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Katharsis and *Phantasia* in Plotinus' Thought

Introduction

In this article, I will attempt to expose Plotinus' concept of *katharsis* in relation to *phantasia* (or *to phantastikon*) as the image-making, representative faculty of the soul in his system. I propose that Plotinian *katharsis*, as the true virtue, essentially targets the faculty of *phantasia* and regulates and transforms it until the soul reaches a purer cognitive state and busies itself with the content from *Nous*, the higher, divine intellect in his system. First, I will show the place of *phantasia* in Plotinus' depiction of the affective and desiderative processes in the body and soul, and examine his concept of a second, higher *phantasia*. Then, I will examine virtues in Plotinus' thought and the cathartic virtue, particularly in its relation to *phantasia*. We can see that *katharsis*, as the true virtue, aims at surmounting the desires by transforming the image-making faculty, so that this faculty is ready to be the locus of higher, intellectual content. The process of establishment of the higher powers of the soul in *phantasia* is a crucial aspect of *katharsis*, and by this process, *katharsis* is less about the removal of the lower content than about the dominance of the higher.

1. *Phantasia* and the affections

For Plotinus, *phantasia* is the faculty of the soul in which the activities happening both in the sensible and the intellectual/noetic realm appear in the form of images (or representations).³⁶ These appearances are the items via which we (as the rational part of the soul) actually became conscious of the things going on within or outside of ourselves. Correspondingly, consciousness and conscious apprehension (*antilepsis*) is possible only when there appears an image in *phantasia*.³⁷ This is how an agent perceives a representation of the related object and this is actually how perception (*aisthēsis*) takes place. Sense-perception is a capacity of the soul which typically works

36 See *Enn.* IV. 3. 29. 24–25 and IV. 3. 30. 2–5. *Phantasia* is also the term which designates the imaginative content itself, and Plotinus sometimes prefers to use *to phantastikon* when he talks about the faculty which is responsible for the imaginative activity. However, since the term *phantasia* rather expresses a certain activity of the soul than a strict faculty of psychology, I prefer using it in this form.

37 Cf. *Enn.* IV. 3. 30. 13–16.

via an external object and the process terminates as a representation in *phantasia*.³⁸ Externality is emphasized by the philosopher due to the fact that what goes on even within the body or soul is external to the perceiving, conscious agent. *Dianoia*, the rational part of the soul on the other hand is the power which gives judgements about the images or appearances which are already the objects of perception.³⁹ Judgements or decisions concern image-items, deciding whether to pursue them or not. Evidently, this part of the soul, the rational mind, also happens to operate via images. Actually, this definite characteristic of the faculties of the soul, i.e. “working via images”, is what makes the soul in its entirety an entity which is typically an “image oriented” one, as opposed to *Nous* which thinks *via* the unity of the subject and object, hence does not operate via representations.⁴⁰ The soul consists of a variety of power or faculties and these powers are characteristically operative through representative items.

Significantly for Plotinus, the powers of the soul are all active when they operate in the above-mentioned processes. The soul in itself is *apathēs*: impassible, unaffected.⁴¹ Desires and passions (*pathē*) first start within the qualified-body, and *physis* (nature), which is the lowest phase of the soul, and which qualifies the body and gives life to it, joins this affection and desires with the body. The passage below is a compact text giving hints of Plotinus’ understanding of the desiderative process and the position of several phases of the psychic realm within it.

[I]t is sense-perception which acquires knowledge and the soul near by, which we call nature, which gives the trace of soul to the body; the nature knows the explicit desire which is the final stage of that which begins in the body, and sense-perception knows the image, and the soul starts from the image, and either provides what is desired – it is its function to do so – or resists and holds out and pays no attention either to what started the desire or to that which desired afterwards [...].⁴²

In the preceding chapter, Plotinus examines the origin of affections and the role played by the body and the soul within it. There he states that affections happen only in the qualified-body (*toionde sōma*) and the perceptive power of the soul merely acquires the

38 About perception’s working merely with external objects even if the object is inside the body, see *Enn.* V. 3. 2. 2–5. For the relation of perception and *phantasia*, *Enn.* IV. 3. 29. 24–25.

39 *Enn.* IV. 4. 20. 16–20.

40 For *Nous*’ special “identity in difference” with its thought, see: *Enn.* V. 1. 8. 26; V. 3. 15. 21–22; VI. 2. 15. 14–15.

