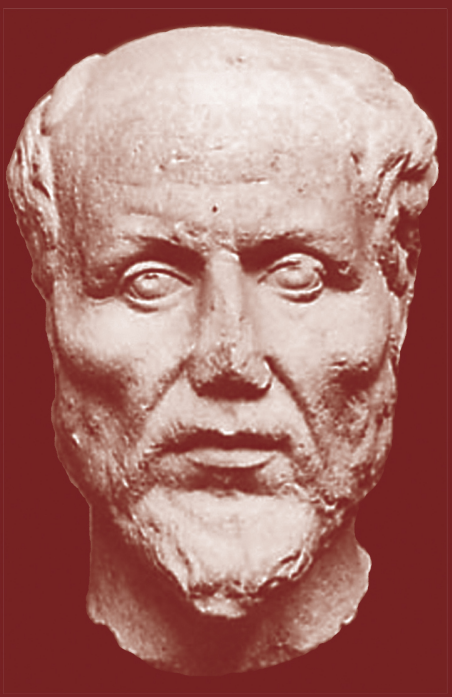
THE PHILOSOPHER AND SOCIETY IN LATE ANTIQUITY



Essays in Honour of Peter Brown

edited by

Andrew Smith

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Contributors:
Karin Alt, Polymnia Athanassiadi, Robbert van den Berg, John Dillon, Mark Edwards, Garth Fowden, Robin Lane Fox, Aideen Hartney, Dominic J. O'Meara, Alexandrine Schniewind, Andrew Smith, Richard Sorabji, Edward Watts



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INTRODUCTION

Andrew Smith

The papers comprising this book were originally given at a conference in University College Dublin held in honour of Peter Brown who has done so much to illuminate the world of late antiquity. The aim of the conference was to bring together philosophers and historians to discuss the relationship of philosophers to society in late antiquity. The emphasis naturally fell on Neoplatonists, both because they were the dominant philosophical movement and because their philosophy would seem to have promulgated an escapist attitude to the world around them. *Omne corpus fugiendum est* is one of the leading ideas espoused by Augustine from his reading of the libri Platonici. Did the Neoplatonists exaggerate one side of a delicate balance of tensions clearly visible in the works of Plato himself? Or is such an exaggeration a misreading of the evidence? Such a balance was never going to be easy to express, let alone to act out in life and the following papers, which range from the discussion of metaphysical principles to the practical engagement of philosophers, do at least demonstrate the many nuances of which we need to be aware if we are to appreciate this. But in general they point to a greater and more meaningful involvement in the world than the conventional handbooks are accustomed to admit.

Our enquiry begins with an account by John Dillon of the way in which the Neoplatonic schools operated. He takes the examples of Plotinus in Rome, Iamblichus in Apamea and Proclus in Athens. In fact the schools were never large affairs and were mostly dependent on some local patron for support and even accommodation, although the Academy in Athens, at least in Proclus' time, had a considerable endowment and its head possessed his own house. Even so the number of students was small. Proclus probably had no more than six in his inner circle at any one time. The atmosphere was quite informal. The more general lectures would have attracted a larger following, whilst wealthy patrons were often at the same time pupils. In all of these respects the late antique school of philosophy differed little from its forbears. The same expectation of public service was also continued, although that became increasingly difficult in a Christian milieu. Plotinus, Iamblichus and Proclus were not disconnected from the

outside world. Plotinus had close contacts with the court of Gallienus, Iamblichus with Licinius, and Proclus was involved in the public affairs of Athens. In each case it would appear that external political relations played a significant role in the continued good fortunes of the establishment. In fact after the demise of Licinius, Iamblichus' school had to go underground for a time. Heads of schools also seemed to use the services of distinguished patrons or pupils who had influence in high places not only as a means of securing their own survival but as a channel through which to bestow their own services to society as men of probity and justice. Even within the schools their activity of teaching was demanding and their devotion to their students exemplary; yet time could still be found for writing, contemplation and prayer.

Robin Lane Fox analyses the impact of late antique philosophers on others and in turn the impact of society on them. The former he categorizes as 'shakers', those who seriously influenced others, the latter as 'movers', those who finally yielded to the impossible pressures around them and took the route of exit. Philosophers continued, in so far as they could in the new Christian environment, to act as intermediaries between ruled and rulers as they had done in previous centuries, as men of trust and impartiality who could exercise παρρησία. Even the theurgically inclined, e.g. Sopater and Proclus, could use their powers for the good of society. Marinus praises Proclus' active involvement in civic affairs, whilst Damascius explicitly praises the practical virtues. On another front, philosophers like Plotinus and Porphyry had a profound impact of an intellectual and spiritual nature on non-professional philosophers such as Ambrose, Augustine, Nigidius and Theodorus who was consul in 399. Synesius is another example of an ambassador, administrator and military commander who was profoundly influenced by his philosophical teachers. On the other side are the 'movers'. But when Proclus, for example, went into enforced exile from Athens for a period, this was only after he had spoken out strongly against what Robin Lane Fox argues may well have been the conversion of the Parthenon into a church. And the seven philosophers who went to Persia after the demise of the Academy in 529 were still politically engaged enough to concern themselves with the laxity of morals and the suppression of the poor in Persia. Priscianus, one of their number, even composed a work tailored to the needs of the philosophical novice and ruler of Persia.

