

Is Rational Mysticism Compatible with Feminism?

A critical examination of Plotinus and Kashani

A thesis
submitted in fulfilment
of the requirements for the Degree
of
Ph.D. in Philosophy
in the
University of Canterbury
by
Elisabeth Jane Cooper

University of Canterbury

2006

ABSTRACT

Plotinus (3rd century C.E.) and Afdal al-Din Kashani (12th century C.E.) each posit that the highest human goal is to become aware of the ultimate unity of reality. Both are *rational mystics*, and each describes a rigorous moral and intellectual training through which alone a human can achieve the goal. Seldom studied as a field in itself, rational mysticism offers a vision of philosophy that combines reason, intuition, virtuous practice, and mystical awareness.

The relatively young discipline of feminist philosophy is both a response to what its practitioners see as male prejudice in past and present philosophical theories and an attempt to forge new, inclusive theories. Plato and Aristotle, among others, are called to account for their alleged contributions to the philosophically common representation of women as less rational than men, and to the development of philosophical and theological paradigms reflecting a male perspective. Since Plotinus and Kashani both owe much to Plato and Aristotle, including significant elements of how they conceptualise human nature and the nature of ultimate reality, it might be expected that they would incur the same criticisms. So far, however, little feminist attention as such has been paid to Plotinus and the rational mystics of the Islamic tradition, and almost none to Kashani. My examination of these two figures is an attempt to rectify this neglect.

In addition, for the first time in a feminist historical critique of this kind, a diversity of feminist perspectives is taken into account. Thus, the question ‘Is rational mysticism compatible with feminism?’ will be seen to yield a somewhat different answer according to which group of feminists is in view. In offering a revisionist interpretation of Plotinus and Kashani, I aim first to establish which of their theses are consistent with feminist theses; second, to determine whether the consistency of theses is significantly affected, in Kashani’s case, by the additional influence of Islamic religion; and third, to identify which group or sub-group of feminists could find in rational mysticism resources for reconstructive work in philosophy.

I thereby aim to enrich the understanding of both rational mysticism and feminism.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Medals are due to all my supervisors, for their incredible generosity of time and expertise, and for being willing to support me in such a multidisciplinary project. My unreserved thanks and abiding admiration go to Diane Proudfoot, Philip Catton, and Ghazala Anwar. Diane, who has probably lost count of the times she had to talk me out of abandoning ship, guided me through the latter half of the project with enormous patience, challenging me relentlessly at every stage to greater precision and coherence in my writing. Philip also stepped in half way through; his encouragement, expansiveness, and insight into implications of my project of which I myself was only dimly aware have been a source of continuing inspiration and hope. Ghazala has been involved from the beginning in her capacity as a specialist in Islamic studies and feminism. Always provocative, she has expanded my thinking and has helped to keep my feet on the ground with regard to issues of social justice. Her stimulating undergraduate and honours classes nurtured my interest in Islamic mysticism and philosophy, as did those of Bill Shepard before her.

Considerable thanks are due to Paul Studtmann, my senior supervisor for the first two years until he left to take up an appointment overseas, for his encouragement and guidance in the early stages. Tom Bestor also deserves special mention, for his willingness to discuss and clarify Platonic concepts on a number of occasions.

I have been extremely fortunate to have the help of William Chittick at the State University of New York (Stony Brook) as a reader of my work on Kashani. As the foremost Western interpreter of Kashani (and many other Islamic philosophers), he has given indispensable guidance and constructive criticism. I greatly appreciate his generosity in agreeing to advise me on this part of my project.

Beyond these, I am grateful to all the members of the School of Philosophy and Religious Studies for their teaching, encouragement, and friendship over more than 8 years since I started at Canterbury as a mature undergraduate. Special thanks go to Cynthia Macdonald and Carolyn Mason for their supportive friendship, to John Eggleston for alerting me to a number of useful and relevant sources, and to Carol Hiller for her ready and friendly help on the administrative side over the years.

Thanks are also due to Julie Wuthnow, of the Gender Studies department, who gave me some helpful direction when I decided to introduce a feminist component to the project; and to Louise Antony, of the University of New Hampshire, who endeavoured to connect me with good 'role models' in feminist philosophy.

Hazel Ashton and Marie Meyer have given invaluable peer support during my years of study, contributing helpful insights from the perspective of other disciplines. I am also grateful to my many friends at St Giles who have urged me on, and forever indebted to my long-suffering family, Nigel, Liz and Willem and Bella, and Francis, for their support and forbearance.

This work has been made possible by a University of Canterbury Doctoral Scholarship.

March 31, 2006
Christchurch, New Zealand

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	iv
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	v
PREFACE.....	viii
Précis of the chapters.....	x
CHAPTER 1: CONFLICTING IDEALS?.....	1
1.1 Defining rational mysticism.....	2
1.1.1 A provisional definition and two examples.....	2
1.1.2 Neoplatonism: harmonising Plato with Aristotle.....	4
1.1.3 Problems with the definition and ascription of ‘mystic’.....	7
1.1.4 History and merits of the concept of rational mysticism.....	11
1.2 Feminist perspectives relevant to a consideration of rational mysticism.....	16
1.2.1 ‘Gendering’ and ‘gender-coding’ in the history of philosophy.....	19
1.2.2 ‘Gendering’ in the history of mysticism.....	22
1.2.3 Potential conflicts between feminist perspectives and those of rational mysticism.....	26
1.2.4 Compatibility between rational mysticism and feminism.....	28
<i>PART 1: PLOTINUS</i>	30
CHAPTER 2: THE OVERFLOW OF UNITY.....	31
2.1 The ‘two-world’ criticism and how Plotinus may be seen to undermine it.....	32
2.1.1 The criticism as applied to Plato.....	32
2.1.2 How the Plotinian framework of reality expresses hierarchy.....	34
2.1.3 Is Plotinus’s metaphysical framework gendered, or gender-coded?.....	41
2.2 The ‘body’ criticism and why Plotinus’s attitude to the body is not gender- coded.....	43
2.3 The ‘divine transcendence’ and ‘unity over multiplicity’ objections.....	47
2.3.1 Non-dominant transcendence of the One.....	50
2.3.2 Immanence of the One.....	51
2.3.3 A Feuerbachian reversal of Platonic doctrine?.....	54
2.3.4 Some problems with continuity and immanence.....	58
Conclusions.....	59
CHAPTER 3: TRANSCENDING KNOWLEDGE.....	61
Introduction.....	61
3.1 The relationship between knowledge and experience in Plotinus.....	61
3.1.1 ‘Knowledge’ and ‘experience’ defined.....	61
3.1.2 The Plotinian path to knowledge and its relationship to experience.....	64
3.1.3 Interpreting Plotinus’s rational ascent as mystical.....	70
3.2 Feminist criticisms of the Platonic account of knowledge: do they apply to Plotinus?.....	74
3.2.1 The argument that the Platonic ideal of rationality is ‘masculine’.....	75
3.2.2 The argument that homoerotic imagery in the Platonic ascent to knowledge conceptually excludes women.....	77
3.2.3 The argument that Platonic soul-body dualism discriminates against women as knowers.....	79

3.2.4 The argument that the Platonic knowledge/experience dichotomy discriminates against women.....	83
Conclusions	89
CHAPTER 4: PERFECTING THE SOUL: OTHERWORLDLY OR CONDUCTIVE TO ENGAGEMENT?	90
4.1 Plotinus’s eudaimonistic ethic: cultivating the self-sufficient soul	91
4.1.1 How virtue contributes to the human good	91
4.1.2 Levels of virtue	93
4.2 ‘Otherworldliness’ and self-sufficiency versus social justice and caring	97
4.3 Motivating ethical engagement in Plotinus’s rational mysticism.....	100
4.3.1 Attempts so far	100
4.3.2 A new proposal: virtuous practice in relation to sharers of one soul	103
4.4 Some problems with a ‘shared soul’ ethic from various feminist perspectives	107
4.4.1 De-identifying with the body	107
4.4.2 Disregard for individual particularity.....	108
4.4.3 No solution to ‘otherworldliness’?.....	111
Conclusions	112
<i>PART II: KASHANI</i>	114
CHAPTER 5: HIERARCHIES OF ACTUALISATION	115
5.1 Background to Kashani’s metaphysical system	115
5.1.1 How sexism is associated with Aristotelian frameworks	115
5.1.2 Koranic cosmology: sexist, non-sexist, or gendered?	120
5.2 Kashani’s conception of the nature of ultimate reality: oppressive or enabling?	126
5.2.1 Is gender implicated in Kashani’s conception of the Divine?	126
5.2.2 The God/world relationship: incomparability or similarity, transcendence or immanence?.....	130
5.3 Kashani’s ‘levels of existence’: a hierarchy of domination or actualisation?	135
5.3.1 Levels of existence	135
5.3.2 Kashani’s use of metaphor in describing the hierarchical structure of reality	137
5.3.3 Activity and receptivity: a gendered distinction?	142
5.4 Could the ‘human goal’ include female humans?	145
5.4.1 What is a human being?	145
5.4.2 Is Kashani’s conception of the human goal masculine?.....	147
Conclusions	150
CHAPTER 6: ALL-EMBRACING SELF-KNOWLEDGE.....	151
6.1 Kashani’s conception of self-knowledge	151
6.1.1 Defining ‘self’	152
6.1.2 Defining ‘knowledge’	153
6.1.3 Conjunction with the divine Intellect.....	156
6.1.4 ‘Self-knowledge’	159
6.2 How self-knowledge relates to rational mysticism.....	161
6.3 Feminist concerns arising from a conception of self-knowledge as knowledge of universals	164
6.3.1 Universals – a male pursuit?.....	166

6.3.2 Is Kashani’s ideal of self-knowledge body-denying, and if so, is it sexist?	169
6.3.3 Is the focus on intellect in Kashani’s goal of self-knowledge elitist?	173
6.3.4 Does the conception of self-knowledge as knowledge of universals compromise individuality?.....	176
Conclusions	178
CHAPTER 7: THE IMPORTANCE OF THE PRACTICAL INTELLECT.....	179
7.1 Is Kashani’s rational mysticism compatible with ethical social engagement?	179
7.1.1 Virtuous practice as preparation for self-knowledge	180
7.1.2 Virtuous practice as outcome of self- knowledge.....	186
7.2 Is Kashani’s ‘kingship’ model compatible with social justice?	189
7.2.1 Kashani’s conception of kingly justice	189
7.2.2 Implications of kingly justice for social justice	192
7.3 Is Kashani’s rational mysticism compatible with seeking political liberation?	193
Conclusions	198
CHAPTER 8: COMPATIBILITY AND BEYOND	199
8.1 Results of the enquiry	199
8.2 Implications of the analysis.....	208
8.3 The alliance of spirituality and rationality	211
REFERENCES.....	216

PREFACE

Can we find any agreement between practitioners of rational mysticism and contemporary feminist philosophers? At first glance, the notion of rational mysticism itself might seem to be a contradiction in terms: mysticism is surely the epitome of non-rational activity. Investigation of Neoplatonism and the medieval Islamic intellectual tradition, however, reveals a widespread belief that the culmination of doing philosophy correctly was an experience we might today label as mystical. In other words, a person who undertook a disciplined rational enquiry into the nature of reality could expect to be rewarded with an experience of union with the source of all reality.

It might further be thought that rational mysticism is a surprising partner to find in dialogue with contemporary feminist philosophy. The record of known female practitioners of the discipline of rational mysticism is slight. Furthermore, feminist philosophers of varying theoretical perspectives have criticised positions analogous to those of rational mysticism in Plato and Aristotle, as well as in monotheistic theology. (For the purposes of this dissertation, I have selected four feminist perspectives that are represented by these critics: namely liberal feminism, socialist feminism, psychoanalytic feminism, and radical feminism.) Rational mysticism, in traditions of and traditions influenced by Neoplatonism, assumes a hierarchical metaphysical framework, promotes the identification of the self with the soul or the intellect rather than the body, and focuses on individual perfection as its ethical goal. Feminism, on the other hand, is primarily a movement to end women's subordination: to that end it is profoundly concerned with social justice and identifying the historical roots of oppression. These roots are seen to include the social and philosophical construction

of gender, whereby maleness is associated with reason, the mind, and dominance. In contrast, femaleness is associated with the emotions, the body, and passivity, and defined in relation to the male.

The history of philosophy has furnished feminist philosophers with many opportunities for exposing explicit and implicit sexism in the theories of its male practitioners. (For the purposes of this dissertation, I define as ‘sexist’ those attitudes, theories, and practices that discriminate negatively against people on the basis of their biological sex.) The history of mysticism, on the other hand, has afforded ‘feminist-friendly’ examples of female and male practitioners who challenged current gender stereotypes in ways both practical and theoretical. So far, however, feminists have not examined, as such, an area that unites these two domains: rational mysticism. It is my contention that there are areas of common ground between each of the designated groups of feminist philosophers and the writings of two representative rational mystics, the 3rd century Neoplatonist, Plotinus, and the 12th century Islamic philosopher, Afdal al-Din Kashani.

The questions structuring my enquiry are these: What features of rational mysticism appear problematic from a feminist perspective, and why? How are these features handled in the metaphysics, epistemology and ethics of Plotinus and Kashani? In what ways can the teachings of each be seen to be conceptually inclusive or exclusive of women, either as compared to the way in which feminists have read analogous doctrines in Plato, Aristotle and Christian and Islamic theology, or in their own right? Are the differences between Plotinus and Kashani’s teachings salient from the perspective of gender-inclusiveness? Can these philosophers be seen as contributing to a gender-inclusive, life-affirming, ecologically responsible perspective for the 21st century? By using these questions to frame the chapters on Plotinus and

Kashani respectively, I aim to identify points of divergence and similarity between rational mystic and feminist positions.

My reason for introducing feminist critiques of Plato, Aristotle, and certain monotheistic doctrines into the discussion is to illustrate the kinds of questions that arise from concern about sexism in connection with rational mysticism. I shall use these existing critiques as a foil for my own exegesis of Plotinus and Kashani, with a view to showing how Plotinus and Kashani either merit or escape the criticisms. In some cases, I shall argue that the criticisms themselves are ill-founded.

The diversity of feminist perspectives makes it difficult, if not impossible, to generalise about what unites them, beyond opposition to sexism. The most significant division among feminists is between those who believe that human nature transcends the differences of biological sex, and those who posit different natures for men and women. Within these divisions are further divisions based on differing theories about the sources of gender difference or the causes of women's oppression. As a result, there is little agreement on what constitutes sexist bias or even 'a feminist perspective'. For this reason, the conclusions of my enquiry will have to take into account differences between feminist perspectives that I am bringing to bear on Plotinus and Kashani. Some aspects of these rational mystics' teachings will be congenial to one group of feminists and not to another; few aspects if any will elicit a universal response.

Précis of the chapters

Chapter 1 is an introduction to the major terms of the enquiry: rational mysticism and feminism. I define rational mysticism with reference to Plotinus and

Kashani in particular, and the synthesising project of Neoplatonism in general. I then discuss some controversial aspects of the definition and use of the term ‘mysticism’, and ultimately defend the aptness of the category of rational mysticism for Plotinus and Kashani. My treatment of feminism begins by outlining the four feminist theoretical perspectives that will feature in the examination of rational mysticism. Following this, I consider some ways in which gender bias is seen to operate in the history of philosophy and the history of mysticism. Against this background, I identify areas of apparent conflict between feminism and rational mysticism, and state my intention to discover whether the tension remains on closer examination of Plotinus and Kashani.

Chapter 2 explores the question of whether the hierarchical metaphysical system underlying Plotinus’s rational mysticism conceptually excludes or denigrates women. I examine his metaphysical levels of reality, his view of the body, and his conception of the nature of the One in the light of criticisms feminists have raised against Platonic conceptualisations in these areas, on the grounds that they either privilege a male perspective on reality or lend conceptual support to unjust social structures. In the case of the first two objections, I elucidate the motivations for Plotinus’s hierarchical distinctions according to his positing unity as the criterion of value. I argue that while this necessitates his prioritising intelligible over sensible realities, there is no explicit connection in his writings between these hierarchies and gender hierarchy; furthermore, I offer reasons for thinking that he would in principle oppose such a connection being made. In response to the third criticism, which relates primarily to alleged connection between male dominance and formulations of divine transcendence, I draw attention to distinctive features of Plotinus’s description of the One that in my view repel any authoritarian connotations.

In chapter 3, I examine the relationship between knowledge and mystical experience in Plotinus's epistemology, and what implications this may have for responding to concerns raised by feminists in relation to the Platonic account of knowledge. Defending the interpretation of Plotinus's rational ascent as mystical against the view of one prominent scholar that mysticism is peripheral to an understanding of Plotinus's philosophy, I then show how his conception of knowledge as experiential and intuitive undermines what has been seen as the hegemony of a masculine ideal of rationality. In addition, I evaluate Plotinus's epistemology in the light of criticisms that 1) the use of homoerotic imagery, 2) the association of the body with women, and the privileging of knowledge over experience in Platonic accounts of knowledge conceptually exclude women's participation.

The question posed in chapter 4 is whether Plotinian ethics are compatible with a feminist commitment to social justice, and with the ideals of caring and empathy. I contrast Plotinus's eudaimonistic ethical theory with Aristotle's eudaimonism, noting that Plotinus's account of human wellbeing lacks reference to the sociality that is important for Aristotle's account. I then assess criticisms of Plotinian ethics as 'self-centred and otherworldly', acknowledging that if these can be sustained, there would be little to commend his ethics to anyone concerned with social justice. In surveying alternative, more favourable interpretations, I discern a motivational gap which I then attempt to fill with a proposal of my own.

