

Concept of Life in the Context of Neoplatonic Noetics

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The article examines the usage of the notion of *live (zoē)* in the context of descriptions of the metaphysical hypostasis of the Intellect presented by Neoplatonic philosophers Plotinus and Proclus. The article discusses different scholarly interpretations of Neoplatonic “life of the Intellect” presented by A. H. Armstrong and P. Hadot. The relevant texts by Plato are also considered before the presentation of a tentative definition of the Neoplatonic notion of the life of the Intellect as it is found in treatises by Plotinus and Proclus. The article concludes with comparative analysis of notion of the life of the Intellect of Plotinus and Proclus. On the basis of presented analysis, it is possible to draw a conclusion, that the essential differences between the two interpretations of the concept are directly related to the fundamental systematic differences between different perceptions of the metaphysical structure of reality as they are presented in philosophical teachings of Plotinus and Proclus.

Keywords: life, intellect, noetics, metaphysics, Neoplatonism, Plato, Plotinus, Proclus.

Plotinus and the question of the life of Intellect

More than a half of century passed after presentation and publication of now a classical paper “Être, Vie, Pensée chez Plotin et avant Plotin” by Piere Hadot¹. Since its publication, this fundamental investigation has become a standard object of reference for all major researches, in which dynamic and, more specifically, vitalistic aspects of Plotinian intelligible universe are discussed. Together with later presentation by

A. H. Armstrong “Eternity, Life and movement in Plotinus’ account of Nous”², which, according to the author, was inspired and provoked by the mentioned research by P. Hadot, we were able to observe an interesting discussion between two scholars and two philosophers in which their different interpretations of the Enneads were motivated by similar urge not only to understand Plotinus’ theory about life of the Intellect but also, as far as it is possible, to give its consistent philosophical interpretation.

1 *Sources de Plotin*. 1960, Entretiens, tome V, vol. 1, p. 107–157.

2 *Le Néoplatonisme*. Royaumont 9–13 juin, 1969, Éditions du centre national de la recherche scientifique 15, quai Anatole-France, Paris, VIIe, 1971, 67–76.

It is not a subject of this paper to give a thorough summary of discussion between Hadot and Armstrong and of the following development of the topic in a number of important works by other scholars that were dealing with Plotinian noetics, such as J. Rist, D. O'Meara, J. Bussanich, K. Emils-son etc. However, it is important to notice that the discussion itself, indeed, opened a range of questions relevant not only to the integrity of Plotinian metaphysics but also to rather peculiar functions of the concept of "life" in Plotinian system. It can be suggested that it is very difficult, if not impossible, to understand this peculiar character of Plotinian notion of "life" without seeing it in wider Platonic context. Therefore, discussion about Plotinian understanding of the life of Intellect in this paper will be complemented by reference to two essential texts by Plato and by concise analysis of the subsequent development of the theory of the life of intellect in Proclus.

Pierre Hadot in his paper gives an overview of Plotinian metaphysics as in fact based on the principle of life. According to Hadot's conclusion, the triad Being – Life – Intelligence is a fundamental philosophical instrument used by Platonic tradition since the old Academy and is in fact a starting point for rather original Plotinian system. Hadot suggests that contrary to the previous and later tradition of Platonic philosophy, Plotinus was unique in his predominant emphasis of the aspect of life not only in the structure of intelligible universe but in the general metaphysical framework of remain, procession and return, in which The One proceeds into and sustains all multiple reality. Life is the

closest and therefore the best image of the infinitely great power of the One that proceeds outwards, turns back to the One and is formed by the One as Intellect. On the most general scale, all phases of metaphysical process of development of reality are in fact different stages of the development of the same dynamic principle comparable with Stoic pneuma or Heraclitus' fiery *logos*. Life, according to Hadot, is the focal point of Plotinus metaphysics, it is the power of expression that uses definition of intellect (or rather intellect as its definition) for its own return to its source. Intellect as life is an episode of general metaphysical framework, in which life becomes a metaphor for ontological circle of procession and return, so that reality is compared to "life that seeks to know its origin". Thus, it is understandable, why Plotinus can talk about life in virtually all levels of being. This interpretation can be supported by an observations that philosophical and soteriological notion of life becomes a common place in the times of Plotinus, also the metaphysical framework for such ontological vitalism was already prepared by pre-Socratic philosophers Anaxagoras and Empedocles³. Quite paradoxically, Intellect itself, when regarded in the wider context of this universal process of life, appears to be the weaker stage of its circle. Hadot is here quoting E. Brehier, who asserts that life defines extreme points of development of reality, while intellect and consciousness are intermediary members of this development. Hadot emphasizes Stoic sources of

