responsibility for persons outside their own circle [38], and their disdain for "all laws in this world and for the

34. *Ibid.*, 26; cf. further DODDS, "Numenius and Ammonius", in *Les sources de Plotin* (cited above, n. 29), 22: Plotinus maintains "the rational Hellenic tradition against the pessimistic otherworldliness which found its fullest expression in Gnosticism." Cf. also R. Harder, who observes that Hellenistic cosmology, which perceived the cosmos as one great *polis*, is revived in Plotinus; his sharpest criticism of the gnostics is directed against their assertion that the world is evil. "Es ist ihm bewusst dass die Rettung der griechischen Bildung an die Wiedereinsetzung des Kosmos in seine Würde hängt. Diese Würde ist die des Notwendigen: ein klares, rational durchgeformtes Bild gegenüber Wirrnis und Willkür." R. HARDER, "Plotins Abhandlung gegen die Gnostiker", in his *Kleine Schriften*, ed. by W. Marg (Munich: Beck, 1960; originally published in *Die Antike* 5 [1929], 78–84), 301-02; the quotation is from p. 302.

35. Even in the relatively late treatise (chronologically, number 33) against the gnostics, however, a tension persists between viewing any procession from the One or Nous as a declension (as gnostics said) and as good (as the *Timaeus* said); the latter we have noted (above, at notes 24-25); for the former cf. *Enn.* 2.9.13.32-33, "there [in the higher world] soul is worse than Nous and Nous is less than something else" (καὶ γὰρ ἐκεῖ ψυχῆ χεῖρον νοῦ καὶ οὗτος ἄλλου ἔλαττον). A. H. Armstrong, in the Loeb edition of Plotinus, *ad loc.*, cites as further instances the late treatises 3.8.8.35-36 (chronologically, number 30) and 3.7.11.15ff. (chronologically, number 45).

36. *Enn.* 2.9.9.52ff.: "senseless persons" (ἄνθρωποι ἀνόητοι) are persuaded by gnostics who tell them that they will be better, not only than humans, but also than gods, and that they are sons of God whereas those whom they honored as sons, according to tradition (ἐκ πατέρων), are not; the gnostics also tell them that even without exerting themselves they are better than heaven. *Enn.* 2.9.16.16-17: the gnostics say there is providential care of themselves alone (λέγουσι γὰρ αὐτῶν προνοεῖν αὐ μόνον). On such narcissism Plotinus comments (*Enn.* 2.9.9.47–51) that to suppose there is room alongside God only for oneself is like flying in dreams and deprives one of the possibility of becoming divine, so far as that is possible for a human soul. Cf. Celsus' ridicule of what he regards as Jewish and Christian narcissism, *C. Cels.* 4.23.

37. *Enn.* 2.9.9.52ff. (see preceding note); 2.9.16.1ff.; 2.9.18.17ff.

38. *Enn.* 2.9.15.18–20: seeing that they reject traditional virtue there remain for them only pleasure and what is not held in common with other persons and a concern for their needs alone (ὥστε αὐτοῖς καταλείπεσθαι τὴν ἡδονὴν καὶ τὸ περὶ αὐτοὺς καὶ τὸ οὐ κοινὸν πρὸς ἄλλους ἀνθρώπους καὶ τὸ τῆς χρείας μόνον). The foil to Plotinus' perception of gnostic irresponsibility is his own civic consciousness and influence, as reported by Porphyry and evidenced in his own affirmation of civic virtues; see the references and discussion in R. HARDER, "Zur Biographie Plotins", in his *Kleine Schriften* (cited above, n. 34), 280 ff.; A. H. ARMSTRONG, *Cambridge History* (cited above, n. 28), 202-03, 229. Cf. also Harder's observations in "Plotins Abhandlung gegen die Gnostiker" (cited above, n. 34), 302: "Scharfsichtig erkennt Plotin den tiefsten Mangel der Gegner, ihr 'Nur mit sich selbst beschäftigt sein', der Hang zum 'Nicht Gemeinsamen'; diese gemeinschaftswidrige Isoliertheit hindert sie am Anerkennen, am Geltenlassen, führt sie zur Verachtung der andern Wesen, welche Hybris ist. Plotin lehrt dagegen in neuem Sinne Weltbürgertum..."

virtue won long ago" [39]. Such disdain subverts the socialization processes that sustain culture and society [40]. It accords with this that gnostics nihilate the founders and foremost representatives of pagan culture (2.9.6.36, 44, 49–51) and that, far from being an elite group, as they imagine, embrace the worst sort of people [41], to the detriment of society.