If we now turn to the founder of Neoplatonism, Plotinus, we may be inclined to regard him as an other-worldly figure and, seeing little discussion of practical ethics in the *Enneads*, ask ourselves whether he addressed himself only to the sage, the philosopher who, like himself, has already reached the goal of assimilation to the divine. Alexandrine Schniewind

argues strongly for exactly the opposite. Plotinus in fact addressed himself primarily to those who had not reached but were on their way to the goal. His portrayal of the sage acts as a model for their encouragement. The sage and the ordinary man are not opposed. The latter may be regarded as a sage in potentiality and each one of us contains both a higher and lower self so that becoming a sage is simply the discovery of one's higher self and allowing it to guide the lower. The higher educates the lower just as the ordinary man initially needs the guidance of the sage, who, because his higher self is already in control of the lower, can provide others with guidance which he communicates through discursive reason. But it is in fact our higher part which the sage primarily addresses. And when, in an exaggerated way, Plotinus claims that the sage does not pity the suffering of others, it is the suffering of the lower part to which he refers and which the individual must himself learn to put into context. The sage thus does 'descend to the cave' in the sense of bringing his message to others in imitation of the generosity of the Good. Plotinus thus presents us with an ethics for the ordinary man expressed in the form of a discourse concerning the sage.

A similar evaluation is made by Andrew Smith who explores the metaphysical principles which allow Plotinus to reconcile the life of contemplation and of action. The metaphysical principles governing the relationship of higher to lower entities and their counterpart in the theory of productive contemplation lie also at the root of the relationship between the contemplative and practical aspects of human existence. And although human souls normally contemplate only intermittently, unlike the perfectly balanced World Soul, we too, Plotinus sometimes says, can strive to be like the World Soul which can combine its contemplative activity with its cosmic functions.

Whilst Plotinus might have held himself somewhat aloof from the religious experience of everyday life, this is hardly true of his colleagues and successors who were very much in touch with this aspect of daily life. It is in this context that Karin Alt explores the world of daimons, a world which belongs primarily to the sphere of popular belief, but which proved particularly attractive to some philosophers like Porphyry and Iamblichus who were deeply concerned with the relationship of philosophy to religion. Of course Plato had laid the groundwork, particularly for the notion of the daimon as intermediary. Other Platonists, and one thinks primarily of Xenocrates and Plutarch, developed a daimonology and it is Xenocrates who first introduces the notion of evil daimons. Plotinus only twice discusses daimons at any great length and that too in an attempt to reconcile apparently discordant passages in Plato. It is indicative of

Plotinus' independent stance that he shows no great interest in the topic for its own sake. This is in marked contrast to Porphyry who is concerned to reconcile philosophical interpretations with popular practice. A prominent case is his interest in evil daimons who are attracted to blood sacrifice.This attraction is but one of the reasons why Porphyry advises us to replace blood sacrifice with 'spiritual sacrifices'. And yet civic loyalty sometimes permits the philosopher to participate in such traditional sacrifices, though without eating the flesh. In his letter to Marcella, in which he is less concerned with the general need for abstinence from the eating of flesh, he is even more positive about popular belief. It is only to be expected that Iamblichus would support many of the beliefs mentioned by Porphyry whilst at the same time clarifying some issues, e.g. the status of the personal daimon, which had been left in the air by Porphyry. But Sallustius' comparative silence on daimons and his rejection of evil daimons is surprising. Was this perhaps a sign of accommodation with an unsympathetic and even dangerous Christian officialdom?

Political involvement, too, became increasingly difficult for fully committed Platonists. And yet Dominic O'Meara adds to our examples of politically engaged Neoplatonists a network of educated individuals connected with Iamblichus and argues for a neoplatonically-inspired theory of political action and duty. In his letter to his son Himerius, a middle-ranking official, Sopator (a decurion in Apamea and son of the politically distinguished Sopator, the pupil of Iamblichus) advises that concern for the 'good life' of those under him should dictate his relationship with his superiors, whilst he should himself exercise a providential care for his charges. This exercise of moral and political virtue is also a stage on his way to becoming like god who exercises providential care over the world. The practical virtuous activity that is relevant to the situation of political responsibility determines the sort of advice that is given to the administrator rather than the enunciation of some absolute ideal. The applicability of this philosophical advice is also seen in Iamblichus' evaluation of law as an expression of virtue and the view of the administration of justice as something to be exercised within the context of an alert and constructive concern for human welfare, where punishment, for example, is conceived as primarily therapeutic. This demonstrates the practical political involvement of the philosophically educated whose active care is an integral part of the search for the transcendent.

In contrast Robbert van den Berg argues strongly for the fundamental tension in Platonism between contemplation and action, particularly in the more extreme manifestations of the philosophical and fully engaged political life. When the Neoplatonists do advocate such a rapprochement it

is more like that of the Platonic demiurge than the philosopher-king. The former, as interpreted by Proclus, is left to contemplate alone while taking care of his providential duties through the agency of subordinates – the younger gods. Similarly Proclus' Parmenides may live an undisturbed philosophical life by handing over to the younger Zeno the task of discoursing with Socrates. Themistius, who chides contemporary philosophers with their lack of external engagement, proves himself the exception when actively involving himself in politics. Moreover the Epicurean invocation to 'live unnoticed' had even become ascribed to the Pythagoreans by later Neoplatonists.

Polymnia Athanassiadi identifies another practical involvement of the Neoplatonists in the establishing of the 'sacred text' as a locus for the divine presence in the universe. The second century AD saw a change in attitudes towards the primacy of the written sacred text over the oral tradition. It is in this period that both Jews and Christians established canonical scriptural texts. The pagan version is seen particularly in the *Chaldaean Oracles* which, like their Jewish and Christian counterparts, soon became, as definitive texts, the object of careful exegesis. Porphyry, Iamblichus and later Proclus were the protagonists. For Proclus the *Chaldaean Oracles* were more important than Plato. Athenassiadi argues that the temple of Bel at Apamea was probably the location of the Chaldaean text itself.