3 See Hadot, op. cit. discussions, also G. Stamatellos, *Plotinus and the Presocratics*, New York, 2007, p. 112–120.

Plotinian metaphysical vitalism explaining how the physical material pneuma became uplifted to the status of intelligible matter in Plotinus' Intellect.

However, in spite of this illuminating discussion about the role of concept of life in the general framework of Plotinus' philosophy, one can make an observation that leads to certain difficulty, which is not explained but rather concealed by such a pan-zoistic interpretation. It is difficult to see the way, in which Plotinus could "uplift" Stoic physical pneuma to intelligible level of his universe without altering its monistic status and thus, its appropriate *modus operandi*. It seems that according to Hadot's and Brehier's interpretation Life is not contrasted with the One as its source but rather assumes the role of the One in its dialectics of internal and external activities. Plotinus, indeed, uses term Life in all levels of his universe including the One itself, but he never implies that development and multiplicity of reality can be explained as self-articulation of the principle of Life only. According to Plotinus, the One as such is not identical with Life. Intellect is frequently described in static terms that are purged from any possible development and, to use a metaphor by A. H. Armstrong, "history". Stones are lifeless, and even more so is the sensible matter. Radical generalization of life makes it difficult so see clearly, in which way life functions in the context of development of reality especially paying attention to different implications of the term "life" when used in different contexts. Moreover, identification of Life with the universal metaphysical process of remain, procession and return blurs any possible

specific characters of the concept of life itself. Thus, it makes difficult to realize, that when Plotinus speaks about the life of the One he evidently has in mind not the same life as that of the intelligible forms, individual souls, or living creatures. It can, indeed, be regarded as the one "long life" but only in a metaphorical sense as perhaps it is implied by Plotinus himself in V.2 [11], 2, 27. Even if we accept the broader meaning of life as a metaphor for the universal dynamism of reality, we are still facing the same question as later Neoplatonic followers of Plotinus, the question that forced them to give their own, very different answers: where and how does Life emerge and how does exactly it contribute to the development of each hypostasis of reality interacting with other related elements?

Another crucial part of Hadot interpretation of the triad Being – Life – Intellect is the analysis of the function of life as a structural element of inner reality of Intellect. Plotinus did not define life as ontologically separate aspect of intellect, always implying the triad Being, Life and Intellect is articulated according to pre-eminence. That means that every member of the triad is coextensive with the whole of hypostasis of intellect as "complete living being". Life is interpreted as a dynamic link between the content of intellection (i. e. Being) and the activity of intellection (e.g. Intelligence) also between the unity of Being and its articulation into individual ideas. Life of intellect is dynamic realization, perfection of the wholeness of eternal Being. However, as Hadot, points out, there are variations in *Enneads* as far as the structure of Intellect, as well as function, and status

of life in it is concerned. Sometimes life is on the second and sometime on the third place in the series of Being – Life – Intellect. Moreover, Plotinus was not absolutely clear about the status of “living being” found in the famous passage from Plato’s *Timaeus* about the demiurgic activity of intellect.

Few years later A.H. Armstrong gave a fuller list of difficulties, which according to the scholar’s conclusion are result of Plotinus being unable to give a consistent interpretation of the inner reality of Intellect as at the same time static, unchanging, and – dynamic, bursting with life. Thus, the static image of eternal presence of intellect is contrasted with two different visions of its dynamic development: firstly, the metaphysical process of generation of Intellect involves certain quasi-temporal dynamism, and secondly, the inner life of the second hypostasis is described using a lively process language, which according to Armstrong is essential for Plotinian concept of Intellect and can not be reduced to inner static logical interrelation among intelligible forms. Armstrong concludes that these difficulties show that it is impossible to combine idea of dynamic life with concept of non-durational eternity in a convincing manner.

