NEOPLATONIC PANTHEISM TODAY

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Abstract. Neoplatonism is alive and well today. It expresses itself in New Thought and the mind-cure movements derived from it. However, to avoid many ancient errors, Neoplatonism needs to be modernized. The One is just the simple origin from which all complex things evolve. The Good, which is not the One, is the best of all possible propositions. A cosmological argument is given for the One and an ontological argument for the Good. The presence of the Good in every thing is Spirit. Spirit sits in the logical center of every body; it is surrounded by the regulatory forms of that body. Striving for the Good, Spirit seeks to correct the errors in its surrounding forms. To correct the errors in biological texts, modern Neoplatonists turn to the experimental method. This Neoplatonism is pantheistic not because of some theoretical definition of God but rather because of its practical focus on the shaping of Spirit.

I. INTRODUCTION

Plotinus says "all men instinctively affirm the god in each of us to be one, the same in all" (*Enneads*, 6.5.1). On this point, and many others, Plotinian Neoplatonism is alive and well in much current Western religious thought and practice. During the 1800s, Neoplatonism was highly influential in America (Bregman, 1990). By way of the New England Transcendentalists, it entered the American religious movement known as *New Thought*. New Thought turned esoteric Plotinian metaphysics into popular theological psychotherapy. It inspired many small sects, such as *Christian Science* (Eddy, 1875); the *Unity Churches* (Cady, 1895); and *Religious Science* (Holmes, 1936). Among these original sects, the Unity Churches still flourish today.

From these sects, Plotinian ideas spread out into the wider culture. Taking inspiration from New Thought, Napoleon Hill wrote the bestseller *Think and Grow Rich* (1938). Norman Vincent Peale studied with Hill, and the ide-

as of New Thought were central to his own bestseller, *The Power of Positive Thinking* (1952). Peale's work helped shape the positive psychology movement and the human potential movement. Ideas from New Thought entered Pentecostal theology, including the Word of Faith movement and the Prosperity Gospel. Neoplatonic and New Thought ideas drive much of the New Age movement. New Thought inspired movements based on the idea that our minds create our realities. These include superstitious movements based on sympathetic magic like the law of attraction (Byrne, 2006). Other popular mind-power movements argue that the purification of consciousness is the key to flourishing. These movements include Western Buddhisms (Harris, 2014) and the new Stoicisms (Robertson, 2015).

Neoplatonism is also alive and well among those who take psychedelic drugs for spiritual purposes. Shanon says the worldview inspired by taking the psychedelic brew *ayahuasca* closely resembles the metaphysics of Plotinus. He writes that ideas and feelings inspired by taking ayahuasca "usually converge upon a coherent metaphysical outlook, one which is monistic, idealistic, pantheistic, imbued with religiosity and tainted with optimism, joy, and love" (2010: 269). Neoplatonic ideas are expressed by *ravers*, who enter ecstatic trances by dancing to electronic music, often under the influence of psychedelics. During their ecstatic trances, ravers often experience a profound energy flowing through their bodies; they see that all things are connected and unified; they feel that this same energy flows through all things (Sylvan, 2005: ch. 3).

Neoplatonism was closely associated with magic. One type of Neoplatonic magic was known as *theurgy*. Theurgy begins with the thesis that the deep being of the body contains a divine energy (see Sallustius, 363, chs. 14 & 15). This energy strives to express itself, through the materiality of the flesh, into powerfully good actions. However, the flesh is corrupt, and its corruption blocks this energy. Theurgy aims to purify the structure of the body so that it can become a clear channel for the manifestation of this divine energy (Shaw, 1985, 2015). The goal of life, for the theurgist, is the purification of the body (Shaw 2014). Johnston (2008: 452) reports that theurgy was described by the Greek phrase *hê telestikê technê*, meaning the craft of self-perfection. Shaw (1999) argues that the theurgists made extensive use of mathematical symbols in their rituals. Since they thought of the soul as an embodied mathematical pattern, they were concerned with the numbers of the body. Dillon

(2007; 2016) says theurgy involved an early technical approach to matter. It is arguable that a long chain of links runs from theurgy to modern *self-hacking*. Modern self-hackers include body-hackers, neuro-hackers, consciousness-hackers, and so on. Self-hackers are concerned with the numbers of their bodies. They apply the experimental method to their own bodies in order to improve their physiological numbers. They pursue the *hê telestikê technê*. Like the old theurgists, they aim to divinize the flesh. But they use modern science and technology to transform human bodies into transhuman bodies.

II. NEOPLATONIC IDEAS IN NEW THOUGHT

Many Plotinian ideas can be found in one of the most important New Thought texts, namely, H. Emilie Cady's *Lessons in Truth* (1895). Where Plotinus talked about the One, Cady talks about God. But her God resembles the One. For Plotinus, the One is not a person (*Enneads*, 3.9.3, 6.9.6). Likewise Cady denies that God is a person (4, 8). For Plotinus, the One is not a being; rather, the One is the *ground* or *source* of being (*Enneads*, 3.8.10, 5.2.1, 5.3.15, 5.6.3). And Cady denies that God is a being among beings; she affirms that God is the ground or source of being (4, 6, 9). God is not a thing which has power or intelligence or goodness; rather, God just is power, intelligence, and goodness (5-6). God is an abstract essence, in the sense that God and the divine attributes are identical. Her name for this essence is *Spirit*. She writes that "God is Spirit, or the Creative Energy which is the cause of all visible things" (4). And she explicitly declares that God is not "*a* spirit" (3). That is, God is not a particular thing.