In chapters 5, 6, and 7, the focus shifts from Plotinus to Kashani. Chapter 5 launches an original investigation into the extent to which gender is implicated in Kashani's hierarchical metaphysics, in particular in his conceptions of the divine nature, the relationship between the levels of existence, and the human goal. I set the

stage by outlining feminist critiques of sexism in two hierarchical ontologies that influenced Kashani's, namely those of Aristotle and Koranic discourse. In both cases, I argue in support of the view that sexism is in principle detachable from the texts in question. In this connection I also discuss a 'Taoist' interpretation of gender attributions in the Islamic intellectual tradition, according to which attributing allegedly masculine and feminine characteristics to humans and to God is tied to cosmic gender principles rather than biological sex. I argue that while the assumptions about gender underlying this interpretation would be questioned by many feminists, the resulting attributions require us to interpret some of Kashani's concepts as being gendered without their being sexist. This turns out to be important for evaluating whether his conception of God and of the levels of reality have prejudicial implications for women. Lastly, I consider reasons why his formulation of the human goal may or may not be seen to include women.

In Chapter 6, I enquire whether self-knowledge, as the goal of Kashani's rational mysticism, falls prey to feminist criticisms of a 'masculine' ideal. Defining self-knowledge leads into considering how Neoplatonic Islamic philosophers typically construe the highest philosophical attainment as conjunction with the divine Intellect, as compared with Plotinus's aim of union with the prior One, and what implications if any this difference has for the gender-inclusiveness of Kashani's philosophical goal. I then conduct an original analysis of self-knowledge from the perspective of whether it tends towards a 'separative' orientation, as has been claimed of the pursuit of abstract knowledge; whether it implies a negative evaluation of the body and women; whether its intellectual focus is elitist; and whether the resulting 'universal' perspective implies loss of individuality.

The topic of chapter 7 is the extent to which Kashani's rational mysticism may be seen to foster an engaged ethical orientation. I argue that, in contrast to Plotinus, Kashani's emphasis on the actualisation of the practical intellect through virtuous practice displays a more obvious concern with the social sphere; I attribute this to the influences on Kashani of Aristotelian and Koranic ethics. I then discuss his analogy of ideal kingship with self-governance and enquire what implications may be drawn from the model for his conception of social justice, as well as for his conception of self-governance. Finally, I examine whether his rational mysticism is compatible with a liberatory stance such as that of feminism.

In Chapter 8, I analyse the results of the enquiry into the compatibility of rational mysticism with feminism. The analysis summarises the major concerns pertinent to each group of feminists, the differences and similarities between relevant theses of Plotinus and Kashani, and which areas of tension are resolved as a result of the revisionist interpretation. I then discuss the significance of the remaining areas of tension for each group of feminists, and conclude with some brief remarks looking beyond compatibility to ways in which rational mysticism can be a resource to a particular group of feminists.

CHAPTER 1: CONFLICTING IDEALS?

The central question this dissertation addresses is whether rational mysticism, as exemplified by Plotinus and Afdal al-Din Kashani, is compatible with feminism. In this introductory chapter, I aim to clarify the terms involved in this question, to provide some background to the two main philosophers under consideration, and to show why the question is an interesting and important one. I begin by stipulating a definition of rational mysticism as exemplified by Plotinus and Kashani, with reference to the wider project of Neoplatonism (§1.1). I then show why existing definitions of ‘mysticism’ fail to do justice to the kind of activity in which Plotinus and Kashani are engaged, and why, as a result, some scholars have been reluctant to ascribe the term ‘mystic’ to such philosophers. Following this, I briefly survey historical usage of the term ‘rational mysticism’ in both the western (European) and the Islamic tradition (§1.2).

The next section focuses on feminism’s relationship with philosophy, mysticism, and rational mysticism. After delineating the main groups of feminists whose views will be represented in this dissertation, I examine a major focus of feminist criticism in the history of philosophy, namely the association of rationality with maleness and of the contrary of rationality with femaleness. I then briefly survey a parallel differentiation among types of mysticism according to gender, and some feminist responses. From these discussions I select three major areas of concern that I take to be relevant to a feminist consideration of rational mysticism, and point to the apparent tension between feminist positions and the assumptions underlying the rational mysticism of Plotinus and Kashani (§1.3). Finally, I explain what I see as the significance of bringing together the perspectives of Plotinus, Kashani, and

contemporary feminists concerned with issues of social justice, and in what sense it is appropriate to speak of ‘compatibility’ (§1.4).

1.1 Defining rational mysticism

1.1.1 A provisional definition and two examples

I define ‘rational mysticism’ as the thesis that the climax of rational thought is an experience of contact or union with what is conceived to be the ultimate reality to which human beings can aspire. The experience, and the theory underlying it, is best explained with reference to actual exemplars. Plotinus’s teaching on the goal of philosophy may be summarised as follows. Embodied existence for the human soul can lead to forgetfulness of one’s divine nature and of the source of one’s being, ‘the One’. The remedy for this condition is to strive to become godlike, a state he defines, quoting Plato, as becoming ‘righteous and holy with the help of wisdom’ (*Enneads* I 2,1,4-5).¹ The whole of Plotinus’s teaching, as recorded in the *Enneads* (his philosophical treatises, collected and edited by his student, Porphyry) aims at helping people achieve this end. Plotinus offers a method by which a person can progress, through steps of moral and intellectual training, to awareness of the source of reality through awareness of the true nature of the self as a rational soul. The philosophical ideal, thus construed, is the climax of a series of shifts in self-identification: from body to soul, from soul to intellect, and finally, as intellect, uniting with the One (V 1,2,1-5,4).

Accomplishing these transitions is not, for Plotinus, a straightforward matter of decision to do so, or of accepting dogmatic conclusions. Rather, students have to be brought, through patient explanation, reasoning, and exposure to alternative, less

¹ All references to the *Enneads* and to Porphyry’s *Life of Plotinus* (hereafter *LoP*) are from *Plotinus*, Vols I-VII (Armstrong’s translation) and are given in parentheses in the text.

satisfactory theories, to understand why they should see things differently. Accordingly, the treatises themselves demonstrate the kind of rational exercise in which human beings must engage in order to advance to higher levels of understanding. This might not seem unlike modern academic teaching procedure, except for three very distinctive features. First, the prerequisite for the course is the cultivation of moral virtue, specifically the Platonic virtues of courage, self-control, justice and wisdom; second, the acquisition of knowledge is understood as transformative; and third, the final stage of the process requires transcendence of knowledge. Rising above knowledge to unite with the One is, for Plotinus, the crowning achievement of the philosophical quest.

Kashani articulates the human goal in similar terms, except that for him, the ultimate philosophical achievement is self-knowledge. Like Plotinus, Kashani believes that the ‘true’ self is a rational soul with the potential for awareness and knowledge, and that actualising this potential transforms the human soul into an intellect that is identical with everything it knows (*HIP* 156-7).² Hence, his conception of self-knowledge turns out to be both a species of awareness (omniscience) and a mode of existence in which the self is unified with all the objects of its thought. Unlike the pagan Plotinus, however, Kashani, as a Muslim, does not ostensibly take the further step of recommending union with the ultimate source of reality, the God of Koranic revelation. A further consequence of Kashani’s Islamic orientation is his emphasis on the cultivation of admirable character traits as the prerequisite for knowledge: his ethical prescriptions, combining Koranic and

² All citations of and quotations from Kashani, as translated by Chittick in *The Heart of Islamic Philosophy* (2001), will be referenced henceforth with the abbreviation *HIP* followed by the page numbers (or just the page numbers where the title ascription is obvious). Citations of and quotations from Chittick’s introductory chapters on Islamic philosophy in the same work will be referenced as Chittick 2001 (or just 2001, where the author ascription is obvious) followed by the page numbers.

Aristotelian virtues, display a more obvious social dimension than is at first apparent in Plotinus (*HIP* 131-4, 136, 185, 266-8).

In describing Plotinus and Kashani as rational mystics, I am making two claims. First, and uncontroversially, they are philosophers for whom the nature of reality has a rational structure that the mind can access intuitively; secondly, and more controversially, they are a species of mystic. Why this is controversial I go on to show below (§1.1.3). Regarding the first claim, some qualification to the use of the term ‘philosopher’ is necessary to dispel the idea that Plotinus and Kashani pursued their craft in the style of modern academic philosophers (Kenney 1997, 315). Rather, philosophy in late antiquity (and arguably also in the medieval Islamic tradition) implied moving towards a transcendent vision by means of meditative exercises: the relationship between theory and practice was integral to the discipline (Hadot 1995, 59-60). Both Plotinus and Kashani, in their respective eras, were exemplary figures whose wisdom and counsel was sought by leaders as well as by their own circles of followers.³

1.1.2 Neoplatonism: harmonising Plato with Aristotle

Plotinus’s and Kashani’s philosophies typify the synthetic orientation of Neoplatonism. A significant feature of this school of thought is the attempted harmonisation of the philosophies of Plato and Aristotle. Whether the attempt was implicit, as in the case of Plotinus, or explicit, as in the work of Porphyry and subsequent figures such as Iamblichus, Syrianus, Proclus, and Simplicius, the resulting synthesis formed the basis of a systematic philosophy aimed at purifying and educating the soul and leading it to a state of direct, unified awareness of reality. This development, though anticipated in some respects by the Middle Platonists, began in

³ For Plotinus’s reputation as a confidante and advisor of dignitaries, see especially *LoP* 7-12;

earnest with Ammonias Saccas in the early part of the third century (Gatti 1996, 16); however, since Ammonias committed nothing to writing, the first extant indications are to be found in the work of his pupil, Plotinus. Although the latter thought of himself as a faithful follower of Plato and was openly critical of Aristotle on many points, his metaphysical structure incorporates a number of Aristotelian features, most notably the identification of the divine Intellect with self-thinking (V 3,5,45-50; cf. *Metaphysics* 12, 1072b18-21⁴). Plotinus rejected the Middle Platonists' identification of Plato's Demiurge with the Form of the Good, and instead identified the Demiurge, as divine Intellect, with Aristotle's *nous* and with Plato's world of Forms (V I,8,1-8; II 3,18,15; V 5,1). In this way, Plotinus was able to construe the self-thinking of *nous* as direct awareness of the Forms, both for the divine Intellect and for human intellects insofar as they could attain to this level (V 4,2,46-50; V 8,10,10-23; see also D'Ancona 2005, 12). The stage was thus set for a mystical development in Platonic philosophy, culminating in Plotinus's arguments for a pre-eminent source of reality (the One), knowable only by means of experiential union.⁵

Although few women had the opportunity to become philosophers in Antiquity (or indeed until relatively recently), a notable exception in 5th century Alexandria was the brilliant mathematician and philosopher, Hypatia. A leader of the Neoplatonic school there, Hypatia continued the tradition of expounding both of the great masters

⁴ Citations of and quotations from Aristotle are taken from Barnes's translation (1984), Vols. 1 and 2, unless otherwise stated.

⁵ It may be objected, of course, that Plato's philosophy was already mystical before the advent of Saccas and Plotinus. On the basis of Plato's description of contemplation (*theoria*) of the Good as the soul's ultimate felicity (e.g. in the 'Allegory of the Cave' at *Republic* 514a-513b), and the account of the ascent to Beauty (*Symposium* 210a-212a), McGinn, for example, sees every reason to ascribe to Plato 'the kind of rational or intellectual mysticism that has been affirmed of a number of Neoaristotelian and Neoplatonic authors' (McGinn 1991, 34). While I would agree with McGinn that the *tenor* of the above-mentioned passages is mystical, Plato nowhere offers a systematic account either of the structure of reality in which the philosophical ascent takes place or of the moral and intellectual preparation required. Plotinus is the first Platonist to provide such an account, and arguably was able to do so at least in part because of his incorporation of Aristotelian elements, as mentioned above.

(Dzielska 1995). Although none of her written works survive – due, in all probability, to the hostility of a particular political faction towards her, resulting in her assassination – contemporary accounts pay tribute to her academic and social standing. According to the ecclesiastical historian Socrates Scholasticus, Hypatia ‘achieved such heights of erudition that she surpassed all the philosophers of her time, succeeded to the Platonic school derived from Plotinus, and delivered all the philosophy lectures to those who wished to listen’ (Socrates Scholasticus, quoted in *ibid.*, 56). A student, Damascius, states that Hypatia ‘explained publicly the writings of Plato or Aristotle, or any other philosopher’ (Damascius, quoted in *ibid.*, 56). He also testifies to the respect in which Hypatia was held as a public figure: politicians regularly sought her advice and attended her lectures (Damascius, cited in *ibid.*, 38).

Furthermore, Hypatia’s teaching appears to have had a distinctly mystical emphasis. A prominent student, Synesius of Cyrene, describes her as a ‘genuine guide’ (a title connoting personal holiness and spiritual authority) who taught her students to regard philosophy as ‘sacred ... the most ineffable of ineffable things’ (Synesius, quoted in Dzielska 1995, 47, 49). Relating the teaching he has received from Hypatia, Synesius speaks of ‘the true life’ as always ruled by reason, first ‘using its cognitive tools to seek eternal wisdom’, then ‘submitting to ecstasy to elevate oneself into another dimension of existence and to direct merging with the One’ (Synesius, cited in *ibid.*, 49). Hypatia may thus be seen to continue the Neoplatonic synthesising of Platonic and Aristotelian teachings into a mystical philosophy.

The spread of Neoplatonism into non-Hellenic areas owed much to political developments associated first with Christianity and later with Islam. Under the growing influence of Christianity in both Athens and Alexandria, Platonism became increasingly suspect and was finally banned from being taught publicly in 529 C.E.

(D’Ancona 2005, 17). Already by this time, Greek sciences had begun to move eastwards, and philosophical texts were being translated into Semitic languages. With the spread of Muslim rule from the late 7th century across north Africa and Asia Minor, Greek philosophy, especially in its Aristotle-focused Alexandrian form, became assimilated into the Arabic-speaking world. Most of the philosophical texts translated into Arabic during the period of translation centred in Baghdad (8th - 10th centuries C.E.) were treatises by or attributed to Aristotle, or commentaries thereon (Adamson and Taylor 2005, 1).

It has been claimed that the Greek work of most decisive influence on the course of philosophical thought in the Islamic milieu from the ninth century onwards was the so-called *Theology of Aristotle* (Fakhry 1970, 32; D’Ancona 2005, 10). Translated around the same time as the *Metaphysics* by Na’imah of Emessa, the *Theology* is in fact an epitome of Books IV, V, and VI of Plotinus’s *Enneads*. Its Greek author is unknown, although Porphyry’s name has been associated with it (Adamson 2002). Thus, Plotinus played a crucial, if at the time unacknowledged role in the development of Islamic philosophy.

1.1.3 Problems with the definition and ascription of ‘mystic’

The designation of Plotinus and Kashani as mystics is contentious because of the lack of scholarly consensus on how, and indeed whether ‘mysticism’ can be defined. Some scholars have no hesitation in describing Plotinus as a mystic; others want to exempt him from the category, while a third group wants to redefine mysticism to accommodate his ‘type’. In Kashani’s case, uncertainty about the ascription of mystic also includes the question of whether he is to be associated with the specifically Islamic form of mysticism, Sufism (I discuss this below, §1.1.4). After a few remarks about the origins of the term ‘mysticism’, I shall briefly indicate

recent debates about its definition and about the appropriateness of the term for rationalist philosophers, before giving my own view.

Derived from the Greek term, *mueîn*, meaning ‘to remain silent’, the term ‘mystical’ referred in antiquity to the Greek ‘mysteries’ or secret religious rites.⁶ Associated in the middle ages with the discernment of hidden meanings in Christian scripture, the concept of mysticism evolved in modernity into a transcultural category of religious experience (Schmidt 2003). Over the last century, efforts to define mysticism have swung between the extremes of an exclusive focus on allegedly universal characteristics of mystical experience on the one hand (e.g. James [1902] 1985, Stace 1960), and an exclusive focus on context-specific theoretical underpinnings on the other (Steven Katz 1978). How one defines mysticism is clearly crucial in determining whether or not the ascription of ‘mystic’ is appropriate to a particular person.

For James and Stace, mysticism is to be defined in terms of experience. James characterises the experience of mysticism as ‘the overcoming of all usual barriers between the individual and the Absolute’, and as marked by the features of ‘ineffability, a noetic quality, transience and passivity’ (James 1985 [1902], 302, 332). Speaking more generally of religious experience, he describes it as ‘the sense of one’s higher part being continuous with a *more* of the same quality, which is operative in the universe outside of him’. This ‘*more*’ he identifies with the ‘subconscious self’, the greater part of the self of which, he suggests, we are normally unaware and which is itself immersed in a dimension of existence quite other than the sensory world we inhabit yet capable of having effects on our conduct (ibid., 400-

⁶ Plotinus refers to a command given in ‘the mysteries’ (*musterion*) ‘not to disclose to the uninitiated’ (VI 9,11,2), and describes as *mustichôs* (translated ‘secretly’ by Armstrong) the way in which ancient wisdom was passed down (III 6,19,26).