Armstrong raises the same philosophical question as Hadot: *what in fact is the life of Intellect and how we should understand dynamic and vitalistic features of the intellect?* However, his perspective on the matter is directly opposite. Hadot consistently refers to universal dynamism of life while exactly this dynamism causes problems for Armstrong. The term “life” – *zoē* – itself becomes the key concept for Hadot, but it

is called a “strange concept” in an adjacent discussion to the paper by Armstrong.

Armstrong is certainly very well aware of the fact that Plotinus himself again and again is qualifying temporal and dynamic descriptions of generation and activity of intellect as inadequate. Concepts of motion and development are used as hints, analogies, or metaphors for timeless logical “process” of generation and inner articulation of intellect. However, this linguistic qualification is not helpful at all in the case of the concept of life, because it is used by Plotinus with different intentions. At least in three crucial situations Plotinus uses term “life” as the most adequate: so Eternity is called the life of Being (III.7 [45], 3,37-39), opposed to time as the life of Soul (III.7 [45], 11, 43-45). The One in its procession is named a “long life” (V.2 [11], 2, 27). In neither of these cases the notion of life was questioned or qualified, on the contrary, it is presented as a conclusive, summarizing, if not self evident, concept.

With no pretention to resolve this profound dispute between these two eminent scholars, I would like to suggest to take a detour and look at the issue through a number of additional perspectives. It could be beneficial to try to look at the notion of life in Enneads in general and then see if its wider description could help understand better more specifically the life of intellect in Plotinus’ philosophy.

Zoē and Bios

There are two closely related terms in Enneads that are translated as “life” – *zoē* and *bios*. Differences and interrelation of their

meaning are significant. *Zoē* in Enneads is more abstract, it defines something or somebody that is not-dead, thus, implies the feature of vitality, liveliness, but also the totality, integrity, and wholeness of a living being, feature that is experienced right “now” as *energeia*, and thus, as fulfilment and happiness according to each beings nature.

Zoē as a wholeness of life is not constrained from outside but it is extensively filling available space as consistent, rhythmical, diverse, “boiling” with multiplicity. Creative *zoē* itself active in its operations is compared to a dancer (III.2 [47], 16, 23–27), a beautiful game (III.2 [47], 15, 29–33). Thus it spreads through entire metaphysical universe and can acquire different qualities according to different ontological levels of reality. It spreads and interacts with material body unpolluted by it just as light that illuminates sensual objects (IV.5 [29], 6, 28).

There is also a important perceptive implication of *zoē*. We perceive living object differently. We are immediately attracted to it just as we perceive it by its liveliness, because, as Plotinus, says, living thing is more beautiful (VI.7 [38], 24, 27–36). Similar instantaneous perception is also of one’s own vitality: there is no life without one’s being aware of his / her own life. For a living being, the being *alive*, does not begin – the perception was always there, and it is not augmented or developed. Just as it is not possible to live *more* than you already live.

Term *bios* is an expression of different wholeness of vitality than *zoē*. *Bios* is a certain way of life, entire lifespan of a person, related to efforts to get resources for living,

create conditions etc. *Bios* as a wholeness of vitality has a certain context that defines it – we can speak about life of cosmos, life of different levels of ontological reality as different ways of existing, *bios* is life in a row of cycles of ages, we speak Intellect as “age of Kronos” for example. *Bios* is also a life lived by a human being and forgotten before another incarnation of the soul. *Bios* is life that can be partly formed by person due to his efforts, also life in which all events or consequences of individual actions are experienced.

Difference between *zoē* and *bios* becomes less pertinent when we understand life as certain expression of the way of existence. In both cases this specific way of existence is related to a specific ontological level of reality. But it seems that *zoē* acts more like as certain initial necessary condition, which becomes individuated as *bios*, that is as an individual whole. This difference is important to keep in mind when Plotinus says that it is *bios* of soul that generates time and at the same time that time is *zoē* of soul. That means that time ontologically depends not on soul as such but on a peculiar character of the soul, which is obliged to behave according to its ontological position. At the same time, time *qua zoē* of the soul is connected to Intellect as Eternity. It is also relevant when soul is said to be *amphibious* – to live one life (*bios*) here and the other one there. There is one life (*zoē*) everywhere, but different ways of life (*bios*) – according to different ontological level of reality.