41 For the impassibility of the soul: *Enn.* III. 6. 1–5; IV. 6. 2; IV. 4. 19.

42 *Enn.* IV. 4. 20. 14–20: ἡ μὲν αἴσθησις μαθοῦσα καὶ ἡ ψυχὴ ἡ ἐγγύς, ἣν δὴ φύσιν φαμέν τὴν δοῦσαν τὸ ἴχνος, ἡ μὲν φύσις τὴν τρανὴν ἐπιθυμίαν τέλος οὔσαν τῆς ἀρξάμενης ἐν ἐκείνῳ, ἡ δ’ αἴσθησις τὴν φαντασίαν, ἀφ’ ἧς ἡδὴ ἡ πορίζει ἡ ψυχὴ, ἧς τὸ πορίζειν, ἡ ἀντιτείνει καὶ καρτερεῖ καὶ οὐ προσέχει οὔτε τῷ ἄρξαντι τῆς ἐπιθυμίας, οὔτε τῷ μετὰ ταῦτα ἐπιτεθυμηκότι. Greek texts of the *Enneads* are from Henry-Schwytzer. Translations are from Armstrong, except where otherwise noted.

knowledge (*gnōsis*) of affection and transmits what it perceives to *phantasia*.⁴³ In chapter 20, where our text is found, Plotinus proceeds by examining the role played by the body and the soul in the desiderative process. In the text above, he repeats the same conviction and asserts that, just like the perceptive faculty, even the lowest phase of the psychic realm, *physis*, merely acquires information about the state of the qualified-body, and is not actually affected. When the related image of the desiderative state is produced in *phantasia*, what is left for the rational part of the soul is to make a judgement about the representative item and decide whether to follow or resist it. Regarding *physis*, the difference to be emphasized is that Plotinus, at the end of the quote, talks about it as the possessor of a secondary desire, following the initial desire of the body. In the following lines, *physis'* role as the maker of the qualified-body is emphasized and it is likened to a mother who is in a position to take care of the needs of her child.⁴⁴ *Physis* becomes compassionate, and desires get together with the desire of the body.⁴⁵ Another significant point about *physis* is made by Plotinus in the following chapter.⁴⁶ There Plotinus states that *physis* has its own mechanism of assent and dissent too, before the rational soul is in the position of making a judgement. Plotinus says that it is *physis*, nature, who knows best what is in accordance with to nature and what is not.⁴⁷

It is critical to observe that the rational part's connection to the desiderative activities is possible only through images. As long as the rational soul (that is, *dianoia*) does not respond to the image, there is no pursuit and satisfaction of the related desire. *Physis* will go on ordering the bodily life and being compassionate with the needs of the body as long as necessary. Hence, it will ignite the production of the corresponding images in *phantasia*, for, as mentioned above, *physis* has its own working mechanisms, and, even has the capability of consent and dissent concerning the demands of the body. Accordingly, it can be argued that, the capability of the rational soul to lower and influence the basic operations of the qualified body is limited, due to the fact that *physis* there with its own rules and regulations. The question regarding the kind of relation between the rational soul and *physis* arises at this point. Below I will argue that the lower parts of the soul, including *physis*, get into a transformation as long as it is the case that the higher, rational part could gain supremacy and prevail in the

43 *Enn.* IV. 4. 19. 4–7: Ἐκεῖ μὲν οὖν τὸ πάθος, ἡ δὲ γνῶσις τῆς αἰσθητικῆς ψυχῆς ἐν τῇ γειτονίᾳ αἰσθανομένης καὶ ἀπαγγελίας τῶ εἰς ὃ λήγουσιν αἱ αἰσθήσεις.

44 *Enn.* IV. 4. 20. 28ff.

45 Karfik puts it like this: “the desiring faculty is nature [...] in so far as it ‘desires from and through something else’ viz. from and through bodily desires.” (Karfik 2014, 122).

46 IV 4. 21. 11–14.

47 However, the capacity of *physis* concerning the judgement it can give about the desires of the body must be limited to the subjects related to the health and sustenance of the organic life of the body, excluding ethical decisions concerning what is good for the soul and what to follow in order to reach that good.

psychic realm. Furthermore, for this supremacy to be the case, the transformation of the faculty of *phantasia* should be provided first, given that the rational center's direct communication is with this faculty, as we have seen above.

