Notes on Plotinus, Ennead I, Tractates 6-9

Tractate 6:

1. To the thesis that beauty is symmetry, numerous objections are raised.
2. All the beauty of this world comes from participation in Form.
   a. Form coordinates diversity into unity
3. The soul recognizes the similarity of the Form in things to the Idea in the realm of mind, and thus perceives beauty.
   a. Thus also the beauty of color and sound (harmony).
4. There is also the beauty of virtue.
5. Soul becomes ugly by sinking into matter.
6. All virtue is purification and becoming like the divine.
7. One must ascend to the Good and to Beauty Itself.
8. To “attain the fatherland” (allegorical interpretation of the Odyssey) one must renounce the beauties of bodies and within oneself call upon a different vision.
9. One must cultivate virtue, in order to become inwardly beautiful. Then, since like knows like, one will be enabled to recognize the beauty of Mind, and ultimately of the One.

Tractate 7:

1. The good of an entity is its natural act. Because the soul is essentially a best, its act is the unqualified good. The good is such, not by directing its act toward others, but by being that towards which all others direct their acts. Others possess it be assimilating themselves to it, and by directing their acts towards it. It is not good by act, but by rest. Being unmoved, it moves all.
2. How are things aligned towards the good? The soulless by being directed towards soul, the soul by being directed towards mind. Life is the good of the living, and intellection the good of mind.
3. Life in the body is not of itself good, but only when virtuous.

Tractate 8:

1. We perceive evil by the same faculty as good, even though it is not that to which this faculty is directed as a good, because evil is the contrary of good.
2. The good is the self-sufficient source and measure of all things. The good is beyond beautiful, beyond the highest, beyond intellect. The first act is the act of the good stationary within itself, and the first existence is the self-contained existence of the good. Intellect circles good, and soul circles intellect, and through it sees good. If this were all, there would be no evil.
3. Evil must be a mode of non-being. Not pure non-being, but something far removed from being. The sense-world, or something even more remote. Formlessness. Absolute formlessness, in which all evil in order to be evil must participate. What is beneath all formedness.
4. Body, in that it partakes of matter, is evil. It resists orderly movement. Soul, on the other hand, is good. The evil soul has entered into the service of body. Not only embodied, but having its intellect obscured, so that it attends not to essence but to process. By contrast, the pure soul has turned to intellect.

5. Evil is not just any lack, but only absolute lack. Matter is really not being at all, but only called being. Sickness, ugliness, and poverty, are all derived for the soul from body and thus matter. We are not evil in ourselves. Vice in us is not absolute evil. Those who defeat evil do so by means of that in them that is not material.

6. We must not flee life, but only vice. The disputant in the dialogue ? says, “There must be evil, for it is the contrary of good.” (I think this is the Timaeus.) This contrariety is the extreme of remoteness.

7. Evil is necessary because what is purely receptive of form is necessary for the wholeness of the all. (?) The escape of the created gods is not a place, but a virtue. (God confers on them the power of immortality, which they do not have of their own nature.) There must be a last extent of the outflowing from the good—this is evil.

8. Some say that wicked desires are due to some form. But form in matter becomes corrupted through that matter.

9. How do we know good and evil? Vice? Vice is known by the ruler of virtue. Formlessness by the measure of form. As vision to see darkness, must withdraw itself from its object, so with mind.

10. How can what is without quality have the quality of evil? Matter is a substratum devoid of quality, and therefore has the quality of evil. The soul dies, at for a time, by wallowing in formlessness.

11. The cause of weakness of soul is entry into matter.

12. Evil is not evil alone—it has the appearance of good.

Tractate 9 (According to Armstrong, not authentically Plotinian.)

1. The violence entailed by suicide harms the soul.