Garth Fowden traces the significance in late antiquity of Pythagoras both as a man of god and as one who is involved in civic life. Plotinus, too, lived in a city (Rome) rather than in some rural retreat, Iamblichus was in Apamea and Proclus in Athens. Indeed Pythagoras as well as Apollonius were more widely recognized as attested by their portrait busts in Aphrodisias. We should also note that the diffidence expressed in the attribution of Epicurean withdrawal to Pythagoras expresses probably no more than a justified concern about possible Christian suppression. The godlike Pythagoras was also the model for the frequent combination of philosopher and 'priest', found above all in Proclus. Many of these philosopher-priests were extraordinarily active in their support of pagan cults both locally and internationally. Their presence was 'discreet but effective' and Damascius' *Life of Isidore* is a rich source of names and anecdotes to illustrate this point. The more discreet philosophers, such as Chrysanthius, Priscus, Themistius and Synesius, were left unmolested or pursued successful public careers, whilst the more flamboyant, such as Maximus of Ephesus, came to a sticky end. And though their activities were more obvious to their fellow sages than, say, to Christian officialdom, some, at least, of what they did came to the attention of Christian writers who even when mocking pagan philosophers at least recognize their existence as a distinct social group.

The conflict between the life of contemplation and the active life is also found amongst Christians, and Aideen Hartney examines the instructive case of John Chrysostom who faced the dichotomy of the ascetic life and that of ecclesiastical administration. At first he dealt with this by an escape from the city into the countryside to live the life of a monk. *De sacerdote* is in effect an apologia for his own act of escape from the city. Yet the very polarity of his life as an ascetic and as Episcopal administrator was curiously bridged by his strong reformist engagement with the corruption of city life and his practical support for the poor. This reconciliation reached its climax in his period as bishop of Constantinople when he seemed able to combine ascetic ideals with the practical activity of preacher and protector of the poor, although the implementation of his ideal would have involved the rejection of most recognizable civic institutions and their replacement by ascetic-living family units.

Mark Edwards explores with two examples the subtle relationship of pagan and Christian in late antiquity. The alchemist Zosimus of Gaza, who is characterized as a sort of third-century Teilhard de Chardin with his theory of spiritualized materiality, is not to be regarded as a confused syncretist, but rather as a master of assimilation in the way in which he combined Christian beliefs and alchemy. Edwards' second example, the destruction of the pagan temple of Marnas in Gaza, is not so much an example of persecution as a case of pragmatic political collusion between clergy and emperor. These two examples should warn us to be wary of clear battle lines between pagans and Christians. The scene is less clear and Proclus, who had himself visited the Marneion, need not be regarded as totally out of joint with the times in his defence of pagan traditions.

But Proclus' religiosity and support of theurgy is not the only form of valid Neoplatonism, as Richard Sorabji demonstrates in his examination of the stance of Ammonius in Alexandria. His starting point is the critical report of Damascius on Ammonius' accommodation with the Patriarch of Alexandria which allowed him to continue teaching. This accommodation, he argues, was not a rejection of strict Neoplatonic theology, nor an abandoning of teaching Plato, nor the betraying of the hiding places of fellow Neoplatonists, but rather an agreement to omit the discussion of pagan religious practice in his school. The evidence is contained in the omission from his commentary on Aristotle's *de interpretatione* of any discussion of divine names. He also notes the absence from the Alexandrian tradition of commentaries on the Orphics and the *Chaldaean Oracles*. The reservation of Ammonius and subsequent Alexandrian Neoplatonism in this regard is striking when compared with the activities of Proclus, Damascius and Horapollo whose school had been closed for over-zealous proselytizing.

Damascius may have regarded this as a betrayal, but it was a betrayal only of his kind of Neoplatonism and Ammonius may be doing no more than following in the footsteps of the religious moderates, Plotinus, Porphyry and Aedesius.

Further insights into the relationship between Christians and Neoplatonists, and into the influence the latter had in fifth-century Alexandria, is provided by Edward Watts' analysis of the intended audience of the *Theophrastus* of Aeneas, bishop of Gaza, and of the *Ammonius* of Zacharias. The former, though written in Gaza, was aimed at an audience of cultural equals in Alexandria. The dialogue is the composition of an educated rhetorician who presents a Christian view of important and topical arguments about the eternity of the universe, but without a reference to Christ or Christianity, in a non-confrontational dialogue with his equals. Zacharias, on the other hand, aims his work at a different and more sensitive audience, the Christian students attending the philosophical schools in Alexandria. His *Ammonius* is confrontational. He names his opponents and ridicules them as they fail to convince their Christian interlocutors in debate. The work lacks the suave literary finish of Aeneas with his learned references to Greek literature and mythology which are replaced by overt biblical citations. Zacharias' *Life of Severus* provides important information about the background of student and intellectual life in the Alexandrian schools. Zacharias had been a staunch supporter of the *philoponoi*, lay Christian groups attached to monasteries. Their student wing provided support cells for Christian students attending the predominantly Neoplatonic philosophical lectures. Edward Watts argues that the *Ammonius* was written for such groups in order to strengthen their Christian convictions and undermine the natural authority of their pagan teachers. It is, then, a strong testimony to the cultural power exercised by Neoplatonic teachers like Ammonius and Gessius.

Finally, in an appendix, Robin Lane Fox disputes the thesis of Tardieu that the seven Neoplatonists who left the Academy settled in Harran (Carrhae) after leaving Persia and there founded a Neoplatonic school which survived until the tenth century as the source for an Abbasid Platonic revival and subsequently the source of Arabic Platonism. The evidence that the seven were in Harran, let alone founded a long-lasting school, is shown to be largely conjectural. It is more probable that a tradition continued in Emesa. The Arabic tradition was more likely inspired by individual reading of chance surviving works in compendia.

