

ANNA NAGY*

AUTHOR AND ACTOR
PLOTINUS AND THE STOICS ON THE AUTONOMY OF ACTION

Ora, se lei pensa che noi come
noi [...] non abbiamo altra realtà
fuori di questa illusione!

L. PIRANDELLO, *Sei personaggi in
cerca d'autore*¹

In this paper² I examine Plotinus' views on the autonomy of human action, as well as the ideas of certain Stoic philosophers who may have influenced his theory³. My analysis will focus on the final chapters of the first Treatise *On Providence* (III, 2 [47] 15-18), in which Plotinus employs a long-established trope: he likens an individual in action to an actor in a theatre, and providence to a playwright. Just as an actor performs the role that has been assigned to him by the author of the play, so every human performs the role they received from providence.

The paper begins with a history of this metaphor, illustrating the differing views and approaches of various Stoic thinkers. Stoic philosophers invoked the theatre only in brief similes; in the writings of Plotinus, however, it was elaborated into a more extensive metaphor. The metaphysics of the human soul will form the starting point for an investigation into the consequences of the soul's transcendent nature on the virtuous conduct within the empirical world. From there I will remark on aspects of the special mode of determinism found in Plotinus, and discuss some of the problems that arise when the theatre metaphor is used to describe the activity of the principles. In

* Pontificia Università Lateranense.

¹ L. PIRANDELLO, *Sei personaggi in cerca d'autore*, in *Opere di Luigi Pirandello*, vol. 2, UTET, Torino 2011, pp. 143-223, here p. 211.

² I would like to thank Profs. László Bene, Riccardo Chiaradonna, Péter Lautner, Enrico Peroli and Emmanuele Vimercati for their helpful comments on earlier drafts.

³ It is often difficult to separate ideas of the single Stoic thinkers within the School. In the first chapter of this paper I just give a short list of ideas on theatre, without dwelling on questions of attribution or on the reasons of some substantial changes inside the School. I will not speak in detail about Stoic ideas on determinism and freedom. However, in the conclusions, I try to show some general outcomes. On different problems of Stoic philosophy I particularly consulted S. BOBZIEN, *Determinism and Freedom in Stoic Philosophy*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1998 and R. SALLES, *The Stoics on Determinism and Compatibilism*, Ashgate, Aldershot 2005.

order to deal with questions of human responsibility, I first examine the freedom of the disincarnate soul, as well as the Platonic heritage present in Plotinus' use of the theatre metaphor, both of which hint at some complications inherent in the original moral character. It is also necessary to discuss the freedom of the embodied soul to change itself, along with the central question of human responsibility. Using these discussions as a foundation, I will then consider the significance of human autonomy within the Plotinian *theatrum mundi*, suggesting that it may not be completely linked to his concept of responsibility. Finally, I will delineate some of the similarities – as well as the basic distinctions – between Plotinus and his Stoic precursors.

The aim of this paper is to address the following questions raised by theatre metaphor, and its challenges to the notion of human autonomy: (1) Does the rigid frame of the theatrical text rule out any freedom of action on the part of the actors, or do the actors retain a kind of autonomy, for example in the communication of their lines, or in their performing style? (2) Should we assume that all actors bear a kind of responsibility for the success of the play? (3) What is the relationship between an actor and the role he is given? (4) What impact do the innate skills of the actors have on the distribution of the roles? Is it fair to expect a less talented actor to perform his role satisfactorily?

One of the reasons Plotinus uses a metaphor when discussing the complex concept of providence is that he wants to avoid applying the terminology of sense perception to a description of noetic principles. Indeed, a central concern of Plotinus' philosophy is to detach the description of principles from the categories of the sensible world (e.g. causality)⁴. At the same time, human freedom is understood to derive from the freedom of the intelligible principles, and is a reproduction of that freedom on a lower level⁵. The former can be understood only in the light of the latter; thus, in trying to comprehend the nature of human freedom we must take the freedom of the principles into consideration. In such cases, the use of metaphor is essential, as it can result in an understanding that goes beyond discursive reasoning; by making use of metaphor, Plotinus is able to underpin and refine his basic concepts⁶.

In the time of Plotinus, the theatre metaphor was already well established. Yet while a number of recent scholarly works refer to his Stoic predecessors, I believe that a closer examination of his sources might lead us to a deeper understanding of the Plotinian metaphor itself. We have to bear in mind that, unlike most of the Stoics, who used the

⁴ R. CHIARADONNA, *Plotino*, Carocci, Roma 2009, pp. 33-48.

⁵ Cf. e.g. *Enn.* III, 2.1.23-26, where Plotinus speaks of the universe as a likeness of the Intellect, and *Enn.* III, 2.2.32-34, where the universe is described as participating in the Intellect.

⁶ However, I do not intend here to discuss the Plotinian production of metaphors in general, which have already been well examined in the scholarly literature. Cf. M. DI PASQUALE BARBANTI, *La metafora in Plotino*, Bonanno, Catania 1981; see L.P. GERSON, *Metaphor as an Ontological Concept: Plotinus on the Philosophical Use of Language*, in M. FATTAL (éd.), *Logos et Language chez Plotin et avant Plotin*, L'Harmattan, Paris 2003, pp. 255-269 for the argument that reality is nothing but a perceptible likeness of the principles. About Plotinus' theatre metaphor in particular see the important studies of S. FERRETTI, *La metafora del mondo come teatro in Plotino*, *Enn.* III 2, in M. HERLING - M. REALE (a cura di), *Storia, filosofia e letteratura. Studi in onore di Gemaro Sasso*, Bibliopolis, Napoli 1999, pp. 77-96; A. LONGO, *L'arte e il teatro per spiegare il mondo: Plotino, Sulla Provvidenza*, *En.* III 2 [47].16-18, «Studi Classici e Orientali», 47 (2001), 3, pp. 503-528; C. MAGGI, *Il conflitto tra le parti sensibili. La metafora teatrale in Plotino*, *Enneadi 3.2, come paradigma del rapporto ὄλον-μέρη*, «Athenaeum», 97 (2009), 2, pp. 527-542 and A. SHEPPARD, *Drama, Dance and Divine Providence in Plotinus*, *Ennead 3.2 (47).15-18*, forthcoming. I would like to thank Prof. Sheppard for her observations, and for sending me her article prior to its publication.

theatre metaphor to illustrate certain cosmological and ethical doctrines – notably that of the *logos* permeating the universe, the ultimate goal of life, the indifference of external things, or the nature of human passions – Plotinus uses the metaphor specifically in the context of a treatise on providence⁷. Furthermore, he does not merely rewrite the Stoic metaphor in a ‘platonizing’ manner or adjust it to the theodicy dilemma, but rather employs a far more complex formulation than anything used by his Stoic predecessors.

1. Stoic background

The discussion of tragedies in ancient philosophy should come as no surprise. As Silvia Ferretti notes, while tragedies replicate reality and depict their subjects in a universal form⁸, everyday life itself, since it can be performed on a theatrical stage, seems illusory, almost like a work of theatre⁹. Although it would be possible to expand this argument to cover the issue of spectacles in general – as an example we may recall that, for Homer, the gods were viewers of human matters – I have chosen to focus primarily on theatrical aspect, in which one must consider not only the viewer, but also the perspectives of the writer and the actor¹⁰.

The theatre simile appears both in Plato and in the Socratic schools¹¹. In these early occurrences, the image is used primarily to make clear that, although it is chance (τύχη) which provides the individual with their role, the individual’s well-being does not depend on the role they ought to perform. The metaphor thus seems mainly interested in promoting adaptation to actual circumstances¹². The Stoics also preserve this ‘practical’ aspect in their interpretation, as it fits well with their basic ethical doctrines:

⁷ Cf. L.S. WESTRA, *Freedom and Providence in Plotinus*, in M. WAGNER (ed.), *Neoplatonism and Nature. Studies in Plotinus’ Enneads*, State University of New York Press, Albany (NY) 2002, pp. 125-148.

⁸ ARIST. *Pol.* IX, 2.

⁹ FERRETTI, *La metafora del mondo*, p. 87. See A.D. NOCK, *Conversion. The Old and the New in Religion from Alexander the Great to Augustine of Hippo*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1933, p. 201, who notes that in theatricality the prospect of being forgotten contrasts with that of becoming a hero and an instance of virtue.

¹⁰ About some interesting links between spectacles and philosophy see H.U. VON BALTHASAR, *Theo-Drama. Theological dramatic theory. Volume 1. Prologomena*, Ignatius Press, San Francisco 1983, 1988², pp. 140-151 (esp. pp. 147-151 for Plotinus); L. LUGARESI, *Il teatro di Dio. Il problema degli spettacoli nel cristianesimo antico (II-IV secolo)*, Morcelliana, Brescia 2008, pp. 67-260 (esp. pp. 251-256); A. MAGRIS, *L’idea di destino nel pensiero antico*, Del Bianco, Udine 1984, vol. II, pp. 695-708. For the theatricality of social life (influential in modernity), see A. CHANIOTIS, *Theatricality Beyond the Theater. Staging Public Life in the Hellenistic World*, in B. LE GUEN (éd.), *De la scène aux gradins*, «PALLAS», 41 (1997), pp. 219-259. It is also interesting that the passion of sorrow, according to SEN. *Ep.* 99.16, grows larger because of its theatricality. For how person changes being seen, cf. *Tranq.* VI, 7-8. It is also interesting to consider the dramatic origin of the term *persona*, cf. R. DÜLL, art. *Persona*, *RE*, 19 (1937), 1, pp. 1036-1041.

¹¹ PLAT. *Phil.* 50b. Some assign it to Bion of Borysthenes, others to Antisthenes, or to Aristippus. We find it in testimonies about Anaxarchus and Monimus. These occurrences of the theatre metaphor are collected in A.M. IOPPOLO, *Aristone di Chio e lo Stoicismo Antico*, Bibliopolis, Napoli 1980, pp. 189-192, as well as in LONGO, *L’arte e il teatro*, p. 512, fn. 17, and E.R. DODDS, *Pagan and Christian in an Age of Anxiety*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1965, p. 9. See also P. KALLIGAS, *The Enneads of Plotinus. A Commentary. Volume 1*, Princeton University Press, Princeton - Oxford 2014, p. 467.

¹² Cf. MAGRIS, *L’idea di destino*, p. 699: «Il saggio contempla la vita dall’alto della fortezza inespugnabile della sua coscienza: egli la prende in giro ma si guarda bene dal lasciarvisi coinvolgere, perché sa che il mondo esteriore è solo un gioco della τύχη, è solo illusione e apparenza».

circumstantial factors such as wealth, health and life were considered ‘indifferent things’ (τὰ ἀδιάφορα) from the beginning of the School¹³.

