

Plotinus

Plotinus was born in 204 C.E. in Egypt, the exact location of which is unknown. In his mid-twenties Plotinus gravitated to Alexandria, where he attended the lectures of various philosophers, not finding satisfaction with any until he discovered the teacher Ammonius Saccas. He remained with Ammonius until 242, at which time he joined up with the Emperor Gordian on an expedition to Persia, for the purpose, it seems, of engaging the famed philosophers of that country in the pursuit of wisdom. The expedition never met its destination, for the Emperor was assassinated in Mesopotamia, and Plotinus returned to Rome to set up a school of philosophy. By this time, Plotinus had reached his fortieth year. He taught in Rome for twenty years before the arrival of Porphyry, who was destined to become his most famous pupil, as well as his biographer and editor.

It was at this time that Plotinus, urged by Porphyry, began to collect his treatises into systematic form, and to compose new ones. These treatises were most likely composed from the material gathered from Plotinus' lectures and debates with his students. The students and attendants of Plotinus' lectures must have varied greatly in philosophical outlook and doctrine, for the *Enneads* are filled with refutations and corrections of the positions of Peripatetics, Stoics, Epicureans, Gnostics, and Astrologers. Although Plotinus appealed to Plato as the ultimate authority on all things philosophical, he was known to have criticized the master himself (cf. *Ennead* IV.8.1).

We should not make the mistake of interpreting Plotinus as nothing more than a commentator on Plato, albeit a brilliant one. He was an original and profound thinker in his own right, who borrowed and re-worked all that he found useful from earlier thinkers, and even from his opponents, in order to construct the grand dialectical system presented (although in not quite systematic form) in his treatises. The great thinker died in solitude at Campania in 270 C.E.

Synopsis of the treatise on Beauty

What is it that makes things beautiful? We will start our enquiry by considering the beauty of bodies. The Stoic view that it is entirely a matter of good proportion will not do (ch. 1). It is due to the presence of form from the intelligible world (ch. 2) and we recognise and appreciate it by our inward knowledge of intelligible form (ch. 3). The beauty of virtue (ch. 4). It is the beauty of true reality in its transcendent purity, and its opposite, moral ugliness, is due to admixture with body (ch. 5). We attain to it by purifying ourselves (ch. 6). The supreme and absolute beauty, the Good (ch. 7). The way to it (ch. 8). The power of inner sight and how to develop it (ch. 9).

1. Beauty, for the most part, consists in objects of sight: but it is also received through the ears, by the skilful composition of words, and consonant proportions of sounds; for in every species of harmony, beauty is to be found. And if we rise from sense into the regions of soul, we shall there perceive studies and offices, actions and habits, sciences and virtues, invested with a much larger portion of beauty. But whether there is, above these, a still higher beauty, will appear as we advance in its investigation.

What is it then, which causes bodies to appear fair to the sight, sounds beautiful to the ear, and science and virtue lovely to the mind? May we not enquire after what manner they all partake of beauty? Whether beauty is one and the same in all? Or, whether the beauty of bodies is one kind, and the beauty of souls of another? And again, what these are, if they are two? Or, what beauty is, if perfectly simple, and one? For some things, as bodies, are doubtless beautiful, not from the nature of the subjects in which they reside, but rather by some kind of participation: but others again appear to be essentially beautiful, or beauties themselves; and such is the nature of virtue. For, with respect to the same bodies, they appear beautiful to one person, and the reverse of beauty to another; as if the essence of body were a thing different from the essence of beauty. In the first place, then, what is that, which, by its presence, causes the beauty of bodies? Let us reflect, what most powerfully attracts the eyes of beholders, and seizes the spectator with rapturous delight: for if we can find what this is, we may perhaps use it as a ladder, enabling us to ascend into the region of beauty, and survey its immeasurable extent.

It is the general opinion, that a certain commensuration of parts to each other, and to the whole, with the addition of colour, generates that beauty which is the object of sight; and that in the commensurate and the moderate alone, the beauty of every thing consists. But from such an opinion, the compound only, and not the simple, can be beautiful; the single parts will have no peculiar beauty; and will only merit that appellation, by conferring to the beauty of the whole. But it is surely necessary, that a lovely whole, should consist of beautiful parts; for the fair can never rise out of the deformed. But from such a definition, it follows, that beautiful colours, and the light of the sun, since they are simple, and do not receive their beauty from commensuration, must be excluded the regions of beauty. Besides, how, from such an hypothesis, can gold be beautiful? Or the glittering of night, and the glorious spectacle of the stars? In like manner the most simple musical sounds, will be foreign from beauty; though, in a song wholly beautiful, every note must be beautiful, as necessary to the being of the whole.

Beauty is mostly in sight, but it is to be found too in things we hear, in combinations of words and also in music, and in all music [not only in songs]; for tunes and rhythms are certainly beautiful: and for those who are advancing upwards from sense-perception ways of life and actions and characters and intellectual activities are beautiful, and there is the beauty of virtue. If there is any beauty prior to these, this discussion will reveal it.

Very well then, what is it which makes us imagine that bodies are beautiful and attracts our hearing to sounds because of their beauty? And how are all the things which depend on soul beautiful? Are they all made beautiful by one and the same beauty or is there one beautifulness in bodies and a different one in other things? And what are they, or what is it? Some things, bodies for instance, are not beautiful from the nature of the objects themselves, but by participation, others are beauties themselves, like the nature of virtue. The same bodies appear sometimes beautiful, sometimes not beautiful, so that their being bodies is one thing, their being beautiful another. What is this principle, then, which is present in bodies? We ought to consider this first. What is it that attracts the gaze of those who look at something, and turns and draws them to it and makes them enjoy the sight? If we find this perhaps we can use it as a stepping-stone and get a sight of the rest.