For Plotinus, every particular thing is a manifestation of the One and in some sense wholly contains the One; that is, the One is integrally omnipresent (*Enneads*, 6.4-5). Likewise for Cady, every thing is a manifestation of God and wholly contains God (6). She says "God IS" while beings exist in the sense of standing out (*ex-sistare*) from God (7). To illustrate this manifestation, Plotinus often metaphorically identifies the One with the Sun. Cady also makes use of solar metaphors (21). But Plotinus also says that the One is like the spring from which all rivers flow (*Enneads*, 3.8.10). Cady appeals to this liquid metaphor: God resembles a primal ocean of being while we are drops of water from that ocean (6, 9). God is the primal reservoir of spiritual energy; this energy flows out from God through many channels into many

fountains; each fountain is a particular thing like a human being (20). Thus "Divine Energy" (7) flows out from the original reservoir into humans. Cady also uses the metaphor of the fire and spark: God is the fire from which we are all sparks (52, 109). Thus while God is Spirit and Self (capital *S*), every human is a spirit and an individual self (lower case *s*).

For Cady, God is both immanent and transcendent. When she talks about divine transcendence, she describes God as an abstract essence or universal. When she talks about divine immanence, she portrays God as being present in things like a universal is present in things. The distinction between divine immanence and transcendence can be expressed in terms of *in re* and *ante rem* universals. An *ante rem* universal is an abstract essence which transcends all concrete things. An *in re* universal is an abstract essence which is immanent in some particular concrete things. An *in re* universal is an expression or manifestation of an *ante rem* universal. The treeness immanent in every tree is a manifestation of the treeness which transcends all trees. You might think of an *in re* universal as a pair (U, L) where U is an *ante rem* universal and L is a location (see Gilmore, 2003). But Cady thinks of universals as energies. Likewise Tillich writes that every concrete tree "exists only because it participates in that power of being which is treehood, that power which makes every tree a tree" (1957: 21). He says the form of a thing is "its *essentia*, its definite power of being" (1951: 178). Thus both transcendent and immanent universals are energetic powers of being.

Universals arrange themselves into a genus-species tree. The leaves of this tree are the forms of individuals. The form of an individual is an essence immanent in exactly one thing. The form of Socrates has only Socrates as its instance. Plotinus recognized such forms (Rist, 1963; Mamo, 1969). But the root of this tree is the maximally abstract universal being-itself. It is the essence immanent in every existing thing. Tillich famously identifies being-itself with God (1951: 235-7). For Tillich, *theism* affirms that God is both immanent and transcendent. Being-itself is both the immanent energy of being in every thing and the energy of being which transcends every thing. But Tillich says that *pantheism* denies this transcendence (1957: 7). For the pantheist, being-itself is entirely immanent. It is an immanent natural energy. Thus Tillich says that pantheism identifies God with "the creative power and unity of nature, the absolute substance which is present in everything" (1951: 233). He says pantheism identifies God with "the *natura naturans*, the creative nature, the

creative ground of all natural objects" (1957: 6). If this is right, then Cady is a theist. For Cady, *Spirit* is the transcendent energy of being while *spirits* are immanent energies of being. Every spirit is a manifestation of Spirit.

Every human being is a manifestation of Spirit. A human being has three layers: spirit, soul, and body. These are organized like the shells of an onion. The core part is spirit; the next part is the soul; the outermost part is the body. Continuing with her liquid metaphors, Cady identifies the spirit with the heat of steam; the soul with water; and the body with the cold of ice (12). Every human has a hot energetic core; its spirit-core is surrounded by a cooler soul; its soul is surrounded by a frozen body-shell. On this metaphor, temperature corresponds to plasticity. Spirit is pure plasticity; it can shape itself into anything; soul is less plastic; body is frozen rigidity. The spirit in us is the presence in us of the Spirit which is God. God lives in us all the time (18) and is at the center of our being (19). Of course, while Spirit is both immanent and transcendent, spirit is merely immanent in us. Yet Spirit is our true self, the authentic self: "Spirit is the central unchanging I" (12, see 9). Thus Spirit is "the real innermost Self of each of us – the Self spelled with a capital S" (25). Since the Capital-S Self is God, or participates directly in God, it is always powerful, intelligent, and good (26). The Self always seeks to make you flourish; it strives to bless you with health and wealth and all the other good things of life; it strives to right all wrongs and cure all afflictions.

Sadly, the Self, which is Spirit, is surrounded by the soul. Your soul is your mind. Of course, it is not your *true* mind, but it is your mortal or carnal mind (12-13). Your mortal mind is free and, through its freedom, it fell. When it fell, it became a *self* (lowercase *s*), which is corrupt. Thus Cady says each human self stands to the divine Self as a spark to its original fire (52, 109). The corrupt self thinks bad thoughts. By thinking these bad thoughts, it blocks the power shining out of the true Self. This blockage affects the outermost layer of your existence, namely, your body. Because your mind thinks bad thoughts, your body suffers from afflictions such as disease, poverty, old age, and death (26). Through techniques of self-purification, you can get rid of the bad thought-patterns in your self to reveal the Self. Thus "we can by a persistent effort of the will change our beliefs, and by this means alone, entirely change our troublesome circumstances and bodily conditions" (26). This is the *mind-cure:* if you purify your thoughts, you will no longer suffer from illness or poverty. You will be healthy and wealthy.