Aristo of Chios was the first Stoic philosopher to use the theatre metaphor: «The wise man he compared to a good actor, who, if called upon to take the part of a Thersites or of an Agamemnon, will impersonate them both becomingly»¹⁴. Aristo uses the metaphor to illustrate that the wise man, thanks to his virtue, is able to act appropriately in any situation. One’s *logos* is the only criterion by which the appropriateness of human action need be measured. The circumstances of one’s existence may change, but these changes do not have a decisive influence on the wise man’s quality of life, for his virtue enables him to achieve his goal regardless (*viz.* the coherent life which, for Aristo, corresponds to living with a disposition of indifference towards anything between vice and virtue)¹⁵; in the same way, the nature of a given role cannot influence the excellence of an actor’s performance¹⁶.

The Stoic tradition dismissed the views of Aristo, accepting a relative value of indifferent things; as a result of subsequent debates, Antipater even proposed that «things that are in agreement with nature» (τὰ κατὰ φύσιν) should be added to the definition of the ultimate goal of life¹⁷. The end is not aimed at objects outside of the agent, but is found in the disposition of the agent towards them¹⁸. For this reason, indifferent things are best handled by maintaining harmony with *logos*. In Cicero’s *De finibus* we read about this kind of use:

For just as an actor or dancer has assigned to him not any but a certain particular part or dance, so life has to be conducted in a certain fixed way, and not in any way we like. This fixed way we speak of as ‘conformable’ and suitable (*Fin.* III, 7.24)¹⁹.

In this case, the metaphor is not intended to emphasise the ever-changing nature of life, or even to illustrate the power of the wise man’s reason above his environment, although both can certainly be inferred. Rather, Cicero draws our attention to the necessity of recognising a predetermined rational structure and accepting its rules²⁰.

According to Panaetius, a later Stoic philosopher, our individual features – including physical and psychological characteristics – define one’s ὁμολογία, and also determine the role that a wise man is most suited to play²¹.

¹³ *SVF* I, 179-196; III, 117-168. In the works of later Stoics, for example in the consolations, we also frequently find an appeal to live without passions, despite losing or gaining indifferent things. The Stoic division of indifferent things into those against nature and according to nature is also used by Plotinus, e.g. in *Enn.* III, 2.6.3 ff. These matters are also discredited by Plotinus in III, 2.15.43-47, and mainly in *Enn.* I, 4 [46].

¹⁴ *DL* VII, 160 (Transl. Hicks).

¹⁵ There are no unconditionally preferred or dispreferred indifferents, but a priority based on circumstances. Cf. *SE M* XI, 64-67.

¹⁶ For Aristo I have consulted IOPPOLO, *Aristone di Chio*, pp. 187 ff.

¹⁷ *STOB. Ecl.* II, 76.11; 83.10 - 84.2 W.

¹⁸ *PLU. Comm. not.* 1070f - 1071e.

¹⁹ *Ut enim histrioni actio, saltatori motus non quivis, sed certus quidam est datus, sic vita agenda est certo genere quodam, non quolibet; quod genus conveniens consentaneumque dicimus* (Transl. Rackham). For the term ὁμολογούμενος cf. *SVF* III, 3, 39, 188. About the attribution of this passage to Antipater, see IOPPOLO, *Aristone di Chio*, pp. 198-200.

²⁰ See also the testimony of *SEN. Ep.* 94.

²¹ See e.g. *CIC. Off.* I, 107 ff., esp. 114 (Fr. 63 Alesse, Transl. Miller): «They select, not the best plays [*fabulas*], but the ones best suited to their talents», that is, they choose according to their vocal and gestural

Epictetus emphasises our helplessness in the face of forthcoming events: the role we play in our lives is not a matter of our own choice, but is assigned to us by the playwright²². On the other hand, he also stresses that the actor may still decide *how* he plays his role²³. In order to achieve freedom (*ἐλευθερία*) we must focus on things within our control, and these things are never to be found in the external world²⁴. In the works of Epictetus we find versions of the simile which contain all the aspects presented by the earlier philosophers. We may enumerate these aspects as follows. The metaphor is: (i) practical or encouraging (in that it teaches real moral values and promotes the extirpation of passions); (ii) actor-oriented (as we have seen in Aristo, we are independent of our role and, if we are good actors, we can always play it well); (iii) role-considering (Antipater discusses man's coherence with his given role) and (iv) individual-considering (Panaetius is the first to raise the issue of the differences between individual). As we have seen in the statements of the Stoic philosophers, these meanings are not always mutually exclusive; they are just different sides of the same requirement for a coherent relationship between man and reason.

In summary we can say that, from a Stoic viewpoint, those who try to alter the events determined by providence are not free, but dim-witted or arrogant²⁵. As the political environment allowed only the appearance of autonomy, the Stoics understood man to be free from the power of fate no more than an actor is free from his role during the performance²⁶. As Mario Vegetti has stressed, the Stoics attributed freedom to the actor only with regard to his own performance, and understood any rebellion against inescapable fate as a senseless effort. However, the Stoics also wished to guide humans out of the realm of passions, and into the realm of wisdom. Anyone who understands the doctrines

abilities (see also Fr. 62 Alesse). For the attribution of this metaphor to Panaetius see F. ALESSE, *Panezio di Rodi e la tradizione Stoica*, Bibliopolis, Napoli 1994, pp. 62-74. For the interpretation of the theory of the four *personae* cf. E. VIMERCATI, *Panaetius on self-knowledge and moral responsibility*, in P. DESTRIÈRE - R. SALLES - M. ZINGANO (eds.), *What is Up to Us? Studies on Agency and Responsibility in Ancient Philosophy*, Academia Verlag, Sankt Augustin 2014, pp. 151-167. See later SEN. *Tranq.* VI, 8.

²² Cf. EPICT. *Diss.* IV 2.10, where Epictetus uses the metaphor in the same way as we read in Cicero: «You cannot act the part of Thersites and that of Agamemnon too. If you wish to be a Thersites, you ought to be humpbacked and bald; if an Agamemnon, you ought to be tall and handsome, and to love those who have been made subject to you». Transl. from EPICTETUS, *Discourses, Books 1-2 (Vol. I), Books 3-4. Fragments. The Encheiridion (Vol. II)* (Transl. Oldfather), Harvard University Press, London 1925, 1928². About human duties depending on individual characteristics see e.g. II, 10; III, 2.4.

²³ Cf. *Diss.* IV, 7.13: «Would you have me bear poverty? Bring it on and you shall see what poverty is when it finds a good actor to play the part»; *ibi*, I, 29.41-43, and *Ench.* 17: «Remember that you are an actor in a play, the character of which is determined by the Playwright: if He wishes the play to be short, it is short; if long, it is long; if He wishes you to play the part of a beggar, remember to act even this role adroitly; and so if your rôle be that of a cripple, an official, or a layman. For this is your business, to play admirably the rôle assigned you; but the selection of that rôle is Another's».

²⁴ Cf. *Diss.* I, 4.18 ff. L. BENE, *Akarat és szabadság a sztoikus és a platonikus hagyományban: Epiktétosz és Plótinosz, «Világosság»*, 9-10 (2003), pp. 107-121 gives prominence to the fact that Epictetus already dissolves the union of will and action, and interprets human will as an attitude toward forthcoming events (cf. *Diss.* II, 14.7). This is motivated by Epictetus' efforts to maintain the integrity and autonomy of the individual, and not to examine action (BENE, *Akarat és szabadság a sztoikus és a platonikus hagyományban*, p. 112).

²⁵ M. VEGETTI, *La saggezza dell'attore. Problemi dell'etica stoica*, «aut-aut», 195-196 (1983), pp. 19-41, esp. p. 32.

²⁶ *Ibidem*.

of the cyclic return and the chain of causation, and perceives the world from the divine perspective of an eternal present, becomes an imperfect image of god²⁷.

It is not the case [...] that the wise should *act* in some other way or should choose for himself a more decorous role. Rather, it is that he has to get profoundly acquainted with the personality he was called to act out, for the sake of controlling it and assuming to it that detachment and that interpretative distance in which consists perhaps his only chance to be wise²⁸.

2. True Self, external world, and world order

Although there are several passages in which Plotinus accepts the principles of the Stoic art of living, he regards Stoic corporealism as an inadequate foundation for these principles. According to Plotinus, these principles would be sound only in the context of Platonic philosophy, in which the transcendent aspect of a human being – missing in the Stoic theory – is also assumed²⁹. The essential difference between animal and man, in Plotinus' understanding, is the possession not only of reason, but also of a superior part of the soul which is connected directly with the transcendent Intellect³⁰.

In Plotinus' version of the theatre metaphor we find a similar 'normative' concept of freedom (ἐλευθερία) to that found in Epictetus³¹. In section III, 2.15.43-62 of the treatise *On Providence*, Plotinus likens the blows of fate (murder, death, robbery, demolition of cities) to the changes of scenes, roles and costumes in a theatrical performance. We should also note that, in section I, 4 [46], Plotinus mentions similar life-situations, and offers practical advice, speaking of τύχαις in a manner similar to Epictetus and the Cynics³². Eric Dodds rightly likens the accompanying feelings of transience and vulnerability to historical circumstances³³. Plotinus, in this instance, is addressing the practical concerns described in point (i) of our enumeration (see above): he wishes to demonstrate how to secure the independence of our real Self against these external factors, and the appropriate conduct when losing or gaining them. The distinctive feature of Plotinus' use of the theatre metaphor lies in the terminological distinction between the mask or role (πρόσωπον)³⁴, and the actor (ὑποκριτής): the former is present in the drama only, while the latter, although subsumed within the instructions of the author, nonetheless occupies a higher ontological level.

²⁷ *Ibi*, pp. 33-35.

²⁸ *Ibi*, p. 35. My translation.

²⁹ For this basic difference between the Plotinian ethical theory and the Stoic one cf. the introduction in A. LINGUITI, *La felicità e il tempo. Plotino*, Enneadi, 14-15, Edizioni Universitarie di Lettere Economia Diritto, Milano 2000. For a very brief account of Plotinus on the Stoics cf. *Enn.* V, 9.1.10-16.

³⁰ There is a transcendent part (ὑπερέχον τι) of the soul, as we read in IV, 8.4.30-31; or the soul is endowed even with a transcendent nature (τὸ ὑπερέχον), as it is the case in IV, 8.8.17-18. Cf. also *Enn.* III, 2.14.16-17.

³¹ Cf. BOBZIEN, *Determinism*, p. 333 for Epictetus: «The perspective from which that which depends on us is discussed has thus become a perspective towards the future, concerned with guidance of actions and behaviour; before, in Chrysippus and the old Stoa it primarily was a backwards perspective or time independent, concerned with the attribution of responsibility and with the moral assessment of actions».

³² See also *Enn.* I, 4.4.30-36; I, 4.7. This is not at all feature of the early Stoics (*SVF* II, 965-973). The pessimistic world view can be traced back to Gnostics as well (see esp. II, 9.13).

³³ DODDS, *Pagan and Christian*, p. 10.

³⁴ Cf. first of all Panaetius' distinction between the four roles (*personae*) in *Cic. Off.* I, 107-121 (Frgs. 61-65 Alesse).