One serious omission from our enquiry has been the artistic dimension, an area which has been greatly illuminated by the recent work of Paul

Zanker. It is instructive to note that the Ostia head of 'Plotinus' which displays the ascetic features of the bearded philosopher with up-turned eyes, looking for inspiration from above, is almost certainly not a portrait of Plotinus, but probably of a local worthy from Ostia.[1] Although we have lost a possible portrait of Plotinus we have gained the understanding that men of affairs wished to be portrayed as transcendent philosophers. It is a fashion confirmed by a series of sarcophagi mostly from Rome, the most impressive of which shows the deceased on one side as pater familias in the toga and on the other as philosopher wearing the *khiton*.[2] Philosophers did influence those around them. But it is also a reciprocal influence as we have seen so often in this collection of papers, for philosophers, even Neoplatonists, were also sensitive and responsive to the needs of their communities. The final blow to that interaction came with the gradual change of that community from Hellenism to Christianity and the consequent transmission of the perennial conflict of action and contemplation to a Christian milieu.

I would like to record my thanks to the Dublin Centre for the Study of the Platonic Tradition under whose auspices this conference was held and to the following for generous financial support: the Faculty of Arts and the College Research Committee, University College Dublin; the Higher Education Authority research programme in Mediterranean and Near Eastern Studies, Trinity College Dublin; and the graduate students of the Department of Classics in University College for their help and practical support.

Notes

[1] See Paul Zanker, *Die Maske des Socrates* (Munich 1995) p. 213, ill. 122f = Ostia, Museo 68 (Helbig IV 3136).

[2] See Zanker, *ibid.* pp. 259–67, ill. 148.

1

PHILOSOPHY AS A PROFESSION IN LATE ANTIQUITY

John Dillon

In the spring of 263, in his thirtieth year, the philosopher Porphyry, originally of Tyre, but for some years previously studying with the distinguished Platonist Longinus at Athens, decided on a career move, and set out with one companion for Rome, to join the circle of the rather avant-garde and somewhat mysterious philosopher Plotinus.[1] What sort of a set-up he found when he got there, and what sort of a set-up he had left behind him in Athens, is part of what I now wish to enquire into.

In fact, as Porphyry tells us in his *Life of Plotinus* (ch. 5), he found nothing much going on at all when he arrived, since Plotinus was enjoying his summer vacation (τοῦ Πλωτίνου τὰς θερινὰς ἄγοντος ἀργούς), and not holding regular classes.[2] But when school resumed in October,[3] what did he find himself faced with?

One of the first things we have to do, I think, when approaching the study of ancient centres of higher learning, whether philosophical, medical, legal, or rhetorical, is to think small. Even the model of the mediaeval university presents us with something far too elaborate. A nearer analogue to the situation in late antiquity, which was put to me many years ago in Berkeley by Peter Brown himself, and which I find most attractive, might be found in what we know of the centres of learning in the mediaeval Arab world, from Seville and Cordoba to Baghdad or Ispahan, where even a world-famous sheikh would gather with his little flock of students, who might themselves have come to sit at his feet from any quarter of the Arab-dominated world, in nothing more formal than an alcove of a mosque, or a corner of its courtyard, and expound his doctrine, after which teacher and students would adjourn to his house for dinner and further discussion.[4]

Similarly, Porphyry, arriving at Plotinus' school in Rome, joins a very simple and informal institution indeed, by modern standards. But how representative, after all, was the school of Plotinus of late antique philosophical schools in general? Here, I think, on the analogy of Sherlock Holmes' dog that fails to bark, one may take note of certain interesting

features of Porphyry's narrative.[5] Porphyry, certainly, is neither blind to, nor reticent about, Plotinus' various eccentricities, but at no point does he suggest that the general organization of the school, or Plotinus' position in it, is noticeably peculiar. This I find significant. Porphyry, after all, as I say, had come to Plotinus from Longinus in Athens. He was presumably also familiar with the establishment of the Platonic *diadochus* Eubulus, even if Longinus was not himself part of that establishment.[6] Yet he does not note in the *Life* any startling change of structure, such as from a large, organized 'research institute' to a totally personal, informal group of 'friends'. Certainly, he notes that Plotinus' method of commentary was remarkable (ch. 14), but this in itself emphasizes that the overall set-up was not a shock to him at all. My conclusion from this is that Plotinus' school – apart from the personality of the Master himself – was not in any essential way different in structure from that of any other teacher of philosophy in these centuries.

What, then, was Plotinus' situation? As far as we can gather from Porphyry's narrative, he lived, when Porphyry knew him, and presumably for some considerable time before that, in the house of a wealthy widow called Gemina (ch. 9).[7] The household included Gemina's daughter, also called Gemina, and a number of young boys and girls who had been entrusted to Plotinus' care on the death of their parents. Whether this was Gemina's only residence, or just a house belonging to her, is not clear, but it was obviously a fairly large and elaborate establishment, in which young ladies and middle-aged philosophers could live decently together.

Around Plotinus in this establishment was gathered a circle of 'companions' – Porphyry does not speak of pupils (*mathētai*), only of companions, *hetairoi.* These companions may be divided into three classes: (1) wealthy patrons, (2) close companions, and (3) more casual auditors. The first category is not, of course, exclusive of the other two, but the latter two categories represent, I think, the same distinction that can be found in earlier centuries in the schools of such figures as Plutarch's mentor Ammonius, and that of Aulus Gellius, L. Calvenus Taurus, between young men who attended philosophical lectures to complete their education (as was the case, for instance, with budding lawyers or rhetoricians like Aulus Gellius or Apuleius), and serious students of Platonism, who would go on to become masters themselves, and one of whom would normally be their master's chosen successor.