406). Similarly, Stace offers a list of ‘common characteristics of mystical experiences’ that includes a unifying vision or unitary consciousness, the sense of objectivity, and a ‘feeling of the holy, sacred, or divine’ (Stace 1960, 131). Both James and Stace treat Plotinus as a paradigm ‘mystic’ according to their definitions.

For Katz, on the other hand, no useful definition of mysticism can be given except with reference to the doctrines of a particular tradition (1978, 51). Katz criticises James’s and Stace’s attempted definitions of mysticism for privileging experience over doctrine (the teachings of the tradition in question) in the effort to isolate a universal core of ‘unmediated experience’ (ibid., 26). In his view, mystical experiences are always conditioned by a prior belief system; there is no possibility of an experience that transcends thought and language (ibid., 62-63). By thus arguing against universalist definitions of mysticism on the ground that they illegitimately reduce the claims of mystics of different traditions to a set of supposedly common experiences, Katz performs a ‘reduction’ of his own, reducing mystical experience to doctrine.⁷

Despite a long tradition of scholarship identifying Plotinus as a mystic, some dissenting voices have been raised in recent decades. Given the tendency to associate mysticism with phenomenological accounts of ecstatic experiences, it has been claimed at least in relation to Plotinus that the term is either inappropriate or irrelevant to an understanding of his philosophy (Kenney 1997; Gerson 1994). Gerson doubts whether the ascription of ‘mystic’ adds anything to the intelligibility of Plotinus’s philosophy, arguing that the philosophy can be understood entirely in terms

⁷ For critical discussion of Katz’s claims, see King (1988). I disagree, however, with her claim that “‘mysticism” primarily has to do with a life and an experience, and only secondarily with a body of literature, or a philosophy based on the experience’ (ibid. 258). As I shall argue during the following chapters, experience is integral to the philosophy of the rational mystics with whom I am concerned here: neither experience nor the supporting philosophy can be said to be primary.

of cognition (Gerson 1994, 218-224). I shall return to Gerson's arguments in detail below (§3.1.3); however, I suspect that his rejection of the term 'mystic' for Plotinus reflects a restricted notion of its intension. More explicit is Kenney, who criticises as 'anachronistic' the tendency to understand Plotinus and his writings in terms of a current category such as 'mysticism', with its largely psychological connotations. According to Kenney, this results in an inappropriate focus on phenomenology at the expense of the 'moral, epistemic, ontological, and soteriological' aspects of the Plotinian ideal (Kenney 1997, 315).

While these critics have faulted the designation of Plotinus as a mystic, others have faulted definitions of mysticism that in their view *exclude* figures like Plotinus. Smith and McGinn criticise the focus on 'experience' in studies of mysticism, claiming that it privileges mystics whose mysticism was of an emotional, ecstatic character and fails to account for those who were also great rationalists (Smith 1983, 264; see also McGinn 1991, xiv).⁸

In my view the focus on experience, if inadequate, is nevertheless appropriate to mystics of the latter kind. Although theoretical underpinnings are all-important for Plotinus and Kashani, what distinguishes their philosophy from non-mystical philosophy is precisely its experiential character. What do I mean by this? In the first place, for these thinkers, knowledge of reality is based not on sensory evidence but on rational principles. Unlike the empiricist, for whom the senses are supposed to give direct awareness of the 'real' world, a strong rationalist like Plato or Plotinus holds that reality is only apprehended directly by the intellect. The allegedly immediate

⁸ Neither is this focus on experience limited to turn-of-the-century theorists like James: Gellman's recent article, 'Mysticism and Religious Experience' in *the Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Religion* (2005) is another case in point. Gellman opens with the statement: 'In modern usage, "mysticism" refers to mystical experience and to practices, discourse, institutions, and traditions associated therewith'. Yet the entire article focuses only on mystical experience and the history of its interpretation and classification.

character of the highest intellectual apprehension qualifies it as experiential. Furthermore, as I show below (§3.1), Plotinus in particular describes the upper reaches of the intellectual awareness in richly imagistic terms, borrowing the language of familiar sensory experiences to evoke the ‘feel’ of the unfamiliar experiences he is describing. Describing Plotinus and Kashani as mystics helps to convey the experiential nature of their philosophy; adding the further qualification of ‘rational’ indicates the foundation of reason upon which their mysticism rests.

1.1.4 History and merits of the concept of rational mysticism

The term ‘rational mysticism’ is surprisingly seldom used in connection with philosophers in the western (European) tradition. A more general category of ‘intellectual mysticism’ has sometimes been distinguished from the so-called ‘emotional mysticism’, associated in its more extreme forms with visions, trances, and raptures (see e.g. Stace 1969, 53-54). Some, however, have recognised that the distinction is not absolute in Plotinus’s case. Edman describes Plotinus’s ‘intellectual mysticism’ as ‘a unique fusion in Western thought of passionate mysticism with the consecutiveness and precision of the rationalistic metaphysician’ (1925, 54). Merlan’s treatment of the concept is the most thorough to date, although he nowhere precisely defines ‘rational mysticism’ as such. In *Monopsychism, Mysticism, Metaconsciousness* (1963), Merlan defines ‘mysticism’ as ‘a doctrine teaching that the highest moments of man’s existence are those of his absorption into whatever he takes the divine to be, and that this absorption, usually called ecstasy, is an experience *sui generis*, distinct from the ordinary human experiences’ (ibid., 1). He accepts a distinction by Madkour between the mystical ecstasy of the Sufis that is ‘a kind of leap and reversal of the “natural” cognitive process’ and that of the Arabic philosopher al-Farabi which is ‘a condition of reason in its perfection’, and which

Madkour terms ‘rationalist mysticism’ (Madkour (1934), quoted in Merlan 1963, 20). Merlan himself coins the term ‘rationalistic mysticism’ with specific reference to Aristotle, Alexander of Aphrodisias, Ibn Bajjah, and Averroes (Ibn Rushd), to indicate that ‘the god with whom we are united in ecstasy is not the God-above-thinking-and-being [as in Plotinus], but rather one who is thought-thinking-itself’ (Merlan 1963, 20-21 – bracketed insertion mine). On occasion, Merlan refers to ‘rational mysticism’ without further qualification (ibid., 21, 29); my conjecture is that for Merlan this indicates a broader category of which ‘rationalist’ and ‘rationalistic mysticism’ are subcategories.

The only recent analyses of rational or rationalist mysticism that I have been able to find in western philosophical literature are those of Smith (1983) and Schufreider (1994). As mentioned above (§1.1.3), Smith is critical of the bias towards description of experience in James’s definition of mysticism; in his view, this bias prevented James from being able to accommodate in his definition what Smith describes as ‘rationalistic mysticism’ (1983, 264). Smith goes on to account for the seeming paradox that ‘there can be a marriage of a certain kind of mysticism with the strongest sort of rationalism’ (ibid., 272). He points to the fact that, while many assume that all knowledge ‘*starts out* from immediate certainties of some sort’, rationalists such as Pythagoras, Plotinus, Bonaventure, Nicholas of Cusa, Spinoza, and Hegel believed that immediate knowledge comes *at the end* of an intellectual process:

This immediacy is a kind of intellectual apprehension, intimately tied to the rational process which brings it about. Mysticism and rationalism can come together because the process whereby the mind is led to the goal can be seen as a thoroughly rational one governed by clear logical transitions; only the goal itself is a final step beyond discursive thought, but it is a step that no one can take who has not passed through the dialectical development. The final seeing is done with the ‘eye’ of the mind. (Smith 1983, 272-3)

Although the example Smith goes on to consider in more detail is Bonaventure, his description of rational or rationalistic mysticism is entirely applicable to the philosophies of Plotinus and Kashani.

Schufreider uses the term ‘rational mysticism’ in connection with Anselm with two purposes in mind. First, he regards both rationality and mysticism as essential to a full understanding of Anselm’s thought, and therefore aims to keep them simultaneously in view (1994, 13). Second, he aims at clarifying the intension of the terms themselves through his application of them in this particular case:

We intend, then, to moderate our understanding of the possible meaning of mystical experience in view of the acuteness of reason’s vision of God, even as we aim to revise our ordinary understanding of human rationality by invoking its visionary capability. (ibid, 13)

It is with just such purposes in mind, *mutatis mutandis* (for ‘God’, read ‘the One’ in Plotinus, and ‘self’ or ‘intellect’ in Kashani) that the term ‘rational mysticism’ is being used in this dissertation.

The concept of rational mysticism has received more attention from commentators on the Islamic intellectual tradition, where philosophy and mysticism have remained uniquely intertwined. Fakhry describes their reciprocal influence within that tradition:

The mystical experience, it is often claimed, is distinct from the rational or the philosophical, and, less often, it is said to be contrary to it. But, whether it is distinct or not, it can hardly be irrelevant to man’s rational or philosophical aspirations, since it allegedly leads to the very object which reason seeks, namely, the total and supreme apprehension of reality. In fact, the history of Muslim mysticism is more closely bound up with that of philosophy than other forms of mysticism. The mysticism of some of the great Sufis, such as Ibn ‘Arabi (d. 1240), culminated in a grandiose cosmological and metaphysical world-scheme, which is of decisive philosophical significance. Conversely, the philosophical preoccupations of some philosophers, such as Ibn Bajjah (d. 1138) and Ibn Tufayl (d. 1185), led logically and inevitably to the conception of mystical experience (designated ‘illumination’) as the crowning of the process of reasoning. (Fakhry 1970, 7)

Elsewhere, Fakhry distinguishes between three types of mysticism in the Islamic tradition: the visionary, the unitary, and the philosophical or rational. Fakhry bases this analysis on the different objects of the mystical quest in each case, namely vision of God, union (*ittihad*) with God, and conjunction (*ittisal*) with the Active Intellect, an intermediary between God and the world, respectively (Fakhry 1971, 196-7).

My choice of Kashani from among a number of possible candidates is motivated by three main factors: his emphasis on the necessity of taking a rational path to knowledge of ultimate reality; the way in which he attempted to harmonise divine revelation with systematic reasoning; and the relative accessibility of his thought. Each of these factors requires some explanation.

While most philosophers in the Islamic tradition may be described as mystical in one sense or another, it is customary to distinguish between those who believe that reason leads ineluctably to a total apprehension of reality and those who maintain that rational investigation alone is insufficient and insist on the need for direct revelation to the heart, or gnosis (see e.g. Kiliç 1996, 948-9; Nasr 1982). The practice of the first group is designated by the name *falsafah*, and includes such figures as al-Farabi (d. 950), Ibn Sina (d. 1037) and Ibn Bajjah (d. 1138). The second group, practitioners of theoretical Sufism or gnosis (*ma'rifah* or *'irfan*), includes Ibn al-'Arabi (d. 1240) and Ibn Sab'in (d. 1270). While Kashani sometimes gives indications of being sympathetic to *'irfan*, there is no evidence that he was a Sufi in the technical sense of having a formal affiliation with a spiritual guide and a recognised chain of transmission (Chittick 2001, 8). The greater part of his philosophical writing reflects the method of a *faylasuf*.⁹ For this reason it is interesting and instructive to compare

⁹ In Chittick's view, Kashani fits Merlan's definition of a 'rationalistic mystic' (Chittick 2001, 9).

him with Plotinus, as a philosopher who likewise aimed at a total apprehension of reality through the exercise of reason

Islamic philosophy is embedded in the perspective of the Koranic revelation, which is accepted as the source of ethics and knowledge (Nasr 1996, 16). This perspective fundamentally influenced philosophical terms that entered the Islamic intellectual milieu with the transmission of Greek texts. For example, the conception of reason/intellect (‘*aql*’) underwent a transformation at the hands of Islamic thinkers as early as Ibn Sina, who equated the Active Intellect with the Holy Spirit (ibid., 28). Similarly, definitions of philosophy inherited from the Greeks became identified in the Islamic setting with the Koranic term *hikmah*, meaning wisdom, believed to be of divine origin. Ibn Sina defines *hikmah* as ‘the perfection of the human soul through conceptualization of things and judgment of theoretical and practical realities to the measure of human ability’ (ibid., 22). Chittick's translation of Kashani brings out these conceptual transformations even more clearly through his choice of everyday terms or, in some cases, neologisms, to convey the concreteness of Kashani's Persian writing. Here the rational soul becomes the ‘talking’ (*gayanda*) soul, the practical intellect becomes the ‘working intelligence’ (*khirad-I kargar*), and the theoretical intellect ‘seeing intelligence’ (*khirad-I bina*). Thus a comparison of Kashani with Plotinus shows not only a continuation of certain ideas and themes but also subtle modifications in the ways these ideas and themes were understood in an Islamic context.

Although a number of individual works by Islamic philosophers have been translated into English and other European languages, few philosophers’ works are available in their entirety to readers unfamiliar with either Arabic or Persian. Even such translations as are available may not be fully representative of their authors’

views as expressed in untranslated works, and are sometimes difficult to read because of their use of obscure terminology and unfamiliar concepts. An advantage of Kashani's writings, in both respects, is that sufficient of them are available in clear translation to provide comprehensive access to his thought. Chittick's introductory chapters and footnotes to the translated text supply considerable elucidation where necessary.

1.2 Feminist perspectives relevant to a consideration of rational mysticism

I have already indicated the diversity of feminist perspectives and the difficulty of finding common ground among them. For the purposes of this dissertation, I shall distinguish between four groups of feminists, namely liberal, socialist, psychoanalytic, and radical feminists. These categories, although not exhaustive, are sufficient to cover the various feminist philosophers (and theologians) whose views I shall be discussing. (There are, of course, other ways of classifying feminist perspectives: a widely used one is Jaggar's (1983), from which mine differs only in the inclusion of 'psychoanalytic' rather than 'Marxist' feminists.)

Liberal feminism

Liberal feminists argue for the equal rights of women and men on the ground that both sexes have the capacity for rationality. According to traditional liberal theory, possession of this capacity is the essential characteristic of human beings and entitles its bearers to fundamental rights such as the right to life, liberty, and property (Locke 1690). Liberal feminists since Wollstonecraft (1792) and Taylor Mill ([1851] 1970) have insisted on the inclusion of women in this theory, focusing on the need for equal opportunities for education and participation in the public sphere to maximise women's individual autonomy and self-fulfilment. Modern liberal feminists like Anthony and Nussbaum have argued for an account of 'human nature' that affirms the

essential humanity of women and men in terms of shared ‘capacities’ (Antony 1996) or ‘capabilities’ (Nussbaum 1992). Antony broadens the classical liberal conception of the human essence to include the capacities to form emotional attachments and to communicate, as well as the capacity for rationality (1996, 86).

Socialist feminism

Socialist feminists argue that gender difference arises through a combination of biology, socialisation, and economic forces. Like Marxists, they claim that defining human nature in terms of mental characteristics reflects a division of labour that privileges mental over manual labour, and that capitalism exploits this division of labour to control the workforce. Socialist feminists extend this analysis of oppression to include men’s domination of women (Jaggar 1983; Young 1981). According to Jaggar, conformity to gender stereotypes prevents both women and men from fully developing their productive capacities:

The concepts of femininity and masculinity force both men and women to overdevelop certain of their capacities at the expense of others. For instance, men become excessively competitive with and detached from others; women become excessively nurturant and altruistic ... Both sexes are fragmented distortions of human possibility. Both sexes are alienated from their humanity (Jaggar 1983, 316).

The socialist feminist agenda includes abolishing all forms of domination (Kelly 1979, 224); eliminating the sexual division of labour in every sphere of activity; and promoting education, social reform, and environmental concern (Jaggar 1983).

Psychoanalytic feminism

Psychoanalytic feminists attribute the difference in gender roles to early socialisation and/or cultural memory. Unlike liberal feminists, many psychoanalytic feminists affirm the value of 'feminine' traits, not only for women but also for men. Examples of this approach are Gilligan's theory that men and women have distinctive forms of moral reasoning (Gilligan 1993), Noddings' 'care ethics' (Noddings 1984), and Ruddick's exploration of 'maternal thinking' as an antidote to militarism and violence (Ruddick 1989). French psychoanalytic feminists such as Irigaray, Kristeva, and Cixous have extended the application of psychoanalytic theory to the symbolic construction of reality, including the contribution of philosophy to that construction.¹⁰ Irigaray, in particular, claims to expose the 'unconscious' workings of philosophy that have functioned to maintain patriarchy and deprive women of their identity in the social order (Irigaray 1985b, 75).

Radical feminism

According to radical feminists, women's oppression is inevitable under patriarchal forms of society and is the primary form of oppression (Firestone 1970). Regarding gender difference as either biologically determined or so entrenched in social practice as to be unchangeable, radical feminists reject 'male-identified' values and institutions. Rather than attempt to alter existing political arrangements, they tend to advocate other strategies such as anarchy, androgyny (Dworkin 1974), or organising a woman-centred society based on distinctive 'female' values (Daly 1978). The latter typically include an emphasis on holism and connection (with other women and with the natural world), transcendence of hierarchical oppositions such as mind/body, public/private, self/world, spirit/nature, reason/emotion, and reliance on

¹⁰ See, for example, Irigaray (1985); Kristeva (1987); and Cixous (1981).

non-rational sources of knowledge such as intuition or mystical insight (Christ 1980, 13; Griffin 1980, 226).