The terminology employed by Plotinus also recalls the Platonic *Laws*, especially when he writes: «toys, too, are taken seriously by those who do not know how to be serious and are toys themselves» (15.55-56)³⁵. The pessimism³⁶ of this view is offset to some extent by the idea that the soul does not perish, but rather transmigrates into another body, just as the actor does not die when his part in the drama is over³⁷. However, as Armstrong observes, there is an important difference between the approaches of Plato and Plotinus: for Plato, man is entirely God's toy and the play in which he appears is the most important thing in his life; for Plotinus, on the other hand, «it is only man's lower, external life which is "play"»³⁸, whereas it is his inner Self which is serious and important³⁹.

Plotinus, in elaborating his own view of the real Self and the toy, makes use of the internal-external opposition known from Epictetus⁴⁰:

For really here in the events of our life it is not the soul within but the outside shadow of man which cries and moans and carries on in every sort of way on a stage which is the whole earth where men have in many places set up their stages (III, 2.15.47-50)⁴¹.

The internal soul views its role as if from outside, while the external one identifies the role as itself and experiences each episode to be either truly good or bad⁴². This division of the Self also influences the relationship of the soul to the body: by understanding the body as subjected to the lower fate, one learns how to handle the loss and gain of illusory goods. Plotinus thus stresses the importance of being able to leave the play⁴³, and

³⁵ Cf. PLAT. *Resp.* X, 604b; ID., *Leg.* I, 644d ff.; 803b-c. See for the same topic EPICT. *Diss.* I, 24.19-20; IV, 1.165. As pointed out by FERRETTI, *L'arte e il teatro*, pp. 84-85, in this context the play implies the existence of an irrational element, which inexorably persists in the sensible world. On the other hand, the play also refers to the severity and complexity of the rules maintaining the actual world order. Cf. PLAT. *Tim.* 47e - 48a; *Enn.* III, 2.15.33-39.

³⁶ The state of being a toy or a spectacle of gods can in fact cause anxiety, cf. Epicurus in ATTICUS fr. 3 des Places, or HERACLITUS' 22 B 52 DK. See again MAGRIS, *L'idea di destino*, esp. pp. 696-699.

³⁷ See e.g. *Enn.* III, 4. The Plotinian actor does really exist outside the role, while for the Stoics he is different from the role but he would not exist at all outside of the play. For Stoics soul is basically not immortal (*SVF* III, 809-822) and so it participates in cyclical recurrence in a fairly different sense (MARC. AUR. *Med.* X, 27).

³⁸ PLOTINUS, *Ennead*, Vol. III, Transl. by A.H. Armstrong, Harvard University Press, Cambridge (MA), pp. 90-91.

³⁹ I am grateful to Prof. Chiaradonna for the observation that the strong textual insistence on the aspect of the 'toy' in Plotinus would appear to suggest that the role of ethics is of lesser importance.

⁴⁰ For Plotinus, the empirical world is separate from the real nature of man (that is, the discarnate soul). The soul, trapped between opposing external circumstances (I, 4.13), is able to find the contents of the Intellect within itself, or is moreover able to become the Intellect (V, 3.4.9-15). About the internal and the external Self see e.g. *Enn.* I, 1.10.15 or IV, 8.1.1-11, for upper and lower parts of soul cf. 7.17-24. For other texts see L. BENE, *Ethics and Metaphysics in Plotinus*, in F. KARFIK - E. SONG (eds.), *Plato Revived. Essays in Ancient Platonism in Honour of Dominic J. O'Meara*, de Gruyter, Berlin - Boston 2013, pp. 141-161, esp. p. 3, fn. 10; A. SCHNIEWIND, *L'Éthique du sage chez Plotin. Le paradigme du spoudaios*, Vrin, Paris 2003, pp. 98-102. See also P. REMES, *Plotinus on Self. The philosophy of the 'We'*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2007, Chapt. 4-5. Cf. PLAT. *Resp.* IX 589a-b; *Alc.* I 128d - 132c; *Sen. Ep.* 9.15.

⁴¹ Καὶ γὰρ ἐνταῦθα ἐπὶ τῶν ἐν τῷ βίῳ ἐκάστων οὐχ ἡ ἔνδον ψυχῇ, ἀλλ' ἡ ἔξω ἀνθρώπου σκιά καὶ οἰμῶζει καὶ δούρεται καὶ πάντα ποιεῖ ἐν σκηνῇ τῇ ὅλη γῆ πολλαχού σκηνῶς ποιησαμένων. Translations of the *Enneads* are by A.H. Armstrong, in PLOTINUS, *Ennead*, 7 Vols., Harvard University Press, Cambridge (MA) 1966-1988. Line numbers refer to PLOTINI *Opera. Editio minor*, 3 Vols., ed. P. Henry - H.-R. Schwyzer, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1964-1982. Cfr. EPICT. *Diss.* I, 29.43

⁴² MAGGI, *Il conflitto tra le parti*, pp. 534-535.

⁴³ Cf. *Sen. Ep.* 115.8; and about some aspects of this ability see also LUCR. *DRN* II, 1 ff.

presupposes an ability to recognise what is actually good or bad⁴⁴. The use of the theatre metaphor as a means of judging the sensible world – as we have seen in aspect (i), above – is a traditional one, even though Plotinus connects it to an intelligible, and thus to incorporeal reality; obviously we do not find this approach in Stoicism.

In Chapter 16 – perhaps in response to the remarks of some audience members⁴⁵, who thought that the apparent punishment of good and the apparent gratification of sin would encourage impious thoughts – Plotinus refers to providence as it was understood by Plato and the Stoics⁴⁶. In section III, 2.16.5-7 he examines the important, and highly controversial Stoic key term *κατὰ φύσιν*: «And how can we assert that some things are according to nature, but others against nature, if all things that happen and are done are according to nature?»⁴⁷. The passage offers an investigation into the possibility of wickedness (*πονηρία*), injustice (*ἀδικία*), and error (*ἁμαρτία*) in a world guided by providence⁴⁸. Plotinus' interpretation is based on the assumption that, if evil is present in the world – an undeniable fact⁴⁹ – it is planted either by god, or by people defying the aims of their creator. In the first case impiety does not exist. In the second, however, the position of god is similar to that of an author who gives life to characters that subsequently insult their own creator (16.8-10). The theatre metaphor allows Plotinus to reject both of these consequences.

The coexistence of evil and providence may indeed be explained by the difference between intelligible reality and the perceptible world, for the diversity of things exists on an inferior ontological level (III, 2.4.15-20): at this level, the imperfection of the parts and the desire for unity result in a conflict between the different parts (16.32 ff.)⁵⁰. Man, like all other beings in the sensible world, does not always go beyond his own position, and as a part of a whole is in conflict with other parts⁵¹. One might address this problem by observing the drama from a neutral point of view. This solution has a direct bearing on metaphysics as well as ethics: understanding the structure of reality provides a key

⁴⁴ Cf. *Enn.* III, 2.15.53 ff., and esp. I, 4, where Plotinus – I believe – reflects directly on the Stoic problem of how to combine the end with the indifferent things. On this topic, strictly connected with the theatre metaphor, see A.A. LONG, *Plotinus, Ennead 1.4 as Critique of Earlier Eudaimonism*, in R. KAMTEKAR (ed.), *Virtue and Happiness. Essays in Honour of Julia Annas*, «Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy», Suppl. Vol. (2012), pp. 245-263.

⁴⁵ Plotinus' opponents in this matter are presumably Epicureans and Gnostics. See E. PEROLI, *Dio, uomo e mondo. La tradizione etico-metafisica del Platonismo*, Vita e Pensiero, Milano 2003, pp. 230 ff.

⁴⁶ PLAT. *Resp.* II, 358b - 367e; *Leg.* X 899e - 900b. There is some tension in this point between two demands: «Egli cerca quindi, attraverso il procedimento metaforico, di saldare insieme i termini contraddittorii del discorso, la bellezza oggettiva del mondo anche nelle sue manifestazioni negative, da un lato, e la vita esteriore come pure apparenza, gioco vano di ragazzi, dall'altro» (FERRETTI, *La metafora del mondo*, p. 85). The same should hold for the Stoics, cf. VEGETTI, *La saggezza dell'attore*, p. 23. For Stoic and Platonic elaborations of Providence see esp. G. REYDAMS-SCHILS, *Demiurge and Providence. Stoic and Platonist Readings of Plato's Timaeus*, Brepols, Turnhout 1999.

⁴⁷ Plotinus agrees that from the perspective of the Universe nothing is against nature: *Enn.* IV, 8 2.14-16; IV 4.42.19-23.

⁴⁸ About the imperfection in the physical world and in wicked human beings in *Enn.* III, 2, see R.W. SHARPLES, *Plato, Plotinus, and Evil*, «Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies», 39 (1994), 1, pp. 171-181.

⁴⁹ *Enn.* III, 2.17.17-18.

⁵⁰ Cf. *Enn.* III, 2.1.30 ff.; III, 2.2; IV, 4.35, 39. Cf. also PLAT. *Leg.* X 903b-c; J. LAURENT, *Les limites de la conformité à la nature selon Plotin*, «Les Cahiers Philosophiques de Strasbourg», 8 (1999), pp. 11-21 calls this conflict «a-cosmicité». The problem is examined in MAGGI, *Il conflitto tra le parti*.

⁵¹ See e.g. *Enn.* III, 2.15.2-7, 4.20-23. Cf. also the poem of Empedocles, for ex. 31 B 17 DK.

to the good life from both the Stoic and Plotinian points of view⁵². In Plotinus, the purifying individual can also be compared to somebody who perceives events as parts of an organic whole, and discovers a stability in the conflicting parts⁵³. This interpretation, for both Plotinus and the Stoics⁵⁴, goes hand in hand with the recognition that what is bad for the individual might be good from a universal perspective (IV, 4.39)⁵⁵. In the same spirit, Plotinus also reminds us that each bad thing will eventually be revealed to have been appropriate in the context of the whole⁵⁶. This, in turn, suggests that there is nothing beyond the bounds of providence⁵⁷. However it is worth noting that, for Plotinus, the perfection of the higher part of the soul exists high above the holistic view of the sensible.

Plotinus adopts the *logos*-doctrine of the Stoics, which explains the structure of both the world and men by means of the rational forming principle (*λόγος*)⁵⁸. The dramaturgy of Plotinus resembles this *logos*: «For though it is at war with itself in its parts it is one thing and on good terms with itself in the same way that the plot of a play might be; the plot of the play is one though it contains in itself many battles» (16.34-36). The plot thus results in a harmony of opposing forces, unifying the stories of the conflicting characters in an organic and rational whole (16.37-39). Opposition is a necessary part of the plurality contained in the *logos*⁵⁹: without the necessary presence of evil the *logos* would also lack goodness (18.20-21)⁶⁰. The Plotinian explication of

⁵² It is sufficient to remember the Stoic definitions of the ultimate goal of life (see e.g. STOB. II, 75.11-76 or D.L. VII 87-89.).