According to New Thought, your thoughts create your reality. You change your thoughts by means of spiritual exercises like affirmations, denials, and meditation. On the one hand, the mind-cure finds superstitious expression in books like *The Secret* (Byrne, 2006). On the other hand, the mind-cure can purify itself by science. More scientific versions of the mind-cure include Westernized Buddhism. According to Sam Harris (2014), if you want to flourish, you must rid your mind of the pernicious illusion of the ego. If you want to be happy, you must rid your *Self* of your *self*. Another more scientific version of the mind-cure appears in the Stoic revival (Robertson, 2015). Stoicism tells you that your misery and happiness both arise only from your mind. Through practices like negative visualization, you can learn to control your mind so that it produces only serenity, tranquility, and peace. While Westernized Buddhism and recent Stoicism are both more scientific than old versions of the mind-cure, they still take inspiration from New Thought, and thus from Neoplatonism. Neoplatonism can be modernized. To modernize it, we need to look at some arguments.

III. THE COSMOLOGICAL ARGUMENT

Plotinus argued for an original unit (*Enneads*, 5.4.1). This original unit is simple and self-sufficient. It is the necessary first cause of all the things in the world. This original unit is *the One*. The Plotinian argument for the One is a kind of cosmological argument (Gerson, 1994: ch. 1). It goes something like this: (1) The world is a complex multiplicity. (2) Much like a plant depends on its seed (*Enneads*, 3.2.2, 3.7.11, 4.8.6, 4.9.3, 5.9.6), so every complex multiplicity depends on some simple unit. Dependency implies that the unit is prior to and so not a member of its many. (3) So, the world depends on some simple unit not in the world. (4) If there were many such units, they would be indistinguishable; hence they would resolve into one. (5) Therefore, the world depends on exactly one simple unit not in the world. This unit is the One. Plotinus says mentality requires complexity (*Enneads*, 3.9.1, 5.3.10-11). Since the One is simple, it has no mentality (*Enneads*, 3.8.10, 3.9.3, 5.6.6, 6.7.41).

A similar Cosmological Argument was given by Leibniz (1697: 84-6). His argument can be modernized by appealing to the difference between contingency and necessity. To say that a thing is *contingent* means that it depends on something else either for the way that it is or for the fact that it is. To say

that a thing is *necessary* means that it does not depend on anything else – it is totally independent. (1) Every contingent thing has an explanation. (2) The explanation for any contingent thing lies in some other thing. (3) Every class of contingent things is a contingent thing. (4) The world is the class of all contingent things. (5) So the world is a contingent thing. (6) Hence the world has an explanation. (7) The explanation for any class is not a member of the class. (8) So the explanation for the world is not a member of the world. (9) If any thing is not a member of the world, then it is not contingent. (10) So the explanation for the world is not contingent. (11) If something is not contingent, then it is necessary. (12) Therefore, the explanation for the world is some Necessary Being (the NB), which is not in the world. Every thing in the world ultimately depends on the NB. Hence it is independent. Since any whole depends on its parts, the NB has none – it is simple. It thus seems plausible to refer to the NB as the One. Since the One explains the world, it contains the *ultimate sufficient reason* for the world. However, it is mindless.

The One is sometimes thought of as existing at the top of some *great chain of being*. The major natural ranks in the great chain are: minerals, plants, animals, humans. These natural ranks are ordered by complexity: the things on higher ranks are more complex than things on lower ranks. The great chain is usually thought to be continuously ordered. From which it follows that the One, if it is simple, and even if it is not natural, is on the bottom rank of the great chain. But the ranks in the great chain are also often thought of as degrees of perfection: things on higher ranks are more perfect than things on lower ranks. So, if the ranks are degrees of perfection, then the One is not the maximally perfect being. On the contrary, since the One is the simplest thing, it must be *minimally* perfect. And while Plotinus typically puts the One at the top of his great chain, he sometimes does put it at the bottom. He describes it as a root or spring (*Enneads*, 3.3.7, 3.8.10). And, as the root of all things, Plotinus says the One is empty (*Enneads*, 2.9.1, 5.2.1). This conception of the One as the simple empty object at the bottom of a hierarchy of increasingly complex things is reflected in the metaphysics of set theory (Boolos, 1971). Set theory says that the empty set is the root of an infinite hierarchy of increasingly complex sets. All other sets are made by compounding the empty set. Like the One, the empty set is original, simple, and empty.

The One is independent, necessary, ultimate, original, and simple. Since the One is the first cause, it contains the ultimate sufficient reason for all the

dependent things in the world. Since the One *causes* other things to exist, it is concrete rather than abstract. The One is the cause of all natural things; but the cause of any natural thing is itself a natural thing. The One is the concrete instantiation of the empty set. The One is the *arche*; it is the Alpha. Since the One is independent and original, it is whole and complete. Since the One has all these features, it is plausible to say that the One is *divine*. However, it is also plausible to say that the One is a *universe*. After all, a universe is a complete concrete whole. It is certainly consistent with pantheism to say that universes can be divine. And a universe can be simple. So the One is just the simple original universe. Since it is simple, it has no parts. It has no space, no time, no matter, no energy, no things, no internal structure, no complexity. It is a partless dot.