While Plotinus' polemic is sharp at times, it is not as shrill as that of Celsus. Plotinus' ultimate attitude to his opponents (though not to their teachings) is one of resignation. "*What is one to say*" (τί ἄν τις εἴποι), asks Plotinus, in face of some of the gnostics' hopelessly muddled notions about the soul (2.9.5.22-23)? The gnostics need to be taught — "*if they would bear with it in good spirit*" (εἰ εὐγνωμόνως ἀνέχοιντο) — the nature of soul and of the demiurge (2.9.8.1–6). In an obvious reference to his opponents, he asks whether anyone — "*unless he had gone daft*" —would put up with the thought that human wisdom is superior to that of the celestial deities [42]. At one point Plotinus pauses to profess compunctions about continuing his detailed refutation of gnostic teachings: he has gnostic friends, and he has no hope of convincing them of their error in any case. They "chanced upon this teaching before they became our friends", and now "a certain regard for them possesses us" [43]. "I do not know how they persist in it [gnostic teaching]", he confesses [44]. Plotinus' treatise, then, is directed not *to* gnostics but *against* them, for the sake of his pupils: "The things we have said are addressed to our pupils, not to them [the gnostics] — for there is nothing more that might be done to persuade them — in order that they [the pupils] may not be disturbed by them [the gnostics], who do not provide proofs (for how could they?) but, rather, make audacious assertions..." [45]

Plotinus' attitude to his gnostic opponents is, at least, an implicit recognition that what is in conflict between him and them is not simply discrete issues or practices — "magic", cosmogony and cosmology, anthropology — but whole ways of constructing reality, social and cultural "worlds" [46]. Thus, while Plotinus may have

39. *Enn.* 2.9.15.12-13 (πάντας νόμους τοὺς ἐνταῦθα ἀτιμάσας καὶ τὴν ἀρετὴν τὴν ἐκ παντὸς τοῦ χρόνου ἀνηυρημένην).

40. *Enn.* 2.9.15.15–17: "gnostic teaching does away with self-control and with the righteousness implanted by mores and brought to fulfillment by reason and by training"; in short, it nihilates the things "by which a person might become morally excellent" (ἀνεῖλε τό τε σωφρονεῖν καὶ τὴν ἐν τοῖς ἤθεσι σύμφυτον δικαιοσύνην τὴν τελειουμένην ἐκ λόγου καὶ ἀσκήσεως καὶ ὅλως καθ' ἃ σπουδαῖος ἄνθρωπος ἂν γένοιτο).

41. *Enn.* 2.9.5.8-9, gnostics say the souls of the most worthless persons (τῶν φαυλοτάτων ἀνθρώπων) are immortal and divine; 2.9.18.17-18, they call the most worthless persons (τοὺς φαυλοτάτους) "brothers".

42. *Enn.* 2.9.8.38-39 (ταῦτα τίς ἂν μὴ ἔκφρων γεγενημένος ἀνάσχοιτο;). Cf. also 2.9.9.52ff. (n. 36 above), where Plotinus calls persons who fall for such assertions "senseless" (ἀνόηται).

43. *Enn.* 2.9.10.3-4 (αἰδὼς γὰρ τις ἡμᾶς ἔχει πρός τινας τῶν φίλων, οἳ τούτῳ τῷ λόγῳ ἐντυχόντες πρότερον ἢ ἡμῖν φίλοι γενέσθαι).

44. *Enn.* 2.9.10.5 (οὐκ οἶδ' ὅπως ἐπ' αὐτοῦ μένουσι).

45. *Enn.* 2.9.10.7–11 (ἀλλ' ἡμεῖς πρὸς τοὺς γνωρίμους, οὐ πρὸς αὐτοὺς λέγοντες — πλέον γὰρ οὐδὲν ἂν γίγνοιτο πρὸς τὸ πείθειν αὐτοὺς — ἵνα μὴ πρὸς αὖτῶν ἐνοχλοῖντο οὐκ ἀποδείξεις κομιζόντων —πῶς γάρ; — ἀλλ' ἀπαυδιζομένων ταῦτα εἰρήκαμεν).

46. For this terminology see P. BERGER, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor Doubleday, 1969), ch. 1.

denigrated some of the gnostics' beliefs and practices as "magic", this does not mean he rejects them simply because they are "magic". Certain passages, both in Porphyry and in Plotinus, support the claim that Plotinus, like others in his day, believed in the efficacy of practices designated as "magic" [47]. His objection to the gnostic variety, as we have seen, was to the premises that were operative and the use to which it was put; gnostic "magic" was part of the gnostic "world", a social and cultural world Plotinus found incompatible with his own [48].

47. See the passages and scholarly discussions cited in ARMSTRONG, *Cambridge History* (cited above, n. 28), 207–09.

48. This is true whether or not the gnostics whom Plotinus knew professed some form of Christianity; on the construing of Porphyry's syntax in *Vita* 16 (are the ἄλλοι, αἱρετικοί to be included among τῶν Χριστιανῶν?) and the identification of the objects of Plotinus' polemic in *Enn.* 2.9 see H. C. PUECH, "Plotin et les gnostiques", and the ensuing discussion, in *Les sources de Plotin* (cited above, n. 29), 161–90.