⁵³ Plotinus does not, strictly speaking, refer to the viewer; this perspective may exist for anyone who knows the entire story, *in primis* for the author. See, for example, *Enn.* III, 2.3.9-12. Cf. MAGGI, *Il conflitto tra le parti*, pp. 540-541; REMES, *Plotinus on Self*, pp. 230-238.

⁵⁴ Plutarch in *De comm. not.* XIV, 1065d 6-10 (*SVF* II, 1181) refers to Chrysippus, when he writes: «“For,” says he, “as comedies have in them sometimes ridiculous epigrams, which, though bad in themselves, give nevertheless a certain grace to the whole poem; so, though you may blame vice in itself, yet is it not useless to other things”» (Transl. Cherniss). On the same topic see also MARC. AUR. *Med.* VI, 42. These passages are different from the Stoic texts mentioned above, as they concern questions about evil. I have not included them at the beginning of the present discussion as they were outside the scope of the argument.

⁵⁵ Cf. *Enn.* III, 2.11.13-16, where Plotinus gives prominence to the plot as a whole when observing that not everybody in a drama is a hero. So both Plotinus' and the Stoics' views on evil are teleological. Also interesting is the suggestion of Armstrong in W. THEILER, *Plotin zwischen Plato und Stoa*, Foundation Hardt, Vandoeuvres - Genève 1960, pp. 95-96 about the productiveness of evil to artistic beauty. Cf. *Enn.* II, 3.18.5.

⁵⁶ *Enn.* III, 2.5.6-9; 10.34-36.

⁵⁷ *Enn.* III, 2.6.21-25. Plotinus elsewhere describes the Universe as a great symphony, where each note, irrespectively of how far it is from perfection, contributes to the universal harmony (17.59-74). From the perspective of the whole – according to both the Stoics and Plotinus – all the unnatural sounds remain in accordance with nature (17.83-85). Cf. *Sen. Ep.* 84.9. Also relevant is the Platonic comparison between man (and its parts) and the universe (and its parts), which is important for the Stoics too. See *Enn.* IV, 4.45.

⁵⁸ On this concept cf. M. FATTAL, *Ricerche sul logos. Da Omero a Plotino*, a cura di R. Radice, Vita e Pensiero, Milano 2005, Chapt. 5. For further literature see *ibi*, p. 205, fn. 4.

⁵⁹ We have to note with MAGGI, *Il conflitto tra le parti*, p. 532: «Tale contrarietà di cui il *λόγος* è causa si realizza non nel *λόγος* in sé [...] ma in ciò in cui esso si manifesta, cioè nel cosmo sensibile. Qui la vita è posseduta nella misura della partecipazione, non è vita in sé».

⁶⁰ In *Enn.* III, 2.4.29 disorder is a consequence of orderliness. Cf. also *Enn.* I, 8.4-8 and II 3; *Theait.* 176a 5 - b 2. However, Plotinus' notion of Providence is not univocal in all occurrences. In *Enn.* III, 3.5.1 ff. he differentiates Providence from Fate, and at *Enn.* III, 3.4.9-13 he speaks of a lower and a higher Providence. These descriptions bear resemblance to Middle-Platonist notions.

the metaphysics of evil is therefore based on the Heraclitean⁶¹ and Stoic⁶² notion of the unity of opposites. The things that differ (τὰ διάφορα), the other (ἕτερον) and the opposites (τὰ ἐναντία)⁶³ are necessarily inherent in the perfection of the whole *logos* (16.52-58)⁶⁴. The *logos* then guides man's life in an organized way, as we have already seen in Antipater [see aspect (iii), above]. For both the Stoics and Plotinus the dancer's movements are fixed by rules, and therefore exclude random chance⁶⁵.

So the activity of life is an artistic activity, like the way in which one who is dancing is moved; for the dancer himself is like the life which is artistic in this way and his art moves him, and moves in such a way that the actual life is somehow of this [artistic] kind (III, 2.16.23-27)⁶⁶.

3. Providence and omniscience

In section III, 2.18, Plotinus approaches the relationship between actor and author aporetically⁶⁷. In order to explain the presence of evil in the sensible world, it is not necessary to give souls a role of equal rank with the author⁶⁸. The actor is unable to impart his own message to the content of the piece; if this were the case, it would suggest that the itself tragedy was flawed. If the actor was able to say anything other than the words written by the author, it would imply that the actor was, in fact, a part of the author (III, 2.18.11-12). If this were the case, the author would possess a foreknowledge of anything the actors would say in the places he left blank, and he might thus have to connect (συνείρω) free actions with their consequences and, indeed, the entire play. This view, which Plotinus⁶⁹ denies, resembles the Middle Platonist idea, accord-

⁶¹ 22 B 8, 51 DK; cf. F. ROMANO, *Studi e ricerche sul neoplatonismo*, Guida, Napoli 1983, Chapt. II. MAGRIS, *L'idea di destino*, p. 705, observes: «Nel concetto filosofico del *logos* come principio della contraddizione si traduce qui in modo evidente la concezione pessimistica arcaica del divino come fondamento trascendente del bene e del male». The Pythagorean influence conveyed in Plotinus by the *Timaeus* of Plato and presumably present in the combination of musical and theatrical metaphors is discussed in A. ALEXANDRAKIS, *The Notion of Beauty in the Structure of the Universe: Pythagorean Influences on Plotinus*, in WAGNER, *Neoplatonism and Nature*, pp. 149-156.

⁶² E.g. in AUL. GELL. NA VII, 1; PLU. *Stoic. repugn.* XVI, 1066 d we read that evil is a precondition of virtue. See e.g. A. LINGUITI, *Choice, Self-determination and Assimilation to God in Plotinus*, in P. D'HOINE - G. VAN RIEL (eds.), *Fate, Providence and Moral Responsibility in Ancient, Medieval and Early Modern Thought. Studies in Honour of Carlos Steel*, Leuven University Press, Leuven 2014, pp. 211-223, esp. p. 217 about the fact that Plotinus refrained from seeing coherently this ontological perspective with ethical field.

⁶³ Cf. ARIST. *Metaph.* I, 4 1055a 4-5, where Aristotle states that the biggest difference is found between opposites.

⁶⁴ I don't discuss here in detail the question of matter and from where evil comes into the world. It should be emphasised that Plotinus' intention in *Enn.* III, 2.15.7 ff. is not to assign a merely negative role to matter (as in I, 8); on the contrary, he intends universal goodness to include it. About this topic see D.J. O'MEARA, *The Metaphysics of Evil in Plotinus. Problems and Solutions*, in J. DILLON - M. DIXSAUT (eds.), *Agonistes. Essays in Honour of Denis O'Brien*, Ashgate, Aldershot 2005, pp. 179-185.

⁶⁵ Cf. also IV, 4.33. Cf. LONGO, *L'arte e il teatro*, pp. 505-506 and KALLIGAS, *The Enneads*, p. 469, on the fact that by speaking about a nonconstructive art such as dancing, Plotinus emphasizes being regulated by a higher principle, which produces temporary forms, «ordained within a unified 'choreographic' project».

⁶⁶ Ἡ τοίνυν ἐνέργεια αὐτῆς τεχνικῆ, ὡς περ ἂν ὁ ὀρχούμενος κινούμενος εἴη ὁ γὰρ ὀρχηστῆς τῆ οὐτω τεχνικῆ ζωῆ ἔοικεν αὐτὸς καὶ ἡ τέχνη αὐτὸν κινεῖ καὶ οὕτω κινεῖ, ὡς τῆς ζωῆς αὐτῆς τοιαύτης πὸς οὐσης.

⁶⁷ It is perhaps Porphyry who, severing the argument, opens a new treatise (III, 3[48]).

⁶⁸ For the Stoic monist view, the actor must be a material part of the author.

⁶⁹ See also II, 3.16.15 ff., esp. 18 ff.

ing to which fate is described as a hypothetical necessity. According to this theory, fate is a law (albeit below the level of providence) which prescribes that, if a certain event occurs, the effect of that event must also necessarily occur⁷⁰.

The soul cannot be the *independent* source of good or malevolent actions; yet if this is the case, Plotinus asks, can we not view human actions as parts of the rational principle of the universe (τοῦ ἐν τῷ παντί λόγου) just as the acts (ἔργα) of the actor are parts of the drama (18.18-26)? Plotinus does not rule this option out. The actions of the actors, performed either well or poorly, are already parts of the drama; they are, in fact, determined by it, for in the universe everything follows from reason (πάντα παρ' αὐτοῦ, III, 2.18.26). In fact Plotinus also uses the *logos* to refer specifically to the *activity* of the Soul-hypostasis. The figure of the playwright would, in fact, correspond to the activity of the *logos*, performed by the Soul-hypostasis. Human activities must therefore be parts of this hypostasis activity, just as the individual souls are also rational principles. For Plotinus, providence is the totality of the *logoi* which, as the image of the intelligible world, guarantees organisation in the sensible world⁷¹. Of course the different souls have their own different natures and, accordingly, their individual actions must also differ. These actions, which can be good or evil in themselves, are united in the same *logos* (III, 3.1.8–12)⁷².

Suppose you say «I have power to choose this or that»? But the things that you will choose are included in the universal order, because your part is not a mere casual interlude in the All but you are counted in as just the person you are (III 3.3.1-3)⁷³.

As Plotinus acknowledges, in the second treatise on providence, man «has another free principle, which is not outside providence or the rational principle of the whole» (III, 3.4.6-8)⁷⁴. Although this assertion is by no means without its problems regarding

⁷⁰ On the fact that man can suspend the order, see also the Cynic Oenomaus of Gadara in EUS. *PE* VI, 7.31-34. For fate as law see e.g. ALC. *Did.* XXVI, 179.1-33; APUL. *Asclep.* XIX, XXXIX, XL; *De mundo* XXXV-XXXVI; PLU. *Fat.* 568c - 70e. For Calcidius' all-inclusive hypothetical fate in relation to Stoics, see REYDAMS-SCHILS, *Demiurge*, pp. 228-243. For other sources on same questions addressed here, see SHARPLES, *Plato, Plotinus, and Evil*, p. 177.

⁷¹ L. BRISSON, *The Question of Evil in the World in Plotinus*, in P. D'HOINE - G. VAN RIEL (eds.), *Fate, Providence and Moral Responsibility in Ancient, Medieval and Early Modern Thought*, Leuven University Press, Leuven 2014, pp. 171-186, esp. p. 172.

⁷² The order (τάξις) connecting the events is also the principle that makes divination possible (II, 3.7).