A significant passage touching upon this point is found in *Ennead* III 6. 5. There Plotinus, after examining the impassible nature of the soul in general, starts chapter 5 by asking why we pursue making the soul free of affections if it is impossible to begin with.⁴⁸ Plotinus states that the image (*phantasma*) in the corresponding faculty produces what we might call the affection and disturbance (*tēn tarakhēn*), and reason (*ho logos*) sees this and tries to avoid the situation.⁴⁹ He goes on by stating that the soul is immune to affection when the cause of the appearing affection, i.e. “the seeing in the soul” (*peri autēn horamatos*), is absent.⁵⁰ Plotinus goes on by trying to give a new definition of purification of the soul, i.e. *katharsis*, in accordance with his examined views which propose the impassibility of the soul. He questions what meaning *katharsis* and the separation (*to khōrizein*) might have for the soul, if the soul is not stained at all. His answer is the following:

The purification would be leaving it alone, and not with others, or not looking at something else or, again, having opinions which do not belong to it – whatever is the character of the opinions, or the affections, as has been said – and not seeing the images nor constructing affections out of them.⁵¹

Katharsis, purification, is still needed according to Plotinus, even if the soul is essentially pure. The important point is, as the text reveals, for Plotinus, that the soul's intermingled condition with the affections is basically caused by its pursuing of images (in *phantasia*). Thanks to IV. 4. 20, we already know that the affections have their origin in the bodily realm and *physis* desires along with the affections and desires of the qualified-body. This is how an image is produced in *phantasia*, corresponding to the relevant affection and desire. Plotinus, here in the text, rather takes the rational soul into consideration and questions how it gets into affective states. For Plotinus however, there is no actual involvement of the soul in affective

48 *Enn.* III. 6. 5. 1–2: Τί οὖν χρῆ ζῆτεῖν ἀπαθῆ τῆν ψυχὴν ἐκ φιλοσοφίας ποιεῖν μηδὲ τὴν ἀρχὴν πάσχουσαν.

49 *Enn.* III 6. 5. 3ff.

50 *Enn.* III 6. 5. 8–9. Fleet reminds us that Plotinus uses ὄραμα as the vision of the one's eye and also that “thoughts are like what is seen.” Fleet 1995, 136, cf. III 5. 3. 6–10 and III. 6. 2. 54.

51 *Enn.* III. 6. 5. 15–19: Ἡ ἢ μὲν κάθαρσις ἀν εἰη καταλιπεῖν μόνην καὶ μὴ μετ' ἄλλων ἢ μὴ πρὸς ἄλλο βλέπουσαν μηδ' αὐτὸ δόξα ἀλλοτριὰς ἔχουσαν, ὅστις ὁ τρόπος τῶν δοξῶν, ἢ τῶν παθῶν, ὡς εἰρηται, μήτε ὄραν τὰ εἶδωλα μήτε ἐξ αὐτῶν ἐργάζεσθαι πάθη.

states but rather, the soul merely falls into the trap of busying itself with the images produced in *phantasia*.⁵²

Significantly, in the preceding chapters, Plotinus gives way to the possibility of affective states originated not in the body but in the rational part of the soul. Grief, anger, pleasure, fear, shame, etc. may all be reason-originated states (whereas, for Plotinus, while the origin is in the rational part, affections themselves take place in the body).⁵³ It is important however that even when the affective state comes into existence through the rational origin, it happens *via* an image again. Plotinus divides the images into two. First is the opinion (*doxa*), which belongs to the rational part, and the second is “that which derives from it”, about which Plotinus says that it is “no longer an opinion, but an obscure quasi-opinion and an uncriticized mental picture”.⁵⁴ The first quoted text should be read along these lines and it must be said that when Plotinus talks about the definition of *katharsis* and the separation as “not seeing the images nor constructing affections out of them”, he includes the images caused by the opinions of the higher part of the soul as well.⁵⁵ However, this only supports the idea proposed in this article, namely that the cathartic work essentially concerns itself with the domain of *phantasia*, whether the contents of *phantasia* find their origins in the affections of the qualified-body or opinions of the rational soul.

What is crucial, according to Plotinus, is that *phantasia* is indeed a two-fold faculty, namely the higher and the lower *phantasia*, and each is the locus of representations coming from two different orders of reality, namely, *Nous* and the sense-world. However, the contents of the higher *phantasia* should not be confused with the above-mentioned opinions of the rational part of the soul which cause images in the lower *phantasia*. Rather, higher *phantasia* has a more special place in Plotinus' thought and it represents images of noetic content. This is crucial for the Plotinian *katharsis* due to the fact that, as long as the cathartic process proceeds and grows, the soul is more and more able to turn its attention from the images of the lower *phantasia* to those of the higher one. This is an important step of *katharsis*, after which the soul will be in touch with a realm even beyond the higher *phantasia*, i.e. *Nous*, in which representational thinking ceases and leaves its place for direct intuition.