Thus, if all this is correct, then both *zoē* and *bios* are not neutral concepts for life, but both express certain perspectives in

which every living being is contemplated. First of all life is not a predicate to being which in itself could be something like primordial lifeless Intellect, which acquires life in subsequent moments of its metaphysical development. In most general sense *zoē* can be applied to any movement that is consistent in itself and is made manifest. Therefore we can analogically speak about life of the One and life from the One too. However, life of the intellect is already a precondition for a different kind of life (*bios*), and even if genetically this is the same procession of the downward movement of life from the One, but it has an Intellect as its subject and has completely different way of existence.

Thus it is important to see how terms *bios* and *zoē* complements each other. Their comparison also helps to see better what is not *zoē*. It seems that in its purest meaning, *zoē* comes very close to the Aristotle's term for active actuality, *energeia*. Here I will try to follow several texts by Plotinus in which we can see parallelism between *zoē* and *energeia*.

Life as a natural good for a living being

In the beginning of the treatise I.7 [54] Plotinus defines a particular good as the activity (*energeia*) of one's life appropriate to his nature, more specifically – “proper, natural, and never failing activity of the best part of complex being”, in the case of human being – activity proper to the soul. Relationship of any being with its good is described by Plotinus in two terms, one of them refers to qualification of similarity, the other expresses its dynamic aspect – aspiration

as “acting towards”.⁴ Every being has this double relationship with its good except the Good itself, which does not “act towards” anything because there is no other Good for it (I.7 [54], 14). The Good itself does not act also because it stands still and is beyond being and energy. Therefore, a living being has *life* as its natural good (I.7 [54], 2, 10) and its specific way of similarity with and acting towards the Good. If a living being has also an intellect, then it has already “twofold relationship” with the Good.

However, Plotinus emphasizes that not just every life is good as such, but more precisely the life which is natural to the soul in a genetic sense, namely, the life that follows soul's aspiration for Intellect and the Good as its source. Peculiar usage of notion “natural” in this discussion separates Plotinus from its Aristotelian and Stoic sources. “Natural” here does not mean “proper to its kind or genus”, it also means “connected to its source”. When Plotinus says that “natural good for a soul is soul's energy” (I.7 [54], 1, 5–6), then life of the soul as its natural energy does not only define specific way of existence of the soul, but also implies a dynamic tension between soul's need and its aspiration towards the good as the object of its desire. It is important that both notions “life” and “energy” here clearly imply both – static and dynamic aspects.

Life and well being

Life as “natural good” (i.e. natural to the soul) is also closely related with idea of

4 και τῷ πρὸς αὐτὸ ὁμοιωῖσθαι καὶ τῷ πρὸς αὐτὸ τῆν ἐνέργειαν ποιεῖσθαι, I.7 [54], 1,11–13.

well being or happiness (I.4 [46]). Plotinus makes clear that well being is coextensive with life – every living being can also *be well*. Section Nr. 3. of treatise I.4 [46] is very interesting from the point of view of juxtaposition of life and well being. This is the only place in *Enneads* where Plotinus explicitly discusses the ambiguity of the notion of life: “The term “life” is used in many different senses, distinguished according to the rank of the things to which it is applied, first, second and so on, and “living” means different things in different contexts, it is used in one way of plants, in another of irrational animals, in various ways of things distinguished from each other by the clarity or dimness of their life; so obviously the same applies to the living well” (I.4 [46], 3, 19–23.⁵ Difference of meaning for Plotinus here is not just arbitrary confusion. Difference among the forms (*eide*) of life is not logical, but depends on the level of intensity of life, that is, its clarity or dimness. There is the source of life, which is life in its full sense and its lower imitations, images of this superabundant life. Well being follows the same pattern of source and image. The section Nr. 3 ends in identification of the true happy life with the life on Intellect as the source of all other forms of life.

Discussions about the good as energy of natural life of soul and about well being as participation in the life of Intellect are closely related. We may say that the relationship between lower (and less well-to-be) image of life and its source is again the same as one of “similarity and activity towards” the good as described in I.7 [54]. However,

additional interesting element is introduced by Plotinus when he discusses the question how a living rational being can experience happiness or more exactly, how he can actually *be well*. There is important observation, that human being must not *have* well being as some additional external attribute to his being, but must directly *be well*. The difference is significant because to *be well* is the only possible way to be contained in well being without depending on any external attachment. Human beings who *are well* in this sense do not seek anything else, because they have everything they need to live happy life (I.4 [46], 4, 24–26).

