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, II, or equivalent).

**Assessment methods and deadlines**

- *Formative assessment*: 1 essay of 2000-3000 words
- *Summative assessment*: 1 essay of 4000 words

**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:

**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**

**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)  
• D.J. O’Meara, “Evil in Plotinus (Enn. I, 8),” in D.J. O’Meara, The Structure of Being and the Search for the Good (Aldershot: 1998), §IX.

**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

* = electronic resource available online through KCL library
Suggested essay questions

Does the claim that the One is utterly simply 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?