⁷³ Καὶ γὰρ «εἰ ἐγὼ κύριος τοῦ τάδε ἐλέσθαι ἢ τάδε»; Ἄλλ' ἂν αἰρήσει, συντέτακται, ὅτι μὴ ἐπεισόδιον τὸ σὸν τῷ παντί, ἀλλ' ἠρίθμησαι ὁ τοιόσδε. One of the most interesting elements in Plotinus is that even though he endorses Alexander of Aphrodisias' critique on many points, he does not adopt Alexander's well known identification of freedom with the realizability of alternative possibilities. Just as the Demiurge does not choose or decide in a given situation, so human freedom does not constitute the freedom of act or choice either. It is interesting to see the role of principles in an analogy about the Aristotelian movers of *Metaph.* XII, 8, interpreted in *Enn.* V, 1.9.12-25.

⁷⁴ In III, 2.10.18-19 Plotinus argues for the claim that human nature is a principle determined by itself and aims at the good. As B. COLLETTE-DUČIĆ, *Plotinus on the Descent of the Soul. Conciliating Moral Responsibility and Fate*, forthcoming, shows, (concerning IV, 3.13.1-8, and IV, 8.5.3-4) fate comprises the voluntary also in terms of the soul's descent into the body, insofar as fate acts from within the soul as a natural principle. Thus, the descent of the soul into the body is just as natural as the falling of a stone.

human autonomy⁷⁵, his way of dealing with the issue is, in many ways, similar to Plato's suggestion in the *Laws*⁷⁶.

For Plotinus, the theatre metaphor cannot be interpreted to suggest that the future is open, since the knowledge of the author necessitates a deterministic framework. The dilemma noted by the Skeptics, as Richard T. Wallis remarks, is that if one is to separate god from an anthropomorphic way of thinking (one which is connected, for example, to choice), then what follows is atheism. Either we reduce god to an irrational, sub-human power or deprive god of any intelligible content⁷⁷. Plotinus, however, tries to find a solution that avoids these two extremes⁷⁸.

The Plotinian Intellect has no capacity for planning or supervision, and the creation of the world is not a result of its purposeful intention⁷⁹; for this reason, the Intellect is fundamentally different from a human playwright⁸⁰. The possession of wisdom is not identical with pursuit of wisdom: the former is characteristic of Intellect, while the latter is a feature of men (IV, 4.12-14). According to Plotinus, divine knowledge should not be confused with foreknowledge, as it exists outside of time, and the activity of the Intellect is not a discursive one⁸¹. It nonetheless followed by providential

⁷⁵ On the λόγος συνάπτων see C. RUSSI, *Provvidenza, λόγος connettivo e λόγος produttivo. Le tre funzioni dell'Anima in Enn. III 3 [48], 4.6-13*, in R. CHIARADONNA (a cura di), *Studi sull'anima in Plotino*, Bibliopolis, Napoli 2005, pp. 59-78, who assumes: «Avanzerò l'ipotesi che il λόγος συνάπτων coincide, da un lato, con l'attività provvidenziale di distribuzione delle anime individuali nell'universo "performato" dal λόγος ποιητικός, e, dall'altro, con il «principio libero» stesso dell'uomo» (p. 63).

⁷⁶ PLAT. *Leg.* X, 904b-c.

⁷⁷ R.T. WALLIS, *Scepticism and Neoplatonism*, «Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt», II, 36 (1987), 2, pp. 911-954, esp. p. 934; cf. KALLIGAS, *The Enneads*, p. 448. According to Plotinus, nature is on the lowest level of the hypostasis of Soul, and it is the opposite pole of the ruling principle of the world, even though both are devoid of representations. Cf. e.g. *Enn.* III, 8.4.22-25; IV, 4.13.17 ff. On the other hand, Plotinus often considers nature as being above human craft and intellect. The reason for this is partly to be found in the Skeptical critique, as we have noted; cf. IV, 4.11; III, 8.3.10 ff.

⁷⁸ See especially C.I. NOBLE - N.M. POWERS, *Creation and divine providence in Plotinus*, in A. MARMODORO - B.D. PRINCE (eds.), *Creation and Causation in Late Antiquity*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2015, pp. 51-70 about the argument.

⁷⁹ See on this aspect KALLIGAS, *The Enneads*, p. 448.

⁸⁰ In fact, the playwright should be the Demiurge, another metaphorical figure for Plotinus. See also the observation of LONGO, *L'arte e il teatro*, p. 507: «Infatti, mentre nel caso del dramma teatrale l'unitarietà appare come un risultato finale in cui sono composti gli elementi inizialmente contrapposti, invece nel cosmo l'unità si collocava piuttosto all'inizio di un processo in seguito al quale le parti si distaccavano e si contrapponevano tra loro (39). Plotino allora ripensa il λόγος non solo come unità iniziale, ma anche come unità risultante, e introduce la nuova comparazione con l'armonia che deriva da contrari, da lui sentita come più adeguata (cfr. 40)». At the same time, the theatre metaphor, as MAGGI, *Il conflitto tra le parti*, p. 539, fn. 35 shows, is just a step toward a non-artisan (but artistic) model of ποιησις, inasmuch we find in it an ontological priority of the whole over the parts. Cf. R. LAMBERTON, *Homer the Theologian. Neoplatonist Allegorical Reading and the Growth of the Epic Tradition*, University of California Press, Berkeley - Los Angeles - London 1986, p. 6 who – as KALLIGAS, *The Enneads*, p. 469 also recalls him – compare the narrative voice of the *Iliad* (in possession of past, present and future's knowledge) with divine knowledge.

⁸¹ Cf. CIC. *Div.* I, 56.127 and WALLIS, *Scepticism*, p. 949. In distinguishing the intuition of principles from choice and from discursive thinking, Plotinus is trying to strengthen his theory against the Skeptical critique that originates in Aristotle, see *EN* III, 3 1112a 18 - 1113a 12; X, 7 1177a 26-27; *DA* I, 4 408b 24-29. For the Skeptics see e.g. *SE M* IX, 168. Cf. CIC. *ND* III, 38. Cf. NOBLE-POWERS, *Creation*, p. 67: «*nous* can be said to have foresight in the sense that it eternally knows the noetic counterparts of what exists both earlier and later in time here in the sensible world».

activity, which is carried out by the *logoi* (IV, 4.9.1-6)⁸². The rational order of *logos* is later described as being similar to the order and law of a state (IV, 4.39.11-17)⁸³: everything that citizens are going to do has already been taken into account by this *logos*, and thus happens in a harmonious way even if it appears spontaneous. The world's developmental process is necessarily included in the seminal reasons, thereby ruling out that anything happens casually (II, 3.16).

We can also say that the World Soul takes care of the world, since sometimes it is described as a doctor who cures diseases (IV, 4.45.47-52)⁸⁴. Plotinus, however, does not believe that all events in the sensible world are caused or arranged by the World-Soul alone, but are rather caused by individual souls and the World Soul together (III, 1.4).

4. Choice, character, and the ability to change

We have already seen that, from a higher perspective, the concept of evil vanishes but the man enclosed within the frame of the drama can recognise this only through intellectual efforts. Within the play, however, there remains the distinction between good and evil. An ethical consequence of the acceptance of the *logos* theory without further distinctions would be that the responsibility of agents for their actions also vanishes, which should thus lead to a general forgiveness (III, 2.16.1 ff.)⁸⁵. According to Plotinus, however, such behaviour is contrary to the activity suggested by reason. Providence cannot be blamed for the acts of the soul, that is, it does not abolish the responsibility of the soul⁸⁶. Culpability must therefore fall on the individual, and it must also be reasonable.

The distinction between (1) the so-called pre-empirical notion of freedom (that is, the freedom of the discarnate soul) and (2) the freedom of the embodied soul is useful in our analysis of the theatre metaphor⁸⁷. (1) Plotinus connects the hierarchy of roles, as well as the issue of allocating the main and supporting roles, to the qualities of actors; specifically, he treats the question with regard to the attribution of merit. The view that presupposes a hierarchy among roles, which we shall discuss below, can be connected to the moment of the soul's descent into the body. It is first necessary to examine the process by which the qualities of the actor – or rather the character of the individual human – can be traced back. (2) The role that has been allocated (be it a ruler or a beggar, a good or a wicked man) is played by every actor according to his own qualities. When describing the situation of the embodied soul, the Plotinian metaphor does not allude to a close

⁸² Plotinus also employs the Stoic term *δοικησις* to describe the providential arrangement of the world. See D. CALUORI, *Plotinus on the Soul*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2015, p. 58, fn. 51.

⁸³ It is important to note again that for the Stoics and for Plotinus normative and factual order coincide.

⁸⁴ For providence, Plotinus says in another metaphor, acts by *logos* on the evil that has been caused by us, as *logos* in animals seals the wound and repairs the injured part since health was given by providence (III, 3.5.24-33).

⁸⁵ «No, their being wicked is not done away with, only their being like that does not originate with themselves (παρ' αὐτῶν)» (17.12-13). As a wrong note does not lose its wrongness even when it becomes part of a harmony, cf. *Enn.* III, 2.18.83-85. See the same question also in II, 3.16.41-44.

⁸⁶ See esp. *Enn.* III, 2.9.1-8, 10.1 ff. See BRISSON, *The Question of Evil*, p. 173 for the fact that providence can make use of evil, but is not responsible for it. Furthermore, neither matter alone is a sufficient cause of evil. Evil is instead in the original affection of soul (I, 8.14.44-54).

⁸⁷ G. LEROUX, *Human Freedom in the Thought of Plotinus*, in L.P. GERSON (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Plotinus*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1996, pp. 292-314, esp. p. 297. There is a parallel in IV, 8.5.16-24 with the two kinds of punishment of the soul's faults.

correspondence between one's qualities and one's role⁸⁸. In dealing with questions about empirical freedom he treats the role as a given; the content of the role and the level it occupies in the hierarchy of roles are irrelevant to the issue of empirical freedom. The reason for this is that the same image may be used to explain both levels. Nonetheless the two issues, (1) and (2), are independent of one another. As Lloyd P. Gerson says: «[1] Moral responsibility as a foundation for all is irrelevant to [2] the moral responsibility which differentiates one person and one act from another»⁸⁹. In Plotinus, the description of choosing a life is essentially in accordance with Plato, whereas the idea of expressing praise or blame for a particular action suggests a Stoic influence⁹⁰.

(1) Plotinus inserts his reading of Plato's myth into the theatre metaphor when, in analysing the casting of actors, he denies that the actor is completely subsumed within the work of the author. «The blame lies with the chooser», says Plato in the *Republic*, and this view is adopted by Plotinus as well⁹¹. In fact, the author serves two functions: not only does he provide his actors with words appropriate to their roles, but he also makes selections among the actors according to their qualities; here «the author gives each actor a part, but makes use of their characteristics which are there already» (17.18-19). Apparently the connection between actor and role, according to the actor's individual qualities or aptness⁹², is made by the author alone, who, then plays the role of a judge⁹³. The kind of role given to each actor, however, does not depend on the author, and is also not grounded in necessity, as the author does not decide without reason who should receive a main role and who should receive a supporting one⁹⁴.