Ethical ideal of *autarkeia* in these texts of Plotinus would be nothing extraordinary if not its Plotinian epistemological and ontological implications. First of all, Plotinus explains that the fact of being well does not depend on the awareness of it (I.4 [46], 9). We might be unaware of our well being just as we are not aware of our activity of growth – even without our awareness, it is *we* that grow, in other words, activity of growth belongs to our essence (*ousia*). Similarly, being wise is not identical to a conscious acquisition of external knowledge, wisdom is in a substance, even more emphatically – in *the* substance (perhaps here meaning the Being itself) (I.4 [46], 9, 20). Implicit activity of our intellect is not identical with mental image, which is a reflection of this activity in the soul as in a mirror (I.4 [46], 10, 19–22). Thus, Plotinus writes, if we think together with Parmenides that “thinking and being are the same”, then prior to perception (*antilepsis*) there should be certain implicit activity (*energema*) in our intellect ([46], 10, 7).

⁵ Translations by A. H. Armstrong, slightly modified.

Life and contemplation

In section Nr. 8 of his treatise on “Nature and contemplation” III.8 [30], Plotinus affirms that all life is contemplation – “every life is a though” (III.8 [30], 8, 16–17, but just before this identification, he again tells that in a wise man, “the objects known tend to become identical with the knowing subject (...) in intellect both are one, not by becoming akin, as in the best soul, but in essence (*ousiai*) because “thinking and being are the same” (III.8 [30], 8,7–8). Plotinus calls this kind of contemplation “living contemplation”, because it does not have its object of thought (*theorema*) in something else (III.8 [30], 8,12). The next sentence might be translated like this: “For that who lives in other is a particular [living being], but not living-being-itself (*autozoon*)”. The parallelism of self-containment of life and self containment of thought in intellect is emphasized. Reference to one supports reference to another. Again Intellect is described as a place of the first, original life, the life, which has more actuality (or, if we accept the conjecture – clearness) than any lower imitations of it (III.8 [30], 8, 16).

There is a clear parallel among Plotinian discussions about soul’s life in its natural “activity towards” its good, its being-well as activity implicit in its essence, and living contemplation of the intellect in which a wise man is able to participate. References to activity of Intellect are not accidental in all these discussions too. Closer look at the notion of *energeia* and its relationship with concept of life its will complete our contextualization of “life” before returning back to the question of life of intellect.

Life and *energeia*

A short and rather technical treatise “What exist potentially and what actually” (II.5 [25]) is also relevant to the discussion about general notion of life and especially life of Intellect. In this treatise Plotinus makes careful distinction between notions “being actually” (*energeiai*) and “being actuality” (*energeia*). Being actually implies transition from certain particular potential being to its actualization, while being actuality does not imply such transition and in fact never changes from or into any kind of potential being. Section 3 of the treatise defines the way of existence of intelligible beings in intellect as exactly being actuality, or, being actually which coincides with being actuality: “so all the primary beings are actuality; for they have what they need to have from themselves and forever” (II.5 [25], 3, 31–32). Argumentation which precedes this identification is very interesting and reveals clear links with notion of life of Intellect, which appears few lines below:

“For intellect does not move from a potentiality consisting in being able to think to an actuality of thinking – otherwise it would need another prior principle which does not move from potentiality to actuality – but the whole is in it. For potential existence wants to be brought to actuality by the coming to it of something else, so that it may become something actually, but that which has itself from itself unchanging identity, this will be actuality” II.5 [25], 3, 26–31.