52 Emilsson emphasizes that the soul is indeed involved in the affective states, but not by being affected and rather by giving consent to them or causing them by opinion (Emilsson 1998, 358). My usage of “involvement” should be understood in “affective” terms, that is, the soul is not involved in the sense that it is affected. Apart from this, the soul's contribution to the affections is accepted in this article as well.

53 *Enn.* III. 6. 3. 3–11.

54 *Enn.* III. 6. 4. 18–21: “Ὅτι μὲν οὖν ἡ φαντασία ἐν ψυχῇ, ἥ τε πρώτη, ἣν δὴ καλοῦμεν δόξαν, ἥ τε ἀπὸ ταύτης οὐκέτι δόξα, ἀλλὰ περὶ τὸ κάτω ἀμυδρὰ οἷον δόξα καὶ ἀνεπίκριτος φαντασία.

55 See Emilsson 1998, 353.

2. Second *phantasia*

Plotinus talks about his second, higher *phantasia* in *Ennead* IV. 3. 31. He finishes the preceding chapter 30 by explaining that the unfolded noetic content is represented in *phantasia* in the form of *logos* (verbal expression) which accompanies the act of intellection.⁵⁶ The true intellectual activity (*noēsis*) is incessantly ongoing in the soul, too, but we apprehend it when it comes to be in *phantasia*.⁵⁷ The apprehension (*antilepsis*), however, does not become the case most of the time because of the fact that *phantasia* also receives sense items beside the noetic content.⁵⁸ *Phantasia* is also responsible for memories and, without the image in this faculty, there can be no memory of noetic thoughts or of sense objects. Thus, there are two sources of memory: the noetic and the sensible world.

Earlier in the same book in chapter 27, Plotinus makes a separation of two kinds of soul in us, one is of a divine origin and the other coming from the Whole,⁵⁹ which is “nature” in us.⁶⁰ He gives the example of Heracles in Hades and makes a distinction of Heracles himself and his shade there in Hades.⁶¹ What is important for our topic here is that Plotinus in chapter 31 questions that if both of the two souls have memory, then there will have to be two faculties of *phantasia*, too.⁶² Plotinus says that if we do not want to posit two numerically different souls, there must be two kinds of memory, and hence two kinds of *phantasia* in one single soul. He then questions why we do not recognize the presence of these two image-making powers.⁶³ Plotinus replies this question by asserting that when the two mentioned souls (or phases of the soul) are in harmony, so that their faculties of *phantasia* are not separate, the better soul will be dominant and the representations of *phantasia* will be of a single origin, i.e. the higher soul. Plotinus here gives the example of smaller light merging into the greater one.⁶⁴ When there is disharmony on the other hand, the representations from the lower one

⁵⁶ *Enn.* IV. 3. 30. 7–11.

⁵⁷ *Enn.* IV. 3. 30. 12.

⁵⁸ *Enn.* IV. 3. 30. 12.

⁵⁹ The soul of the universe. See *Enn.* IV. 3. 1–8.

⁶⁰ *Enn.* IV. 3. 27. 1–5.

⁶¹ *Enn.* IV. 3. 27. 8.

⁶² *Enn.* IV. 3. 31. 2.

⁶³ *Enn.* IV. 3. 31. 9.

⁶⁴ *Enn.* IV. 3. 31. 12–13. Elsewhere, in *Enn.* I. 4. 10. 6ff., Plotinus uses the example of a mirror. When the mirror is smooth, we have the images from the higher soul and *phantasia*, and when it is not, images from the lower phase of the soul dominate the mirror. However, we do not have the conceptualization of two different powers of representation here.

become manifest and then we are not even conscious of the other-higher *phantasia* or the existence of that higher phase of the soul.⁶⁵

Significantly, Plotinus' division of the two phases of the soul in these passages relates to his previous discussions of nature (*physis*) and the rational soul (*dianoia*) in *Ennead* IV. 4. 20, which he took into consideration in the first quoted text in terms of desiderative processes. We saw there that desiderative processes are natural, that is they take their root from the qualified, living body. Moreover, nature, as the lowest phase of the soul, is compassionate with the qualified body and desires along with it and communicates this desire to the proper soul. I take it that we have a very similar division here within the psychic realm, too. In both places, the real tension is between the two phases of the psychic world, i.e. the rational soul and *physis*, the nature-soul.⁶⁶ Besides, the locus of the break between the higher and the lower phases of the psychic life is the faculty of *phantasia* in both places. The reason for this is that the items which the rational-center in the soul is in the position to decide about whether to pursue or renounce are images which perpetually appear in this faculty. In addition, this image-making faculty is two-fold and the rational-center's conviction regarding which of the two sources of the image-items to pursue is the decisive point for the soul's taking care of itself, which is an important component of the cathartic path.⁶⁷