Nearly everyone says that it is good proportion of the parts to each other and to the whole, with the addition of good colour, which produces visible beauty, and that with the objects of sight and generally with everything else, being beautiful is being well-proportioned and measured. On this theory nothing single and simple but only a composite thing will have any beauty. It will be the whole which is beautiful, and the parts will not have the property of beauty by themselves, but will contribute to the beauty of the whole. But if the whole is beautiful the parts must be beautiful too; a beautiful whole can certainly not be composed of ugly parts; all the parts must have beauty. For these people, too, beautiful colours, and the light of the sun as well, since they are simple and do not derive their beautifulness from good proportion, will be excluded from beauty. And how do they think gold manages to be beautiful? And what makes lightning in the night and stars beautiful to see? And in sounds in the same way the simple will be banished, though often in a composition which is beautiful as a whole each separate sound is beautiful.

Again, since the same proportion remaining, the same face is to one person beautiful, and to another the reverse, is it not necessary, to call the beauty of the commensurate one kind of beauty, and the commensuration another kind; and that the commensurate is fair, by means of something else? But, if transferring themselves to beautiful studies, and fair discourses, they shall assign as the cause of beauty in these, the proportion of measure; what is that which, in beautiful sciences, laws, or disciplines, is called commensurate proportion? Or, in what manner can speculations themselves be called mutually commensurate? If it be said, because of the inherent concord; we reply, that there is a certain concord and content in evil souls, a conformity of sentiment, in believing (as it is said) that temperance is folly, and justice generous ignorance. It appears, therefore, that the beauty of the soul is every virtue; and this species of the beautiful possesses far greater reality than any of the superior we have mentioned. But, after what manner in this, is commensuration to be found? For it is neither like the symmetry in magnitude, or in numbers. And since the parts of the soul are many, in what proportion and synthesis, in what temperament of parts, or concord of speculations, does beauty consist? Lastly, of what kind is the beauty of intellect itself, abstracted from every corporeal concern, and intimately conversing with itself alone?

2. We still, therefore, repeat the question, what is the beauty of bodies? It is something, which, at first view, presents itself to sense; and which the soul familiarly apprehends, and eagerly embraces, as if it were allied to itself: But when it meets with the deformed, it hastily starts from the view, and retires abhorrent from its discordant nature. For since the soul in its proper state, ranks according to the most excellent essence in the order of things, when it perceives any object related to itself, or the mere vestige of a relation, it congratulates itself on the pleasing event, and astonished with the striking resemblance, enters deep into its essence, and, by rousing its dormant powers, at length perfectly recollects its kindred and allies. What is the similitude then between the beauties of sense, and that beauty which is divine? For if there be any similitude, the respective objects must be similar. But after what manner are the two beautiful? For it is by participation of species that we call every sensible object beautiful. Thus, since every thing void of form is by nature fitted for its reception, as far as it is destitute of reason and form, it is base, and separate from the divine reason, the great fountain of forms; and whatever is entirely remote from this immortal source, is perfectly base, and deformed. And such is matter, which by its nature is ever averse from the supervening irradiations of form.

And when, though the same good proportion is there all the time, the same face sometimes appears beautiful and sometimes does not, surely we must say that being beautiful is something else over and above good proportion, and good proportion is beautiful because of something else? But if when these people pass on to ways of life and beautiful expressions of thought they allege good proportion as the cause of beauty in these too, what can be meant by good proportion in beautiful ways of life or laws or studies or branches of knowledge? How can speculations be well-proportioned in relation to each other? If it is because they agree, there can be concord and agreement between bad ideas. The statement that "righteousness is a fine sort of silliness" agrees with and is in tune with the saying that "morality is stupidity"; the two fit perfectly. Again, every sort of virtue is a beauty of the soul, a truer beauty than those mentioned before; but how is virtue well-proportioned? Not like magnitudes or a number. We grant that the soul has several parts, but what is the formula for the composition or mixture in the soul of parts or speculations? And what [on this theory], will the beauty of the intellect alone by itself be?

So let us go back to the beginning and state what the primary beauty in bodies really is. It is something which we become aware of even at the first glance; the soul speaks of it as if it understood it, recognises and welcomes it and as it were adapts itself to it. But when it encounters the ugly it shrinks back and rejects it and turns away from it and is out of tune and alienated from it. Our explanation of this is that the soul, since it is by nature what it is and is related to the higher kind of reality in the realm of being, when it sees something akin to it or a trace of its kindred reality, is delighted and thrilled and returns to itself and remembers itself and its own possessions. What likeness, then, is there between beautiful things here and There? If there is a likeness, let us agree that they are alike. But how are both the things in that world and the things in this beautiful? We maintain that the things in this world are beautiful by participating in form; for every shapeless thing which is naturally capable of receiving shape and form is ugly and outside the divine formative power as long as it has no share in formative power and form. This is absolute ugliness. But a thing is also ugly when it is not completely dominated by shape and formative power, since its matter has not submitted to be completely shaped according to the form.

c

d

Whenever, therefore, form accedes, it conciliates in amicable unity, the parts which are about to compose a whole: for being itself one, it is not wonderful that the subject of its power should tend to unity, as far as the nature of a compound will admit. Hence beauty is established in multitude, when the many is reduced into one; and in this case it communicates itself both to the parts, and to the whole. But when a particular one, composed from similar parts, is received, it gives itself to the whole, without departing from the sameness and integrity of its nature. Thus at one and the same time, it communicates itself to the whole building, and its several parts; and at another time confines itself to a single stone: and then the first participation arises from the operations of art, but the second from the formation of nature. And hence body becomes beautiful, through the communion supernally proceeding from divinity.