1.2.1 'Gendering' and 'gender-coding' in the history of philosophy

A frequent target of feminist criticism is the philosophical structuring of reality in ways that are seen to discriminate against women. The structures in question may be pairs of apparently opposed terms or entire cosmologies; common to both types of structure is a hierarchical arrangement, according to which elements associated with maleness are privileged over elements associated with femaleness.¹¹ What is not always clarified in the critiques is the nature and implications of the alleged 'associations', beyond general claims linking them to an unjust social order. It is variously claimed that conceptual hierarchies of the kinds in question *result from* a value system founded on male privilege (e.g. Cixous 1981, 90-91), *support* gender inequity (e.g. Ruether 1975, 3-4; Anderson 1998, 47-50; Frankenberg 1998, 177), and *imply* the exclusion of women/the feminine from the cultural ideal (e.g. Lloyd 1984, 37).

I share with all feminists the assumption that there is injustice based on gender. Moreover, I find it plausible to think that sexist representations of the metaphysical order lend support to male dominance, although I cannot prove it. Claims of a *causal* connection between a hierarchical ontology and the social hierarchy, whichever direction the causality is presumed to take, would require historical and sociological investigation in order to substantiate them. Rather, I am concerned here with the claim that there is a *conceptual* connection; I shall argue that this is sometimes harder to establish than it first appears.

¹¹ Critics of the first type of structure include Lloyd (1984), Young (1990), Bordo (1988), and Whitbeck (1989); critics of the second type include Frankenberg (1998), Culpepper (1987), and Johnson (1993).

Lloyd's *The Man of Reason* (1984), canonical in feminist philosophical literature, is a case in point. Lloyd cites as an early historical source of gender bias in the conceptualisation of reason the Pythagorean 'table of opposites', according to which

... femaleness was explicitly linked with the unbounded – the vague, the indeterminate – as against the bounded – the precise and clearly determined. The Pythagoreans saw the world as a mixture of principles associated with determinate form, seen as good, and others associated with formlessness – the unlimited, irregular or disorderly – which were seen as bad or inferior. There were ten such contrasts in the table: limit/unlimited, odd/even, one/many, right/left, male/female, rest/motion, straight/curved, light/dark, good/bad, square/oblong. (1984, 3)

As Lloyd points out, these categories were not merely descriptive but evaluative, assigning greater worth to the first term in each pairing because of its link with form and determinacy (ibid., 3). Presumably, though, not all the contrasting pairs are salient to concerns about gender hierarchy. Does the presence of 'male' or 'female' on one side of the list imply that all other concepts on that side are gendered accordingly? If one assumes this, one must also accept that the meaning of any other concept on the list is similarly implicated in the meaning of all the concepts on the same side, and hence, for example, that 'oblong' implies 'curved', 'motion', and 'dark'! Clearly, the relationship between the items on one side of the list cannot be one of mutual implication, other than in respect of the attribute of form or formlessness. Of course, the salient associations for Lloyd and other feminist critics are those between 'male' and 'good', on the one hand, and 'female' and 'bad', on the other, but no principled way of accounting for this selection is offered, nor is it clear that it could be.

In pointing out Lloyd's lack of critical analysis on this point, I am not trying to trivialise her main argument, which is that the cultural ideal of reason has been partly constituted by the exclusion of what is symbolically associated with the feminine (1984, 104). Clearly, the Pythagorean table, insofar as it includes 'female' among the

indeterminate, inferior principles of reality, is consistent with Lloyd's diagnosis. Furthermore, as Lloyd goes on to show, the form/matter distinction in Plato and Aristotle's writings displays similar symbolic associations with gender (1984, 3-9). However, as I shall argue throughout this dissertation, such associations merit careful examination to determine whether they are intrinsic or merely incidental to the concepts in question, and thus whether it is legitimate to describe those concepts as 'gendered'. The term 'gender-coded' has been applied to these and other traditionally paired concepts such as reason/unreason, mind/body, and reason/emotion, the first term in each case ranked above the second and aligned with maleness (see e.g. Bordo 1988, 622-7). This term, in my view, captures the idea of an incidental association with gender, although not all its users may agree with me. I shall therefore reserve 'gendered' for only those concepts that, according to their users, are intrinsically masculine or feminine, and use either 'gender-coded' or 'sexist' for those concepts that appear to me to be incidentally and gratuitously linked with gender.

A further assumption I shall make in this dissertation is that not all hierarchies describe normative relations of dominance. I shall employ Eisler's distinction (1987) between *domination hierarchies*, which refer to enforced systems of human rankings, and which are frequently (though not necessarily) sexist, and what she proposes be called *actualisation hierarchies*. The latter are the familiar hierarchies of systems within systems, for example, of molecules, cells, and organs of the body: a progression toward a higher, more evolved, and more complex level of function. In Eisler's view, domination hierarchies characteristically inhibit the actualisation of higher functions, not only in the overall social system, but also in the individual human (ibid., 105-6). Some actualisation hierarchies, as I shall argue, *look* like domination hierarchies because of the sexist language in which they are described;

closer inspection may reveal the sexist elements to be either a later overlay on a conceptual framework that was originally gender-neutral, or a dispensable part of the original framework.

1.2.2 'Gendering' in the history of mysticism

Types of mysticism have sometimes been differentiated according to gender, in line with traditional associations of certain psychological traits with maleness and femaleness. If mysticism of an intellectual or speculative kind was held to be a distinctively male activity, did this merely reflect the fact that women were largely denied access to the kind of education that would have enabled their participation? Or does rational mysticism itself rest on the same kind of unreflective assumptions about the female nature that licensed women's exclusion from opportunities for intellectual development? This question will be implicit throughout the following chapters; however, the example of Hypatia discussed above (§1.1.2), even if exceptional, suggests otherwise. Furthermore, the distinction between 'rational' and 'affective' mysticism will be shown to be far less clear-cut than has been claimed.

Rational mysticism as such has attracted little attention from feminist scholars until now. One reason for this neglect may be the legacy of historical biases. As Hollywood (2002, 8) has pointed out, centuries of scholarship have tended to associate emotional, bodily and affective forms of mysticism with femininity and women, and intellectual and speculative mysticism with masculinity and men, even though the evidence often belies the distinction. Implicit (and sometimes explicit) in the gendered distinction from the 15th century onwards was the acceptability of so-called male mysticism, contrasted with the unacceptability of its female counterpart.¹²

¹² Referring in 1415 to women's claims to mystical revelation and prophecy, the French prelate Jean Gerson warned of the dangers of the emotional qualities of women's spiritual expression, and of their

More recently, female mysticism has been acknowledged by French feminists such as Beauvoir and Irigaray as an opportunity for women to achieve a measure of agency. Hollywood argues, however, that these writers perpetuate an inaccurate distinction between male and female mysticisms. In her view Beauvoir and Irigaray, by emphasising the bodily character of the mystical experiences of St. Teresa, Angela of Foligno and other female mystics, have bypassed the texts authored by these women and contributed to a generalised picture of the ‘woman mystic’ which the texts themselves undermine (Hollywood 1994, 160). In any case, apart from Hollywood’s own considerable work in the area, the failure to challenge the dichotomy between male, intellectual mysticism and female, bodily mysticism has allowed rational mysticism to remain largely unnoticed in feminist literature.

In this connection, it is worth mentioning that Plotinus, surely a paradigm ‘intellectual’ mystic, frequently crosses the category line. Most notable is his description of Intellect ‘in love’ and “‘drunk with the nectar’” on beholding the One (VI 7,35,24-25). This sounds dangerously like the kind of ‘emotional’ mysticism that Stace contrasts unfavourably to ‘intellectual’ or ‘speculative’ mysticism when denying that such phenomena as visions or raptures are a necessary part of mystical experience. Stace finds excessive the ‘emotionalism’ of, for example, St. Teresa’s account of being ‘beside myself, drunk with love’ during union with God, and commends those mystics such as Eckhart and the Buddha, ‘who usually keep their emotions well under control’ (Stace 1960, 53-54). One can only imagine that he is unfamiliar with the afore-mentioned passage in the *Enneads*.

Another way in which gender has been seen to be implicated in historical constructions of mysticism is in the focus on private experience. Jantzen (1994) has

‘insatiable itch’ to see, speak, and touch (Gerson, *De probatione spirituum*, cited in Lochrie, 1991, 1). For extensive discussion of feminine mysticism, see also Bynum 1991, especially 119-150.

argued that the social construction of mysticism reflects an agenda of delimiting authority and varies with changes in the broader construction of reality, including gender relationships. In Jantzen's view, defining mysticism exclusively in terms of private experience is part of a relatively recent move to relegate religion and spirituality to the private sphere, already construed as the domain of the feminine, thus undermining its relevance to issues of social justice (ibid., 186-192). Whether in the struggles of the medieval Christian church to control those (frequently women) who claimed direct access to God or in modernity's privatisation of religion and spirituality, and consequent willingness to 'allow' women to be mystics, Jantzen sees similar mechanisms at work: 'The decline of gender as an issue in the definition of who should count as a mystic occurred in direct relation to the decline in the perception of mystical experience, and religion generally, as politically powerful' (ibid., 190). According to Jantzen, considerations of social justice were far more central to the lives of medieval Christian mystics than were their own intense, personal experiences (ibid., 192, 198-9).

Although Jantzen in my view underrates the importance of personal mystical experiences (as providing the impetus for political engagement, for example), she has drawn attention to an issue that is important in a feminist consideration of rational mysticism, namely whether it is conducive to political engagement. Jantzen herself strongly opposes attempts to define 'mysticism' ahistorically, and confines her own remarks to particular mystics in the tradition she has studied (ibid., 188). Certainly no inferences can be drawn from her examples to the rational mystics with whom I am concerned, still less to 'rational mysticism' as a category. On the other hand, her analysis of the historical nature of the construction of mysticism exposes the unreflective assumptions that may arise when describing a Plotinus or a Kashani as a

mystic, such as that they were only concerned with their own private mystical experiences. Even a cursory acquaintance with their writings will quickly dispel that impression, although how Plotinus's teachings relate to the social dimension may not be immediately clear.

Another reason for the lack of feminist attention to rational mysticism may be that its proponents are not commonly recognised as influential, either generically or individually, in the tradition of Western philosophy. Plotinus and other Neoplatonist philosophers seldom feature in the curricula of philosophy departments in the Western world. In addition, the complexity of their writings can be a deterrent to someone who is not a specialist in ancient philosophy, so that their valuable insights remain obscured from a wider audience. Feminist critiques in the history of ancient philosophy have tended to focus on Plato and Aristotle, both of whom made controversial statements about women that are frequently held up as fundamental to the historical development of sexism in Western culture.¹³ Plotinus, on the other hand, though an avowed follower of Plato and critic of Aristotle, scarcely mentions women and is not an obvious target of either praise or blame.

Despite this general tendency for feminists to overlook rational mystics, there have been some exceptions. Furthermore, the few existing feminist treatments of Plotinus evince a variety of contrasting responses. Irigaray (1985), for example, presents a selection of Plotinian texts on matter and the mother, without comment, to portray him as hostile to both, while Miles (1999) finds in his teaching on the body and beauty resources for creating new worldviews capable of challenging oppression. Vassilopoulou (2003) argues that Plotinus's pedagogical method embodies a number of features of feminist educational theory, while Kristeva (1987) considers Plotinus a

¹³ See, for example, the collections of essays in Bar On, ed. (1994); Freeland, ed., (1998); Tuana, ed., (1994), and Ward, ed. (1996).

forerunner of ‘narcissism’ in Western thought. I shall advert to these assessments in the course of the following chapters on Plotinus.

1.2.3 Potential conflicts between feminist perspectives and those of rational mysticism

Aspects of rational mysticism appear to be in tension with the feminist perspectives outlined in the introduction to this section (§1.3). I now identify three major areas of potential conflict, relating roughly to the domains of metaphysics, epistemology, and ethics respectively, that will focus my interpretation of Plotinus and Kashani.

The first area of concern for some feminists is the hierarchical metaphysics that seem to be an indispensable feature of intellectual mystical theories. While feminists have not addressed this area explicitly in the context of mysticism, there is a substantial feminist literature in theology and philosophy of religion on the implications of hierarchical ontologies for social justice and women’s self-understanding in relation to the divine. Privileging a single, ultimate principle has been seen as a source of ‘hierarchical, oppositional dichotomies’, starting with the One and everything that is not the One (e.g. Culpepper 1987, 65). The centralisation of ontological power in a single centre has been said to lend symbolic support to unequal power relations in society, which has resulted historically in the oppression of women. Furthermore, the very ideal of union with, or absorption in, some kind of totality is thought to threaten the distinctness of individuals who have had to struggle for political recognition (Frankenberry 1993, 31-34). Within Islamic discourse, the hierarchical relationship between God and humans, men and women (God:believer::man:woman) has been seen as blatantly sexist (Sabbah 1984).

A second issue of concern for some feminists is the conception of the self as the rational soul. To identify the self exclusively with the rational soul is seen to be giving a one-sided account of the human being, reflecting the traditional male philosopher's privileged position in society and excluding those (e.g. women and slaves) who took care of his bodily needs. It is claimed that the traditional Greek association of maleness with rationality and femaleness with what is contrary to rationality (whether nature, emotion or bodiliness) and the ranking of the first group over the second, has been used as grounds for asserting that men should dominate women in patriarchal society. It has also seemed to exclude women in principle from participating in intellectual activities (Lloyd 1984, 7; Grimshaw 1986, 38-49). The mere absence of women from medieval Islamic philosophical texts has been seen as an indication of the problematic status of woman (and especially that of her body) for the male authors (Malti-Douglas 1991).

Thirdly, a self-perfecting, contemplative ideal has been seen as otherworldly and incompatible with social responsibility (Annas 1999). Some feminist ethicists have emphasised ideals such caring and empathy are fundamental to an ethical worldview, criticising ethical theories based solely on self-interest, duty, or 'abstract' virtues (Gilligan 1993, 19; Noddings 1984, 36-37; Ruddick 1989, 135-136).

I detect, among others, the following assumptions in these concerns:

- a) The sexist implications of hierarchical metaphysics effectively exclude women from achieving their full humanity.
- b) The body, like the female, needs to be rehabilitated from the margins of philosophical thought.
- c) The urgent ethical task is social transformation to end discrimination of all kinds.

To anticipate later discussions, underlying the philosophical agendas of Plotinus and Kashani I discern the following assumptions:

- d) Human self-actualisation is possible only in the light of (a given) understanding of the hierarchical structure of reality
- e) The body is an obstacle to the actualisation of the soul as intellect
- f) The urgent ethical task is self-perfection.

It would appear that these two sets of assumptions are pulling in opposite directions, even if not logically incompatible. If that is the case, have Plotinus's and Kashani's prescriptions for human perfection anything useful to say to people seeking liberation from oppressive structures and attitudes?

1.2.4 Compatibility between rational mysticism and feminism

In asking whether rational mysticism is compatible with feminism, I am really asking a question about consistency of theses. In order to establish whether there is consistency, I propose to examine the theses first of Plotinus, then of Kashani, with respect to the main issues I have outlined above as relevant feminist concerns, namely hierarchical metaphysics, an androcentric conception of knowledge, and an individualist ethic. Each of these issues will be broken down into specific concerns and criticisms that have been raised by feminist theorists in relation to Plato, Aristotle, and monotheistic theology. In discussing these concerns, I shall identify the critics (where possible) with the wider feminist group with which they identify, so that by the end some substantive conclusions may be drawn as to which group will find the greatest degree of compatibility with rational mysticism.

An initial point of contact between rational mysticism and feminism, I submit, is that both the feminist and the rational mystic see themselves as taking up a critical stance in relation to the dominant culture. For the feminist, this stance involves challenging the assumption of male superiority and centrality (Beasley 1999, 4). For the rational mystic, on the other hand, the critique is directed towards ignorance of the true nature of the self, in particular the belief that the self is just the body with its appetites and aversions. Accordingly, the aims of both the rational mystic

and the feminist are concerned with transformation, starting in both cases with the attitude of the agent and requiring total commitment. From this point, it might be assumed that the two paths diverge: the rational mystic apparently focuses on individual self-realisation, while the feminist wants to bring about social change.

In the following chapters, however, I shall argue that the orientation of Neoplatonic rational mysticism towards synthesis and unity is relevant to each of the feminist concerns outlined above (§1.3.3). That the feminist groups I have identified will turn out to have very different responses to that orientation will be illuminating of a broader tension in the history of philosophy between analysis and synthesis. It will become clear that the differences of feminist responses to rational mysticism depend on differing conceptions of human nature and liberation – among feminists, and between feminists and rational mystics. It may emerge that Plotinus and Kashani’s teachings contribute to the oppression, exploitation, and degradation of women and of the environment, or conversely, that these teachings contain untapped resources for tackling such problems. Either way, the enquiry is important for mining insights into current problems and their solutions.

PART 1: PLOTINUS

CHAPTER 2: THE OVERFLOW OF UNITY

The context for Plotinus's rational mysticism is a hierarchical ordering of reality in relation to an ultimate unity. According to this framework (which Plotinus claims to find in Plato), the highest value resides in pure unity ('the One'), and is progressively dispersed in descending levels of reality, down to the level of utterly indeterminate matter. Through rational reflection, the soul can ascend from the fragmented existence of total preoccupation with the world of the senses to the highest level at which it is aware of a unified reality. Transcending even this level of intelligible reality, the soul can join with the ultimate unity of the One.