IV. THE AGATHONIC ARGUMENT

Although the One exists, it is obvious that there are many other things. Neoplatonists need some argument to go from the One to these others. If the One is impotent, then the others will not exist; hence Neoplatonists seek an argument that the One has some generative power. Plato says the Good is a generative power (*Republic*, 507b-508c). Thus any generative power of the One comes from the Good. But we need some argument for the existence of the Good. Taking a term from Plato, the argument for the Good can be referred to as the *Agathonic Argument*. It has six premises. It runs to the conclusion that every thing surpasses itself in every possible way.

The first premise of the Agathonic Argument states that propositions exist. Propositions are abstract objects. Of course, Neoplatonists will not object to abstract objects. The existence of propositions can be defended by well-known indispensability arguments. The laws of nature are propositions. The axioms of mathematical systems are propositions. Because of their roles in the sciences, it is plausible to say that propositions are natural. The second premise of the Agathonic Argument states that propositions are ranked by value. Some propositions are better than others. Better propositions entail more surpassing. They entail that more things surpass themselves in more ways. The third premise states that there exists a unique best proposition. It is that proposition than which no better is possible. By definition, this best of all possible propositions asserts that every thing surpasses itself in every way.

The fourth premise asserts that propositions are either true or false. The fifth premise asserts that some propositions are true. The sixth premise is the *principle of the superiority of truth*. Truth is a *value* and true propositions are more valuable than false propositions. Any attempt to refute the superiority of truth must rely on valid inference from true premises. Hence any such attempt assumes the very principle which it aims to refute, and thereby contradicts itself. The superiority of truth is analytically true. And a false proposition does not entail that any thing surpasses itself in any way. It entails no self-surpassing at all. Hence any false proposition has no value. Once more, it turns out that the superiority of truth is analytic. It is logically necessary.

The Agathonic Argument now proceeds as follows: (1) There are some propositions. (2) These propositions are ordered by value. More valuable propositions asserts more self-surpassing. (3) There exists some unique best proposition. It asserts that every thing surpasses itself in every possible way. (4) Propositions are either true or false. (5) Some propositions are true. (6) Any true proposition is better than any false proposition. (7) Assume for *reductio* that the best proposition is false. (8) If the best proposition is false, then any true proposition is better than it. (9) But then the best proposition is not the best proposition. (10) Since this is a contradiction, the best proposition must be true. (11) Therefore, every thing surpasses itself in every possible way. Since the best proposition asserts universal self-surpassing, and since self-surpassing is good, the best proposition is *the Good*. Here modern Neoplatonism differs from Plotinus. Although Plato did not identify the One with the Good, Plotinus did. However, that identification is obscure (Jackson, 1967: 322; Mortley, 1975: 49; Gerson, 1994: 19-20). Modern Neoplatonists say they are distinct. The One is concrete while the Good is abstract. And since the Good involves absolutely universal quantifiers, it is arguably maximally complex. So the One is simple while the Good is complex. The One is the root or seed in the earth at the bottom of the great chain while the Good is the sun at the top.

On the conception of the Good presented here, goodness is self-surpassing. Since every possible state of affairs is surpassable by some better state of affairs, no state of affairs is best. An Aristotelian might challenge this by arguing that there does exist some best state of affairs, namely, the state in which every thing achieves its perfection. Each thing has a perfect *telos* at which it aims. If it reaches its *telos*, it cannot surpass itself. Against this finality, Neo-

platonists can argue that the realization of any degree of perfection always reveals higher degrees (see Hick, 1976: 422). Many who have argued against the Anselmian God have argued that perfection has no maximality. Hartshorne in particular argued that every degree of divine perfection is surpassed by a greater degree (1967: 19-20; 1984: 7-10, 31). And set theory shows how every infinity is surpassed by greater infinities. If degrees of perfection are indexed by ordinals, then the Good asserts that all things on every ordinal degree are surpassed by things on greater ordinal degrees. Since this quantifies over the proper class of ordinals, the Good has the indefinite extensibility of a proper class. The Good can still be a *telos*; it can be the Omega. But it will not be a closed finality; it will be an open horizon.

It is even arguable that the Good brings the One into being. Suppose the totality of abstract objects (including the Good) exists with logical necessity. Yet even if the One exists necessarily with respect to other concrete things (as the cosmological argument aims to show), it still does not exist with logical necessity. It is logically possible that no concrete things exist at all. The *empty situation* is that situation in which the class of concrete things is empty. The empty situation can surpass itself by containing the simplest concrete thing. And, if the Good is true, then it does surpass itself in exactly this way. Hence the Good is logically (but not causally) responsible for the One. If this is right, then the *telos* logically produces the *arche*; the Omega calls the Alpha into being. Here an abstract *telos* generates *ex nihilo* a concrete *arche*. Since this generation is logical rather than causal, it may be called *emanation*. Bishop (2018) has defended a similar view. Oppy (2018: ch. 4.4) has criticized Bishop as incoherent. The present reasoning indicates that Bishop makes sense. The Good has many features that point to its divinity. Modern Neoplatonists affirm that the Good is divine.