3. But the soul, by her innate power, than which nothing more powerful, in judging its proper concerns, when another soul concurs in the decision, acknowledges the beauty of forms. And, perhaps, its knowledge in this case arises from its accommodating its internal ray of beauty to form, and trusting to this in its judgment; in the same manner as a rule is employed, in the decision of what is straight. But how can that which is inherent in body, accord with that which is above body? Let us reply by asking how the architect pronounces the building beautiful, by accommodating the external structure to the fabric in his soul? Perhaps, because the outward building, when entirely deprived of the stones, is no other than the intrinsic form, divided by the external mass of matter, but indivisibly existing, though appearing in the many. When, therefore, sense beholds the form in bodies, at strife with matter, binding and vanquishing its contrary nature, and sees form gracefully shining forth in other forms, it collects together the scattered whole, and introduces it to itself, and to the indivisible form within; and renders it consonant, congruous and friendly to its own intimate form. Thus, to the good man, virtue shining forth in youth is lovely, because consonant to the true virtue, which lies deep in the soul. But the simple beauty of colour arises, when light, which is something incorporeal, and reason and form, entering the obscure involutions of matter, irradiates and forms its dark and formless nature. It is on this account that fire surpasses other bodies in beauty, because, compared with the other elements, it obtains the order of form: for it is more eminent than the rest, and is the most subtle of all, bordering as it were on an incorporeal nature. Add too, that though impervious itself, it is intimately received by others; for it imparts heat, but admits no cold. Hence it is the first nature which is ornamented with colour, and is the source of it to others: and on this account it beams forth exalted like some immaterial form. But when it cannot vanquish its subject, as participating but a slender light, it is no longer beautiful: because it does not receive the whole form of colour.

The form, then, approaches and composes that which is to come into being from many parts into a single ordered whole; it brings it into a completed unity and makes it one by agreement of its parts; for since it is one itself, that which is shaped by it must also be one as far as a thing can be which is composed of many parts. So beauty rests upon the material thing when it has been brought into unity, and gives itself to parts and wholes alike. When it comes upon something that is one and composed of like parts it gives the same gift to the whole; as sometimes art gives beauty to a whole house with its parts, and sometimes a nature gives beauty to a single stone. So then the beautiful body comes into being by sharing in a formative power which comes from the divine forms.

The power ordained for the purpose recognises this, and there is nothing more effective for judging its own subject-matter, when the rest of the soul judges along with it; or perhaps the rest of the soul too pronounces the judgement by fitting the beautiful body to the form in itself and using this for judging beauty as we use a ruler for judging straightness. But how does the bodily agree with that which is before body? How does the architect declare the house outside beautiful by fitting it to the form of house within him? The reason is that the house outside, apart from the stones, is the inner form divided by the external mass of matter, without parts but appearing in many parts. When sense-perception, then, sees the form in bodies binding and mastering the nature opposed to it, which is shapeless, and shape riding gloriously upon other shapes, it gathers into one that which appears dispersed and brings it back and takes it in, now without parts, to the soul's interior and presents it to that which is within as something in tune with it and fitting it and dear to it; just as when a good man sees a trace of virtue in the young, which is in tune with his own inner truth, the sight delights him. And the simple beauty of colour comes about by shape and the mastery of the darkness in matter by the presence of light which is incorporeal and formative power and form. This is why fire itself is more beautiful than all other bodies, because it has the rank of form in relation to the other elements; it is above them in place and is the finest and subtlest of all bodies, being close to the incorporeal. It alone does not admit the others; but the others admit it : for it warms them but is not cooled itself; it has colour primarily and all other things take the form of colour from it. So it shines and glitters as if it was a form. The inferior hing which becomes faint and dull by the fire's light, is not beautiful any more, as not participating in the whole form of colour.

Again, the music of the voice rouses the harmony latent in the soul, and opens her eye to the perception of beauty, existing in many the same. But it is the property of the harmony perceived by sense, to be measured by numbers, yet not in every proportion of number or voice; but in that alone which is obedient to the production, and conquest of its species. And thus much for the beauties of sense, which, like images and shadows flowing into matter, adorn with spectacles of beauty its formless being, and strike the respective sense with wonder and delight.

4. But it is now time, leaving every object of sense far behind, to contemplate, a certain ascent, a beauty of a much higher order: a beauty not visible to the corporeal eye, but alone manifest to the brighter eye of the soul, independent of all corporeal aid. However, since, without some previous perception of beauty, it is impossible to express by words the beauties of sense, but we must remain in the state of the blind; so neither can we ever speak of the beauty of offices and sciences, and whatever is allied to these, if deprived of their intimate possession. Thus we shall never be able to tell of virtue's brightness, unless by looking inward we perceive the fair countenance of justice and temperance, and are convinced that neither the evening nor morning-star, are half so beautiful and bright. But it is requisite to perceive objects of this kind with that eye by which the soul beholds such real beauties. Besides, it is necessary that whoever perceives this species of beauty, should be seized with much greater delight, and more vehement admiration, than any corporeal beauty can excite; as now embracing beauty real and substantial. Such affections, I say, ought to be excited about true beauty†, as admiration and sweet astonishment; desire, also and love, and a pleasant trepidation. For all souls, as I may say, are affected in this manner about invisible objects, but those the most who have the strongest propensity to their love; as it likewise happens about corporeal beauty; for all equally perceive beautiful corporeal forms, yet all are not equally excited, but lovers in the greatest degree.

5. But it may be allowable to interrogate those who rise above sense, concerning the effects of love in this manner; of such we enquire, what do you suffer respecting fair studies, and beautiful manners, virtuous works, affections, and habits, and the beauty of souls? What do you experience on perceiving yourselves lovely within? After what manner are you roused as it were to a Bacchanalian fury; striving to converse with yourselves, and collecting yourself separate from the impediments of body? For thus are true lovers enraptured. But what is the cause of these wonderful effects? It is neither figure, nor colour, nor magnitude; but soul herself, fair through temperance, and not with the false gloss of colour, and bright with the splendours of virtue herself. And this you experience as often as you turn your eye inwards; or contemplate the amplitude of another

The melodies in sounds, too, the imperceptible ones which make the perceptible ones, make the soul conscious of beauty in the same way, showing the same thing in another medium. It is proper to sensible melodies to be measured by numbers, not according to any and every sort of formula but one which serves for the production of form so that it may dominate. So much, then, for the beauties in the realm of sense, images and shadows which, so to speak, sally out and come into matter and adorn it and excite us when they appear.

