6AANA020 Neoplatonism
Syllabus – Academic year 2014/5

Basic information

Credits: 15
Module Tutor: Dr. Raphael Woolf
Office: 712
Consultation time: TBA
Semester: 2
Lecture time and venue*: TBA

*Please note that tutorial times and venues will be organised independently with your teaching tutor

Module description (plus aims and objectives)

Neoplatonism is the last great ancient philosophical tradition, founded in the 3rd century by Plotinus, who is arguably the most important ancient thinker after Plato and Aristotle. Neoplatonism had a tremendous historical influence on subsequent philosophy, in both the European and Islamic worlds. It is also distinctive for its philosophical interest, as Neoplatonists developed striking positions on issues such as the relation between language and thought, the nature of evil, and the meaning of freedom. The Neoplatonic tradition also devoted considerable attention to the interpretation and harmonization of Plato and Aristotle; thus anyone interested in the work of these two thinkers is likely to find Neoplatonism of interest too. For the same reason, some background in the study of Plato and Aristotle is a prerequisite for this module (Greek Philosophy I or equivalent).

Assessment methods and deadlines
Outline of lecture topics (plus suggested readings)

The two main primary texts for the course are:


These are available in the library, but I would recommend buying at least the Dillon and Gerson.

Some useful general survey volumes are worth getting:

- P. Remes, Neoplatonism (Stocksfield: Acumen, 2008).

NB Please note that for semester I-only Study Abroad students, assessment requirements may vary. In particular, May exams will be replaced by summative essays to be submitted by the end of term (date TBC)
**Week 1**, Plotinus’ philosophy: an overview  
Primary text: *Enneads* V.1, “On the Three Principal Hypostases” (in Dillon and Gerson)  

**Week 2**, Plotinus on the One and the generation of intellect  
Primary text: *Enneads* VI.7, “How the Multitude of Ideas…” (in Dillon and Gerson)  

**Week 3**, Plotinus on Intellect and the Forms  
Primary text: *Enneads* V.5, “That the Intelligibles are not…” (in Dillon and Gerson)  
- H.A. Armstrong, “The Background of the Doctrine ‘that the Intelligibles are not Outside the Intellect,’” in *Les Sources de Plotin* (Geneva: 1960), 393-413.  

**Week 4**, Plotinus on soul and self  
Primary text: *Enneads* I.1, “On What is the Living Being” and IV.8, “On the Descent of the Soul…” (in Dillon and Gerson)  

**Week 5**, Iamblichus on the soul  
Primary text: Iamblichus *On the Soul* and extracts from Pseudo-Simplicus *Commentary on the Soul* (in Dillon and Gerson)  

**READING WEEK** – NB FIRST FORMATIVE ESSAY DUE –

**Week 6**, Plotinus on Happiness  
Primary text: *Enneads* I.4, “On Happiness” (in Dillon and Gerson)  

**Week 7**, Plotinus on matter and evil  
Primary text: *Enneads* I.8 “On What Evils Are…” (in Dillon and Gerson)  

**Week 8.** Proclus on matter and evil  
• J. Opsomer, “Proclus vs Plotinus on Matter (De mal. subs. 30-7),” *Phronesis* 46 (2001), 154-188.*  

**Week 9.** Plotinus on providence and freedom  
• Primary text: *Enneads* VI.8 “On the Free Will…” (in Dillon and Gerson)  
• See also *Enneads* III.2-3, “On Providence” (for this see Armstrong’s translation in the Loeb edition)  

**Week 10.** Porphyry on vegetarianism  

NB SECOND FORMATIVE ESSAY DUE –  
* = electronic resource available online through KCL library
Suggested essay questions

Does the claim that the One is utterly simple really mean that the One is ineffable?

Does Plotinus give grounds for distinguishing Intellect (nous) from the One?

Critically discuss Plotinus’s claim that the intelligibles are not outside the Intellect.

Were the Neoplatonists able to explain how an immortal, immaterial soul can interact with a physical body?

Was Iamblichus right to criticise Plotinus’s doctrine of the undescended soul?

‘Plotinus’s ethical thought consists in nothing more than the claim that we should turn away from the physical world and contemplate the Forms’. Discuss

According to Plotinus, what does it mean for a human to be free? How does this relate to what it means for the One to be free?

Who had the better of the debate between Plotinus and Proclus as to whether matter is to be identified with evil?

Does Porphyry make a convincing case that a philosopher should not eat meat?