Hierarchical Platonic metaphysics and its repercussions in Western monotheisms have appeared to some feminist philosophers and feminist theologians to promote a gender-biased view of reality. First, the apparent positing of 'two worlds', intelligible and sensible, and the subordinating of the second to the first, is seen by some critics to reflect a male bias, insofar as the proponents of this system tend to associate intellectual activity with men and bodily activity (such as giving birth and nurturance) with women (Cavarero 1995; Irigaray 1985). A second, related object of criticism is the negative attitude towards the body that is evident in Platonic philosophy. Again, because of the association (whether by women themselves or by male philosophers) of women with bodily functions and concerns, disparaging bodies is interpreted as disparaging women (Griffin 1982; Jaggar 1983). Thirdly, privileging unity over multiplicity in this metaphysical framework is seen as legitimating oppressive social structures or suppressing difference (Culpepper 1987, Frankenberry 1993). Some feminists have criticised theistic models emphasising divine transcendence as being linked with male dominance, and have pointed to Greek

philosophical ideals as the source of many of the divine attributes associated with power (Frankenberry 1993, 1998).

In the light of the above criticisms, it might be thought that the framework underlying Plotinus's rational mysticism incurs the same charges. In this chapter, I assess the relevance of these criticisms to a consideration of Plotinus's metaphysics. I begin by examining the focus of the 'two-world' criticism as it has been articulated in relation to Plato. I then argue that, whether or not that criticism is truly fair to Plato, Plotinus's account of the derivation and continuity of the levels of reality gives us reason to question the aptness of the criticism in his case (§2.1). Next, I discuss the 'body' criticism and acknowledge that, while some of Plotinus's statements about the body may be seen as counselling respect and at least a modicum of concern, other statements indicating hostility towards the body are more prevalent and consistent with his concern to elevate unity above dispersion (§2.2). Finally, I examine the 'unity over multiplicity' and 'divine transcendence' criticisms and argue first that Plotinus's conception of the unity and transcendence of the One is not characterised by features normally associated with male dominance, and, furthermore, that he emphasises to a greater extent than some of his predecessors the immanence of the One (§2.3).

2.1 The 'two-world' criticism and how Plotinus may be seen to undermine it

2.1.1 The criticism as applied to Plato

For Plato, positing a world of Forms is necessary to provide a locus of epistemic stability for a world of changing appearances: the intelligible world provides the order that allows us to make sense of the visible world (*Phaedo* 79a1-c5). Because he

frequently uses spatial metaphors, it is difficult not to imagine the upper world situated literally 'above' the sensible world. Yet he clearly is not recommending a physical departure from the sensible world in pursuit of knowledge, since it is not the bodily sense organs but the soul that is capable of apprehending the truth, and the soul is immaterial and therefore non-spatial. For Plato, the soul itself is a transcendent entity, essentially prior to, and more real than the body: hence, its connection is naturally with the transcendent world.

According to Irigaray (1985), a philosophy that divides the sensible from the intelligible tends to support a gendered social hierarchy. In her essay on 'Plato's hystera', Irigaray performs what amounts to a satirical psychoanalysis on the myth of the cave (*Republic*, Book VII), drawing parallels between the philosopher's emergence from the cave and male transcendence of all that is earthly and feminine, represented by the womb:

The cave gives birth only to phantoms, fakes, or at best images. One must leave its circle in order to realise the factitious character of such a birth. Engendering the real is the father's task, engendering the fictive is the task of the mother – that 'receptacle' for turning out more or less good copies of reality. (Irigaray 1985, 300)

The tongue-in-cheek references to 'the real' and 'the fictive' of course belie Irigaray's view that Platonic philosophy reverses the commonsense order of sensory and intelligible.

The alleged reversal is brought out more clearly by Cavarero (1995), whose own critique of Platonic metaphysics owes much to Irigaray's. According to Cavarero, Plato continued and sharpened Thales' distinction between a world of reality and a world of appearances, reducing the significance of sensory experience to 'unreliable deception'. This polarisation, she claims, 'has turned our sense of reality upside down, so that the world of the living becomes the phenomenal shell of a kind

of truth that is removed from the realm of the senses and is accessible only to thought' (1995, 34-5). In Cavarero's view, the philosopher who chooses to live in the realm of pure thought thereby 'abandons the world of his own birth' and carries out 'a symbolic matricide' (ibid., 36). In thus identifying transcendence of the sensible world with transcendence of the feminine in the Platonic worldview, Irigaray and Cavarero find symbolic endorsement of male dominance.

An alternative interpretation is given by Hampton (1984), who presents Plato's metaphysics as both hierarchical and holistic. Sensitive to the nuances in Plato's thought, and the difficulty of pinning him down to a particular viewpoint, she argues that Plato attempts to overcome the 'dualism' of the earlier, Pythagorean analysis of reality with his theory of the Forms. Acknowledging his apparent positing of separate worlds of sensibles and intelligibles in the theory of Forms, as described in the *Republic*, she demonstrates that he strives to counteract this in the *Philebus* with his account of the mediating role of the Forms between the infinite plurality of the sensibles and the ultimate One or Good (ibid., 221-3). For Hampton, this aspect of Plato's metaphysics is evidence that he resisted 'masculinist dichotomous thinking' and appropriated 'feminine' ideals such as 'interrelatedness' and 'harmony' (ibid., 219). While it is beyond the scope of the present enquiry to adjudicate between the two interpretations presented, enough has been said to suggest the nature of the problem that some feminists have perceived to be present, to a greater or lesser degree, in the two-world distinction.

2.1.2 How the Plotinian framework of reality expresses hierarchy

Unquestionably, Plotinus accepts the Platonic hierarchical distinction between sensible and intelligible realms. Indeed, he consistently claims Plato's authority for

his metaphysical framework (e.g. V I,8,1-14).¹⁴ Plotinus's rationale for the ordering of 'worlds' is that 1) unity is perfection; 2) what is perfect 'overflows' and generates something less perfect; and 3) the movement of generation is always towards dispersion:

Since in things which are generated it is not possible to go upwards but only to go downwards and move further towards multiplicity, the principle of each group of things is simpler than they are themselves. Therefore that which makes the world of sense could not be a world of sense itself, but must be an intellect and an intelligible world. (V 3,16,6-10)

Crucial to understanding the nature of the Plotinian structure of reality is his conception of 'principles' (*archai*), since it is in terms of these that Plotinus accounts for the derivation of all that exists. Principles, for Plotinus, are 1) explanatory categories, 2) paradigms, and 3) causes.¹⁵ The first two functions are relatively unproblematic and will become clearer in the exposition of actual examples; the third is more controversial, particularly in relation to Plotinus's first principle, the One (*to hen*). Describing the nature and functions of the principles Plotinus posits as fundamental to an understanding of reality will help to clarify in what sense his framework is hierarchical.¹⁶

The One

Plotinus argues for the necessity of a first principle that is non-composite, self-sufficient, and unique, on the ground that the ultimate explanation and cause of existence must be of this nature to preclude the need or possibility of further explanation:

¹⁴ It is not my purpose here to discuss in detail the ways in which Plotinus followed or modified Plato's cosmology; ample treatments of this subject are to be found, for example, in Armstrong (1967), Gatti (1996), and Gerson (1994).

¹⁵ I am adopting here Gerson's interpretation (1994, 3-4), with some qualification. For history of the Greek concept of *arche*, see also Gerson 1990, 5-14).

¹⁶ For historical antecedents of the three principles, see Armstrong (1967); Gatti (1996); Merlan (1963).

For there must be something simple before all things, and this must be other than all the things which come after it ... For if it is not to be simple, outside all coincidence and composition, it could not be a first principle; and it is the most self-sufficient, because it is simple and the first of all: for that which is not the first needs that which is before it, and what is not simple is in need of its simple components so that it can come into existence from them. A reality of this kind must be one alone: for if there was another of this kind, both would be one. (V 4,1,11-16)

Plotinus calls this principle ‘the One’ and characterises it both negatively and positively. Negatively, it is ‘beyond being’, ‘a denial of multiplicity (V 5,6,11; V 5,6,26-27), and ineffable: ‘We can say nothing of it: we only try, as far as possible, to make signs to ourselves about it’ (V 3,13,6-7). Positively, the One is said to be powerful and perfect, the paradigm of unity, the transcendent first cause of existence, the Good towards which everything strives (V 4,1,24-27; VI 9,1,1; VI 7,23,5-6; I 7,1,8-11).

In what sense does Plotinus think of the One as cause? As the object of universal striving, he clearly intends final causation. However, there is much to suggest the idea of efficient causation as well, although this should not be understood as operating spatio-temporally. Plotinus reasons that what is powerful and perfect necessarily produces something like itself but of lower degree (V 1,6,38-40). The One ‘overflows, as it were, and its superabundance makes something other than itself’ (V 2,1,8-9). As ‘the source ... of being and the why of being’ (VI 8,14,32), the One appears to be causal in both senses. On the other hand, Plotinus at times appears to deny, or at least to deny the appropriateness of a *claim* about the causality of the One: ‘For to say that it is the cause is not to predicate something incidental of it but of us, because we have something from it while that One is in itself’ (VI 9,3,49-51). This however seems to be another instance of the negative characterisation of the One that is a denial of the *adequacy* of such claims rather than of their *truth* (Bussanich 1996,

45). Elsewhere, Plotinus clearly states that the One is ‘cause of the cause’ and ‘in a greater degree something like the most causative and truest of causes’ (VI 8,18,39).

Intellect

The ‘superabundance’ of the One results in the generation of the second principle, Intellect (*nous*). Plotinus uses the imagery of the sun’s radiation of light to describe the process whereby the One, itself remaining unchanged, eternally produces ‘a surrounding reality’ from its own substance (V 1,6,29-35). The secondary reality is described as ‘an image of that Good’, resembling it as sunlight resembles the sun (V I,7,1-5). This image, still indeterminate, ‘turns back upon the One and is filled’ and in thus contemplating is constituted as divine thinking or ‘Intellect’ (V 2,1,8-13). Lacking the power to reflect the One as a unified image, Intellect refracts it into multiple ‘offspring’, the ‘Forms’ of the intelligible universe and is thus both one and many (VI 7,15,16-23; IV 8,3,10). In this way, Plotinus reconciles Plato’s world of Forms with Aristotle’s self-thinking First Cause, while however making both subordinate to the One, reasoning that even a self-thinking entity cannot be utterly non-composite in the way that he has argued is necessary for the first principle (V 9,8,1-5; VI 7,16; V 6,2,1-21).

That the One’s first act of generation should result in an intellectual principle is self-evident for Plotinus, but may need some unpacking for anyone unfamiliar with the tradition. The perception of the world as a *cosmos*, a unified arrangement of parts, led the Pre-Socratic philosophers to conclude that what is transparent to human intellects must have been made so by another intellect (Gerson 1994, 43). Aristotle, positing the identity of the knower with the object of knowledge, incorporated this hypothesis into his conception of the First Cause as a divine mind that thinks itself (*DA* 429a14-17; *Metaph.*1072b15-24). Plotinus, as shown above, adopts this feature

of self-thinking for his second principle, but identifies the object of its thought with the intelligible universe. The ‘thinking’ of Intellect is *noesis*, an immediate grasping of its object (VI 2,21,28). As a completely ‘self-contained’ activity, Intellect’s self-thinking is the most perfect kind of activity next to the perfect self-sufficiency of the One (Gerson 1994, 46).

Plotinus does in fact provide an argument of sorts for the necessity and superiority of Intellect (although not for why it should be the primary product of the One), based on analogy with works of art. A statue can be analysed into its raw material and the forming principles (*logoi*) that the artist brings to its creation; these principles come from the art of sculpture; the art of sculpture is necessary to account for the bringing into existence of statues, which are ‘imitations’ of the art. In the same way, Plotinus reasons, the making of the universe depends on forming principles, the source of which must be even greater than the ‘maker’ (V 9,3,11-36). The source of the forming principles is Intellect; their executor, so to speak, is the next principle in the hierarchy.

Soul

The generation of the third principle in Plotinus’s framework, Soul (*psyche*), occurs in a similar way to that of Intellect. Plotinus states that Intellect ‘pours forth a multiple power’ from its own substance, while remaining unchanged, and that this ‘power’ contemplates its source and is constituted as Soul (V 2,1,14-19). Soul is ‘the expressed thought’ and ‘whole activity’ of Intellect (V 1,3,8-9). In other words, Intellect, like the One, overflows and produces Soul as the expression of its contemplation.

In contrast to the relatively straightforward activity of Intellect as contemplation of the One in the multiplicity of the Forms, Soul has greater complexity. It appears that Soul comprises two parts, a higher and a lower, with different activities:

The first part of soul, then, that which is above and always filled and illuminated by the reality above, remains There; but another part ... goes forth, for soul goes forth always, life from life ... But in going forth it lets its prior part remain where it left it. (III 8,5,10-15).

As well as being directed towards Intellect and the contemplation of Forms, Soul is directed away from Intellect towards the production of an 'image' of the intelligible universe (V 2,1,18-20). This image is the sensible universe, composed of matter and given form by the forming principles that Soul receives from Intellect. Thus Soul acts as an intermediary between the intelligible and the sensible world, between the unity of the world of Forms and the multiplicity of the objects of sense. (V 1,2,1-7; V 9,3,29-32; IV 3,11,8-10).

Plotinus says a number of different things about the production of the sensible world, not all of which are easy to reconcile into a single, coherent account. There seem to be several 'agents' involved in the process: the world soul or 'soul of the All', which makes the 'body' of the universe and individual bodies (IV 3,6,11-13); individual souls, which Plotinus also describes as making 'all living things' (V 1,2,1-2); the 'image' of Soul, which is 'sensation and the principle of growth in plants' (V 2,1,18-19); and 'nature', which is a lower part or manifestation of Soul and 'makes what it contemplates' (III 8,3,7-9; III 8,4,7-8). In addition, Plotinus states that the universe is 'one part the composite of body and a sort of soul bound to body, and one the soul of the All which is not in body but makes a trace of itself shine on that which is in body' (II 3,9,32-34).

I understand the above-mentioned elements to fit together in the following way.¹⁷ The world soul, which derives directly from the principle, Soul, is the maker in a primary sense. Individual souls share in the making in a participatory sense, since they share the same ‘parentage’ (Plotinus describes as them as ‘sisters’ of the world soul at IV 3,6,13). The world soul produces the ‘image’ of Soul that is nature, with direct responsibility for the characteristic activities of living things, namely growth in the case of plants and, additionally, sensation in the case of animals. Nature is the part of the world soul that forms a composite with the sensible bodies, while the other, higher part of the world soul remains at the higher, more unified level of Intellect.

The idea that reality is structured according to a hierarchy of value is alien to a modern way of thinking, given the rise of modern empiricism and the tendency to separate questions of ‘fact’ from questions of ‘value’ (see e.g. Ayer 1960). Furthermore, the Platonic enterprise of establishing what is fundamental in reality differs from modern conceptions of ontology that are typically concerned with developing an ‘inventory’ of the kinds of things there are (Moravcsik 1992, 55-56). Plotinus, in ranking levels of reality according to their proximity or likeness to the absolute unity of the One (VI 9,1,1-3), is clearly involved in the former rather than the latter sort of activity. (For this reason I avoid using the term ‘ontology’, with its modern connotations of ‘what there is’, in connection with Plotinus or Plato, and use instead the term ‘metaphysics’ to denote their conceptions of reality.) As I discuss below (§2.4.2), Plotinus’s hierarchical levels of reality have been variously interpreted as levels of experience, levels of knowledge, or levels of spiritual

¹⁷ In this reconciliation I largely follow Gerson (1994, 62-63), and Armstrong (1967, 84-85).

attainment.¹⁸ Whatever the interpretation, however, they clearly point to a positive evaluation of unity over multiplicity.

2.1.3 Is Plotinus's metaphysical framework gendered, or gender-coded?

Plotinus's metaphysical framework can be described as gendered only in a superficial sense. Since nouns are gendered in the Greek language, the terms Plotinus uses to name the levels of reality are no exception: the One (*to hen*) is neuter; Intellect (*nous*) is masculine; and Soul (*psyche*) is feminine. On occasion, Plotinus invokes gendered analogies to describe the relationships within or between these levels. As we have seen, he describes the relationship between the world soul and individual souls as that of 'sisters' (IV 3,6,13). Elsewhere, he likens the love of the soul for the One to 'the noble love of a girl for her noble father' (VI 9,9,34-35). On the other hand, a comparison of the soul's relationship to the body to that of a steersman to a ship implies that the soul can also be masculine (IV 3,21,7). Thus his gendered analogies do not consistently correspond with the grammatical gender of the entities he is describing.

In view of psychoanalytic, radical, and socialist feminists' claims about the sexist implications of metaphysical frameworks that privilege the intelligible over the sensible, it might be assumed that this distinction in Plotinus's framework is gender-coded. I shall argue, however, that the criticism is difficult to sustain in the case of Plotinus, for two reasons. The first reason has to do with what he actually says (or rather, does not say) about women. The second has to do with the way in which he describes the structure of reality.

¹⁸ O'Meara warns against reading back into Plotinus modern, anti-egalitarian connotations of the term 'hierarchy', which was not in any case coined until some 300 years after Plotinus, and recommends using instead the terms 'priority' and 'posteriority' that Plotinus himself used (1996, 66-81). While I accept O'Meara's caution about anachronistic use of the term 'hierarchy', I believe the dangers he anticipates are mitigated by distinguishing between 'domination' and 'actualisation' hierarchies (see §1.2.1).