In Plotinus' case, patrons included the wealthy senators Castricius Firmus, Marcellus Orontius, Sabinillus, and Rogatianus,[8] the last of whom went rather overboard, giving away all his possessions and adopting the philosophic way of life. This did wonders for his gout, it seems, but

presumably rather lessened his usefulness as a patron. The others, however, seem to have found philosophy compatible with the *bios praktikos.* Castricius Firmus was a particularly good friend. Plotinus was always welcome, one gathers, at his country estate at Minturnae, and when the philosopher was afflicted with his final illness in 269, it was to an estate adjacent to this in Campania that he retired (*V.Plot.* ch. 2). This estate belonged to, and was presumably bequeathed to him by, a prosperous doctor of Arabian extraction by the name of Zethus, who had himself been given it by Castricius – interesting patterns of patronage are revealed here.[9] 'His wants,' Porphyry tells us, 'were provided in part out of Zethus' estate, and for the rest were furnished from Minturnae, where Castricius' property lay.' We see in all this Castricius providing very much the same range of services for Plotinus as, back in the second century, we find Herodes Atticus providing for Calvenus Taurus in Athens.[10]

Plotinus' patrons actually came to include the Emperor Gallienus himself, and his wife Salonina (*V.Plot.* ch. 12), which imperial favour led Plotinus to propose the rather wild project of establishing a philosophic city on a ruined site in Campania, to be called Platonopolis and to be run in accordance with Plato's *Laws* – presumably with Plotinus and his friends acting as a kind of Nocturnal Council. This project came to nothing, in fact, Porphyry tells us, by reason of opposition by certain parties at court.[11]

The presence on the scene of the lady Gemina and of Castricius goes some way to answer, perhaps, a question which must occur to the modern observer. What were the financial arrangements, in an ancient philosophic school, between master and pupil? Such indelicate matters are, after all, never mentioned in our sources – though endowments are, much later, in the case of the Academy in Athens.[12] The answer is, I would suggest, that financial arrangements were left quite vague, in accordance with the philosophic inhibition, dating from Socrates himself, against taking fees for imparting knowledge. The pupil was expected to provide for himself (Porphyry, at least, had a house or apartment of his own, *V.Plot.* ch. 11), and perhaps to contribute to such communal meals as were held. The pupil's father, or he himself, if he were mature and rich, might make the philosopher 'presents' of various sorts, but such matters would not be regulated to the extent of constituting anything like an explicit fee. As far as one can observe from the sources available to us, one simply presented oneself at the establishment of the philosopher of one's choice and hoped to be allowed to enter his circle. It is thus that Porphyry arrives at the school of Plotinus, and it is thus, nearly two centuries later, that Proclus arrives at the school of Syrianus and Plutarchus.[13]

About attending lectures there was, it seems, no great difficulty. Plotinus' lectures, at least, were open to all (*V.Plot.* ch. 1). Amelius was once able to bring along a friend of his who was a noted portrait painter, to make sketches surreptitiously for a portrait of Plotinus, and no notice, it seems, was taken of this by the great man (though here his students were in collusion against him). Visitors in town might drop in unexpectedly – as did once, to Plotinus' great confusion, his former fellow-pupil Origenes (ch. 3). In Proclus' case, a century and a half later, it would seem that he just turned up to a lecture by Syrianus,[14] and then commended himself to Syrianus and one of his inner circle of followers, Lachares, by ostentatiously worshipping the rising moon as he left the house at the end of the session – as a result of which, it would seem, Syrianus asked him to stay to dinner, and subsequently received him into his circle.

Moving on from Plotinus, I merely note the school of Porphyry, since we know virtually nothing about it, save that it existed. He presumably set it up, in Rome, on the ashes of that of Plotinus (which seems to have simply dissolved at his death), after his return to Rome from self-imposed exile in Lilybaeum in Sicily some time after the death of Plotinus in 269, perhaps in the mid-270s. The philosopher Iamblichus is declared by Eunapius to have studied with him (and previously with a sort of deputy of his, one Anatolius, Eunap. *V.Phil.* V 1: 467), and we know the names of a number of other pupils, such as Gedalius, to whom he dedicated his vast commentary on Aristotle's *Categories.* The school will have continued for upwards of thirty years (his death is generally fixed at shortly after 305). It is possible that his wife Marcella (to whom he addresses a rather pompous epistle at around the turn of the century) filled for him something of the same role as Gemina did for Plotinus. At any rate, reading between the lines of the distinctly defensive proem to his epistle, we may gather that there were many relations of Marcella (who was a widow with five children, her husband having been a 'friend' – perhaps an aristocratic disciple – of Porphyry) who were highly indignant at the marriage, and who had been making trouble. Despite Porphyry's high-minded denial, there must have been an estate there worth fighting about.

If we turn from the uncertainties surrounding Porphyry to the school established by Iamblichus at Apamea after his departure from Porphyry, we find more or less the same degree of informality manifesting itself as we saw in that of Plotinus.[15] Iamblichus, it would seem, returned from his sojourn in Rome to his native Syria some time in the late third century, and established himself in Apamea, a flourishing town in the Orontes valley, already notable as the birthplace (and perhaps also the place of work) of Numenius,

and the town to which Plotinus' senior pupil Amelius had retired in the late 260s. Amelius himself was probably already dead by the time Iamblichus arrived[16] (though his protégé Hostilianus Hesychius, to whom he bequeathed his library,[17] may well still have been around). The important factor, though, from Iamblichus' point of view, was the existence of a local patron, in the person of Sopater, scion of a prominent local family, who may or may not have been acquainted with him previously.