The Good is a proposition that is true at the One. Since the Good asserts that every thing surpasses itself in every way, the One surpasses itself in every way. This truth of the Good is present in the One as its *power of self-surpassing*. The presence of the Good in the One is the power of self-surpassing in the One. While the Good is an *ante rem* proposition, its presence in the One is an *in re* power. The goodness in the One is its power of self-surpassing. For the Neoplatonist, the goodness immanent in the One is a specific presence of the Goodness which transcends all things. Of course, the goodness immanent in the One is not a part of the One; the One is simple; hence the One is partless.

The goodness in the One is the essence of the One. However, since the One is simple, it has no other essence besides its own unity. So the goodness of the One is the unity of the One. This goodness goes wherever unity goes.

Following Cady, the power of self-surpassing in the One is the *Energy* of the One. The Energy of the One is the goodness in the One. The presence of the divine Good in the divine One is divine Energy. Since Cady also refers to this Energy as Spirit, the term *Spirit* will also be used here. But here Spirit is natural: it is *natura naturans*. Many old traditions posit something like Spirit. They say an ultimate power animates all things. The Stoics talked about *pneuma*; the Hindus posited *prana*; the Daoists posited *qi*; the Melanesians posited *mana*; the Aztecs talked about *teotle*. However, Spirit differs from those older energies in that it has no mentality. Spirit is an original power that drives the evolution of complexity; but minds appear only after long evolution (Dawkins, 2008: 52); hence Spirit has no mentality. Moreover, modern Neoplatonism demands consistency with modern science. So, if it exists at all, Spirit does not violate modern science. Spirit is an entirely natural power of self-surpassing (Steinhart, 2018c).

V. THE LAWS FOR UNIVERSES

Since the One is the initial universe, the *initial law for universes* simply affirms that the One exists. The One is the simplest of all possible universes. Since the One contains Spirit, the One surpasses itself in every possible way. It might be thought that the One surpasses itself by growing in complexity. But then the One would cease to be the One. And both set theory and biology teach that things gain complexity through *replication with variation*. They evolve through *descent with modification*. So the One surpasses itself through replication with variation. As Plotinus says, the One became pregnant and gave birth (*Enneads*, 3.8.8). It begets different versions of itself. These are its offspring. Since the One is simple, its offspring are more complex. And since the One is minimally valuable, its offspring are more valuable. At first, increases in complexity and value go together; later they are likely to come apart.

Since the One is a universe, its offspring are also universes. But each offspring of the One is also a unified whole. Since Spirit goes with unity, each offspring inherits Spirit from the One. Spirit flows from the One into its offspring. Each offspring inherits the power of self-surpassing. Its energetic es-

sence is its immanent goodness. It is a spark of the Good. Since each offspring is better than its parent, each offspring burns more brightly with goodness. As descendents of the One, these offspring are *counterparts*. They are ontological siblings joined by a counterpart relation. But now self-surpassing iterates: the offspring beget offspring. The grandchildren of the One are all ontological cousins. And so it goes. Since the One is surpassed by its offspring, which are surpassed again and again, the One is the seed or root of an endlessly ramified tree of universes; but the branches in this tree rise ever higher towards the Good itself.

The iteration of self-surpassing motivates the *successor law for universes*. This law states that every universe creates at least one better version of itself. It surpasses itself by begetting its better versions. The successor law is justified by the maximality of the Good. If the Good were to fail to drive every universe to create every possible better version of itself, then some better proposition would be possible; but then the Good would not be the best; so, the Good drives every thing to surpass itself in every way. For the sake of continuity, it is plausible to say that succession involves only minimal increases in value. Yet through iteration these minimal increments add up. Greater value (that is, greater goodness) implies greater intensity of the Energy of the Good. So Spirit acts more intensely at every successor. Still, all this surpassing makes only finite values. The successor law cannot pass from the finite to the infinite.

To pass from the finite to the infinite, it is necessary to run through limits. There must be some *limit law for universes*. The limit law generates infinitely great universes. The limit law acts on progressions of universes. A progression is any infinitely long series of improvements. Every progression starts with the initial universe and continues at least through all of its successors. It contains an endless chain of successors. Since every successor is better than its predecessor, every progression is a series of increasingly good universes. Just as universes have successors, so progressions have limits. The limit of any progression is minimally better than every universe in the progression of which it is the limit. Every progression is surpassed by its limits. The limit law now states that every progression produces at least one limit universe. This means that every universe in the progression contributes to the production of every limit universe. Since every limit surpasses an infinitely long sequence, the limit itself is infinite.

The limit law for universes is justified by the maximality of the Good. If the Good were to fail to drive every progression to produce all its limits, then some better proposition would be possible; but then the Good would not be the best; so, the Good drives every progression to produce all its limits. It entails that every progression generates a non-empty set of limits. The limits of a progression are like its offspring. Spirit flows through every progression and into its limits. Each limit contains the Energy of the Good. At any limit universe, Spirit acts with infinitely intensity. The Good entails that surpassing runs from the finite into the infinite. Surpassing is restricted only by logic: every universe surpasses itself in every consistently definable way. This gets cashed out using set theory. The limit law acts at every consistently definable ordinal. The tree of universes is a proper class of universes.