In the first place, the critics of Platonic metaphysics pointed to a ‘traditional’ association of the intelligible realm with the male, and of the sensible realm with the female, citing the Pythagorean table of opposites and the derogatory comments about women’s non-rational or irrational activity that appear in many of Plato’s dialogues (see §1.3.1 and below, §3.2.3). In the *Enneads*, however, there is no explicit association of women with the non-rational: they are scarcely mentioned in his texts. Someone wanting to maintain that the association is nevertheless implicit could do so only by appealing to evidence outside his writings, such as the influence of the tradition to which he belonged. However, as I show below (§2.2), Plotinus was by no means an uncritical recipient of traditional doctrines or analogies, and there is no reason to think that he would be in this case.

In the second place, Plotinus undermines the notion of ‘separate realms’ in his descriptions of the framework of reality. This may be seen in his use of metaphors emphasising closeness and continuity rather than remoteness and disjunction. Thus, for example, he states that the sensible world ‘moves in Soul’ (III 7,11,33-34) and ‘Soul is in Intellect’ (V 5,9,32), the ‘in’ relationship denoting absolute dependence rather than position (V 5,9,4-5). Furthermore, he conceives of the One as continuous with its products. For Plotinus, the unity of the One as the supreme transcendent principle of reality entails, on the one hand, its uniqueness and separateness from everything else, and on the other hand, its compresence *with* everything else:

There must be something simple before all things, and this must be other than all the things which come after it, existing by itself, not mixed with the things which derive from it, and all the same able to be present in a different way to these other things, being really one. (V 4,1,5-7)

Plotinus frequently explicates the relationship between the One and the other levels of reality by the use of metaphors expressing continuity. The One’s

productivity is likened to the way in which the sun radiates light without decreasing in brilliance (V I,6,27-30), and a spring issues forth into rivers without itself being used up (III 8,10,5-10). The relationship is further illustrated by an analogy with time: ‘It is then like a long life stretched out at length; each part is different from that which comes next in order, but the whole is continuous with itself, but with one part differentiated from another, and the earlier does not perish in the later’ (V 2,2,25-30). By thus emphasising the omnipresence of the One and its continuity with the manifold realities, Plotinus subverts the idea of separate realms.

2.2 The ‘body’ criticism and why Plotinus’s attitude to the body is not gender-coded

The apparently negative Platonic view of embodiment alienates at least three groups of feminists. Radical feminists like Griffin, and some psychoanalytic feminists like Irigaray embrace the identification of women with the body and therefore see a body-denying philosophy as contributing to the ‘invisibility’ of women in traditional philosophical theories. In Griffin’s words, ‘We [women] know ourselves to be made from this earth. We know this earth is made from our bodies. For we see ourselves. And we are nature. We are nature seeing nature’ (Griffin 1980, 226). Negativity about the body also alienates socialist feminists, who claim that defining human nature in terms of mental characteristics reflects a pejorative distinction between mental and manual labour, and that the distinction has resulted in the exploitation not only of workers, as Marxism claims, but also of women by men (Jaggar 1983; Young 1981). According to Jaggar, Western society has ‘excluded’ women from ‘the so-called “life of the mind”’ and has defined as ‘non-rational’ their traditional work of caring for children and for the needs of the body (1983, 186-7). These groups of feminists tend

to associate a negative conception of the body with the perspective of male dominance.

One response to the ‘body’ objection, in relation to Plotinus, has been to explain his stance on embodiment in terms of contextual factors. Miles (1999) attributes Plotinus’s apparent hostility to the body in part to the obsession with human flesh in the society in which he lived. Featuring prominently in the entertainment culture of third-century Rome were the Colosseum games and the public baths: both focused on bodies, whether as sites of pain or pleasure. The games served to accustom the populace to violence and bloodshed on a vast scale in an age of imperial expansion through military conquest. The combatants and victims were drawn from the lower, supposedly less human classes. The public baths, on the other hand, were open to all, and though social rank was subverted by disrobing, it was reconfigured by assessment of bodily attributes. Miles suggests that Plotinus’s call to identify with the soul rather than the body was thus in part a corrective move away from debasing tendencies and towards a greater humanity (ibid., 83-110).

Besides such possible causal reasons, there are conceptual reasons for Plotinus’s pessimism about the soul’s descent into the body (which Miles also acknowledges). These reasons have to do with what may be called his metaphysical anthropology, which mirrors his cosmology. According to this account, the human being is composed of body and soul: body is essentially lifeless, but soul enlivens it (I 1,3,1-4; IV 7,2,16-19). A lower part of the soul supplies sensation and feeling while a higher part thinks and reasons (I 1,4,1-13; 7,14-17). Since Plotinus holds that the soul, as an immortal, changeless entity, cannot admit ‘movement’ from a lower level, he differentiates between the higher part of the soul that ‘uses the body’, and remains unaffected, and the lower part that is ‘somehow mixed with body and on a level with

that which it uses', that may be affected (I 1,3,23-24). This higher part of the soul, the true 'self', is one with all other souls and with the universal Soul (IV 9,1,1-13); it is potentially also one with its own intellect and with the universal Intellect, and actually so insofar as it contemplates correctly (I 1,8.1-8; 9,13-15). Finally, the soul also possesses the One at its centre, coincident with the universal One at the centre of all things (I 1,8,9-11; VI 9,8,1-22). The individual human thus contains all the levels of the macrocosm.

Plotinus shows some ambivalence about the presence of the soul in the body. He holds that the soul is culpable for wanting to assert its individuality and exist independently of its origin in the intelligible world (V 1,1,1-17). The danger of embodiment is that the soul becomes enmeshed in the world of bodily cares and preoccupations, ceasing to recognise its divine nature and source (IV 8,2 43-44). Thus, the need to reorient the soul towards the source of unity motivates Plotinus's negative assessments of the body, although in fact he regards this as an inferior strategy, compared with reminding the soul 'how high its birth and value are' (V 1,1,26-29).

On the other hand, there are also indications that Plotinus regards the soul's descent in a positive light. He likens the body to a house that has been skilfully prepared for us by 'a good sister soul' (a reference to the world soul), and that we must therefore inhabit until it is no longer needed (II 9,18,1-17). He is clear that due attention should be paid to the body's requirements: the virtuous person 'knows [the body's] needs, and gives it what he gives it without taking anything away from his life' (I 4,4,30-31). In other words, Plotinus does not think that basic care of the body will deprive the soul. Furthermore, he describes the soul's entry into a body as necessary for setting in order the body that has been allotted to it, and ultimately for

the perfection of the universe (IV 8,5,1-5, 25-27). His reasoning here is that the powers of the soul would have remained hidden if they had not found expression in a body: 'As things are, everyone wonders at what is within because of the varied splendour of the outside and admires what the doer is because it does these fine things' (IV 8,5, 36-38). Hence, in his view, the body serves the useful function of manifesting the soul.

Even in these more favourable assessments, the body clearly continues to occupy a lowly position in Plotinus's metaphysical hierarchy. However, for Plotinus at least, this fact seems to have no gendered connotations. On the contrary, he challenges a received view of generation, much criticised by feminists (see below, §5.1.1), according to which the female contributes the matter while only the male contributes the form of the offspring. This point seems to have been lost on one of the few feminists to examine Plotinus in a feminist context. Irigaray, in *Speculum of the Other Woman*, devotes an entire chapter to quotations, without comment, from *Enneads* III 6, Plotinus's treatise 'On the Impassibility of Things without Body' (Irigaray 1985, 168-179). These quotations are selected to demonstrate as self-evident the misogyny and phallocentrism implicit in Plotinus's descriptions of matter. Absent from the selections, however, is a crucial passage that calls for quite a different interpretation of Plotinus. After quoting Plotinus's comparison (following Plato) of the forms entering matter with the insemination of a mother[-to-be], she omits lines 19-26 in which Plotinus questions the assumption on which Plato bases that comparison:

But those people seem to call it 'mother' who claim that the mother holds the position of matter in respect to her children, in that she only receives [the seed] and contributes nothing to the children ... But if the mother does contribute something to the child, it is not in so far as she is matter, but because she is also

form, for only form can produce offspring, but the other nature is sterile. (III 6, 19,19-26)¹⁹

Plotinus clearly distances himself from ‘those people’ and acknowledges, unlike his predecessors, the possibility that the mother, as well as the father, contributes form to the offspring.²⁰ Yet Irigaray proceeds with selections which continue the analogy of matter and motherhood, leaving the reader with the impression that this is precisely the view Plotinus endorses.

Thus, while Plotinus may fairly be judged to view the body with ambivalence, if not outright hostility at times, there are no grounds for thinking that his view of it reflects or is in any way connected with his view of women, as has been claimed in connection with Plato (see below, §3.2.3). While this conclusion may not redeem Plotinus in the eyes of those feminist critics who are opposed in principle to a philosophical theory that devalues the body, it does place the onus on them, in my view, to explain why his lower evaluation of the body is a *feminist* issue.

2.3 The ‘divine transcendence’ and ‘unity over multiplicity’ objections

Plato’s metaphysics continue to echo, via his medieval interpreters such as Plotinus, in monotheistic theologies, where it would seem that gender bias has become more entrenched. In the view of some feminists, the traditional emphasis on divine transcendence – the idea that God is remote, omnipotent, and omniscient – reflects the interests of dominant males and neglects an equally important strand of theological thought, divine immanence – the idea that God is immediately present, indwelling, and continuous with creation. Frankenberry, for example, claims that the

¹⁹ I am indebted to Sara Rappe for alerting me to Irigaray’s use of Plotinus. Discovery of the significant omission is, however, original.

²⁰ Vassilopoulou points out the significance of Plotinus’s revision of the earlier metaphor, not only for the content of the revision but also as an example of his practice of eliciting alternative meanings from verbal images and encouraging his students to do likewise and thereby exercise critical thinking (2003, 141).

classical theistic conception of God, based on Greek philosophical ideals of necessary being, self-sufficiency, omnipotence and omniscience, is 'thoroughly embedded in a discourse of domination that disproportionately inscribes male bias' (Frankenberry 1993, 31-4). In her view, this gender bias in traditional Christian theology undergirds patriarchal power in social and religious institutions:

The supreme, ruling, judging, as well as loving, male God envisioned as a single, absolute subject and named Father has been conceived as standing in a relation of hierarchical domination to the world. In ways both implicit and explicit, this has tended in turn to justify various social and political structures that exalt solitary human patriarchs at the head of pyramids of power. Drawn almost exclusively from the world of ruling-class men, traditional theistic concepts and images have functioned effectively to legitimate social and intellectual structures that grant a theomorphic character to men who rule but that relegate women, children, and other men to marginalized and subordinated areas. (Frankenberry 1998, 177)

Johnson, similarly critical of the 'masculine' model of divinity, offers a classic psychoanalytic explanation, describing classical theism's emphasis on 'the absolute transcendence of God over the world' as 'the reflection of patriarchal imagination ... the quintessential embodiment of the solitary ruling male ego' (Johnson 1993, 21). To redress the balance, Johnson proposes a renewed emphasis on divine immanence (ibid., 147)

Culpepper (1987), a radical feminist, directs a more generalised criticism at any metaphysical system that subordinates multiplicity to unity. In her view, privileging a single, ultimate principle such as 'The One' has the effect of creating an ontologically inferior category of everything that is 'Other'. Furthermore, she claims that this polarisation translates into a hierarchical division of society into elite and outcast groups: 'The One is basically a hostile term for feminists. It pulls together all that is valued, and separates from all that is rejected, creating 'the Other' as repository for what is rejected or feared ... Monotheism functions as a mask for a debilitating

dualism, a binary hierarchy that impoverishes our imaginations and obscures the fantastic multiplicity of be-ing' (ibid., 65-6).

While the target of the first two critics is a theistic model that postdates Plotinus, some essential features of that model can be found in his conception of the One, as I shall show presently. Furthermore, the influence of Plotinus, as well as that of Platonism more generally, on the theology of such figures as Augustine, Anselm, and Bonaventure has been well documented elsewhere (see e.g. Rist 1996; Armstrong 1979). It is therefore plausible to think the criticisms would apply to Plotinus insofar as he posits a transcendent, divine source of reality. However, while divine transcendence is undoubtedly important to Plotinus's view of the One, I shall argue that his conception of the One as (i) continuous with the other levels of reality and (ii) non-coercive lacks the 'dominance' connotations of the theistic model criticised by Frankenberry (§2.3.1). Furthermore, I shall argue that, to the extent that Plotinus is understood as proposing the immanence of the One, he may be seen as further undermining the dominance associated by Culpepper with privileging a single principle (§2.3.2). I then consider an analogy of Plotinus with Feuerbach in relation to Plato and traditional Christian theology, respectively, prompted by Alliez and Feher's interpretation (1989) of Plotinus as 'reversing' Platonic doctrine about the soul's relationship to the One (§2.3.3). I conclude however that attributing total immanence to the divine is neither accurate to Plotinus nor ultimately as conducive to the elimination of gender bias in the conception of the divine as is the balance Plotinus achieves between immanence and transcendence (§2.3.4).

2.3.1 Non-dominant transcendence of the One

(i) Continuity

As discussed above in relation to the positing of separate realms (§2.1), Plotinus conceives of the One as in some way continuous with the successive levels of reality, and expresses this in his metaphors of light, a spring of water, and time. Admittedly, the notion of continuity is not sufficient to exclude the possibility of a dominant relationship existing between the source and what issues from the source, as is obvious in the analogy of parent and child, which Plotinus also uses, for example of souls in relation to ‘their father, God’ (V 1,1,1).²¹ On the other hand, continuity qualified by non-coerciveness and balanced by immanence *is* arguably sufficient to dispel connotations of dominance.

(ii) Non-coerciveness

Although Plotinus conceives of the One as the transcendent source of power, the ‘power’ in question is creative rather coercive: his cosmology contains no suggestion of divine intervention in the natural order. According to Plotinus, the universe exists ‘of necessity’, not as a result of planning but ‘of a better nature naturally producing a likeness of itself’ (III 2,3,1-6). While the instrument of production referred to here is the divine Intellect, the same principle applies in the first act of production, that of Intellect by the One. For Plotinus, since ‘planning’ implies ‘lack’ and therefore imperfection, it cannot be the case that the divine source, being perfect, planned to bring the universe into existence (III 2,2,10-15; V 8,7). While Plotinus strongly endorses the existence of an order of ‘providence’, its operation follows a rational pattern and does not admit of manipulation by, for

²¹ Cf. also Plotinus’s comparison of the soul’s love for God to ‘the noble love of a girl for her noble father’ (VI 9,9,34-5).

example, theurgical means (III 2,7,34; 9,11-13). Furthermore, in his view, human misdeeds reap their natural consequences, since ‘the rational principles bring into a connected whole the consequences and results which follow upon those deeds which are evil’ (III 2,18,14-16). Thus, there appears to be no room for intervention, coercive or otherwise, in his view of divine transcendence.

Furthermore, Plotinus describes the One in terms that imply the reverse of authoritarian characteristics. It is, for example, ‘gentle and kindly and gracious, and present to anyone when he wishes’ (V 5,12,34-35). A similar emphasis on the volition of the individual soul in turning to the One is evident in his analogy of the choir:

[We] are always around [the One] but do not always look to it; it is like a choral dance: in the order of its singing the choir keeps round its conductor but may sometimes turn away, so that he is out of their sight, but when it turns back to him it sings beautifully and is truly with him. (VI 9,8,37-41)

In other words, individuals are free to turn and contemplate the One or not, though Plotinus undoubtedly thinks their lives will go better if they do. Thus, for Plotinus, divine transcendence is benign and non-authoritarian.

2.3.2 Immanence of the One

In addition to stressing the transcendence of the One, Plotinus strongly suggests its immanence. When using a favoured geometric metaphor to describe the structure of reality, he states that, relative to successive domains of reality and individual souls, the One is like the centre point of a series of concentric circles (VI 9,8,19-22). Accordingly, he enjoins seekers to contemplate the One by turning within and ascending ‘to the principle in oneself’ (VI 9,7,3-5, 17-20; 9,3,21). Frequently, he links turning inwards to discover the One with self-knowledge, as if the two are mutually entailing:

If then a soul knows itself ... and knows that its movement is ... as it were, in a circle around something, something not outside but a centre, and the centre is that

from which the circle derives, then it will move around this from which it is and will depend on this, bringing itself into accord with that which all souls ought to, and the souls of the gods always do. (VI 9,8,1-7)

Plotinus asks whether this ‘centre of the soul’ is the ultimate object of the search, but concludes that that is, rather, ‘something else in which all such centres coincide’ (VI 9 8,10-12). Thus, for Plotinus, the One is both immanent and transcendent: immanent insofar as it is within the soul, transcendent insofar as all souls derive from it and reach towards it.

While scholars generally acknowledge a dialectic between transcendence and immanence in Plotinus’s conception of the One (as in the other divine principles), some have attempted to analyse the ‘transcendent’ aspects in terms of human psychology (e.g. Barnes 1945; Hadot [1963] 1993; Joseph Katz 1950; and Alliez and Feher 1989). As a result, these latter scholars in effect defend the immanence of the One, Intellect and Soul. I consider their interpretations next, and argue that while they may seem promising to feminists like Johnson, who have proposed reconceptualizing the divine as immanent (Johnson 1993), an exclusive emphasis on immanence, in my view, neither represents Plotinus adequately nor serves the interests of women’s liberation as Johnson hopes.