We come upon him, in Eunapius' narrative, already well established in Apamea, with a flourishing school, including members from Cappadocia (Aedesius and Eustathius), and even mainland Greece (Theodorus of Asine and Euphrasius). The school appears to have had at its disposal more than one suburban estate (*proasteion, V.Phil.* 1, 12: 458), whether provided through the beneficence of Sopater, or from Iamblichus' own resources, on which the disciples could live a communal life. It seems that Iamblichus imposed something of a Pythagorean regime on his followers – as a back-up to which, no doubt, his *Pythagorean Sequence* was composed, a set of ten works, put together largely from extracts from previous works, and serving as an introduction to all aspects of 'Pythagorean' philosophy. Eunapius tells us (*V.Phil.* 1, 5: 458) that he devoted himself unstintingly (*aphthonōs*) to his pupils, merely retiring occasionally by himself to pray and meditate – a custom which led to the growth of wild rumours about levitation and suchlike!

The business of the school would seem to have involved, after the study of the basic principles of Pythagorean philosophy, first, a course in the logic of Aristotle (if we may conclude that from the existence of a massive commentary by Iamblichus on the *Categories,* and some evidence of ones on the *De Interpretatione* and *Prior Analytics* as well), and then the study of a carefully-selected sequence of Platonic dialogues, designed to take one through the philosophy of Plato in a coherent order. We are given some account of this in the *Anonymous Prolegomena to Platonic Philosophy,* a (probably) sixth-century compilation (ch. 26).[18] First there came a sequence of ten dialogues, beginning with the *First Alcibiades,* which inculcated the basic self-knowledge which enabled one to embark upon a programme of Platonic philosophy, and followed by the *Gorgias* (civic virtue), *Phaedo* (purificatory virtue), after which one passed to the properly theoretic level, the study of true reality (*ta onta*). Here one first worked through the *Cratylus,* to acquire a theory of language, then the *Theaetetus,* for the study of concepts, then the *Sophist* and the *Statesman* for the study of cosmic realities,[19] and the *Phaedrus* and *Symposium* for the study of theology. As the culmination of this whole course he chose the *Philebus.* This, however, is only the first cycle; the course concludes with the study

of the two 'summits' of Platonic wisdom, the *Timaeus,* covering 'physics,' the study of every aspect of the physical world, and the *Parmenides,* for 'theology', the study of intelligible reality.

How long all this was designed to take, in terms of years, we have no idea, but the general impression that one receives of the procedure of ancient philosophical schools is that there was no hurry – a serious student might spend upwards of ten years with his master (as Plotinus did with Ammonius, and Amelius with Plotinus).[20] Iamblichus doubtless commented on the text of the dialogues in considerable detail. We have evidence of detailed commentaries by him on virtually all of those in his cycle,[21] and for each of them he proposed the radical notion that they had one single *skopos,* or subject-matter, to which all parts of the given dialogue, including the apparently casual details of the introductory portions, related.[22] The working out of this Procrustean system involved a large degree of allegorizing, and forcing of the text, but it was actuated by the belief that the divine Plato could have done nothing at random, and that a dialogue must be a single, coherent living whole, on the lines laid down by Socrates in the *Phaedrus* (264C).

Apart from normal school seminars, there will have been public disputations from time to time, as in the case of the visit to the school (related by Eunapius, V 3: 406) of a rival philosopher, Alypius, who tries to put Iamblichus on the spot by asking an awkward question – really a proposal for discussion: 'The rich man is either unjust, or the heir of one unjust, yes or no?' Iamblichus in the event deflects the question, but we can see here in operation a procedure not unlike the mediaeval disputation, or indeed the modern press conference, to which a philosopher might submit from time to time, for purposes of self-advertisement or public relations. The school also went on periodic outings, it would seem, as on one occasion to the hot springs at Gadara – a considerable journey south, into present-day Jordan (*V.Phil.* 2, 2: 459) – where the great man impressed his followers by conjuring up a pair of spirits, Eros and Anteros, out of adjacent wells.

Another kind of external relations in which a philosopher of late antiquity might indulge was the composition of 'letters', popular expositions of aspects of his doctrine in epistolary form, addressed to friends, former pupils, patrons (male or female), or distinguished public figures. Iamblichus is actually the only later Platonist of whom we have any surviving letters (preserved in extracts by John of Stobi in his *Anthology*), and they illustrate well the range of topics and recipients which might be covered. We find letters to various pupils: to Sopater (also, perhaps, a patron), *On Fate, On Dialectic, On Bringing up Children,*[23] *On Ingratitude, On Virtue,* and *On Truth;* to Dexippus (whose short commentary on the

Categories survives), *On Dialectic;* to Eustathius, *On Music.* There is one to Anatolius, presumably his old teacher, *On Justice;* two to a certain Macedonius, *On Fate* (perhaps the weightiest, from a philosophical point of view), and *On Concord;* one to the lady Arete, *On Self-Control;* and a number of others to persons of unidentifiable status. One figure, however, Dyscolius, is identifiable with probability as the governor of Syria around 323 AD, towards the end of Iamblichus' life,[24] and this reminds us of a significant aspect of the philosopher's *Sitz im Leben*, his relations with those in authority. Iamblichus' position was secure so long as the anti-Christian Licinius was in power in the East – we have most interesting testimony to his relations with the court in the form of a series of letters addressed to him by an anonymous correspondent who was plainly a prominent member of Licinius' staff, and very probably an ex-pupil[25] – but when Constantine took over, it became increasingly difficult to maintain such a prominent centre of Hellenic culture and religion, and the school, under Sopater's successor[26] Aedesius, had to go underground, re-emerging somewhat later in Sardis.