But about the beauties beyond, which it is no more the part of sense to see, but the soul sees them and speaks of them without instruments—we must go up to them and contemplate them and leave sense to stay down below. Just as in the case of the beauties of sense it is impossible for those who have not seen them or grasped their beauty—those born blind, for instance,—to speak about them, in the same way only those can speak about the beauty of ways of life who have accepted the beauty of ways of life and kinds of knowledge and everything else of the sort; and people cannot speak about the splendour of virtue who have never even imagined how fair is the face of justice and moral order; "neither the evening nor the morning star are as fair." But there must be those who see this beauty by that with which the soul sees things of this sort, and when they see it they must be delighted and overwhelmed and excited much more than by those beauties we spoke of before, since now it is true beauty they are grasping. These experiences must occur whenever there is contact with any sort of beautiful thing, wonder and a shock of delight and longing and passion and a happy excitement. One can have these experiences by contact with invisible beauties, and souls do have them, practically all, but particularly those who are more passionately in love with the invisible, just as with bodies all see them, but all are not stung as sharply, but some, who are called lovers, are most of all.

Then we must ask the lovers of that which is outside sense "What do you feel about beautiful ways of life, as we call them, and beautiful habits and well-ordered characters and in general about virtuous activities and dispositions and the beauty of Souls? What do you feel when you see your own inward beauty? How are you stirred to wild exultation, and long to be with yourselves, gathering your selves together away from your bodies?" For this is what true lovers feel. But what is it which makes them feel like this? Not shape or colour or any size, but soul, without colour itself and possessing a moral order without colour and possessing all the other light of the virtues; you feel like this when you see, in yourself or in someone else,

soul: the just manners, the pure temperance; fortitude venerable by her noble countenance; and modesty and honesty walking with an intrepid step, and a tranquil and steady aspect; and, what crowns the beauty of them all, constantly receiving the irradiations of a divine intellect.

In what respect then, shall we call these beautiful? For they are such as they appear, nor did ever any one behold them, and not pronounce them realities. But as yet reason desires to know how they cause the loveliness of the soul; and what that grace is in every virtue which beams forth to view like light? Are you then willing we should assume the contrary part, and consider what in the soul appears deformed? for, perhaps it will facilitate our search, if we can thus find what is base in the soul, and from whence it derives its original.

Let us suppose a soul deformed, to be one intemperate and unjust, filled with a multitude of desires, a prey to foolish hopes, and vexed with idle fears; through its diminutive and avaricious nature the subject of envy; employed solely in thought of what is mortal and low; bound in the fetters of impure delights; living the life, whatever it may be, peculiar to the passion of body; and so totally merged in sensuality as to esteem the base pleasant, and the deformed beautiful and fair. But may we not say, that this baseness approaches the soul as an adventitious evil, under the pretext of adventitious beauty; which, with great detriment, renders it impure, and pollutes it with much depravity; so that it neither possesses true life, nor true sense, but is endued with a slender life through its mixture of evil, and this worn out by the continual depredations of death: no longer perceiving the objects of mental vision, nor permitted any more to dwell with itself, because ever hurried away to things obscure, external and low? Hence, becoming impure, and being on all sides snatched in the unceasing whirl of sensible forms, it is covered with corporeal stains, and wholly given to matter, contracts deeply its nature, loses all its original splendour, and almost changes its own species into that of another: just as the pristine beauty of the most lovely form would be destroyed by its total immersion in mire and clay. But the deformity of the first arises from inward filth, of its own contracting; of the second, from the accession of some foreign nature. If such a one then desires to recover his former beauty, it is necessary to cleanse the infected parts, and thus by a thorough purgation to refine his original form. Hence, then, if we assert that the soul, by her mixture, confusion and commerce with body and matter, becomes thus base, our assertion will, I think, be right. For the baseness of the soul consists in not being pure and sincere. And as the gold is deformed by the adherence of earthly clods, which are no sooner removed than on a sudden the gold shines forth with its native purity; and then becomes beautiful when separated from natures foreign from its own, and when it is content with its own purity for the possession of beauty: so the soul, when separated

greatness of soul, a righteous life, a pure morality, courage with its noble look,' and dignity and modesty advancing in a fearless, calm and unperturbed disposition, and the godlike light of intellect shining upon all this. We love and delight in these qualities, but why do we call them beautiful? They exist and appear to us and lie who sees them cannot possibly say anything else except that they are what really exists. What does "really exists" mean? That they exist as beauties. But the argument still requires us to explain why real beings make the soul lovable. What is this kind of glorifying light on all the virtues? Would you like to take the opposites, the uglinesses in soul, and contrast them with the beauties? Perhaps a consideration of what ugliness is and why it appears so will help us to find what we are looking for.

Suppose, then, an ugly soul, dissolute and unjust, full of all lusts, and all disturbance, sunk in fears by its cowardice and jealousies by its pettiness, thinking mean and mortal thoughts as far as it thinks at all, altogether distorted, loving impure pleasures, living a life which consists of bodily sensations and finding delight in its ugliness. Shall we not say that its ugliness came to it as a "beauty" brought in from outside, injuring it and making it impure and "mixed with a great deal of evil," with its life and perceptions no longer pure, but by the admixture of evil living a dim life and diluted with a great deal of death, no longer seeing what a soul ought to see, no longer left in peace in itself because it keeps on being dragged out, and down, and to the dark? Impure, I think, and dragged in every direction towards the objects of sense, with a great deal of bodily stuff mixed into it, consorting much with matter and receiving a form other than its own it has changed by a mixture which makes it worse; just as if anyone gets into mud or filth he does not show any more the beauty which he had: what is seen is what he wiped off on himself from the mud and filth; his ugliness has come from an addition of alien matter, and his business, if he is to be beautiful again, is to wash and clean himself and so be again what he was before. So we shall be right in saying that the soul becomes ugly by mixture and dilution and inclination towards the body and matter.

This is the soul's ugliness, not being pure and unmixed, like gold, but full of earthiness; if anyone takes the earthy stuff away the gold is left, and is beautiful, when it is singled out from other things and is alone by itself. In the same way the soul too, when it is separated from the lusts which it has through the body with which it consorted too much, and freed from its other affections, purged of what it gets from being embodied, when it abides alone has put away all the ugliness which came from the other nature.

from the sordid desires engendered, by its too great immersion in body; and liberated from the dominion of every perturbation, can thus and thus only, blot out the base stains imbibed from its union with body; and thus becoming alone, will doubtless expel all the turpitude contracted from a nature so opposite to its own.

