

**PLOTINUS: PSYCHIC AND
PHYSICAL TREATISES,
COMPRISING THE SECOND
AND THIRD ENNEADS**

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Plotinus: psychic and physical treatises, comprising the second and third Enneads by Stephen Mackenna

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STEPHEN MACKENNA

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AND THIRD ENNEADS**



LOTINUS

PSYCHIC AND PHYSICAL
TREATISES; COMPRISING
THE SECOND AND THIRD
ENNEADS, TRANSLATED
FROM THE GREEK BY STEPHEN MACKENNA

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THE THIRD ENNEAD

FIRST TRACTATE

FATE

I.

In the two orders of things—those whose existence is that of process and those in whom it is Authentic Being—there is a variety of possible relation to Cause.

Cause might conceivably underly all the entities in both orders or none in either. It might underly some, only, in each order, the others being causeless. It might, again, underly the Realm of Process universally while in the Realm of Authentic Existence some things were caused, others not, or all were causeless. Conceivably, on the other hand, the Authentic Existents are all caused while in the Realm of Process some things are caused and others not, or all are causeless.

Now, to begin with the Eternal Existents :—

The Firsts among these, by the fact that they are Firsts, cannot be referred to outside Causes ; but all such (Eternals) as depend upon those Firsts may be admitted to derive their Being from them.

And in all cases the Act may be referred to the Essence (as its cause), for their Essence consists, precisely, in giving forth an appropriate Act.

As for Things of Process—or for Eternal Existents whose Act is not eternally invariable—we must hold that these are due to Cause ; Causelessness is quite inadmissible ; we can make no place here for unwarranted “ slantings,” for sudden movement of bodies apart from any initiating power, for precipitate spurts in a soul with nothing to drive it into the new course of action. Such causelessness would bind the Soul under an even sterner compulsion, no longer master of itself, but at the mercy of movements apart from will and cause. Something willed

—within itself or without—something desired, must lead it to action ; without motive it can have no motion.

On the assumption that all happens by Cause, it is easy to discover the nearest determinants of any particular act or state and to trace it plainly to them.

The cause of a visit to the centre of affairs will be that one thinks it necessary to see some person or to receive a debt, or, in a word, that one has some definite motive or impulse confirmed by a judgment of expediency. Sometimes a condition may be referred to the arts, the recovery of health for instance to medical science and the doctor. Wealth has for its cause the discovery of a treasure or the receipt of a gift, or the earning of money by manual or intellectual labour. The child is traced to the father as its Cause and perhaps to a chain of favourable outside circumstances such as a particular diet or, more immediately, a special organic aptitude or a wife apt to childbirth.

And the general cause of all is Nature.

2.

But to halt at these nearest determinants, not to be willing to penetrate deeper, indicates a sluggish mind, a dullness to all that calls us towards the primal and transcendent causes.

How comes it that the same surface causes produce different results ? There is moonshine, and one man steals and the other does not : under the influence of exactly similar surroundings one man falls sick and the other keeps well ; an identical set of operations makes one rich and leaves another poor. The differences amongst us in manners, in characters, in success, force us to go still further back.

Men therefore have never been able to rest at the surface causes.

One school postulates material principles, such as atoms ; from the movement, from the collisions and combinations of these, it derives the existence and the mode of being of all particular phenomena, supposing that all depends upon how these atoms are agglomerated, how they act, how they are affected ; our own impulses and states, even, are supposed to be determined by these principles.

Such teaching, then, obtrudes this compulsion, an atomic Anagke,

even upon Real Being. Substitute, for the atoms, any other material entities as principles and the cause of all things, and at once Real Being becomes servile to the determination set up by them.

Others rise to the first-principle of all that exists and from it derive all they tell of a cause penetrating all things, not merely moving all but making each and everything ; but they pose this as a fate and a supremely dominating cause ; not merely all else that comes into being, but even our own thinking and thoughts would spring from its movement, just as the several members of an animal move not at their own choice but at the dictation of the leading principle which animal life presupposes.

Yet another school fastens on the universal Circuit as embracing all things and producing all by its motion and by the positions and mutual aspect of the planets and fixed stars in whose power of foretelling they find warrant for the belief that this Circuit is the universal determinant.