In order to get a clear view of the items from the higher *phantasia*, which are the unfolded expressions of the noetic contents, the lower *phantasia* should be clear and silent. Lower *phantasia*'s being clear and silent means that the soul is not busy with the representations of sense-objects or desires which *physis* transmits from the qualified-body. The more sense-perception and desire-related content are removed from *phantasia*, the more visible the content of the noetic activity in the higher *phantasia* becomes. Conversely, the more the higher *phantasia* is activated, the less visible the lower one becomes.⁶⁸ For the center which is in a position to be busy with both of them is one and the same, which is the rational soul.

65 *Enn.* IV. 3. 31. 9–15. For Warren, the crucial point is the identification and the focus of attention of the person. Respective activities of both *phantasia* will go on in their own right, but if the man's identification is with the conceptual imagination (in his words), that is the higher *phantasia*, he will just not be conscious of the items of the lower one anymore (Warren 1966, 282).

66 It is of course the fact that in the discussion at *Enn.* IV. 3. 30–31, Plotinus makes a distinction between noetic (purely intellectual) activity of the soul and the lower, sense-related cognitive activities. Still, *dianoia* in its given state at *Enn.* I. 2 (and *Enn.* IV. 4. 20) is the "judging" power, giving assent or dissent to the images in *phantasia*. Thus, it is representative of a higher, rational phase of the soul, albeit not purely noetic.

67 Dillon points out that the role given to *phantasia* by Plotinus is a significant broadening and upgrading of the concept in comparison to earlier ancient philosophical thought (Dillon 1986, 62).

68 *Enn.* IV. 3. 31. 12–13; I. 4. 10. 6ff.

3. Virtue and *katharsis*

In *Ennead* I. 2 (titled “On Virtues”) Plotinus explains the twofold structure of the virtues. The first of them are civic-political virtues (*politikai*) and the second is true, cathartic virtue. The civic virtues, which are the traditional virtues of the classic Greek philosophical tradition (wisdom, self-control, courage and justice), moderate and regulate the desires and passions of the human being.⁶⁹ However, they are all context-based and externally oriented according to Plotinus.⁷⁰ He explains this characteristic of the lower, civic virtues by taking the universal soul (*hē kosmou psychē*) into account and questioning if it needs them at all. Plotinus asserts that the universal soul’s possession of all of the virtues is open to debate. For instance, being self-controlled (*sōphrōn*) or brave (*andreios*) would not be needed by the soul of the universe, since it has nothing to be afraid of.⁷¹ The reason for this is that nothing is outside of, or external to it (*ouden gar exōthen*).⁷² There is nothing that it does not possess in the corporeal realm and all belongs to it somehow. Nevertheless, it desires its higher principle (the divine, pure intellect, *Nous*) like we also desire it as individual human souls. Our order and virtue come from *Nous*, given the fact that the soul of the universe and individual souls share this higher, intellectual principle as their origin. Thus, the question to be answered now is if this highest intellectual principle of the Plotinian world, *Nous*, has or needs any virtue as we have and need virtues. Plotinus asks this question and plainly replies that it does not have the civic virtues (*politikai aretai*). According to him, each of the four cardinal virtues of the *Republic*,⁷³ which are practical wisdom (*phronēsis*), courage (*andreia*), self-control (*sōphrosynē*) and justice (*dikaiosynē*) are related to certain practical contexts and dimensions of our lives: to discursive reasoning, emotions, the harmony of passions and reason, and minding one’s own business, respectively. These civic virtues merely bring order to the life of the individual by giving limits and measure to our desires and all affections.⁷⁴

Since the aim of the article is not to present a thorough examination of the virtues in their entirety in Plotinus, it should be enough to mention that in the following paragraphs, Plotinus stresses the importance of the civic virtues mainly as the starting points in the ascent of the soul to *Nous*. On the other hand, he clearly asserts their non-presence in the noetic realm, where only their archetypes or paradigms reside.⁷⁵ The

69 *Enn.* I. 2. 2. 13–16.

70 Also, in *Enn.* VI. 8. 5. 20f. Plotinus says that civic virtues presuppose external evils and are therefore under compulsion and only the inner virtue is free.

71 *Enn.* I. 2. 1. 10.

72 *Enn.* I. 2. 1. 12.

73 *Republic* 427e–434d.

74 *Enn.* I. 2. 2. 13–16.