6. Indeed, as the ancient oracle declares, temperance and fortitude, prudence and every virtue, are certain purgatives of the soul; and hence the sacred mysteries prophesy obscurely, yet with truth, that the soul not purified lies in Tartarus, immersed in filth. Since the impure is, from his depravity, the friend of filth; as swine, from their sordid body, delight in mire alone. For what else is true temperance† than not to indulge in corporeal delights, but to fly from their connection, as things which are neither pure, nor the offspring of purity? And true fortitude is not to fear death: for death is nothing more than a certain separation of soul from body; and this he will not fear, who desires to be alone. Again, magnanimity is the contempt of every mortal concern; it is the wing by which we fly into the regions of intellect. And lastly, prudence is no other than intelligence, declining subordinate objects; and directing the eye of the soul to that which is immortal and divine. The soul, thus refined, becomes form and reason, is altogether incorporeal and intellectual; and wholly participates of that divine nature, which is the fountain of loveliness, and of whatever is allied to the beautiful and fair. Hence, the soul, reduced to intellect, becomes astonishingly beautiful; for as the lambent flame which appears detached from the burning wood, enlightens its dark and smoky parts, so intellect irradiates and adorns the inferior powers of the soul, which, without its aid, would be buried in the gloom of formless matter. But intellect, and whatever emanates from intellect, is not the foreign, but the proper ornament of the soul: for the being of the soul, when absorbed in intellect, is then alone real and true. It is, therefore, rightly said, that the beauty and good of the soul consists in her similitude to the Deity; for from hence flows all her beauty, and her allotment of a better being. But the beautiful itself is that which is called beings; and turpitude is of a different nature, and participates more of non-entity than being.

But, perhaps, the good and the beautiful are the same, and must be investigated by one and the same process; and in a like manner the base and the evil. And in the first rank we must place the beautiful, and consider it as the same with the good; from which immediately emanates intellect as beautiful. Next to this, we must consider the soul receiving its beauty from intellect; and every inferior beauty deriving its origin from the forming power of the soul, whether conversant in fair actions and offices, or sciences and arts. Lastly, bodies themselves participate of beauty from the soul, which, as something divine, and a portion of the beautiful itself, renders whatever it supervenes and subdues, beautiful, as far as its natural capacity will admit.

For, as was said in old times, self-control, and courage and every virtue, is a purification, and so is even wisdom itself. This is why the mysteries are right when they say riddlingly that the man who has not been purified will lie in mud when he goes to Hades, because the impure is fond of mud by reason of its badness; just as pigs, with their unclean bodies, like that sort of thing. For what can true self-control be except not keeping company with bodily pleasures, but avoiding them as impure and belonging to something impure? Courage, too, is not being afraid of death. And death is the separation of body and Soul; and a man does not fear this if he welcomes the prospect of being alone. Again, greatness of soul is despising the things here: and wisdom is an intellectual activity which turns away from the things below and leads the soul to those above. So the soul when it is purified becomes form and formative power, altogether bodiless and intellectual and entirely belonging to the divine, whence beauty springs and all that is akin to it. Soul, then, when it is raised to the level of intellect increases in beauty. Intellect and the things of intellect are its beauty, its own beauty and not another's, since only then [when it is perfectly conformed to intellect] is it truly soul. For this reason it is right to say that the soul's becoming something good and beautiful is its being made like to God, because from Him come beauty and all else which falls to the lot of real beings. Or rather, beautifulness is reality, and the other kind of thing is the ugly, and this same is the primary evil; so for God the qualities of goodness and beauty are the same, or the realities, the good and beauty.

So we must follow the same line of enquiry to discover beauty and goodness, and ugliness and evil. And first we must posit beauty which is also the good; from this immediately comes intellect, which is beauty; and soul is given beauty by intellect. Everything else is beautiful by the shaping of soul, the beauties in actions and in ways of life. And soul makes beautiful the bodies which are spoken of as beautiful; for since it is a divine thing and a kind of part of beauty, it makes everything it grasps and masters beautiful, as far as they are capable of participation.

7. Let us, therefore, reascend to the good itself, which every soul desires; and in which it can alone find perfect repose. For, if any one shall become acquainted with this source of beauty, he will then know what I say, and after what manner he is beautiful. Indeed, whatever is desirable is a kind of good, since to this desire tends. But they alone pursue true good, who rise to intelligible beauty; and so far only tend to good itself, as far as they lay aside the deformed vestments of matter, with which they became connected in their descent. Just as those who penetrate into the holy retreats of sacred mysteries, are first purified, and then divest themselves of their garments, until some one, by such a process, having dismissed every thing foreign from the God, by himself alone, beholds the solitary principle of the universe, sincere, simple, and pure, from which all things depend, and to whose transcendent perfections the eyes of all intelligent natures are directed, as the proper cause of being, life and intelligence. With what ardent love, with what strong desire will he who enjoys this transporting vision be inflamed, while vehemently affecting to become one with this supreme beauty? For thus it is ordained, that he who does not yet perceive him, yet desires him as good: but he who enjoys the vision, is enraptured with his beauty; and is equally filled with admiration and delight. Hence, such a one is agitated with a salutary astonishment; is affected with the highest and truest love; derides vehement affections, and inferior loves, and despises the beauty which he once approved. Such, too, is the condition of those, who, on perceiving the forms of gods or dæmons, no longer esteems the fairest of corporeal forms. What then must be the condition of that being, who beholds the beautiful itself? In itself perfectly pure, not confined by any corporeal bond, neither existing in the heavens, nor in the earth, nor to be imaged by the most lovely form imagination can conceive; since these are all adventitious and mixt, and mere secondary beauties, proceeding from the beautiful itself. If, then, any one should ever behold that which is the source of munificence to others, remaining in itself, while it communicates to all, and receiving nothing, because possessing an inexhaustible fullness; and should so abide in the intuition, as to become similar to his nature, what more of beauty can such a one desire? For such beauty, since it is supreme in dignity and excellence, cannot fail of rendering its votaries lovely and fair. Add too, that since the object of contest to souls, is the highest beauty, we should strive for its acquisition with unabated ardor, lest we should be deserted of that blissful contemplation, which whoever pursues in the right way, becomes blessed from the happy vision; and which he who does not obtain, is unavoidably unhappy. For the miserable man, is not he who neglects to pursue fair colours, and beautiful corporeal forms; who is deprived of power, and falls from dominion and empire; but he alone who is destitute of this divine possession, for which the ample dominion of the earth and sea, and the still more extended empire of the heavens, must be relinquished and forgot, if, despising and leaving these far behind, we ever intend to arrive at the substantial felicity, by beholding the beautiful itself.