But let us turn now, finally, to the so-called Athenian School, and to its most prominent figure, Proclus. We have already caught a glimpse of the circumstances of his arrival in Athens in 431.[27] He was met at the port of Piraeus by his friend Nicolaus, who was a fellow-Lycian, and was prepared to offer him a place to stay until he found his feet. Nicolaus was himself studying rhetoric, and may indeed have made some attempt to enrol Proclus in the school of his master,[28] but Proclus' inclinations were firmly directed towards philosophy, and specifically towards Platonism, and this led him, more or less inevitably, to the feet of its chief, if not only, exponent, Syrianus, son of Philoxenus, himself the designated successor of the grand old man of Athenian Platonism, Plutarchus, son of Nestorius. Marinus (loc. cit.) gives us a pleasant description of what may have been an introductory interview, at which there was also present a certain Lachares, who seems to have been a kind of assistant, or senior student, of Syrianus' (holding a status analogous, presumably, to that of Amelius vis-à-vis Plotinus, or Sopater with Iamblichus). I will let Marinus take up the story:[29]

> As they were still conversing, the sun came to set, and the moon, emerging from her conjunction with the sun (ἀπὸ συνόδου), made her first appearance.[30] So they moved to dismiss the young man, seeing as he was a stranger,[31] so that they could have leisure on their own to pay reverence to the Goddess. But he, after proceeding just a short distance, and himself observing the moon appearing from her (zodiacal) house, stopped in his tracks, took off his shoes,

> and, as they looked on, made his prayer to the goddess. At that, Lachares, struck by the frank and fearless behaviour (παρρησία) of the young man, remarked to Syrianus, employing that admirable expression of Plato about great natures (cf. *Rep.* 491E–492A): 'This fellow will either come to be a great good, or its opposite!'

And at that, the young Proclus was accepted into the inner circle. Syrianus took him into his house,[32] and then introduced him to the aged Plutarchus, who had officially retired, but who was prepared to take on this promising young man for private lessons. With Plutarchus, Marinus tells us (ch. 12), Proclus read Aristotle's *De Anima* and Plato's *Phaedo,*[33] and Plutarchus was so pleased with him that he suggested that Proclus should take notes of his expositions and write them up; and, to encourage him in this, he put it to him (rather significantly, in view of what we know of the provenance of other surviving commentaries, such as that, ostensibly, of Hermeias on the *Phaedrus*)[34] that in future times they would be regarded as *Proclus'* commentaries on the works in question.

There is no evidence, in fact, that Proclus took him up on this generous offer, but he plainly owed a good deal to his association with the old man, which went on for his first two years in Athens, after which Plutarchus died. It is not clear, in this time, whether Proclus also took lectures from Syrianus, but it rather sounds from Marinus' narrative (chs. 12–13) as if Syrianus had farmed the young man out to his own former teacher, until he should have covered all the preliminaries to the 'advanced' course in Platonism, which in fact amounted to a thorough survey of Aristotle's works – as Marinus specifies, 'in logic, ethics, politics, physics, and theology'. Apart from the *De Anima,* then, we may conjecture that in these first two years with Plutarchus, Proclus was taken through the *Organon, Nicomachean Ethics, Politics, Physics,* and *Metaphysics* (at least *Met.* Λ – but possibly A, M and N as well, on which Syrianus himself composed a commentary, which survives). That would be quite a demanding schedule, but these works may well not have been read *in toto.*

At any rate, when Proclus finally transferred full-time to Syrianus, he was ready – after what Marinus describes (ch. 13) as 'the preliminary initiations and lesser mysteries' (προτέλεια καὶ μικρὰ μυστήρια) – for initiation into the central mysteries of Platonism. This presumably means the Iamblichean canon of dialogues, culminating in the two 'summits' of philosophy, the *Timaeus* and the *Parmenides.*

Syrianus himself did not survive for many years after Plutarchus. He was certainly dead by the time Proclus composed his own dialogue on the *Timaeus* (in 440, when Proclus was twenty-eight, as Marinus tells us, loc. cit.), and he is generally agreed to have died around 437. In his last

year, Marinus tells us (ch. 26), having got through the Plato course, he gave Proclus and one of his fellow senior pupils, Domninus, the choice of a seminar on the Orphic poems or on the Chaldaean Oracles, but Domninus and Proclus could not agree (Domninus favouring the Orphics, Proclus the Chaldaeans), and while they were still bickering, Syrianus died; but we can observe from this the general direction that instruction might take – culminating, after a full course of Platonism, in more properly theological and even theurgic revelations.

We get no very clear idea, unfortunately, from Marinus about the communal life of Syrianus' school. Plainly, there were other students than Proclus, though not many may have lived 'in', as Proclus did. We know of Lachares, for a start, but there was also Plutarchus' grandson[35] Archiadas (who may also have shared his sessions with Plutarchus – at any rate, the old man bequeaths him to Syrianus along with Proclus; Marinus, ch. 12) – and of course Hermeias. But how many more? I think it improbable that there were many. We are dealing with tiny groups here – little more than half a dozen serious students, probably, at any one time, though the number of hangers-on and occasional attenders at lectures may have been larger. I suppose, between one source and another (Marinus, Damascius, Proclus' own dedications), we have names of about a dozen students of Proclus covering the whole period of over forty years during which he was head of the Athenian Academy. A number of these, such as Archiadas, Hierius, son of Plutarchus, Hegias, son of Theagenes, Damascius' master Isidorus, Marinus, Athenodorus,[36] Asclepiodotus,[37] or Pericles of Lydia,[38] will have stayed with him for a considerable time, but still the evidence does not point to a group of more than half a dozen serious students at any one time.