According to Barnes, Plotinus’s doctrine of the All-Soul (i.e. the principle, Soul) prefigures Jung’s theory of the collective unconscious. While noting that Plotinus’s conception is ‘more metaphysical’ than that of Jung, she likens the Plotinian ‘*ascent* into higher spheres’ to the Jungian ‘*descent* into deeper realms of consciousness’. In her view, both Jung and Plotinus aim to harmonise the individual psyche with the ‘world of greater scope of which he at best usually only dimly perceives himself to be a part’ (Barnes 1945, 567). By thus linking the Plotinian

realms of reality with Jungian levels of consciousness, Barnes is not thereby denying their transcendent aspect, although the transcendence is limited to human history.

Similarly, Hadot, at least in his earlier work, describes Plotinus's intelligible or 'spiritual' world as 'nothing other than the self at its deepest level'. Hadot sees Plotinus as articulating an inner experience of awakening to a different mode of consciousness that was previously unconscious, and describing the experience in terms of the traditional Platonic framework (Hadot [1963] 1993, 25-27). It is not clear whether Hadot is using 'unconscious' in a modern psychoanalytic sense, but in any case, his views on the subject appeared to change over the next few decades. In his later work, he speaks of passage through stages of spiritual progress as occurring *with* the ascent through the hierarchical levels of reality, although he is still able to claim that, for Plotinus, the intelligible world is internal to the contemplative soul (Hadot 1989, 234, 239). By this I do not think he means that it is just a psychological state of the individual soul, rather that the contemplative soul comes to identify with a larger intelligible domain through having intuitive access to it.

Unlike Hadot and Barnes, Joseph Katz's account of Plotinian and indeed Platonic cosmology appears to reduce it entirely to (typical) individual psychological states. According to Katz, the key to Platonism is to read its levels of reality as an expressive of experience and ideals (Katz 1950, vii). Thus the intelligible realm is recognisable as a description of the process of thinking, free from most of the limitations of sensory objects, uniting past, present, and future, and unifying sense experience (*ibid.*, 21-22). In Katz's view, Plotinus is describing experiences that are not, in fact, unknown in ordinary life, such as the experience of seeing the connections between things, or of the immediate presence of objects, but misinterpreting these experiences as separate realms of existence (*ibid.*, 23-24). The

idea that Plotinus ‘misinterpreted’ his experiences is a curious one indeed, considered in the light of the other (Steven) Katz’s claim that prior beliefs are largely constitutive of experience (see discussion above, §1.1.1). From what Plotinus says about the experience of union with Intellect and the One, it seems clear that such an experience is only possible for someone who has undertaken the requisite intellectual training and thus *has* the prior structure of beliefs (see below, §3.1.2). Reducing the Plotinian divine realms to experiences, and thus to total immanence, as does (Joseph) Katz, is thus untenable.

A daring suggestion by Alliez and Feher (1989) is that Plotinus effected what (I shall suggest) amounts to a kind of Feuerbachian reversal of Platonic doctrine in respect of the relationship of individual souls to the source of ultimate value. Alliez and Feher use the terms *influence* and *effluence*, respectively, to describe this relationship in Plato and Plotinus. In Plato, they claim, the *influence* exerted by the Good on souls via the Ideas implies that different sorts of entities (i.e. the Good and souls) are involved; in Plotinus, the *effluence* leading from the One to souls indicates difference in degree but not in kind. This, in their view, has significant implications for the nature of contemplative intellection in the two philosophers. Whereas the Platonic soul turns outwards towards something other than itself, the Plotinian soul turns within, ‘devoting himself to exploring his own psychic space, his own internal life deep within which he discovers radiant Intellect and, even deeper, the One of which Intellect is already a reflection’ (Alliez and Feher 1989, 63).

2.3.3 A Feuerbachian reversal of Platonic doctrine?

In my view, Alliez and Feher’s claim that Plotinus reversed Platonic doctrine regarding the soul’s relationship to the divine suggests a modern parallel with Feuerbach and traditional Christian theology. Feuerbach aimed in his philosophy to

withdraw his tradition's projection of ultimate good onto a transcendent entity, relocating it in the individual. He claimed that in religion, man becomes disunited from himself by projecting his best human qualities onto a distinct, separate being, to whom he then subjects himself (Feuerbach 1957, 30-31). Since, in Feuerbach's view, disunion can only occur between beings that ought to be or are essentially one, the nature from which man feels alienated must be something innate and internal to himself and yet of a different order from that which prompts the feeling of estrangement. Feuerbach believes that the alienated and objectified nature is in fact the faculty of reason, which enables man to abstract from his subjectivity and become aware of reason. In contrast to the limitations of his individuality, man sees reason as infinite, immaterial, mysterious, and requiring some ultimate realisation (ibid., 33-36). Religion makes of this perceived necessity a metaphysical being, a first cause explaining the existence and order of the world (ibid., 37-38). Thus Feuerbach accounts for the existence of God in human thought.

According to Feuerbach's historical view of cultural development, the above represents a primitive stage of religion in which human beings are unaware of the identity of God with their own ability to be self-reflexive:

... [The] historical progress of religion consists in this: that what by an earlier religion was regarded as objective, is now recognised as subjective; that is, what was formerly contemplated and worshipped as God is now perceived to be something *human* ... The divine being is nothing else than the human being. ... All the attributes of the divine nature are, therefore, attributes of the human nature. (1957, 13-14)

However, the more 'human' qualities are attributed to God, the more they are denied of the human being. Thus, in proportion as God is loving, merciful and just, the human is seen as lacking in these qualities: 'To enrich God, man must become poor; that God may be all, man must be nothing' (ibid., 26). With the dawning of philosophy comes the realisation that the qualities predicated of God are human

qualities writ large and that the divine being has no existence apart from the properties attributed (ibid., 19-21).

To what extent is Plotinus engaged in a comparable project? Did he, in fact, reclaim ultimate good from its transcendent position in Plato's cosmology and rehouse it in the human psyche?²² Certainly it would be anachronistic to impute to Plotinus a modern understanding of the mechanisms of psychological projection, or indeed to compare his motivation as such with Feuerbach's. It is rather in the *effects* than in the *causes* that I am suggesting a basis for comparison, at least according to Alliez and Feher's interpretation. Furthermore, Plotinus's 'man', in whom the One may be found, is a human soul that has renounced its identification with the body, unlike Feuerbach's 'man', who is presumably a thoroughly physical being with no thought of sloughing off his embodiment. That the comparison ultimately fails is, I shall argue, no great loss from the point of view of feminist concerns about gender-biased conceptions of the divine.

How then does Plato's conception of the divine compare with a theological doctrine of transcendence? Plato's equivalent consists not just of one Supreme Being but of an entire realm, the world of Forms. Admittedly, he speaks of a creator, the Demiurge (*Timaeus* 28b-37d), but this figure appears to be more of a heuristic device rather than a metaphysical posit. However, Plato does place one Form over and above all the rest: the Form of the Good, upon which the other Forms depend for their being and knowability (*Republic* 508e-509b). The Form of the Good functions not only as a principle of unity for the Forms but as the object of human striving (*Republic* 505e). This striving is not, as in Plotinus, the soul's desire for a return to or identity with its

²² Whether Plato's cosmology can be said to require transcendent entities in a similar way to the theology that Feuerbach attacked is, of course, controversial, although it seems uncontroversial that it did for many of Plato's followers, including Plotinus.

origin, hence for Plato there is no ‘merging’ of contemplator and contemplated: the primary metaphor used for contemplation of the Forms is vision, which maintains the distinction between subject and object (Teloh 1981, 101-2). Thus, the goal of the Platonic journey or ascent, at least on Teloh’s interpretation, is a vision of a reality utterly distinct from the soul.²³

Against the claim that Plotinus reclaimed the ultimate good from its transcendent position in Plato’s cosmology and rendered it immanent in the human soul is the fact that that Plotinus very often *sounds* as if he is talking about transcendent entities when he speaks of the One, Intellect, and Soul. While many scholars would agree that Plotinus stressed the immanence of the divine realities to a greater degree than did his Platonic predecessors, few would go to the lengths of interpreting this as a denial of transcendence. The fact that Plotinus repeatedly calls for a ‘turning within’ to apprehend the ultimate source of value strongly suggests a conception of the divine as immanent. However, he frequently *appears* to refer to transcendent realities when, for example, he speaks of the generation of the multiplicity of beings from One, via Intellect and Soul; indeed, he seems to oscillate between speaking of the microcosm and the macrocosm, between psychology and cosmology, throughout his teachings. This may be due partly, as Hadot suggests, to the constraint of using language consonant with the Platonic tradition (Hadot [1963] 1993, 26). In my view, however, it would be a distortion of Plotinus to deny that he holds a conception of absolute value transcending the human condition. This is evident in his claim, quoted above (§2.2.2), that the object of the soul’s search for the source of unity is ‘something else in which all such centres [e.g., of the soul]

²³ While I am aware that other interpretations of Plato are possible, I shall assume that Teloh’s is typical for the sake of the argument. See however *Charmides* 158e-159a for an instance of Socrates implying that the form of temperance to be found *within* the individual (Charmides in this case).

coincide' (VI 9,8,10-12 – bracketed insertion mine). While it may be true to say that Plotinus emphasised the interiority of the soul's contemplation, this was not at the expense of a framework of transcendent principles that he claimed to find in Plato's writings.

2.3.4 Some problems with continuity and immanence

While continuity of levels and the immanence of the One may be seen to overcome some of the problems feminists have identified in conceptions of the divine, models privileging immanence and/or connectivity have also been seen to have adverse implications for women. In addition to her afore-mentioned criticism of the classical theistic model (§2.2.1), Frankenberry also finds problematic the theistic model of panentheism ('all in God'). In her view, panentheistic models (such as Hartshorne's process theology) that posit an organic connection between God and the world idealise unity and connection in a way that can be repressive for women. Frankenberry claims that organic metaphors for the social order, whether in feudal society or modern totalitarian movements, have functioned no less than have classical theistic models to keep individuals in their (ostensibly divinely) ordained place (1993, 36-7).

Some of Plotinus's statements about the relationship between the One and other beings seem to suggest panentheism. For instance, in arguing for the omnipresence of the One (described here as 'the Principle'), he makes the following claims: '[The] Principle, since it has nothing before it, has not anything else to be in; but ... it encompasses all the other things. But in encompassing them it is not dispersed into them and it possesses them without being possessed ... So it is there and not there; it is not there because it is not in the grasp of anything, but because it is free from everything it is not prevented from being anywhere' (V 5,9,8-15). Since Plotinus

holds that everything that comes into being both depends on and exists in some way in what ontologically precedes it, he can justifiably claim that the universe exists in Soul, Soul in Intellect, and Intellect in the One (V 5,9,1-5; 30-32). Hence, the One, according to Plotinus, is, like the panentheistic model, both all-encompassing and supreme.

On the other hand, Plotinus's doctrine of the One differs significantly from panentheism in that he does not consider the derived realities to be in any way constitutive of the One (as process theologians consider the world to be partially constitutive of God). This is evident when he says that '[the] One is all things and not a single one of them' and that 'though he is nowhere, there is nowhere where he is not' (V 2,1,1-2; V 5,8,24-25). These statements have been taken by some scholars to mean that all things have a *virtual* existence in the One, which has the power to cause their existence but does not coincide with them (see e.g. Gerson 1994, 35-6, Costa 1996, 363). On this interpretation, it would be inaccurate to describe Plotinus's conception of the One as panentheistic, and *a fortiori* as pantheistic, as some interpreters have proposed.²⁴ From the point of view of Frankenberry's worry about organic metaphors, it is to Plotinus's advantage that his conception of divine immanence is qualified by the apophatic statements with which he 'unsays' his positive statements about the One.²⁵

Conclusions

I have argued that Plotinus's account of the structure of reality avoids at least two of the criticisms of masculine bias that have been directed at hierarchical structures in Platonic metaphysics. First, he undermines the alleged polarisation of the

²⁴ For two sides of the debate on whether Plotinus was pantheistic, see Mamo (1976) and Rist (1989).

²⁵ For discussion of apophatic language in Plotinus, see Sells (1994).

sensible world and the intelligible world by the use of metaphors expressing continuity between the levels of reality proceeding from the absolute unity of the One. Second, in view of his conception of the One as both continuous with the derived realities and non-coercive, and his statements indicating the immanence of the One, his formulation of divine transcendence is not associated with dominance. This leaves the criticism of negativity towards the body still standing. However, I have shown that, while the body represents for Plotinus the pull of dispersion on the soul's quest for unity, there is reason to think that he did not associate the body with a particular gender.

CHAPTER 3: TRANSCENDING KNOWLEDGE

Introduction

Plotinus conceives of his philosophy as an ascent through stages of knowledge that correspond with the metaphysical levels of reality discussed in the previous chapter. The aim of philosophy on this construal is a transforming unification of the self or soul, as it comes to understand the structure of reality as a progression of increasingly unified and unifying principles. How does the seemingly abstract process of grasping principles effect this transformation, the climax of which Plotinus sometimes describes in terms of passionate experience? What indeed, for Plotinus, *are* knowledge and experience, and what is the relationship between them? How does he construe the role of the body in attaining knowledge and the experience of union with the One? In the first part of this chapter, I discuss these questions and the related issue of the appropriateness of calling Plotinus's philosophy mystical, in view of its experiential dimension (§3.1). I then consider various feminist objections to the Platonic account of knowledge, namely that it privileges an androcentric perspective, discriminates against women as knowers, and devalues the body and sensory experience. I examine the resources in Plotinus's account of knowledge for responding to these concerns (§3.2).

3.1 The relationship between knowledge and experience in Plotinus

3.1.1 *'Knowledge' and 'experience' defined*

Because 'knowledge' and 'experience' are such familiar terms, it is easy to read into their occurrences in the *Enneads* just what *we* mean when we use these words in everyday speech. In particular, both terms today, even in a philosophical

context, seem to be closely linked with the deliverances of the senses. According to a current definition of ‘knowledge’, for example, as justified, true belief, the justification condition is often thought to be satisfied by an appeal to sensory data, which in turn is identified with experience. It is therefore important to present Plotinus’s analysis of these terms insofar as they relate to the ascent to the One. For Plotinus, as for Plato, sense-perception (*aesthesis*) can only give us only opinion (*doxa*), since its objects are subject to change and fluctuation; knowledge (*episteme* or *noesis*) is of what is permanent and changeless, and therefore not of sensory objects (I 3,4,9-10). For both Plato and Plotinus, *episteme* denotes discursive reasoning, the premises of which are judgements that may be based on sense-perception, and *noesis* denotes intuitive grasping of other immaterial objects such as principles or forms. To avoid ambiguity, I shall use the term ‘knowledge’ only where both activities are intended, and otherwise specify discursive reason or intuition. When I use the terms ‘rationality’ or ‘the rational path’, I intend this also to include both activities.

Although Plotinus uses the term (or the concept) ‘experience’ to describe sensory interaction with the external world and the affections that arise from this, he also uses it in connection with the intellectual and ostensibly non-sensory activity of the soul. In fact, the soul is involved in both types of experience, since, according to Plotinus, sense-perception and affectivity are ‘powers’ of the soul-body composite (I 1,1-4). However, as stated above (§2.2), Plotinus posits only a lower part of the soul as belonging to the composite, while the higher part remains separate (I 1,3,23-24) and uses the body. This higher part of the soul, he maintains, is not affected by feelings and sensations, since this would imply change and movement, sourced from a lower level, in an immortal and changeless entity (I 1,2,9-28). Nevertheless, in contexts where Plotinus clearly intends the higher, unmixed part of the soul, he speaks

explicitly of the soul's 'experiences' of the One (VI 9,3,55), the vision of the One that is 'a kind of passionate experience like that of a lover resting in the beloved' (VI 9,4,18-19), and the experiences of delight that souls have when in contact with 'invisible beauties' such as beautiful dispositions, souls, and the Forms (e.g. I 6,4,16; I 6,7,13-14). In each case, the object of experience is directly intuited, without the mediation of judgement or reasoning.

Despite Plotinus's denial that the (higher) soul can be affected by its experiences, his descriptions of contact with the higher intellectual realities nevertheless convey a strong impression of affective or 'felt' qualities – something *that it is like* for the agent to have this experience. Does this mean that the higher soul is 'moved' after all? In discussing the soul's investigation of its own nature, Plotinus asks the very same question, since the activity of investigating implies movement. He concedes that the soul does have a kind of movement, 'which is not a movement of bodies but its own life' (I 1,13,1-5). Although Plotinus does not say so explicitly, he would presumably explain the 'passionate experience' of the higher soul in the same way. Bearing in mind that 'higher' for Plotinus means 'more unified' (closer to the One), the movement of the higher soul is presumably more unified *in some sense*, though it is difficult to conceptualise this, and harder still to imagine the difference in terms of affect. For the experiences to be recognisable as experiences of delight, however, there must be something about them that is at least analogous to 'ordinary' feelings of delight. Accordingly, while Plotinus posits two levels of experience corresponding to the higher and lower parts of the soul, it is in my view legitimate to conclude that experience in both cases involves immediacy and affective qualities.