75 For the view that the paradigms are beyond virtue, see *Enn.* I. 2. 1. 28f; I. 2. 2. 3–4.

relationship between the archetype and the image is asymmetrical, i.e. the archetype does not share the qualities of the latter, which aims at being like the paradigm.⁷⁶ For Plotinus, these characteristics and relative deficiencies of the civic virtues give way to the need of another, higher kind of virtue, and this is where we first meet the concept of *katharsis*. According to him, Plato, when he speaks of likeness (*homoioōsis*) to the higher principle “as a flight to God” (*pros ton theon phygēn*), does not recognize the civic virtues as “virtue as such” but qualifies them as “civic”.⁷⁷ In doing so, Plato requires the existence of a true kind of virtue and, according to Plotinus, explicates this elsewhere by the term “purifications” (*katarseis*).⁷⁸ In the following lines, Plotinus makes what he understands from *katharsis* explicit and converts the given four-fold classification of virtues to a new scheme in conformity with his fresh perspective.

Since the soul is evil when it is thoroughly mixed with the body and shares its experiences and has all the same opinions, it will be good and possess virtue when it no longer has the same opinions but acts alone – this is intelligence and wisdom – and does not share the body’s experiences – this is self-control – and is not afraid of departing from the body – this is courage – and is ruled by reason and intellect, without opposition – and this is justice.⁷⁹

Plotinus here starts by depicting the soul as evil or vice (*kakē*), hence away from virtue, when it is kneaded together with the body. He immediately presents this condition as giving way for two states of the soul, i.e. its becoming sympathetic (*homopathēs*) with the experiences of the body and secondly, its opining in accordance with the qualified-body. This qualified body has its own needs and desires due to the fact that it grows, feeds and wants to sustain and survive. The soul, which accords its rational powers to the world of the living-body and the desires of which are presented in *phantasia* through the agency of *physis*, gets into a special kind of compassion and operates by following the passions of the body.⁸⁰ Here too, the rational soul’s compassionate following of the body is depicted in terms of its producing corresponding opinions to the affections of the body.

⁷⁶ *Enn.* I. 2. 2. 4–10. For the asymmetrical relation see Kalligas 2014, 138; Plass 1982, 242.

⁷⁷ *Enn.* I, 2. 3. 5–10.

⁷⁸ Cf. *Phaedo* 69b–c.

⁷⁹ *Enn.* I. 2. 3. 11–19: “Ἡ ἐπειδὴ κακὴ μὲν ἐστὶν ἡ ψυχὴ <συμπεφυρμένη> τῷ σώματι καὶ ὁμοπαθῆς γινομένη αὐτῷ καὶ πάντα συνδοξάζουσα, εἴη ἂν ἀγαθὴ καὶ ἀρετὴν ἔχουσα, εἰ μὴτε συνδοξάζοι, ἀλλὰ μόνῃ ἐνεργοῖ – ὅπερ ἐστὶ νοεῖν τε καὶ φρονεῖν – μὴτε ὁμοπαθῆς εἴη – ὅπερ ἐστὶ σωφρονεῖν – μὴτε φοβοῖτο ἀφισταμένη τοῦ σώματος – ὅπερ ἐστὶν ἀνδρίζεσθαι – ἤγοιτο δὲ λόγος καὶ νοῦς, τὰ δὲ μὴ ἀντιτείνου – δικαιοσύνη δ’ ἂν εἴη τοῦτο.

⁸⁰ As also seen in *Enn.* III. 6. 5. 15–19.

In the text, by the new four-fold scheme of virtues by Plotinus, we witness a picture in which cathartic virtue already establishes itself and succeeds the soul's not busying itself with sensible and desiderative content. It is also possible to see that the new scheme upgrades the virtues to the level of *phantasia* from the level of the qualified-body. As seen in the texts from *Enn.* IV. 4 and III. 6, the fate of affection and desires are directly bound to the judgement of the rational center of the soul, through their representative images in *phantasia*. The new scheme above in the text shows us that, in this advanced state of the cathartic virtue, the soul does not produce positive judgement and opinion anymore regarding the images in *phantasia*, which have their origins in bodily affections and desires. This cathartic regulation happens in *phantasia*.