Finally, there are those that dwell on the interconnection of the causative forces and on their linked descent—every later phenomenon following upon an earlier, one always leading back to others by which it arose and without which it could not be, and the latest always subservient to what went before them—but this is obviously to bring in fate by another path. This school may be fairly distinguished into two branches ; a section which makes all depend upon some one principle and a section which ignores such a unity.

Of this last opinion we will have something to say, but for the moment we will deal with the former, taking the others in their turn.

3.

“ Atoms ” or “ elements ”—it is in either case an absurdity, an impossibility, to hand over the universe and its contents to material entities, and out of the disorderly swirl thus occasioned to call order, reasoning, and the governing soul into being ; but the atomic origin is, if we may use the phrase, the most impossible.

A good deal of truth has resulted from the discussion of this subject ; but, even to admit such principles does not compel us to admit universal compulsion or any kind of “ fate.”

Suppose the atoms to exist :—

These atoms are to move, one downwards—admitting a down and an up (in the Universe or before the Universe is in being)—another slantwise, all at haphazard, in a confused conflict. Nothing here is orderly ; order has not come into being, though the outcome, this Universe, when it achieves existence, is all order ; and thus prediction and divination are utterly impossible, whether by the laws of the science—what science can operate where there is no order ?—or by divine possession and inspiration, which no less require that the future be something regulated.

Material entities exposed to all this onslaught may very well be under compulsion to yield to whatsoever the atoms may bring : but would anyone pretend that the acts and states of a soul or mind could be explained by any atomic movements ? How can we imagine that the onslaught of an atom, striking downwards or dashing in from any direction, could force the soul to definite and necessary reasonings or impulses or into any reasonings, impulses or thoughts at all, necessary or otherwise ? And what of the soul's resistance to bodily states ? What movement of atoms could compel one man to be a geometrician, set another studying arithmetic or astronomy, lead a third to the philosophic life ? In a word, if we must go, like soulless bodies, wherever bodies push and drive us, there is an end to our personal act and to our very existence as living beings.

The School that crects other material forces (such as " the elements ") into universal causes is met by the same reasoning : we say that while these can warm us and chill us, and destroy weaker forms of existence, they can be causes of nothing that is done in the sphere of mind or soul : all this must be traceable to quite another kind of Principle.

4.

Another theory :—

The Universe is permeated by one Soul, Cause of all things and events ; every separate phenomenon as a member of a whole moves in its place with the general movement ; all the various causes spring into action from one source : therefore, it is argued, the entire descending

claim of causes and all their interaction must follow inevitably and so constitute a universal determination. A plant rises from a root, and we are asked on that account to reason that not only the interconnection linking the root to all the members and every member to every other but the entire activity and experience of the plant, as well, must be one organised overruling, a "destiny" of the plant.

But such an extremity of determination, a destiny so all-pervasive, does away with the very destiny that is affirmed : it shatters the sequence and co-operation of causes.

It would be unreasonable to attribute to destiny the movement of our limbs dictated by the mind and will : this is no case of something outside (some destiny) bestowing motion while another thing (mind) accepts it and is thus set into action ; the mind itself (and not destiny) is the prime mover.

Similarly in the case of the universal system ; if all that performs act and is subject to experience constitutes one substance, if one thing does not really produce another thing under causes leading back continuously one to another, then it is not a truth that all happens by causes, there is nothing but a rigid unity. We are no "We" : nothing is our act ; our thought is not ours ; our decisions are the reasoning of something outside ourselves ; we are no more agents than our feet are kickers when we use them to kick with.

No ; each several thing must be a separate thing ; there must be acts and thoughts that are our own ; the good and evil done by each human being must be his own ; and it is quite certain that we must not lay any vileness to the charge of the All.

5.

But perhaps the explanation of every particular act or event is rather that they are determined by the spheric movement—the Phora—and by the changing position of the heavenly bodies as these stand at setting or rising or in mid course and in various aspects with each other.

Augury, it is urged, is able from these indications to foretell what is to happen not merely to the universe as a whole, but even to indi-