So we must ascend again to the good, which every soul desires. Any-one who has seen it knows what I mean when I say that it is beautiful. It is desired as good, and the desire for it is directed to good, and the attainment of it is for those who go up to the higher world and are converted and strip off what we put on in our descent; (just as for those who go up to the celebrations of sacred rites there are purifications, and strippings off of the clothes they wore before, and going up naked) until, passing in the ascent all that is alien to the God, one sees with one's self alone That alone, simple, single and pure,' from which all depends and to which all look and are and live and think : for it is cause of life and mind and being. If anyone sees it, what passion will he feel, what longing in his desire to be united with it, what a shock of delight!

The man who has not seen it may desire it as good, but he who has seen it glories in its beauty and is full of wonder and delight, enduring a shock which causes no hurt, loving with true passion and piercing longing; he laughs at all other loves and despises what he thought beautiful before; it is like the experience of those who have met appearances of gods or spirits and do not any more appreciate as they did the beauty of other bodies. "What then are we to think, if anyone contemplates the absolute beauty which exists pure by itself, uncontaminated by flesh or body, not in earth or heaven, that it may keep its purity?" All these other things are external additions and mixtures and not primary, but derived from it.

f

If then one sees That which provides for all and remains by itself and gives to all but receives nothing into itself, if he abides in the contemplation of this kind of beauty and rejoices in being made like it, how can he need any other beauty? For this, since it is beauty most of all, and primary beauty, makes its lovers beautiful and lovable. Here the greatest, the ultimate contest is set before our souls; all our toil and trouble is for this, not to be left without a share in the best of visions. The man who attains this is blessed in seeing that "blessed sight", and he who fails to attain it has failed utterly. A man has not failed if he fails to win beauty of colours or bodies, or power or office or kingship even, but if he fails to win this and only this. For this he should give up the attainment of kingship and of rule over all earth and sea and sky, if only by leaving and overlooking them he can turn to That and see.

8. What measures, then, shall we adopt? What machine employ, or what reason consult, by means of which we may contemplate this ineffable beauty: a beauty abiding in the most divine sanctuary, without ever proceeding from its sacred retreats, lest it should be beheld by the profane and vulgar eye? We must enter deep into ourselves, and, leaving behind the objects of corporeal sight, no longer look back after any of the accustomed spectacles of sense. For, it is necessary that whoever beholds this beauty, should withdraw his view from the fairest corporeal forms; and, convinced that these are nothing more than images, vestiges, and shadows of beauty, should eagerly soar to the fair original from which they are derived. For he who rushes to these lower beauties, as if grasping realities, when they are only like beautiful images appearing in water, will, doubtless, like him in the fable, by stretching after the shadow, sink into the lake, and disappear. For, by thus embracing and adhering to corporeal forms, he is precipitated, not so much in his body, as in his soul, into profound and horrid darkness; and thus blind, like those in the infernal regions, converses only with phantoms, deprived of the perception of what is real and true. It is here, then, we may more truly exclaim "Let us depart from hence, and fly to our father's delightful land." But, by what leading stars shall we direct our flight, and by what means avoid the magic power of Circe, and the detaining charms of Calypso? For thus the fable of Odysseus obscurely signifies, which feigns him abiding an unwilling exile, though pleasant spectacles were continually presented to his sight; and every thing was promised to invite his stay which can delight the senses, and captivate the heart. But our true country, like that of Odysseus, is from whence we came, and where our father lives. But where is the ship to be found, by which we can accomplish our flight? For our feet are unequal to the task, since they only take us from one part of the earth to another. May we not each of us say,

What ships have I, what sailors to convey
What oars to cut the long laborious way?

But it is in vain that we prepare horses to draw, or ships to transport us to our native land. On the contrary, neglecting all these, as unequal to the task, and excluding them entirely from our view, having now closed the corporeal eye, we must stir up, and assume a purer eye within, which all men possess, but which is alone used by the few.

9. What is it then this inward eye beholds? Indeed, suddenly raised to intellectual vision, it cannot perceive an object exceeding bright. The soul must therefore be first accustomed to contemplate fair studies, and then beautiful works; not such as arise from the operations of art, but such as are the offspring of worthy men: and next to this, it is necessary to view the soul which is the parent of this lovely race. But you will ask, after what manner is this beauty of a worthy soul to be perceived?

But how shall we find the way? What method can we devise? How can one see the "inconceivable beauty" which stays within in the holy sanctuary and does not come out where the profane may see it? Let him who can, follow and come within, and leave outside the sight of his eyes and not turn back to the bodily splendours which he saw before. When he sees the beauty in bodies he must not run after them; we must know that they are images, traces, shadows, and hurry away to that which they image. For if a man runs to the image and wants to seize it as if it was the reality (like a beautiful reflection playing on the water, which some story somewhere, I think, said riddingly a man wanted to catch and sank down into the stream and disappeared) then this man who clings to beautiful bodies and will not let them go, will, like the man in the story, but in soul, not in body, sink down into the dark depths where intellect has no delight, and stay blind in Hades, consorting with shadows there and here.