He does not himself rank them as leading actor or second or third, but gives each man suitable words and so assigns him to the position which is proper to him. So there is a place for every man, one to fit the good and one to fit the bad. Each kind of man, then goes according to nature and the rational principle to the place that suits him, and holds the position he has chosen (III, 2.17.19-25)⁹⁵.

⁸⁸ The complexity of the metaphor includes two problems. First, the main character does not necessarily correspond to the good man, i.e. the moral value of the role and the importance of the role are not parallel (cf. LONGO, *L'arte e il teatro*, pp. 512-513). Second, it is not obvious that the role of a wicked man has to be played by a bad actor. Pace R. DUFOUR, *Plotin. Traités 45-50* (prés., tr. et annot. to the *Treatise 47* by R. Dufour), Éditions Flammarion, Paris 2009, p. 288, fnn. 199 and 201 ad III, 2.17.30: «La métaphore devient boiteuse, car elle implique que le rôle du méchant est joué par le mauvais acteur». Furthermore, as R. FERWERDA, *La signification des images et des métaphores dans la pensée de Plotin*, J.B. Wolters, Groningen 1965, p. 182, fn.: «il est invraisemblable qu'un acteur ou un régisseur ordonne qu'un acteur joue mal». Cf. SHARPLES, *Plato, Plotinus, and Evil*, p. 175. See also Magris' convincing position in *L'idea di destino*, p. 707, about how it is possible to perform badly a positive as well as a negative part.

⁸⁹ L.P. GERSON, *Moral Responsibility and what is 'up to us' in Plotinus*, in DESTREE - SALLES - ZINGANO, *What is Up to Us?*, pp. 251-263, here p. 254.

⁹⁰ Cf. BOBZIEN, *Determinism*, p. 291: «There is no evidence at all that Chrysippus or any other early Stoic grappled with the problem of character determination and moral responsibility [our 1], let alone the problem of character determination and free will [our 2]».

⁹¹ PLAT. *Resp.* X 617e, to which Plotinus, too, refers at *Enn.* III, 2.7.19-20. Cf. ID., *Phaedr.* 248a ff.; ID., *Leg.* IX 870 e, 872 e; ID., *Tim.* 42d.

⁹² Here Plotinus is very close to Panaetius' view (iii).

⁹³ Paradoxically here the Stoics succeeded better in not identifying their first principle as an anthropomorphic judge.

⁹⁴ When it «assigns him to the position which is proper to him», the *logos* does not make the souls worse in order to achieve its goals, but «puts them in places appropriate to them according to their worth» (III, 2.12.11-12).

⁹⁵ οὐ γὰρ αὐτὸς πρωταγωνιστὴν οὐδὲ δεῦτερον οὐδὲ τρίτον ποιεῖ, ἀλλὰ διδοῦς ἑκάστῳ τοὺς

On the basis of this text, it seems certain that there is a close relationship between the position and the features of the soul. The enigmatic phrase «the position (or place, τόπος) of men» – that which most probably corresponds to the character one has⁹⁶ – may be explained by the fact that everything happens according to nature and the *logos*, and it would appear that the soul itself chooses its own proper place⁹⁷. With regard to the soul's descent into the body, Plotinus does not appear to loosen the connection between character (ἦθος) and choice⁹⁸. However, if τόπος is ultimately the outcome of a choice made by the actor based on his inborn capacities, the act of choosing must also be understood in accordance with the nature of the individual soul. If this is the case, we may ask whether the initial nature of the soul has already been determined by the time of the soul's descent into the body, or if the soul creates itself wholly through its choice⁹⁹.

The metaphor does not provide a satisfactory answer to the issue of the origin of good or wicked moral character. It would appear that inequalities may exist as early as the first incarnation, since Plotinus says that «souls are better or worse, some from other causes and some because they were not all equal, as we may say, from the beginning» (18.1-2). It should be noted that, if the soul's first descent into the body took place not willingly but from necessity – as suggested by certain parallels with Plato's *Phaedrus* – then it is improper to speak about of choice as having been responsible for the abandonment of contemplation¹⁰⁰. In this sense we may, following the interpretation of Luc Brisson, compare the attribution of a wicked character to the 'tragic fault'¹⁰¹. This view is supported by an earlier treatise (VI, 7 [38].7) in

προσῆκοντας λόγους ἤδη ἀπέδωκεν ἐκάστῳ εἰς ὃ τετάχθαι δέον· οὕτω τοι καὶ ἔστι τόπος ἐκάστῳ ὁ μὲν τῷ ἀγαθῷ ὁ δὲ τῷ κακῷ πρέπων. Ἐκάτερος οὖν κατὰ φύσιν καὶ κατὰ λόγον εἰς ἐκάτερον καὶ τὸν πρέποντα χωρεῖ τὸν τόπον ἔχων, ὃν εἴλετο.

⁹⁶ Cf. III, 3.5, IV 4.45.40-44: «It is not then unreasonable either for souls to change their places, since they do not always keep the same character (ἦθος), and are ranked in accordance with their experiences and actions, some receiving a rank like that of the head, others like that of the feet, in tune with the All: for the All itself has differences of better and worse». The place is connected to the spatial fragmentation: «l'universo sensibile è ancora meno unitario del suo λόγος, data la frammentazione nello spazio» (LONGO, *L'arte e il teatro*, p. 509). See also III, 3.5.1 ff. according to which τόπος is – I believe – the position (of a part) on a vertical ontological scale. Cf. III, 2.5.1 ff.

⁹⁷ See also IV, 4.45.21 ff. (esp. 44-47).

⁹⁸ The basic source is PLAT. *Leg.* X 904b-c; Id., *Resp.* X 614b - 621b. Cf. esp. III, 4. However the issue of προαίρεσις leads to complex interpretative questions which are beyond the scope of the present study. See F. ROMANO, *Azione morale e libero arbitrio in Plotino*, in M. VEGETTI - M. ABBATE, *La Repubblica di Platone nella tradizione antica*, Bibliopolis, Napoli 1999, pp. 151-191, esp. pp. 176-185; J. PHILLIPS, *Plotinus and Iamblichus on Προαίρεσις*, «Ancient Philosophy», 15 (1995), 1, pp. 135-153; L. BENE, *Okság és morális felelősség Plótinosznál*, «Magyar Filozófiai Szemle», 54 (2010), 3, pp. 25-44, esp. pp. 32, 36-37.

⁹⁹ Cf. *Enn.* V, 7 on the question of whether or not there exists an essential difference between every individual thing. On the conception of souls as intelligible universes (III, 4.3.22) which contain the forming principles of all living beings cf. REMES, *Plotinus on Self*, pp. 76-85. Cf. also P.-M. MOREL, *Individualité et identité de l'âme humaine chez Plotin*, «Les Cahiers Philosophiques de Strasbourg», 8 (1999), pp. 53-66.

¹⁰⁰ In opposition to the Gnostics, there is not a revolt against the Intellect but the Soul suffers from a lack or weakness. This weakness also seems to precede any relation to matter. See BRISSON, *The Question of Evil*, pp. 178-179, 183 ff.

¹⁰¹ See BRISSON, *The Question of Evil*, esp. pp. 181-186. Cf. *Enn.* IV, 8.4.10-17 on the idea that the source of the differences is the souls' isolation and retreat into themselves. Cf. III, 2.4.31-34, which takes the soul's nature to be a potential cause of the differences. On the origin of the various natures see III, 3.4.44-54. At other places it seems that the soul's descent into the body is voluntary; nonetheless it does not depend on a choice (IV, 3.13.1-20). The topic is treated in detail in COLLETTE-DUČIĆ, *Plotinus on the Descent of the Soul*.

which Plotinus describes the creation of the Soul and the souls, using the image of the dance [cf. (iii)] in the following way:

For what is there to prevent the power of the Soul of the All from drawing a preliminary outline, since it is the universal forming principle, even before the soul-powers come from it, and this preliminary outline being like illuminations running on before into matter, and the soul which carries out the work following traces of this kind and making by articulating the traces part by part, and each individual soul becoming this to which it came by figuring itself, as the dancer does to the dramatic part given him? (VI, 7.7.8–16)¹⁰².

(2) A final verdict on the question of pre-empirical conditions would require further research; nonetheless it is clear that, insofar as it is impossible for a person to change his character, he is unable to ameliorate either the ‘tragic fault,’ or even the ‘original sin’ mentioned by Brisson. In the former case it would be inappropriate to attribute responsibility to the person, whereas in the latter we would also be faced with a pessimistic anthropology that is by no means what Plotinus intended¹⁰³. Just as the tension of the Stoic πνεῦμα is formed in all situations, so are the qualities of the actors are formed during the performance. While this possibility is not made explicit in the text, it is implied by the idea that if an actor’s performance is good, he may be allocated a higher rank of role in the next play. As a character is not the sufficient cause of its actions, it will not become an autonomous entity, independent of factors outside of itself¹⁰⁴. In the early treatise *On Fate* (III, 1[3].7.20–21) Plotinus states that constitution (κατασκευή) cannot be the source of what depends on us¹⁰⁵. At the same time, some people remain like a natural substance (VI, 8.2.21 ff.). Every person is responsible for their actions, in so far

For the connection between ignorance and descent into the body see also GERSON, *Moral Responsibility*, p. 261. The solution for the origin of the moral character in the Stoics is less complex, even though the question of ‘unfairness’ contained in differing starting position should provoke (at least for modern readers) some problems for them as well. But is this just a problem? «(For if you give some such empirical explanation of how badness gets into human being, then it is more difficult to shift responsibility away onto some impersonal power like fate.) So it appears that Chrysippus uses the fact of the initial formation of different characters in order to justify the moral responsibility of the agent – rather than a possible objection to it» (BOBZIEN, *Determinism*, p. 300). See *ibi*, pp. 290–301. The same question is surely in the centre of the debates in the II A.D., as we see e.g. in ALEX. APHR. *Fat.* VI, 170.16–171.17. About this topic, see P. DONINI, *Psicologia ed etica in Galeno e in Alessandro di Afrodisia. Il problema del determinismo*, in *Id.*, *Tre studi sull’aristotelismo nel II secolo d. C.*, Paravia, Torino 1974, pp. 127–185.

¹⁰² Τί γάρ κωλύει τὴν μὲν δύναμιν τῆς τοῦ παντὸς ψυχῆς προὑπογράφειν, ἅτε λόγον πάντα οὐδσαν, πρὶν καὶ παρ’ αὐτῆς ἦκειν τὰς ψυχικὰς δυνάμεις, καὶ τὴν προὑπογραφὴν οἷον προδρόμους ἐλλάμψεις εἰς τὴν ὕλην εἶναι, ἥδη δὲ τοῖς τοιοῦτοις ἴχνεσιν ἐπακολουθοῦσαν τὴν ἐξεργαζομένην φυχήν κατὰ μέρη τὰ ἴχνη διαρθροῦσαν ποιῆσαι καὶ γενέσθαι ἐκάστην τοῦτο, ᾧ προσήλθε σχηματίσασα ἑαυτήν, ὥσπερ τὸν ἐν ὀρχήσει πρὸς τὸ δοθὲν αὐτῷ δρᾶμα;

¹⁰³ See e.g. R. CHIARADONNA, *Esiste un’etica nella filosofia di Plotino?* in P. DONATELLI - E. SPINELLI (eds.), *Il senso della virtù*, Carocci, Roma 2009, pp. 61–72.