What is particularly important is that the new fourfold scheme of the cathartic virtue is not interested in ordering the desires of the qualified body any longer but rather aims at eliminating them and operating without them. This can be called the negative and purgative aspect of cathartic virtue in that it aims at a removal of the desires and passions, in order to leave the place for the higher capacities of the rational soul at the end. The regulative work of the civic virtues leaves its place to cathartic virtue, because the regulation does not put an end to the tiring relation between the soul and the qualified body.⁸¹ Cathartic virtue initially tries to eliminate the pathos and later, by the help of this step, opens space to the higher, intellectual powers of the soul.⁸² It must be said that establishment of the higher powers, which can be called the positive aspect of *katharsis*, is an important part of the cathartic process and the presence of these powers enables the soul to handle the desiderative processes better.⁸³

The question of “How far down the cathartic virtue reaches in the stratified structure of psychic and bodily life?” becomes important in this context. Plotinus questions the extent of *katharsis* in *Enn.* I. 2. 5. This inquiry, according to him, will make it clear which level of identification we are supposed to strive for and “what god we are made like to and be identified with”.⁸⁴ The subject of the whole chapter is about how far the separation (*to khōrizein*) is possible from the body-related desires and experiences. In accordance with his general and fundamental thesis concerning the soul, he says that

81 Dillon claims that Plotinus develops a theory of “grades of virtue”, according to which the civic virtues are succeeded by the cathartic-purificatory ones. More importantly, he argues that Plotinus develops this theory because he saw an apparent conflict in the teaching of Plato, who in the *Republic* proposes a system of civic virtues and in the *Phaedo*, a system of purification (Dillon 1983, 96). Also cf. O’Meara 2003, 40.

82 Fleet puts it clearly by stating that purification and separation for the soul is “being active according to its essence” and only “by analogy” purification and separation of bodily things (Fleet 1995, 137–138).

83 Eichenlaub emphasizes the positive, active aspect of *katharsis*, too. However, in his article, finding its sources in Aristotle, he focuses on the positive, ethical value of all *pathemata* in Plotinus’ conception of *katharsis* (Eichenlaub 1999, 64). See also Barnes 1942, 382.

84 *Enn.* I. 2. 5. 2.

the soul will be unaffected when it is on its own.⁸⁵ He goes on by saying that in the process of *katharsis*, the soul's relation to the pleasures will be based on necessity (*tas anankaias*), otherwise it will not even perceive them. Similarly to the passions (*thymos*), it gets rid of them as much as possible if it can (*ei dynaton*), but if not, it will not be compassionate to them.⁸⁶ Equally significant is the fact that Plotinus lets involuntary impulses (*to aproaipeton*) take place even at the advanced level of the cathartic process, provided that the related impulses never reach further than *phantasia* as an image.⁸⁷ After talking in the same vein about fears, Plotinus puts forth his thought that as soon as the rational part prevails, the tension will vanish from the picture.

So there will be no conflict: the presence of reason will be enough; the worse part will so respect it that even this worse part itself will be upset if there is any movement at all, because it did not keep quite in the presence of its master, and will rebuke its own weakness.⁸⁸

In this passage, Plotinus reveals a significant aspect of his cathartic ethics. The cathartic work reaches down to the level of the lower soul, which is to be understood as nature according to the previous work above, and causes a transformation there as well. However, it should be noted that the emphasis in the text, and in the preceding lines, is on *katharsis*' explicit reliance on the gradually increasing dominance of the rational soul. Whereas Plotinus mentions that the lower soul will behave as much as possible in accordance with the example of the higher part, the reason for this is not proposed as a perfect transformation in the lower part. Nor it is presented as the outcome of the rational part's deliberate effort in order to transform it. Rather, Plotinus emphasizes the activated capacities of the higher part of the soul and the very sufficiency of this for the lower parts' transformation.⁸⁹

Actually, as mentioned by Plotinus in the preceding lines of the quoted text, the involuntary impulse (*to aproaipeton*) goes on taking place even at this level of the cathartic process, with the qualification that they stop at the level of *phantasia*.⁹⁰ The

85 For his thesis that the soul and all its activities are active and never passive, hence the soul is impassible, see *Enn.* III. 6. 5. 1–5; IV. 4. 18–21; IV. 4. 1; IV. 8. 8.

86 *Enn.* I. 2. 5. 11.

87 *Enn.* I. 2. 5. 14.

88 *Enn.* I. 2. 5. 27–31: Οὐκουν ἔσται μάχη· ἀρκεῖ γάρ παρὸν ὁ λόγος, ὃν τὸ χεῖρον αἰδέσεται, ὥστε καὶ αὐτὸ τὸ χεῖρον δυσχερᾶναι, εἰάν τι ὄλωσ κινήθῃ, ὅτι μὴ ἡσυχίαν ἦγε παρόντος τοῦ δεσπότου, καὶ ἀσθένειαν αὐτῷ ἐπιτιμῆσαι.