This would be truer advice "Let us fly to our dear country." What then is our way of escape, and how are we to find it? We shall put out to sea, as Odysseus did, from the witch Circe or Calypso-as the poet says (I think with a hidden meaning)-and was not content to stay though he had delights of the eyes and lived among much beauty of sense.' Our country from which we came is there, our Father is there. How shall we travel to it, where is our way of escape? We cannot get there on foot; for our feet only carry us everywhere in this world, from one country to another. You must not get ready a carriage, either, or a boat. Let all these things go, and do not look. Shut your eyes, and change to and wake another way of seeing, which everyone has but few use.

And what does this inner sight see? When it is just awakened it is not at all able to look at the brilliance before it. So that the soul must be trained, first of all to look at beautiful ways of life: then at beautiful works, not those which the arts produce, but the works of men who have a name for goodness: then look at the souls of the people who produce the beautiful works. How then can you see the sort of beauty a good soul has?

It is thus. Recall your thoughts inward, and if, while contemplating yourself, you do not perceive yourself beautiful, imitate the statuary; who, when he desires a beautiful statue, cuts away what is superfluous, smooths and polishes what is rough, and never desists until he has given it all the beauty his art is able to effect. In this manner must you proceed, by lopping what is luxuriant, directing what is oblique, and, by purgation, illustrating what is obscure; and thus continue to polish and beautify your statue, until the divine splendour of Virtue shines upon you, and Temperance, seated in pure and holy majesty, rises to your view. If you become thus purified, residing in yourself, and having nothing any longer to impede this unity of mind, and no farther mixture to be found within, but perceiving your whole self to be a true light, and light alone; a light which, though immense, is not measured by any magnitude, nor limited by any circumscribing figure, but is every where immeasurable, as being greater than every measure, and more excellent than every quantity: if, perceiving yourself thus improved, and trusting solely to yourself, as no longer requiring a guide, fix now steadfastly your mental view, for with the intellectual eye alone, can such immense beauty be perceived.

But, if your eye is yet infected with any sordid concern, and not thoroughly refined, while it is on the stretch to behold this most shining spectacle, it will be immediately darkened and incapable of intuition, though some one should declare the spectacle present, which it might be otherwise able to discern. For, it is here necessary, that the perceiver and the thing perceived, should be similar to each other, before true vision can exist. Thus the sensitive eye, can never be able to survey the orb of the sun, unless strongly endued with solar fire, and participating largely of the vivid ray. Every one, therefore, must become divine, and of godlike beauty, before he can gaze upon a god, and the beautiful itself.

Thus proceeding in the right way of beauty, he will first ascend into the region of intellect, contemplating every fair species, the beauty of which he will perceive to be no other than ideas themselves; for all things are beautiful by the supervening irradiations of these, because they are the offspring and essence of intellect. But that which is superior to these, is no other than the fountain of good, every where widely diffusing around the streams of beauty, and hence, in discourse, called the beautiful itself; because, beauty is its immediate offspring. But, if you accurately distinguish the intelligible objects, you will call the beautiful the receptacle of ideas; but the good itself, which is superior, the fountain and principle of the beautiful; or, you may place the first beautiful and the good in the same principle, independent of the beauty which there subsists.

Trans. Thomas Taylor

Go back into yourself and look; and if you do not yet see yourself beautiful, then, just as someone making a statue which has to be beautiful cuts away here and polishes there and makes one part smooth and clears another till he has given his statue a beautiful face, so you too must cut away excess and straighten the crooked and clear the dark and make it bright, and never stop "working on your statue" till the divine glory of virtue shines out on you, till you see "self-mastery enthroned upon its holy seat." If you have become this, and see it, and are at home with yourself in purity, with nothing hindering you from becoming in this way one, with no inward mixture of anything else, but wholly yourself, nothing but true light, not measured by dimensions, or bounded by shape into littleness, or expanded to size by unboundedness, but everywhere unmeasured, because greater than all measure and superior to all quantity; when you see that you have become this, then you have become sight; you can trust yourself then; you have already ascended and need no one to show you; concentrate your gaze and see. This alone is the eye that sees the great beauty.

But if anyone comes to the sight bleary-eyed with wickedness, and unpurified, or weak and by his cowardice unable to look at what is very bright, he sees nothing, even if someone shows him what is there and possible to see. For one must come to the sight with a seeing power made akin and like to what is seen. No eye ever saw the sun without becoming sun-like, nor can a soul see beauty without becoming beautiful. You must become first all godlike and all beautiful if you intend to see God and beauty.

First the soul will come in its ascent to intellect and there will know the Forms, all beautiful, and will affirm that these, the Ideas, are beauty; for all things are beautiful by these, by the products and essence of intellect. That which is beyond this we call the nature of the Good, which holds beauty as a screen before it. So in a loose and general way of speaking the Good is the primary beauty; but if one distinguishes the intelligibles [from the Good] one will say that the place of the Forms is the intelligible beauty, but the Good is That which is beyond, the "spring and origin" of beauty; or one will place the Good and the primal beauty on the same level: in any case, however, beauty is in the intelligible world.

Trans. A H Armstrong

In the mysteries of Love thus far perhaps, Socrates, you may be initiated and advanced. But to be perfected, and to attain the intuition of what is secret and inmost, introductory to which is all the rest, if undertaken and performed with a mind rightly disposed, I doubt whether you may be able. However, not to be wanting in a readiness to give you thorough information, I will do my best to conduct you till we have reached the end. Do but you your best to follow me.

Whoever then enters upon this great affair in a proper manner, and begins according to a right method, must have been from his earliest youth conversant with bodies that are beautiful. Prepared by this acquaintance with beauty, he must, in the first place, if his leader lead aright, fall in love with some one particular person, fair and beauteous; and on her beget fine sentiments and fair discourse. He must afterwards consider, that the beauty of outward form, that which he admires so highly in his favourite fair one, is sister to a beauty of the same kind, which he cannot but see in some other fair. If he can then pursue this corporeal beauty, and trace it wherever it is to be found, throughout the human species, he must want understanding not to conceive, that beauty is one and the same thing in all beauteous bodies. With this conception in his mind, he must become a lover of all visible forms, which are partakers of this beauty; and in consequence of this general love, he must moderate the excess of that passion for one only female form, which had hitherto engrossed him wholly: for he cannot now entertain thoughts extravagantly high of the beauty of any particular fair one, a beauty not peculiar to her, but which she partakes of in common with all other corporeal forms that are beauteous.