¹⁰⁴ BOBZIEN, *Determinism*, p. 216, E. ELIASSON, *The Notion of That Which Depends On Us in Plotinus and Its Background*, Brill, Leiden - Boston 2008, p. 88, fn. 24. One might recall the well-known Stoic analogy with a cylinder, in which the factors that depend on us are the nature of the cylinder (*natura*: CIC. *Fat.* 42), or its mode and form (*modus eius et formae volubilitas*: AUL. GELL. *NA VII*, 2.11). This latter description in Gellius picks out the will and the mental dispositions in general, whereas Cicero refers to the power and the nature of the mind.

¹⁰⁵ This expression usually serves as a description of human nature.

as they are able to make use of their intellect and change their attachment to the body¹⁰⁶. Since the option of improving one's character is open to everyone, one is responsible if one chooses not to do so¹⁰⁷. We may thus agree with Gerson's statement that

by distinguishing psychic endowments from personal or individual psychic achievements [...] one's choices are not necessarily determined by the former, but are themselves determinative of the latter. [...] If the 'first' nature determines the 'second', then there is no conceptual space for moral responsibility; only if the 'first' nature is not a sufficient condition for the 'second' is the conceptual space potentially available. But to make such a claim, one would have to suppose that *nothing* that occurs between the moment of endowment and the development of the 'second' nature is necessary for the latter¹⁰⁸.

The potential for changing one's moral character rules out also the possibility that human nature is perfectly determined by external causes, as is the case with plants and brute animals (III, 3.3.3 ff). If an external source alone was capable of causing a change in moral character (whether that external source be the principle producing the character or any other factor), it would not be possible to explain culpability. The ability to change one's character by one's own resources is, for Plotinus, equivalent to possessing a principle that is free. However this principle, the soul, must function within the framework of the *logos* of providence and the universe (III, 3.4.6-8), just as the actor's own performance must remain within the framework of the author and the theatrical play.

5. *Circumstances and individual performance*

In the view of both the Stoics and Plotinus, an actor may not refuse to perform the role that was allocated to him by the author. Moreover, the role implies further prescriptions: in role *X* one has to behave in mode *x*, just as when string *X* is played, the note *x* has to sound (17.64-67). The idea of matching one's behaviour to one's place, and of following the mode corresponding to that place, rather than the beauty of the sound or the moral quality of the *role*, is especially relevant to the theatre metaphor. The actor, on the one hand, moves within the space of a particular stage¹⁰⁹ and, on the other hand, receives all of the external things essential to his role during the course of the play¹¹⁰. «Just as the actors here get their parts and their costumes, the saffron robes and the rags, so the soul, too, itself gets its fortunes, and not by random chance» (17.35-37). Fortune (τύχη) is presumably taken by Plotinus to refer to all the external factors that accompany a role. It is not random chance that determines the manifestations of a particular life-role, but – as we have seen in case of the Stoics (iii) – these manifestations

¹⁰⁶ Cf. e.g. *Enn.* III, 2.4.39 ff.

¹⁰⁷ *Enn.* III, 3.3.12 ff. For the specific position men occupy between god and brute animals see e.g. *Enn.* III, 2.8.9, 9.21 ff.; *Cic. Off.* I, 105 and *EPIC.T. Diss.* I, 3.3.

¹⁰⁸ GERSON, *Moral Responsibility*, pp. 254-255. For the Stoic οἰκείωσις and the superposition of reason with nature cf. R. RADICE, *Oikeiosis. Ricerche sul fondamento del pensiero stoico e sulla sua genesi*, Vita e Pensiero, Milano 2000.

¹⁰⁹ The Demiurge, however, in contrast to the author of the drama, has a much wider stage, so that everyone may have an appropriate place; see also IV, 4.45.35-40. For the idea that the good and the evil have their place in the universe see *PLAT. Leg.* X, 904c.

¹¹⁰ See also III, 3.2, where Plotinus compares souls to the soldiers in an army, who receive all that is needed for war (food, drink, weapons and war machines).

are also fixed in accordance with reason (κατὰ λόγον, 37). Illustrious costumes should be worn by someone playing a role of a high rank, even if the costume or role does not determine the quality of the actor's performance¹¹¹.

External circumstances can clearly be hindrances (ἐμποδίσαντο) to the human *logos* (II, 3.14.30); however, as Plotinus notes elsewhere, they cannot completely change either the nature of the human being or the force of the *logos*¹¹². Moreover the universal *logos* – as we have already seen – can always arrange things in such a way that offspring of good nature may still be born of evil actions and negative external causes (III, 2.18.13-18)¹¹³.

Returning to the issue of empirical freedom, the fact that the actor brings himself into the play (17.27-28) determines not only the casting of the actors, but also the quality of the actor's performance: it depends on the actor (παρ' αὐτῶν καὶ ἐξ αὐτῶν) whether he plays his role well or poorly (17.29-31)¹¹⁴. At this point we arrive at the central question of autonomy, for, as Plotinus claims, «there is action, too, which is their business, following from the speeches written by the author» (17.31-32). The actor stepping into the play makes himself an integral part of the play, in the same way that the soul realises itself according to this rational principle (κατὰ λόγον, 17.37), but also according to his character (17.39-41).

Plotinus uses a different, and in some ways more efficient metaphor, to describe the incarnation of the soul:

It embarks, then, with this [guardian] spirit first of all in this universe as if in a boat, then the nature which has the name of the 'Spindle' takes it over and sets it, just as in a ship, in some seat of fortune. And as the circuit of heaven, like a wind, carries round the man sitting, or even moving about, on the ship, there occur many and various sights and changes and incidents, and, just as in the actual ship, [they occur because] he is moved either by the tossing of the ship or by himself, of his own impulse, whatever it may be, which he has because he is on the ship precisely in his own way (III, 4.6.46-56)¹¹⁵.

¹¹¹ See again EPICT. *Diss.* I, 29.41-43: «A time will soon come when the tragic actors will think that their masks and buskins and the long robe are themselves. Man, all these things you have as a subject-matter and a task. Say something, so that we may know whether you are a tragic actor or a buffoon; for both of these have everything but their lines in common. Therefore, if one should take away from him both his buskins and his mask, and bring him on the stage as a mere shade of an actor, is the tragic actor lost, or does he abide? If he has a voice, he abides». See also SEN. *Ep.* 79.18.

¹¹² For the Stoic view (i) see SVF III, 229, 229a; DL VII, 89. The development of character depends both on inherited features and on nurture and environment, viz. the affiliation with society.

¹¹³ «For certainly in the All the rational principles bring into a connected whole the consequences and results which follow upon those deeds which are evil, and do so rationally; for instance, from adultery, or the carrying off of a captive, children may come according to nature and better men, it may happen, and other better cities than those sacked by wicked men». Cf. SVF II, 1181, 1176. For the possible difference between Chrysippus' and Cleanthes' views regarding this issue, see BOBZIEN, *Determinism*, p. 47.

¹¹⁴ Cf. MAGRIS, *L'idea di destino*, pp. 706-707 regarding the so-called 'hermeneutic freedom' in Plotinus. For Magris, the relationship between text and interpretation reflects the rapport between being and knowing in Greek tragedies (see also vol. I, p. 234).

¹¹⁵ Ἐπιβαίνει οὖν μετὰ τούτου τοῦ δαίμονος ὥσπερ σκάφους τοῦδε τοῦ παντὸς πρώτον, εἶτα παραλαβούσα ἢ τοῦ ἀτράκτου λεγομένη φύσις κατέταξεν ὥσπερ ἐν νηὶ εἰς τινα ἔδραν τύχης. Περιαιούσης δὲ τῆς περιφορᾶς ὥσπερ πνεύματος τὸν ἐπὶ τῆς νεῶς καθήμενον ἢ καὶ φερόμενον πολλοὶ καὶ ποικίλοι γίνονται καὶ θεαὶ καὶ μεταθέσεις καὶ συμπτώματα, καὶ ὥσπερ ἐν αὐτῇ τῇ νηὶ ἢ παρὰ τοῦ σάλου τῆς νεῶς ἢ παρ' αὐτοῦ κινήθεντος ὀρμηὶ οἰκείᾳ, ἣν ἂν σχοίη τῷ ἐπὶ νεῶς εἶναι παρὰ τὸν ἑαυτοῦ τρόπον.

When the actor comes onto the stage, he is responsible only for himself and his own actions (ἐαυτῆς καὶ τῶν ἔργων αὐτῆς, 17.52-53). What precisely does this mean? For Plotinus, as for Aristo (ii) and Epictetus, the actor is described as being responsible for the intonation of his voice and the gestures he makes (17.41 ff.)¹¹⁶. It is, for the most part, the quality of the actor's performance (ὑπόκρισις) that determines whether they should be met with applause or whistles. In the same way, the qualities of an individual must be assessed independently of surrounding circumstances. If the actor is found deserving (or lacking) by the author of the play, he will be given a higher (or lower) position on the next occasion. As it is clear from III, 2.4.23-26, «the wrongdoers pay the penalty, being corrupted in their souls by their works of wickedness, and are set in a lower place; for nothing can ever escape that which is ordained in the law of the All»¹¹⁷.

The attribution of merit at this point is connected only to the way in which the actor performs the prescribed play; and at the level of πράξις, one is free only in terms of the manner of their performance. In investigating how the notions of αὐτεξούσιον and ἐπ' αὐτῷ may be applied to the soul in action, in VI, 8.5, Plotinus admits that these cannot be made dependent on either the outcome of the action – since contributing to it is beyond our power¹¹⁸ – or the circumstances in which the action takes place. What depends on the individual is the quality of the action (that is, its goodness: τὸ καλῶς)¹¹⁹. Thus, the question that must be asked is:

How is the activity then in our power when if war did not break out it would not be possible to carry out this activity? But it is also the same with the other actions done according to virtue, since virtue is always being compelled to do this or that to cope with what turns up (VI, 8.5.8-13)¹²⁰.

Plotinus' ultimate answer seems to be that the concept of 'what is up to us' *stricto sensu* refers exclusively to theoretical activity. Virtue is thus not only independent of circumstance, but also does not have a primary external goal¹²¹. For both Plotinus and the Stoics, these two factors are central in assuring that the virtuous life is found only in things that are always accessible to people, and that the metaphor of the nonconstructive arts (theatre and dance) may be applied to it¹²².

¹¹⁶ The beautiful-ugly and the good-evil, the level of form and content, presumably correspond to each other here. Cf. LONGO, *L'arte e il teatro*, p. 519. Even though Plotinus hints that this is about the intonation of the actor, it is nonetheless unlikely that the reference is really to such a formal element that is attached to the person from the outside, in other words, that is independent of his moral qualities.