As for the day-to-day work of the School, Marinus tells us (*V.Procl.* 22) that Proclus would deliver five lectures (*praxeis*) a day,[39] and sometimes more, while also composing up to seven hundred lines. And this did not prevent him from paying visits to other philosophers, and from giving informal evening seminars (ἄγραφοι ἑσπεριναὶ συνουσίαι). The point of describing the evening *synousiai* as *agraphoi,* 'unwritten' is presumably to contrast them with the daytime lectures, which would be delivered from a written text. If we may speculate about the daily timetable, I would suggest an early start (8.00 a.m., or even 7.30?), culminating in lunch around 2.00, followed by a siesta, and then perhaps an *agraphos synousia* around 5.00 p.m., followed by dinner, attended by the whole School. After that, or perhaps during the siesta period, the great man might find time to compose his seven hundred lines (possibly dictated to a slave *amanuensis*). Later in the night, at any rate, Marinus tells us, Proclus devoted himself to

prayer and occasionally the composition of hymns (some of which we still have),[40] since he was very sparing of sleep. No doubt this is an idealized picture, but still anything resembling this routine would be pretty gruelling, especially as one got older.

Proclus' school was not, so far as we can see, entirely a one-man show, though the status of assistants is something on which we have little guidance. Plainly, in all the schools we have looked at, senior students came to be entrusted with pedagogical tasks of one sort or another, whether or not this conferred on them any official position. In Plotinus' circle, Amelius and then Porphyry were set various such tasks, such as refuting the Gnostics (Porph. *V.Plot.* 16), but they are not explicitly said to be involved in teaching. In the case of Iamblichus' school, we have no evidence, but we have observed him studying with, prior to Porphyry himself, Anatolius, whom Eunapius describes as τῶν κατὰ Πορφύριον τὰ δεύτερα φερόμενος, which seems to point to some kind of deputyship (the phrase is used later by Photius – probably reproducing the terminology of Damascius – at *Bibl.* cod. 181, introducing the *Philosophos Historia*, to describe the position of Zenodotus: διάδοχος καὶ οὗτος Πρόκλου, τὰ δεύτερα Μαρίνου φέρων – which I take to mean 'successor to Proclus, acting as assistant to Marinus'). This is presumably also the solution to the mystery of the status of Domninus as *diadochos* to Syrianus (Marinus *V.Procl.* 26): he was an 'associate *diadochos*'! Apart from this, we also hear of such figures as Athenodorus giving seminars (cf. above, n. 36).

Certainly not every day can have taken the course outlined by Marinus, because, despite his unworldly attitudes, Proclus' life had a practical, political dimension. Engaging in civic politics in an increasingly Christianized empire had its dangers, but Marinus tells us (ch. 15) that Proclus 'sometimes took part in political deliberations, attending public meetings on city affairs (τοῖς κοινοῖς ὑπὲρ τῆς πόλεως συλλόγοις παραγιγνόμενος), and proposing resolutions with sound judgement. He also consulted with magistrates on matters of justice, not only exhorting these men, but in a manner compelling them, with plain speaking befitting a philosopher (τῇ φιλοσόφῳ παρρησίᾳ), to do their proper duty.' He also seems to have had some supervisory role in public education.

All this reminds us that the late antique philosopher was, after all, whether he liked it or not, a public figure, and if one was not of the now prevailing faith, that role could be troublesome. There does appear to have been at least one period where, Marinus tells us (loc. cit.), Proclus found it prudent to withdraw for a year from the city, and undertake a cultural and religious tour of Asia Minor. Marinus speaks darkly of a 'hail-storm and mighty wave of troubles' (ζάλη καὶ τρικυμία πραγμάτων), which could

possibly refer to the fall-out from the Council of Chalcedon in 451, but could have been something much more local; at any rate it was a period where a Hellene had to keep his head down. The Academy in this period, as we know from both Damascius (*Phil. Hist.* §102 Athanassiadi) and Olympiodorus (*In Alc.* 141, p. 92 Westerink), was very well endowed – Damascius talks of an income of 1000 gold *nomismata* (= *solidi*) and more in Proclus' day,[41] the product of generations of endowments and legacies – and this, while giving the *diadochos* a certain clout in civic politics, and providing a comfortable living (especially for a man of such sober habits as Proclus), also gave hostages to fortune: there was the ultimate danger of expropriation, if Christian enthusiasm got out of hand.

These reflections bring me, finally, to touch on the topic of the philosopher in politics in this era. As we have had occasion to observe, none of the holy and divine men with whom we have been dealing was quite as untouched by the 'real world' of society and politics as they would, no doubt, have wished to be. Plotinus was a society figure in Rome (leaving aside speculation on what political connexions had been necessary to set him up there in the first place), and was well connected at court; it is even possible, as I have suggested, that the assassination of Gallienus, and the accession of the rough Illyrian soldier Claudius Gothicus, proved a serious blow to the school. The flourishing of Iamblichus' school at Apamea was plainly intimately bound up with the survival of the anti-Christian regime of Licinius; when Constantine was victorious, the school simply dissolved. The Academy at Athens survived, despite the vicissitudes hinted at by Marinus, until whatever Justinian did to it in 529[42] – but whatever that really was, it seems effectively to have closed the Academy down, and caused a scattering of the faculty.

In all three cases, it is interesting to note that, while the great man himself is not involved in politics, someone in his immediate circle always is: in the case of Plotinus, the Arabian doctor Zethus; in that of Iamblichus, his senior pupil and probable patron, Sopater (for whom his foray into imperial politics in Constantinople in the late 320s, after Iamblichus' death, proved fatal, as Eunapius tells us)[43] – but there is also his anonymous friend at the court of Licinius, plainly a former pupil, and possibly, as I have suggested above, none other than Julius Julianus. In the entourage of Proclus, we have above all the figure of his close friend Archiadas, grandson[44] of Plutarchus, but also Archiadas' son-in-law, Theagenes, who was plainly a prominent member of society, and a useful patron of the school. At *V.Procl.* 14, Marinus tells us that, while Proclus himself was too high-minded to enter actively into political life, he 'encouraged Archiadas