The wholeness of Intellect for Plotinus is not only direct self-identification of Intellect's thought and its content, but it is also articulated living plurality of all the primary beings. Their inner intelligible articulation comprises interaction of intelligible forms with intelligible matter as pure potentiality, which is always formed in Intellect and cannot change from potentiality into anything actual, so that everything is always already formed in Intellect and there is never happening anything new. If there is movement in Plotinus Intellect, this is clearly and emphatically not the movement from potentiality to actuality of thinking. On the contrary, thinking as *energeia* is exactly the actuality which has itself as its goal, and has its goal always achieved, thus if we can call it a process, then it is a process, which is without any change in a sense that it always contains its all aspects already articulated and realized. It seems probable, and previous texts, in which we traced several significant parallels, corroborate to this conclusion, that it is this *energeia* as certain unchanging but all encompassing process that is the life of Intellect. Again in treatise II.5 [25] we read:

“But, granted that everything there exists actually in this way, is everything there actuality? Why not? Certainly, if it is well said that that nature there is sleepless, and life, and the best life, the noblest actualities would be there. All things there, then, both exist actually and are actualities, and all are lives, and the region there is a region of life and the origin and spring of true soul and intellect.” II.5 [25], 3, 38–41.

It seems difficult to define precise status and function of the intellect's *energeia* especially trying to keep closer focus on its dynamic aspects – what could exactly the movement of intellect as *energeia* mean? Predominance of being *energeia* instead of being *energeiai* gives us a clue that actuality of Intellect can not be simply defined by means of contrasting it with any other aspect of Intellect as distinctive part of it. Plotinus is much clearer on this point in VI.7 [38], 13, where he explains how the wholeness of Intellect's *energeia* articulates plurality of all intelligibles at once. First of all, Plotinus is clear that there is no otherness that could awaken life in Intellect form outside (VI.7 [38], 13, 12), which would imply some particular non-actual being in it. Such particular being would be alive potentially and therefore its movement towards life would suggest that it is “life not in all ways, but in one way only” (VI.7 [38], 13, 14), while intellect “must live all things and from all directions and there must be nothing it does not live” (VI.7 [38], 13, 15). The play with grammatical tenses of verbs explains this quite paradoxical motion applicable to Intellect: “It must therefore move (*kineisthai*) to all, or rather have moved (*kekinesthai*) to all” (VI.7 [38], 13, 15). It is tempting to understand this description here as an explanation only of the fact that Intellect always comprehends all intelligible forms. Plotinus here also addresses the question of “coming to life”, that is, of any initial movement that resulted in articulated living content of the Intellect. This motion, here expressed by perfect tense, is an exact parallel to the way in which the dynamism of *energeia* operates:

being identical with its goal it always has its initial moment of start as if already behind its horizon: it is always *already* active. Moreover, the fact of being *always* active in such a way is directly related to its wholeness (“movement to all”) because it is not actualized from outside. Thus, Intellect moves in itself in all directions at once, this movement is always accomplished and has never started. In our common apprehension any movement is movement towards some specific “other” state. In the case of Intellect, in its movement it becomes (or rather already *is*) universally *other* in all respects. Such movement is natural for Intellect, Plotinus calls it “wandering among substances”, however, Intellect is everywhere itself, therefore, its wandering is “remaining” (VI.7 [38], 13, 33). Does his movement have a “history” or does it experience moments of discovery while wandering? Yes, but in rather peculiar way – it always has its history “accomplished” and it always experiences the moment of discovery of itself. There is no intrigue, no “gray zones”, unexplored territories that could promise new discoveries for Intellect. However, if we think that Intellect could become disappointed or “bored” in its steady movement, then we are attributing to it a way of life and perception common to our soul and this would be a mistake.

Thus, it seems reasonable to suggest, that Intellect’s life is exactly its *energeia*, which is described as steady, calm, movement of the whole Intellect inside itself, which comprehends entire hypostasis and is not contrasted with any other possible partial aspect of inner reality of Intellect that would not be *energeia*. Such identi-

fication of life of Intellect with its active actuality (*energeia*) became possible after contrasting the usage of terms *zoē* and *bios* in Enneads and indicating several more general contexts, in which notions of *zoē* and *energeia* manifest parallel development. As active actuality, life of Intellect is coextensive with the whole of the hypostasis and cannot be opposed to any partial aspect of it.