VI. WHOLES AND PARTS

The logic of self-surpassing produces an endlessly ramified tree of better universes. As universes gain value, they also gain complexity. They evolve into more complex wholes with more complex parts (here all parts are proper unless otherwise noted). They contain increasingly deeply nested part-whole structures. For Plotinus, every whole rests on some ultimate simples. Plotinus says every whole has some unity (*Enneads*, 3.8.10, 5.6.3, 6.6.13, 6.9.1). For if some multiplicity has no unity, then it is merely an aggregate rather than a whole. If simples fuse into some first-level wholes, those wholes can fuse into higher-level wholes. They can be unified parts of higher-level unities. At every level, parts are unified. Since Spirit goes with unity, it follows that every part of every whole in every universe is animated by Spirit. The Energy of the Good is present in every part of every whole in every universe. This is the integral omnipresence of the Good (*Enneads*, 5.1.11, 6.4-5). The integral omnipresence of the Good is justified by its maximality. For if the Good were not present in every part of every whole, then some better proposition would be possible; but then the Good would not be the best; hence the Good is present in every part of every whole. Yet wherever the Energy of the Good appears, it is regulated by form. All the Spirit in any universe, including ours, is entirely regulated by the natural laws of that universe (Steinhart, 2018c).

The maximality of the Good entails that, as new wholes surpass old wholes, no value is lost. This means that improvement is *Pareto optimal*:

when any whole is improved, at least one part gets better while none gets worse. Pareto optimality can be defined more precisely by *four constraints* on improvement. These four constraints apply to the ways that lesser wholes are surpassed by greater wholes. (1) The first constraint is that every part in the old whole must have at least one new version of itself in the new whole. Hence no value is lost by absence. The new version of the old part is a *counterpart* of the old part. (2) The second constraint says that distinct parts in the old whole must have distinct counterparts in the new whole. Hence no value is lost by erasure of uniqueness. (3) The third constraint says that no part in the old whole can have a less valuable counterpart in the new whole. The values of the parts are never decreased. (4) The fourth constraint says that at least one part in the old whole must have a more valuable counterpart in the new whole. At least one part must get better.

The four Pareto constraints ensure that the values of wholes are not increased merely by increasing the sums or averages of the values of their parts. Hence improvement based on these constraints avoids utilitarian paradoxes (Parfit, 1985: chs. 17-19). Concepts of improvement based on sums and averages cannot pass through limits into the infinite. But concepts based on counterparts can pass through limits into the infinite. So the Pareto constraints can pass into the infinite. These four constraints allow one part of the old whole to have many counterparts in the new whole. And they allow new simple things to be added to any new whole. The maximality of the Good entails a *principle of harmony:* for every part of every universe, for every way to improve that part, there exists some Pareto optimal improvement of the universe which contains that improvement of that part. Consequently, since every universe is improved in every way, it follows that every part of every universe is improved in every way. Suppose a universe contains an animal composed of a head (H) and tail (T). The improved versions of H are H1 and H2 while those of T are T1 and T2. Hence the better versions of the universe include the better animals {H, T1}, {H, T2}, {H1, T}, {H1, T1}, {H1, T2}, {H2, T}, {H2, T1}, {H2, T2}. Analogous remarks apply to progressions and limits.

As universes surpass universes, they become more complex. A complex universe contains many interacting things. The laws for cosmic self-surpassing permit the things in universes to come into conflict (*Enneads*, 4.4.32). Conflict can drive things to evolve to greater heights of value (*Enneads*, 2.3.16-18). This drive expresses itself in evolution by natural selection. Every

organism strives for its own goods. Some of those strivings cooperate while others compete. But competition ensures the survival of the fittest. It produces arms races: through conflict, the cheetah and the gazelle are both driven to ever greater heights of biological excellence (Dawkins, 2003: ch. 5.4). If there were no conflicts among organisms, life would never evolve to sufficient complexity to manifest all the goods we associate with animality, sociality, rationality, and so on. Conflict is necessary for the production of all but the lowest degrees of value (*Enneads*, 1.8.12). Of course, conflict often manifests itself as suffering. But Neoplatonists are not utilitarians. The power of self-surpassing does not strive to increase happiness. On the contrary, it strives to increase the virtue that manifests itself through competitive struggle. It strives to increase the *arete* that emerges in the *agon*. This virtue appears to our senses as dramatic beauty (*Enneads*, 2.3.18, 3.2.15-18, 3.6.2). And conflict sometimes also manifests itself as evil. For Plotinus, all evil is local. The evils in the parts do not refute the goodness of the whole (*Enneads*, 3.2.3, 3.2.11, 3.2.17, 4.4.32).

The laws of self-surpassing apply to all things in all universes. Any thing can be taken as initial. Every thing is the root of an infinitely ramified tree of ever better versions of itself. Hence the surpassing relation is an order relation on all things. Since every successor is a better version of its predecessor, it carries information about its predecessor. And since every limit is a better version of its progression, it carries information about its progression. Thus information flows through every lineage in every tree. It flows through any lineage like it flows through some causal chain. So it plausible to say that any lineage is a timelike process. The things in any lineage are *temporal counterparts*. Things at greater positions are *later than* things at lesser positions; things at lesser positions are *earlier than* things at greater positions. Earlier things *will be* their later counterparts and later things *were* their earlier counterparts.