¹¹⁷ The μετενσωμάτωσις in IV, 8.5.16-24 is described as the retribution for this-worldly sins. See also *Enn.* III, 2.8.26 ff., 9.8 ff., 13.1 ff., 15.21 ff., etc.

¹¹⁸ Cf. EPICT. *Diss.* II, 5 or CIC. *Fin.* III, 7.24.

¹¹⁹ See also *Enn.* III, 2.10.7-11. Other texts, such as III 1.7, III 4.6.46-56 (above) suggest that this quality – of being a man causally undetermined from outside – should correspond to a scale of the good or bad actions which may be realised.

¹²⁰ Λέγω δὲ τὴν τότε ἐνέργειαν πῶς ἐφ' ἡμῖν, ὅποτε πολέμου μὴ καταλαβόντος οὐκ ἦν τὴν ἐνέργειαν αὐτὴν ποιήσασθαι; Ὁμοίως δὲ καὶ ἐπὶ τῶν ἄλλων πράξεων τῶν κατὰ ἀρετὴν ἀπασῶν πρὸς τὸ προσπίπτον ἀεὶ ἀναγκαζομένης τῆς ἀρετῆς τοδὶ ἢ τοδὶ ἐργάζεσθαι.

¹²¹ For Plotinus the higher level of virtue does not belong at all to practical ethics. On Plotinian ethics see G. CATAPANO, *Plotino, Sulle virtù, I 2 [19]*, Pisa University Press, Pisa 2006.

¹²² «In fact we do not consider Wisdom to be like seamanship or medicine, but rather like the arts of acting and of dancing just mentioned; its End, being the actual exercise of the art, is contained within the art itself, and is not something extraneous to it» (Transl. Rackham; CIC. *Fin.* III, 7.24 vs. V, 6.16 ff.) and also *Enn.* III, 2.16.23-27. See also the Aristotelian distinction between making and doing (*NE* VI, 2 1139b

6. Implications

If we acknowledge the soul to be a causal principle not determined by external factors – as Plotinus suggests in a several passages of the *Enneads* – then we must also admit that it is an independent principle, which is free to a certain extent. As we have already seen, this freedom does not imply that the future is open, since the author’s knowledge encompasses the entire play. However, even though Plotinus believes in providential determinism, when it comes to moral responsibility he also believes that different people, in the same situation, will act in accordance with their individual nature. Paris and Idomeneus react to the same situation in a different manner (III, 3.5.41-43), and for this reason their acts can become objects of moral judgement. Plotinus in III, 4.6.57-60 says:

For everyone is not moved and does not will or act alike in the same circumstances. So different things happen to different people as a result of the same or different occurrences, or the same things to others even if the circumstances they encounter are different; for that is what destiny is like¹²³.

Plotinus’ concept of moral responsibility is not dissimilar from that of the Stoics: both are based on the fact that it was the agent, and not something else, who committed the action, and the agent is thus – by the determination of his nature – causally responsible for the action’s occurrence. Furthermore, both the Stoics and Plotinus consider some kind of ‘second nature’ to be the basis of the autonomy of human action¹²⁴. These similarities would seem to justify the claim that Plotinus’ views regarding the theatre of the world were inspired by the Stoics (perhaps Epictetus), with the exception of those questions surrounding the soul’s descent and reincarnation, which are clearly Platonic. His understanding of responsibility may have stemmed from, or at least existed in parallel with¹²⁵ the Stoic solution, while his concept of cosmic justice and the organic relationship between the role and the actor seems to have emerged from the Platonic framework¹²⁶. On the totality of the plot and the benefit of evil in the world, Plotinus also appears to have drawn on both Plato and the Stoics.

The theatre metaphor also presents us with some general implications on the harmonisation of determinism and moral responsibility. Indeed, we can see that the general aim of its application is not to reach a state of resignation or pure adaptation, but rather to invoke the good and happy life. In a famous later-Stoic simile that compares human beings to dogs tied to carts (see, for instance, Hipp. *Haer.* I, 21.2) we find that it is pointless to try to surpass our boundaries. This same powerless human being is not, however, the subject of the theatre metaphor either for the Stoics or Plotinus. It is true that the metaphor is commonly used as a means of providing practical advice (i)¹²⁷. Nevertheless, in the cart simile «these parts of destiny – especially the negative

1-2, 5 ;1140b 6-7) and KALLIGAS, *The Enneads*, p. 448 about their position in Plotinus’ Intellect.

¹²³ Οὐ γὰρ ὁμοίως ἐν τοῖς αὐτοῖς πάς κινεῖται ἢ βούλεται ἢ ἐνεργεῖ. Γίνεται οὖν διάφορα διάφοροις ἢ ἐκ τῶν αὐτῶν ἢ διαφόρων προσπεσόντων, ἢ τὰ αὐτὰ ἄλλοις, κὰν διάφορα τὰ προσπεσόντα τοιοῦτον γὰρ ἢ εἰμαρμένη. The same idea is expressed in III, 3.5.40-41.

¹²⁴ For Stoics it is reason; for Plotinus the question is more controversial.

¹²⁵ Since to base somebody’s behaviour on his being can be also attributed to Plato.

¹²⁶ For Platonic elements in the theatre metaphor see esp. FERRETTI, *La metafora del mondo*.

¹²⁷ W. THEILER, *Plotin zwischen Plato und Stoa*, in *Forschungen zum Neuplatonismus*, de Gruyter, Berlin 1966, pp. 124-139, esp. p. 137.

things which one cannot escape – are quite independent of one's moral qualities»¹²⁸. For the Stoics (i-iv) and Plotinus, however, the theatre metaphor includes an active aspect¹²⁹. As Plotinus reminds us, the ship goes on regardless, and man is free to act even if his actions do not affect the lot of the ship.

The theatre metaphor also makes it apparent that placing human existence into a wider context is an essential part of the process for discovering the real and independent Self. Moreover Plotinus and the Stoics conceive the role being analogous to the external circumstances of life over which we have no control; as a consequence, both focus on moral disposition, and not on the execution that depends on it¹³⁰. For the Stoics too, as Vegetti has pointed out, the theatre metaphor exemplifies the withdrawal of the sage into himself; the ascension from the role does not make the sage independent of society, of the dimension of time, or of the passions, yet does prevent him giving himself up to these factors¹³¹.

For Plotinus, however, the upper part of the soul, in the realm of the intelligible world, exists independently of empirical reality. The question of whether or not Plotinus affirms that the virtuous man could *constantly* be aware of contemplation is a fairly complex matter of interpretation¹³². In either case, it must be stressed that, for Plotinus, action itself is only secondary, a mere shadow of contemplation¹³³; this is quite different from the Stoic view¹³⁴. As Graeser has noted: «Plotinus makes some effort to point out that the Stoics [...] overestimated the extent of empirical freedom in attributing to τὸ ἐφ' ἡμῖν those characteristics that actually apply to the metaphysical self only»¹³⁵. In Plotinus, being 'up to us' is interpreted on different levels; «the true polar opposite of the vicious individual is not the virtuous one, but the separate and undescended intellect whose activity is, paradigmatically, "up to it"»¹³⁶.

7. Conclusion

Our analysis of the problem of human autonomy in Plotinus' text, allows us to propose a set of answers to the questions raised in the introduction. (1) The theatre metaphor

¹²⁸ BOBZIEN, *Determinism*, p. 350.

¹²⁹ For the Stoic side see especially *ibi*, pp. 345-357. Representatives of the Stoic school have ardently rejected the charge that their physics leads to total passivity. Cf. CIC. *Fat.* 28-29; ORIG. *Cels.* II, 20.342.62-82; [PLUT.] *Fat.* 574e; SEN. *QN* II, 38.3. On idleness cf. also III, 2.9.36 of our treatise.

¹³⁰ Cf. also F. TRABATTONI, *Libertà e autodeterminazione dell'essere umano in Plotino*, in M. BARBANTI - D. IOZZIA (eds.), *Anima e libertà in Plotino*, Atti del convegno nazionale 29-30 gennaio 2009, CUECM, Pisa 2009, pp. 189-211.

¹³¹ VEGGETTI, *La saggezza dell'attore*, p. 38.

¹³² On the question of whether activities of the sensible and intelligible worlds are compatible and contemporary there exist different interpretations, cf. J. WILBERDING, *Automatic action in Plotinus*, «Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy», 34 (2008), pp. 373-404; CHIARADONNA, *Esiste un'etica*; C. BRITAIN, *Attention Deficit in Plotinus and Augustine*, «Proceedings of the Boston Area Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy», 18 (2003), pp. 264-273; M. FREDE, *A Free Will. Origins of the Notions in Ancient Thought*, University of California Press, Berkeley - Los Angeles - Oxford 2011, pp. 136 ff.; BENE, *Ethics and Metaphysics*; CALUORI, *Plotinus on the Soul*, esp. Chapt. 6.

¹³³ *Enn.* I, 5.10. Cf. R. CHIARADONNA, *Dualismo metafisico e teoria dell'azione in Plotino*, in E. CANONE (a cura di), *Anima-corpo alla luce dell'etica. Antichi e moderni*, Olschki, Firenze 2015.

¹³⁴ This main difference is underlined by A. GRAESER, *Plotinus and the Stoics*, Leiden, Brill 1972, p. 122.

¹³⁵ *Ibi*, p. 115.

¹³⁶ GERSON, *Moral Responsibility*, pp. 258-259.

does indeed involve a deterministic structure. The plot, the words of the characters and the moment of their enunciations are all given. The foreknowledge of the author rules out the possibility of improvisation during the play. On the other hand, the actor recites his text, and the excellence of his performance provides the basis on which his acting is evaluated. (2) The outcome of the play, however, depends on the playwright alone; the actor has absolutely no influence on it. The author has written the play as perfectly as possible, just as the events of real life originate in providence. (3) The role allocated to the actor next time depends on the excellence he has displayed in his last play. His new role will be fully deserved, for it will be a consequence of his performance in the former role and not on some arbitrary act of the author, or on good or bad fortune. (4) There is still a problem of how much significance should be ascribed to the innate features of the actor (provided that they really are innate, given that the world has no beginning in time), and the impact they have on the role he is given. However the presence of bad innate characteristics do not rule out the possibility that the actor can develop his abilities and thus be responsible for his performance.

Abstract

In several chapters of his treatise *On Providence* (III, 2 [47] 15-18) Plotinus uses the theatre as a metaphor in his discussion of coexistence of providence and evil, as well as anthropological and ethical problems such as human autonomy and responsibility. This paper examines how Plotinus – as well as his Stoic forerunners – employed the metaphor of the theatre, paying special attention to the ways in which the metaphor was used to determine the consistency and limits of human autonomy. In order to illustrate the similarities and differences between Plotinus and the Stoics, this paper analyse how the actor is integrated into the play, and the extent to which he is shown to have some independence within it.

Keywords: autonomy, evil, freedom, providence, responsibility