Plato on life of Being and immortality of soul

There are few texts, which had bigger influence on the Neoplatonic concept of the life of Intellect than Plato’s *Sophist*, 248e–249d. In this famous passage, intellect, life and movement are attributed to Being. This text, in corroboration with Aristotle’s description of Intellect as *energeia* and life in *Metaphysics* (XII, 1072b), became the basis for Plotinian theory of hypostasis of Intellect as self contained, self directed, self sufficient active actuality (*energeia*), which is identical with Being and features Life that is identified with Eternity. In similar fashion the crucial text about the eternal self-motion of immortal soul found in *Phaedrus* (245c–249d) is one of the most important sources for traditional Platonic and later Neoplatonic doctrine of soul as the source of life of living beings and as the essence of identity of human being that is independent of and not compromised by physical body.

In spite of probable epistemological rather than ontological implications of the mentioned passage in *Sophist*, the text itself was used by Plotinus and later Neoplatonic

philosophers as an example of attribution of life to the intelligible Being in its wholeness. The whole and perfect Being should not lack any aspects of being, including life, thinking and motion, therefore it is thinking, moving and living. The idea of thinking and living Being does not raise any serious philosophical problems as far as reader of Plato positions both the soul and intellect on the similar level close to the true Being and opposing them together to sensible reality of physical bodies. Likewise, the self-caused motion of soul without any bodily hindrance complements the idea of intelligible life of Being as contrasted with sensible reality of physical bodies.

However, starting with Plotinus, we have a metaphysical system in which Intellect and Soul are arranged according to clearly established hierarchical order. Now Intellect and Soul are two different hypostases, Intellect is the source of the Soul, it is the aim of soul's return and object of its desire. It is also Intellect that is the place where Being, Life and Eternity exercise their archetypal influence on Soul and all lower reality. If this is the case, then Plotinus faces an important question, which as yet did not seem to be a problem for Plato: *what exactly are the roles of Intellect and Soul in providing the metaphysical background for life as we see it in sensible reality?*

Implications of this question become clearer if we look closer to two mentioned texts by Plato and notice that they use two different tactics of argumentation. According to Neoplatonic reading of *Sophist*, the attribute of "life" is *deduced* from the idea of wholeness, completeness, and perfec-

tion of Being, while *Phaedo* arrives at idea of self sufficient eternal life of the soul by *abstracting* it from external harmful bodily influences.

Two observation should be made here. First of all, Plotinus evidently merges two mentioned tactics of Platonic argumentations into one. In his case the all-inclusiveness and wholeness of Intellect or Being is defined exactly by abstracting it from any possible external influence and alteration: Eternity must already contain everything; otherwise there is something that is excluded from its eternal "now". Secondly, it is exactly the idea of *the wholeness* of Being or Intellect that is the archetype for the specific life of Soul, the archetype, which is realized in best possible way. Thus, Plotinus is talking about two ways of life – the one of Intellect and the other one – that of Soul, and at the same time defines their relationship as that of the archetype and image, assuming them to be the procession of the same universal Life that has its origin in the dynamic wholeness of Intellect which is coextensive with its Being. Soul is an external *energeia*, an expression of intellect (V.1 [10], 6, 45).

Plotinus provides answer to the question *what is relationship between life of Intellect and life of Soul*, however, the question *how life of Intellect provides the metaphysical background of life as we observe in sensible universe* remains problematic. It seems that is really difficult to maintain the idea of life as coextensive with being: we observe beings that are not alive or not alive anymore and this should probably indicate that there are different archetypes for being and life in the intelligible realm.

It was exactly the way, which was followed by Proclus in giving his own interpretation of Life of intellect.

Proclus on Life as an aspect of the second Intelligible triad

Plotinus tends to use term “life” in a number of different contexts, sometimes even the supraintellectual activity of the One is described as life coming from the One. Proclus is much clearer in exact positioning of the intelligible archetype of all life. It is at the level of the second intelligible triad that intelligible Life is introduced presented as a mixture of limit and unlimited with predominance of unlimited. It is significant that it is neither aspect of limit nor that of mixture that are predominant in intelligible Life. It is *unlimited* that dominates Life, unlimited that is associated by Proclus with power and progression.⁶ Intelligible Being is positioned at the level of the first intelligible triad as a mixture with predominance of the limit, i.e. stability and *hyperaxis*. The third intelligible triad introduces the intelligible Intellect, mixture of limit and unlimited with predominance of mixture, associated with the idea of return.