Your current earthly life is one of the things in our universe. Your life is spatially and temporally extended; it is a four-dimensional process. Your life can be surpassed in many ways. Your life is surpassed by better versions of your life; those better versions of your life are the improvements of your life; they are your successor lives. Your successor lives inhabit successor universes. Since your successor lives are later than your life, they are the future counterparts of your current life. You will be your successor lives. After you die, you will live again. You will be reborn. Plotinus endorsed reincarnation (*Enneads*,

3.2.13, 3.4.2, 4.3.23, 6.7.6). His version of reincarnation is not naturalistic. But it is easy to naturalize. Plotinus endorsed the forms of individuals. So the soul of Socrates is just the form of the body of Socrates. If the soul is the form of the body, then reincarnation is just the reinstantiation of that form by a new body. This is a naturalistic conception of life after death. It resembles conceptions of life after death found in multiverse versions of Buddhism, in Hick (1976: chs. 15, 20), and in Steinhart (2014). The limit laws of self-surpassing carry your future lives into the transfinite. More generally, the logic of self-surpassing applies to your current earthly life. Hence your current earthly life is the root of an infinitely ramified tree of ever better lives.

VII. THE LOGICAL ANATOMY OF THE BODY

After a long evolutionary process, human animals appear on earth. For New Thought writers like Cady, human animals have a metaphysical anatomy. We are composed, like onions, of concentrically nested shells. For Cady, the body is the outermost shell; the mind is the middle shell; spirit is the inner core. For modern Neoplatonists, metaphysical anatomy studies the *immanence* of the body. The immanence of any thing is its logical interiority. The logical interiority of any thing can be thought of as a series of nested shells. But these shells are formal rather than material. These shells are concentrically nested essences. For bodies, they are layers of biological code.

Any body is a unified living whole. It inherits the unity of the One; but the unity of the One is the goodness of the One; so the unity of the body is the goodness of the body. The goodness of the body is the presence of the Good in the body; but this presence of the Good in the body is Energy. This Energy is Spirit. Spirit flows from the One through an enormously long chain of evolutionary links into the unity of every human body. Since unity is the most general essence, it dwells in the center of the logical anatomy of the body. It is the *first logical layer* of the body. Here modern Neoplatonists agree with both Cady and Tillich. The logical core of the body is the unity of its being; which is the goodness of its being; which is the power of its being; which is Spirit. Spirit burns like a fire in the logical core of the body. This logical core is surrounded by more complex immanent universals. These are the more specific forms of the body. These forms are layered by functional priority: the functions in outer layers specialize those of inner layers. After Spirit, the

second logical layer of the body contains its most basic form. If the body is a biocomputer, then its most basic form is its operating system. Modern biology identifies this most basic form with the genetic code.

The second logical layer of the body is its genetic code. Of course, for the sake of logical anatomy, the genetic code is not identical with DNA. On the contrary, it is a system of functional devices realized by DNA. It is a biological algorithm, composed of machines like codons, genes, promoters, operons, and so on. The genetic code, realized by DNA, runs in every cell in the body. But the genetic code is logically surrounded by algorithms realized by other molecules (like RNA, proteins, and so on). The *third layer* of the logical onion contains all the cellular algorithms of the body which are realized by DNA and these other molecules. The *fourth logical layer* of organization contains the algorithms running on networks of cells. Networks of cells run algorithms which regulate their functions. One of the most complex cellular networks is the neural network of the brain. The *fifth layer* of body-code contains the algorithm that binds all the functions of the cellular networks together into a single organism. It is an extremely complex algorithm which is the form of the body as a unified whole.

All the layers of biological code make up the form of the body. Aristotle said that the form of the body is its *soul* (*De Anima*, 412a5-414a33). Modern Neoplatonists agree. The form of the body defines its set of possible states. The interaction between the goodness in the body and the form of the body entails that the possible states of the body are ranked from best to worst. And since the goodness in the body is its power of self-surpassing, this ranking begets a *striving* in the body. Driven by the goodness in its core, the body strives to some of its possible states and away from others. The states to which it strives are good for it while the states from which it strives are bad for it. The body strives from states of illness and dysfunctionality; it strives to states of health and eufunctionality. Hence the interaction between goodness and form *manifests itself* as a directed power. Here modern Neoplatonists follow Cady. Cady distinguished between Spirit (S) and spirit (s). Modern Neoplatonists say that Spirit is the goodness at the core of the body; but spirit is the directed power that emerges from the interaction between that goodness and the specific form of the body. The spirit of the body drives it from dysfunctional states defined by its form and to eufunctional states defined by its form. Thus spirit is Spirit specialized by form. It is the Energy of the Good shaped by the form of the body. But the

form of the body is its soul. Consequently, modern Neoplatonists agree with New Thought writers like Cady that the body contains both soul and spirit. But they define those two entities very differently.