After this, if he thinks rightly, and knows to estimate the value of things justly, he will esteem that beauty which is inward, and lies deep in the soul, to be of greater value and worthy of more regard than that which is outward, and adorns only the body. As soon, therefore, as he meets with a person of a beauteous soul and generous nature, though flowering forth but a little in superficial beauty, with this little he is satisfied; he has all he wants; he truly loves, and assiduously employs all his thoughts and all his care on the object of his affection. Researching in his mind and memory, he draws forth, he generates such notions of things, such reasonings and discourses, as may best improve his beloved in virtue. Thus he arrives, of course, to view beauty in the arts, the subjects of discipline and study; and comes to discover, that beauty is congenial in them all.

He now, therefore, accounts all beauty corporeal to be of mean and inconsiderable value, as being but a small and inconsiderable part of beauty. From the arts he proceeds further to the sciences, and beholds beauty no less in these. And by this time having seen, and now considering within himself, that beauty is manifold and various, he is no longer, like one of our domestics who has conceived a particular affection for some child of the family, a mean and illiberal slave to the beauty of any one particular, whether person or art, study or practice; but betaking himself to the ample sea of beauty, and surveying it with the eye of intellect, he begets many beautiful and magnificent reasonings, and dianoëtic conceptions in prolific philosophy, till thus being strengthened and increased, he perceives what that one science is which is so singularly great, as to be the science of so singularly great a beauty.

But now try to give me all the attention you are master of. Whoever then is advanced thus far in the mysteries of Love by a right and regular progress of contemplation, approaching new to perfect intuition, suddenly he will discover, bursting into view, a beauty astonishingly admirable; that very beauty, to the gaining a sight of which the aim of all his preceding studies and labours had been directed: a beauty, whose peculiar characters are these: In the first place, it never had a beginning, nor will ever have an end, but always IS, and always flourishes in perfection, unsusceptible of growth or of decay. In the next place, it is not beautiful only when looked at one way, or seen in one light; at the same time that, viewed another way, or seen in some other light, it is far from being beautiful: it is not beautiful only at certain times, or with reference only to certain circumstances of things; being at other times, or when things are otherwise circumstanced, quite the contrary: nor is it beautiful only in some places, or as it appears to some persons; whilst in other places, and to other persons, its appearance is the reverse of beautiful. Nor can this beauty, which is indeed no other than the beautiful itself, ever be the object of imagination; as if it had some face or hands of its own, or any other parts belonging to body: nor is it some particular reason nor some particular science. It resides not in any other being, not in any animal, for instance; nor in the earth, nor in the heavens, nor in any other part of the universe: but, simple and separate from other things, it subsists alone with itself, and possesses an essence eternally uniform.

All other forms which are beauteous partipate of this; but in such a manner they partipate, that by their generation or destruction this suffers no diminution, receives no addition, nor undergoes any kind of alteration.

When from those lower beauties, reascending by the right way of Love, a man begins to gain a sight of this supreme beauty, he must have almost attained somewhat of his end. Now to go, or to be led by another, along the right way of Love, is this: beginning from those beauties of lower rank, to proceed in a continual ascent, all the way proposing this highest beauty as the end; and using the rest but as so many steps in the ascent; to proceed from one to two, from two to all beauteous bodies; from the beauty of bodies to that of souls; from the beauty of souls to that of arts; from the beauty of arts to that of disciplines; until at length from the disciplines he arrives at that discipline which is the discipline of no other thing than of that supreme beauty; and thus finally attains to know what is the beautiful itself.

who passes in a regular manner, over the dark and stormy sea of generation; and thus, at length, arrives at that region where tempests and seas are unknown, and finds a nation, who

Ne'er knew salt, or heard the billows roar.

Indeed, he who is conscious of the delusions of the present life, and the enchantments of this material house, in which his soul is detained, like Odysseus in the irriguous cavern of Calypso, will, like him continually bewail his captivity, and inly pine for a return to his native country. Of such a one it may be said as of Ulysses (in the excellent and pathetic translation of Mr Pope,)

But sad Ulysses by himself apart.
Pour'd the big sorrows of his swelling heart;
All on the lonely shore he sate to weep,
And roll'd his eyes around the restless deep:
Tow'rd the lov'd coast, he roll'd his eyes in vain,
Till, dimm'd with rising grief, they stream'd again.

Odyssey, book v. 103.

Such a one, too, like Odysseus, will not always wish in vain for a passage over the dark ocean of a corporeal life, but by the assistance of Hermes, who may be considered as the emblem of reason, he will at length be enabled to quit the magic embraces of Calypso, the goddess of Sense, and to return again into the arms of Penelope, or Philosophy, the long lost and proper object of his love. – Taylor

h) *We must stir up and assume a purer eye within.* This inward eye, is no other than intellect, which contains in its most inward recesses, a certain ray of light, participated from the sun of Beauty and Good, by which the soul is enabled to behold and become united with her divinely solitary original. This divine ray, or, as Proclus calls it a mark or impression, is thus beautifully described by that philosopher, (*Theology of Plato*): "The Author of the universe, (says he) has planted in all beings impressions of his own perfect excellence, and through these, he has placed all beings about himself, and is present with them in an ineffable manner, exempt from the universality of things. Hence, every being entering into the ineffable sanctuary of its own nature, finds there a symbol of the Father of all. And by this mystical impression, which corresponds to his nature, they become united with their original, divesting themselves of their own essence, and hastening to become his impression alone; and, through a desire of his unknown nature, and of the fountain of good, to participate him alone. And when they have ascended as far as to this cause, they enjoy perfect tranquillity, and are conversant in the perception of his divine progeny, and of the love which all things naturally possess of goodness, unknown, ineffable, without participation, and transcendently full." – Taylor.