89 Kalligas says that after possessing the higher virtues, the person will not be governed by any deliberate intention of moderating the affections, but their moderation and elimination will come about as a concomitant of his conversion (Kalligas 2014, 148).

90 *Enn.* I. 2. 5. 14. In the following chapter of the same book however, Plotinus states that our aim must be to be God rather than be out of sin, hence signifies a further level (*Enn.* I. 2. 6. 1–3). He goes on by

pathos in the body still goes on, given that the body incessantly strives for better unity with the soul.⁹¹ In addition, *physis* goes on transmitting the affections of the qualified-body to the whole soul, if not itself already revoked some of the demands of the body. However, the more the rational part grows in presence, the less turmoil takes place in *phantasia*, hence in the soul on the whole. The rational part has a growing awareness of the things going on in *phantasia* and does not use its cognitive capacities in the construction of images corresponding to affective states, nor give way to the fleeting images which could appear to further progress. Thus, *phantasia* now becomes a faculty more or less consisting of higher intellectual content, rather than being a locus of appearances which are body and sensation related. The “presence” (*parōn*) of reason which the philosopher points out is an extension of the rational capacities of the soul which make it possible that the higher and the lower parts of the soul are now in direct touch, hence neighbours.

Plotinus gives practical advice concerning the relation of *katharsis* and the faculty of *phantasia*. He states that in order to get to the awareness of the ongoing noetic activity in the soul, attention should be paid by turning (*epistrephein*) our apprehensive power inwards to the inner workings of the soul.⁹² One must deliberately aspire to distinguish the lower, sensual contents in *phantasia* from the higher, intellectual ones.⁹³ Nevertheless, since even the contents of the higher *phantasia* are merely images (whereas they are images of genuine noetic content) the next step is to transcend from the images to the originals. Plotinus depicts this process as fitting or adopting (*epharmozō*) the images to the realities they represent.⁹⁴ The end of the cathartic process signifies the end of the representational processes as well. The soul’s *katharsis* can only be needed as long as the soul descends from its pure state in *Nous* and by this way acquires capacities of memory, discursive thought and perception, all of which find their locus in *phantasia*.

saying that if there are still involuntary impulses at this stage, the person is like “a god or spirit who is double”, but if not, the person is basically a god (*Enn.* I. 2. 6. 3ff.). Nevertheless, I think that this stage already signifies a level beyond any *phantasia*, the level of *Nous* or even beyond. Correspondingly, I take it that it does not affect the argument above proposing that the regulation of the lower parts of the soul is left behind after a while and concentration is put upon the higher powers. It must also be mentioned that in the following lines Plotinus starts explaining his view that beyond the level of soul, in *Nous*, there is no virtue anymore (hence no *katharsis*) but there is the immediate contact with the paradigms of the virtues (*Enn.* I. 2. 6. 13ff).

91 *Enn.* IV. 4. 20. 5–8: ἀλλὰ ὁ σῶμα μὲν ἐστίν, ἐθέλει δὲ μὴ μόνον σῶμα εἶναι, ἀλλὰ καὶ κινήσεις ἐκτῆσατο πλέον ἢ αὐτῆ, καὶ ἐπὶ πολλὰ διὰ τὴν ἐπίκτησιν ἠνάγκασται τρέπεσθαι.

92 *Enn.* V. 1. 12. 12–20.

93 In this text, Plotinus, contrary to the passages of IV. 3. 30–31, prefers using the perceptive faculty (*aisthēsis*) instead of *phantasia*. However, together with Atkinson in his commentary, it can plausibly be taken to mean that Plotinus has the same faculty in mind (Atkinson 1983, 245). Atkinson adds that the use of *phantasia* in the latter treatises (instead of *aisthēsis*) marks a refinement in Plotinus’ psychological thinking and vocabulary.

94 *Enn.* I. 2. 4. 24–25.

Conclusion

Plotinian psychology is designed around the faculty of *phantasia*, and *katharsis* is essentially based on reforming this psychology by clearing up *phantasia* and later on freeing the soul from this faculty altogether. This applies both to the desiderative, affective states and the cognitive, intellectual reactions to these states. *Katharsis* encompasses all and becomes a synonym for genuine virtue in general. Whereas the lower-civic virtues aim at controlling and regulating the affective and desiderative states, the higher/cathartic virtue aims at surmounting these states entirely, by a conversion of the soul to its image-making faculty, i.e. *phantasia*, and further, activating the higher intellectual capacities of the soul, which still takes place in the so-called higher *phantasia*. The goal, which is to reach an intellectual state beyond any representational and propositional activity, is what also provides the positive transformation of the lower components of the human soul and related organic activities.

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