The unity at the logical center of the body shines with luminous power. This spiritual light shines out *from* the logical core of the cell and *through* its logical periphery. But the unity at the core of the body is just its immanent goodness. So this goodness shines out through its layers of form. These forms are equivalent to abstract texts written in biological programming languages (Kull et al., 2009). These biotexts are more or less coherent. On the one hand, if a biotext is more coherent, then the functions of its parts are mutually consistent; they work more cooperatively. Coherent biotexts are more transparent to the spiritual light of goodness. The light of goodness shines out through them with little distortion; hence bodies with coherent biotexts radiate health. On the other hand, if some biotext is less coherent, then the functions of its parts have some inconsistencies and conflicts. Incoherence is opacity. So if some biotext is more opaque, then goodness shines out through it in a distorted or perverted way; bodies with incoherent biotexts radiate illness. For both ancient and modern Neoplatonists, evil has no positivity of its own; it is merely perverted goodness.

VIII. REWRITING THE FORM OF THE BODY

According to New Thought, the task of spiritual practice is to correct the errors in the soul. But New Thought regards the soul as the mind, so that the task of spiritual practice is to correct bad thought-patterns. When those bad though-patterns are fixed, goodness will shine out through the body, so that it solves its problems. As goodness shines out through the body, it becomes healthy and wealthy. The advocates of New Thought believed that the errors in the soul could be corrected through the mind-cure. The mind-cure consists of ritual practices, such as mentally saying words to yourself, or using meditation to quiet the chattering monkey-mind. Techniques from the mind-cure are currently advocated by Westernized Buddhists and the new Stoics.

Modern Neoplatonists agree that the task of spiritual practice is to correct the errors in the soul. They affirm that spirit drives the soul to correct its errors. However, they do not regard the soul as the mind. The soul is the form of the body. The soul is the system of biological algorithms running on the body. To

correct the errors in the soul is to correct the errors in these algorithms. It is to reprogram the body by rewriting its codes. The codes of the body are written into texts whose words are molecules. These texts are generally not affected in any way by purely mental exercises. If you suffer from cystic fibrosis, thinking will not change your broken CFTR gene. And even if you suffer from a neurological illness like depression, mentally talking to yourself will not help very much. Thus modern Neoplatonists have little use for the mind-cure.

Modern Neoplatonists, like their ancient counterparts, want the divine Energy to manifest itself through their bodies. Like the ancient theurgists, they too pursue the *hê telestikê technê*, the craft of self-perfection. They seek to become healthier and more virtuous. They seek to optimize all the positive qualities of their bodies. But they use modern science and technology. All the qualities of the body are quantities measurable by scientific instruments. Hence modern Neoplatonists, much like the ancient theurgists, pursue self-knowledge through numbers (Neff & Nafus, 2016). They use digital sensors and smart phones to do self-tracking and self-quantification. By studying the numbers of their bodies, they learn about the errors in their biological algorithms.

Modern Neoplatonic theurgists are interested in scientific techniques for correcting the codes of the body. They use scientific techniques to rewrite their bodily biotexts. These are technologies for changing your soul. Thinking will not change your broken CFTR gene; but genetic technologies like CRISPR-Cas9 might change it. Self-talk will not change your depressed neural networks very much; but drugs like SSRIs might change them greatly. Thus modern theurgists apply the experimental method to their bodies (Roberts, 2004). This method has several steps: (1) you measure your body; (2) you formulate scientific hypotheses about the errors in your body-codes; (3) you apply technologies to your body to try to correct those errors; (4) repeat. This experimental method is also known as *hacking*. Thus modern theurgists *hack* their bodies. They are life-hackers, body-hackers, neuro-hackers, and consciousness-hackers.

XI. CONCLUSION

According to Tillich, pantheism means that God is a divine natural power which animates all things. Tillich thus makes two claims: (1) all things are animated by a divine natural power; (2) it is appropriate to use the name "God" to refer

to this power. These claims are independent. It is arguable that the first claim is pantheistic while the second is monotheistic. If *paganism* denotes the family of Western alternatives to monotheism, then *pagan pantheism* affirms that (1) all things are animated by a divine natural power; and (2) it is wrong to identify it with God. The Neoplatonism developed here is a kind of pagan pantheism. All things are animated by a divine natural power, namely, Spirit; however, Spirit is not God. Although Spirit is divine, the Good and the One are equally divine. As pagans, modern Neoplatonists resist the urge to identify exactly one of these divine entities with God or to fuse them into some trinitarian deity.

Modern Neoplatonists say all things are animated by Spirit; but the forms of different things shape the manifestations of Spirit in those things. Thus Spirit expresses itself through the form of your body (your soul) as a spirit which orients itself towards the goods of your body. Since you are a rational social animal, the spirit active in your body orients you towards the goods of rational social animality. Since spirit aims your body at its goods, it obligates you to move towards those goods. It is your duty to cultivate the spiritual power in your body through proper ways of living. You are obligated to live a spiritual life. Hence pagan pantheists strive to arrange their ways of living so that their bodies apply the *hê telestikê technê* to themselves. They seek to make their own bodies both the agent and object of the craft of self-perfection. Thus pagan pantheists engage in a wide variety of spiritual practices (Steinhart, 2018a, 2018b). They make their bodies into shrines from which the fire of goodness blazes into the world.

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