In comparison with Plotinus, Proclus makes two important modifications. Not only he fixes intelligible Life at a specific level of hypostasis of Intellect between higher intelligible Being and lower intelligible Intellect, but he also narrows the concept of intelligible Life itself by attributing its specific aspects to now external entities. Thus, according to Proclus, intelligible Life

is not coextensive with Being as it is a case in Plotinus. It is also not coextensive with entire intellectual process (in the case of Plotinus – *energeia*). According to Proclus, intelligible life is associated with particular aspect of this process, namely, progression. Remaining and return are attributed to Being and Intellect respectively. However, Proclus is also in his own way stressing the connection of the intelligible Life with the idea of wholeness of all intelligible triads. Thus, intelligible Life is positioned in the middle of intelligible order, it is an intermediary reality that assures structural and dynamic integrity of intelligible triads.⁷

It seems that by reducing the notion of intelligible Life to the idea of progression, Proclus would distance himself from Platonic argument of eternal life as perpetual self-directed activity. There are however two modifications introduced that help Proclus to avoid this. First of all, Eternity as such is positioned at the level of intelligible Life itself. Thus, all corpus of Plotinian argumentation in favour of Eternity as the wholeness of Being and Intellect is valid in the system of Proclus as well. On the other hand, Proclus is very clear that Eternity is participated by intelligible Intellect, which is the third term of the third intelligible triad, and which is called the Living being itself, referring to Plato's *Timaeus*. It is this intelligible Intellect that is responsible for the aspect of return and is associated with the notion of *energeia*. It complements the static remain of the first triad and progressive procession of the second. Thus we see that in Proclus *it is the interaction of all of*

6 *Theologia Platonica*, III, 47, 7.

7 *Ibid*, III, 48, 7–10.

the three intelligible triads that expresses the idea of inner self-directed activity of Intellect as a whole. It is interesting that Proclus admits relationship of participation or imitation within intelligible order and it was something, which was carefully, avoided by Plotinus with one very well known exception from his early treatise III.9 [13].

Therefore, just as Plotinus, Proclus is finally capable of using both arguments drawn from mentioned two texts by Plato – the one from *Sophist* about the wholeness of being and the one from *Phaedrus* about eternal life as perpetual as self motion. But instead of identifying deduction with abstraction, Proclus is reconstructing inner process of Intellect as a whole and attributing much more precise place and function to intelligible Life in comparison with Plotinus.

It seems that Proclus provided a convincing answer to the question about the way, in which the life of Intellect becomes the archetype for life that we observe in sensible universe. According to Proclus, Being, rooted in the first intelligible triad, is naturally more extensive than Life, based in the second, therefore, there are also lifeless beings around.

However, there is one important consequence of this solution provided by Proclus. As the process of eternal life lived and participated by perfect eternal living being is reconstructed by interaction of all three intelligible triads, so the life of Soul can not any more be directly caused by life of the whole Intellect as it is in Plotinus. Therefore, in Proclus, Soul is at the same time Life (or the principle of life) and a living being (*ET*, 188).

If soul were only living being, it could not convert on itself. So in order for soul to be able to convert on itself, to know itself, and, thus to be alive and properly soul, it should also be a principle of life. But if it is only the principle of life then it could not participate the intellectual Life, with which it is not identical. Soul participates Life, therefore it is also a living being. Proclus is drawing rather complex scheme of relationship between different aspects of Intellect and Soul in order to explain the metaphysical background of the life of the soul. Soul is *life*, or principle of life, because it is transparent, self directed process of reversion, which is similar to the wholeness expressed by the intelligible Life, but it is not identical with intelligible Life, because of its lower order, thus it is not a principle of life only but also *a living being*.

It is difficult to see, whether soul as a living being participates intelligible Life or intelligible Intellect, or both in different ways. What makes soul alive exactly – its similarity to intelligible Life or to eternal living being? It is tempting to assume that there are both cases relevant: *qua* principle of life soul is similar to intelligible Life, but *qua* living being it imitates intelligible Intellect as the perfect living being. However, it seems that by introducing much more precise articulation of the element of life a the level of intelligible triads, Proclus complicated the answer to the question about the metaphysical background of the life of Soul. It can be suggested, that, in contrast with Plotinus, Proclus affirms that the life of the soul is caused not by the wholeness of Intellect but by its different aspects and their interaction.

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