3.1.2 The Plotinian path to knowledge and its relationship to experience

In one sense the whole of the *Enneads* exemplify the rational path Plotinus prescribes for those wanting to attain knowledge of ultimate reality. The method of ‘ascent’ typically takes the form of tracking a fundamental concept such as ‘unity’ from its visible manifestations to what is for Plotinus its metaphysical principle (*arche*). Thus, for example, he starts with a discussion of how the concept of unity enables us to individuate collectives (e.g. armies), artefacts (e.g. houses) and continuous bodies. Not only is the concept useful from the point of view of being able to identify things correctly, but it represents something necessary to the existence of those things qua entities: without unity, they cease to be those entities (VI 9,1,1-14). The question then arises as to where unity comes from. A reasonable supposition for a Platonist would be that the primary Soul is the source of unity, since the Soul is believed to bring form and harmonious activity to matter; however, Plotinus points out that the Soul itself contains parts and so is not a true unity, even though it can unify other things (VI 9,1,17-43). Beyond the Soul, according to Platonic metaphysics, is the primary Intellect (equivalent, for Plotinus, to the Platonic Forms and the realm of real Being), but this too contains multiplicity and so cannot be the source of unity (VI 9,2,21-47). This leads him to deduce that there must be an original principle or paradigm of unity, beyond Soul and Intellect, that is altogether single, partless and formless: the One (VI 9, 2,29-3,55).

For Plotinus, dialectic is ‘the valuable part of philosophy’ and is to be distinguished from logic, which is ‘about propositions and syllogisms’ (I 3,5,9; 4,19-20). From Plato’s description of dialectic as ‘the purest part of intelligence and wisdom’ (*Philebus* 58d), Plotinus infers that dialectic must be concerned with what is most real (i.e. closest to the source of reality) and most valuable (I 3,5,6-7). He

describes dialectic as ‘the science which can speak about everything in a reasoned and orderly way, and say what it is and how it differs from other things and what it has in common with them’ (I 3,4,2-4), in other words classification and division. In this science, Plotinus includes the activities of determining what belongs in the classes of existents and non-existents, good and not good, eternal and not eternal; distinguishing Forms; and finding primary kinds (I 3,4,6-14). Why are these activities not propositional? It appears that Plotinus is distinguishing between the method of acquisition of dialectical knowledge, which for him is intuitive, and its (mere) verbal expression, which is of course propositional. Since he equates intelligibility with reality, he understands intuition of intelligible objects to be a direct grasping of real beings themselves, not just of words about them.²⁶

As well as classification and division, Plotinus’s conception of dialectic includes a synthetic function: ‘Weaving together by the intellect all that issues from these primary kinds, till it has traversed the whole intelligible world ... [the soul] resolves again the structure of that world into its parts, and comes back to its starting-point; and ... contemplates, having arrived at unity’ (I 3,4,14-18). Abstract as this sounds, Plotinus’s method for contemplating the intelligible world in fact begins with contemplation of ‘this visible universe’, with its heavenly bodies, earth, sea, and ‘all the living creatures’, as if within a transparent sphere (V 8,9,1-8). Holding this image in view, the contemplator is then enjoined to subtract materiality from the vision:

Let there be, then, in the soul a shining imagination of a sphere, having everything within it, either moving or standing still ... Keep this, and apprehend in your mind another, taking away the mass: take away also the places, and the mental picture of matter in yourself, and do not try to apprehend another sphere smaller in mass than the original one, but calling on the god who made that of which you have the mental picture, pray him to come. And may he come, bringing his own universe with him, with all the gods within him. (V 8,9,8-16)

²⁶ Cf. V 5,1,38-41: ‘[Intelligibles] are certainly not “premises” or “axioms” or “expressions”; for then they would only say something about other things and would not be the things themselves’.

The ‘god’ referred to here is Intellect, in its capacity of the giver of Forms; subtracting matter from the vision, the contemplator is enabled to grasp the Forms in their original beauty. Dialectical contemplation thus involves an exercise of the imagination in bringing together all the features of the cosmos in such a way as to apprehend them simultaneously.

However, the contemplative activity just described is, for Plotinus, only preparatory to the ultimate act of synthesis. Just as the contemplator of the intelligible must let go of the perceptible, so, if he would contemplate what is beyond the intelligible, he must let go of the intelligible (V 5,6,18-21). As Plotinus says, ‘[He] will learn *that it is* by means of the intelligible, but *what it is like* by letting the intelligible go’ (V 5,6,21-22 – italics mine). In other words, intellect makes it possible to grasp the necessity of there being something beyond intellect, but cannot provide experiential knowledge about what this is like since doing so would require intellect to go beyond itself. According to Plotinus, so long as the soul adheres to ‘reasoned knowledge’, it fails to achieve the awareness of the One that results in and from its own internal unity: ‘The soul experiences its falling away from being one and is not altogether one when it has reasoned knowledge of anything; for reasoned knowledge is a rational process, and a rational process is many’ (VI 9,4,4-6). For Plotinus, reasoning implies the presence of multiplicity in the mind of the thinker, as she moves from one object or premise to another. Hence he insists that going beyond ‘knowledge and things known’ and ‘wakening from reasonings to the vision of [the One]’ is the only way to grasp the ultimate condition of unity (VI 9,4,9-10,13-14).

That Plotinus considered himself to have achieved this unified vision on several occasions is evident both from the report of his biographer, Porphyry (*LoP* 23,15-16), and from his own account of having often ‘woken up out of the body to myself ... I

have actually lived the best life and come to identity with the divine; and set firm in it I have come to that supreme actuality, setting myself above all else in the realm of Intellect' (*Enneads* IV 8,1,1-8). In this passage Plotinus describes a recurrent 'awakening' from his usual, sense-bound existence ('the body') to the experience of his true self on the level of the divine. Other passages, including the following in his most celebrated treatise on the ascent to the One (VI 9), also suggest first-hand experience, even though he speaks of the 'seer' in the third person:

[T]here were not two, but the seer himself was one with the seen ... He was one himself, with no distinction in himself either in relation to himself or to other things ... but there was not even any reason and thought, and he himself was not there, if we must even say this; but he was as if carried away or possessed by a god, in a quiet solitude and a state of calm ... altogether at rest and having become a kind of rest. (VI 9,11,4-16)

Here Plotinus struggles to articulate the experience of becoming united in vision and being with the ultimate reality – even though he believes the experience cannot, by its very nature, be communicated to those who have not had it themselves.²⁷ He characterises the experience as one of sublime peace, simplicity and illumination, after thought has been left behind (see also VI 9,9,56-60; VI 9,11,23-25; VI 7,36,21-23). Purification and intellection were necessary to reorient the soul towards the One, but the argument that showed the necessity of a single and simple first principle requires a corresponding simplification on the part of the would-be contemplator. According to the rational mysticism of Plotinus, to be fully aware of the One is possible only by becoming one with the One.

While the early stages of the ascent are concerned with propositional knowledge, the later stages involve a move to something more like Russellian acquaintance knowledge, direct and unmediated (Russell 1914, 127). The climax,

²⁷ Commentators point out that such phrases as 'if we must even say this' (*ei dei kai touto legein*) indicate Plotinus's awareness that speaking of the One can impose limitations, hence his frequent use of apophatic or self-deconstructive language. See e.g. Sells (1994, 16-17).

however, transcends even acquaintance knowledge: Plotinus argues that since we cannot grasp something utterly simple with a tool (i.e. knowledge) that essentially divides the subject from the object of thought, we have to transcend knowledge itself to come to awareness of the One (VI 9,4,1-6). Even though he sometimes uses language suggesting vision to describe this awareness (VI 9,4,16; 9,56-57), he is at pains to show that this is not sensory vision and that it exceeds even intellectual vision: ultimately there is no distinction between 'seer' and 'seen', but both become one (VI 9,10,9-21).

For Plotinus, the soul's arrival at union with the One is a return to its origin (VI 9,9,20-21). Having an innate love for the One, the soul naturally craves this union but, upon entering the body, becomes distracted by the things of the sensory world, until it recognises their deceptiveness and realises where its true destination lies (VI 9,9,33-46). Shedding everything else, the soul draws near to that 'giver of true life', embracing it wholeheartedly and seeing itself as 'pure light – weightless, floating free, having become – but rather, being – a god, set on fire' (VI 9,9,50-60). At this point the soul, as seer, ceases to be separate from its object: it is one with itself, beyond relation, movement, desire, reason or thought (VI 9,10,4-12). Plotinus, in describing the experience here, no longer refers to another entity besides the soul: all emphasis is on the seer, and even his presence is in doubt: he is 'not there, if we must even say this', but rather 'out of [him]self' (VI 9,11,12; 23). The soul's destination is thus the arrival, not at something other but at itself and in itself, beyond being and substance, good and beauty.

Even after attaining the vision, the soul is unable to enjoy it continuously whilst weighed down by the body. It is not just the physical body that is a hindrance at this stage, but the part of the soul that engages in discursive reason and thus reintroduces

duality (VI 9,10,3-9). As soon as the soul rests from the vision and the sensory world once more impinges giving rise to discriminations and judgements, the unitive state is fragmented. However, the vision has a lasting effect on the seer even after it has ceased. First, he now bears within himself an image of what he was when united with the One (VI 9,11,4-7). Second, the purifying virtues have ordered his soul and habituated him to a pathway along which he can repeatedly ascend through virtue, intellect and wisdom to the ultimate Good (VI 9,11,46-51).

From the preceding account of Plotinus's teaching on the rational path and the final goal of union with the One, several questions arise for Plotinus about the relationship between the two. Does the rational path automatically lead to the final unitive vision, provided all the conditions are met? If rationality itself is to be transcended, why attach such importance to it in the first place (in other words, does the unitive vision depend absolutely on having taken the rational path)? If rationality and the mystical union are two such incommensurate states, how is the transition from the one to the other effected? I shall address these questions in order.

Plotinus thinks that correct reasoning leads inescapably to the recognition of a primal unity, the One. However, he also thinks that the very nature of the One precludes our being able to apprehend it with the tool of discursive reason (*epistêmê*), which is inherently divisive, or even with intuition (*noesis*) (VI 9,4,1-6). He therefore has to solve the problem of how one can know something utterly simple and single without destroying its unity in the process. The experiential union is, for Plotinus, the solution to the epistemological problem, but it is also much more than that: metaphysically, it is the return of the soul to its original home, and so the goal, the *telos* that gives meaning to human existence. Plotinus assumes that his readers have embraced this goal and that it is for this reason that they are motivated to follow his

method. He describes the vision as ‘the task of someone who has already resolved to see’ (VI 9,4,15-16), and that resolve presupposes familiarity with the correct route to take. In that context, and given his own experience, it would appear that he regards the mystical union as the necessary climax of the path. Whether it in fact takes place depends on the extent to which the seeker has managed to overcome impediments such as doubts and distractions. The seeker must exhaust the possibilities of rationality before he can enter into the suprarational by way of participation.

The transition from rationality to the ultimate vision involves the transformation of the soul into intellect. Just as, on the macrocosmic scale, Intellect looks towards the One, so, according to Plotinus, in the microcosm the human soul, having become intellect, cannot help seeing that which is before it in priority (VI 9,3,33-37). Plotinus states that the final vision cannot be described to someone who has not had it himself (VI 9,11,1-4). This is due to the difficulty of conceptualising the content of a vision in which the seer and his object become one (VI 9,10,20-21). For the duration of the vision, it is as if the seer is not there since he is no longer a separate being, but joined ‘as it were, centre to centre’ with the One (VI 9,10,14-19). The possibility of conceptualising something depends on one’s being able conceptually to isolate it from its surroundings, and this is precisely what Plotinus argues is impossible here.

3.1.3 Interpreting Plotinus’s rational ascent as mystical

In view of the foregoing account of Plotinus’s conception of the philosophical ascent culminating in the experience of union with the One, it is surprising that some scholars regard mystical experience as peripheral to an understanding of Plotinus. As discussed earlier (§1.1.3), unwillingness to call someone like Plotinus a ‘mystic’ may be the result of dissatisfaction with existing definitions of mysticism. This at any rate seems to be the case with Miles, who finds the term ‘freighted’ in current usage and

unsuitable for conveying ‘Plotinus’s sense of a vision of a *reality* more immediate and (in a sense) ordinary than the everyday’ (Miles 1999, 201, n.14). However, this does not seem to be the main concern of Gerson, who accepts that Plotinus appears to have had experiences aptly described as mystical, but claims that there is no logical connection between these and his philosophy:

[In] sharp contrast to the doctrines of many mystics, Plotinus’ own experience or even a claim he might have made that such an experience is possible for anyone are logically disengaged from his entire philosophy. That is, his experience of union with the One is not a substitute for a proof of its existence, nor is its possibility entailed by it. Nothing in that experience is taken to disclose what is not otherwise knowable, apart from the knowledge by acquaintance that the experience involves. If one simply ignores that experience, the arguments, including those pertaining to Intellect and the One and the true ideal self, remain intact and open to inspection. Certainly, the invitation to detachment from the endowed self [i.e. the soul-body composite] and to ascent to an ideal self is not usefully or fairly identified as an extrusion of mystical experience as opposed to a consequence of metaphysical, epistemological and psychological arguments. (Gerson 1994, 220 – bracketed insertion mine)

Contrary to this assessment, Plotinus’s own words imply the necessity of a transition from the rational ascent to the ‘passionate experience’ of transcending rational knowledge to become one with the One:

One must therefore run up above knowledge (*epistêmê*) and in no way depart from being one, but one must depart from knowledge and things known, and from every other, even beautiful, object of vision ... For teaching goes as far as the road and the travelling, but the vision is the task of someone who has already resolved to see. But if someone has not come to the vision, and his soul has no awareness (*sunesis*) of the glory there, and he has not experienced and does not have in himself in seeing a kind of passionate experience like that of a lover resting in the beloved, then, having received the true light and illumined his whole soul through drawing nearer, but being still held back in the ascent by a burden which hinders the vision, and having ascended not alone but taking something with him which keeps him from the One, or being not yet brought together into unity ... if then someone is not yet there but is outside because of these impediments, or through lack of a reasoning to guide him and give him assurance about the One, let him blame himself for those hindrances and try to depart from all things and be alone ... (VI 9,4,7-34)

For Plotinus, the person who has ‘travelled’ the rational path without reaching the climactic experience has simply not grasped the One. The importance of argumentation in this endeavour can be seen in the fact that Plotinus equates failure of the ultimate vision with a failure in reasoning. The soul that has made the journey and has become illumined through approaching the

One may still be held back and unable to pass into the final stage of passionate awareness because of 'impediments'. Plotinus suggests that these impediments have to do with 'a lack of assurance about the One', which reasoning would supply. Unquestionably, however, he views reasoning and even intuitive knowledge as only preliminary to the crowning experience of union with the One.

Gerson gives three reasons why Plotinus's personal experiences, as recorded by Porphyry, are neither identical with the philosophical ideal he espouses nor necessary to its attainment (1994, 218-220). First, he claims that Plotinus's teaching on the ascent of the self aims to induce enduring states of contemplation of the Forms, whereas the experiences referred to by Porphyry in his biography of Plotinus are transitory and evidently not ones of contemplating Forms. However, this seems to ignore the many references in the *Enneads* to the higher goal of becoming one with the One, leaving contemplation behind (e.g. VI 9,3,11-13; VI 9,4,1-10; VI 9,10,13-21). While contemplation of the Forms is undoubtedly a lofty stage of the Plotinian ascent, it is not the summit. Plotinus himself indicates that attainment of the highest goal cannot be permanent while the soul is still embodied (VI 9,10,1-3). Therefore the transitory character of his recorded experiences does not count against their being, for him, achievement of the philosophical quest.

Gerson's second claim is that since an experience of the One is necessarily beyond cognition and allegedly ineffable, the only way for a subject to experience the One as an object (presumably a condition for being able to conceptualise it) is via the intelligible objects, an experience that Plotinus *does* describe (1994, 219). Here again, Gerson seems to have missed the point: according to Plotinus, as long as the One remains an object of thought, separate from the subject, its reality has not been grasped (V 3,13,32-24). To deny the importance of the ultimate stage of the ascent just because it cannot be expressed in cognitive terms is to dismiss what is for

Plotinus precisely the condition of our being able to attain awareness of the One – that we no longer try to conceptualise it but realise our unity with it.

Third, Gerson argues that Plotinus's 'mystical' experiences did not obviate his continued striving to identify with his ideal self or replace the goal of permanent union, implying that they were not philosophically ultimate. While admitting the experiences may have been confirmatory and anticipatory, Gerson claims they did not reveal further, otherwise unattainable knowledge, apart from knowledge by acquaintance: Plotinus's arguments do not depend on them (1994, 219). To this I would respond that Gerson may be mistaken in suggesting that the experiences even yielded knowledge by acquaintance, since this too implies a distinction between subject and object. The Iranian philosopher Mehdi Ha'iri Yazdi makes a distinction in this connection between 'knowledge by correspondence' (which includes propositional knowledge and knowledge by acquaintance) and 'knowledge by presence' (Ha'iri Yazdi 1992, 57-61). The latter, a venerable category in Islamic epistemology and derived in large measure from Plotinus, denotes a kind of knowledge that is direct and immediate, involving no representation. The paradigm case of knowledge by presence, according to Ha'iri Yazdi, is self-awareness in the sense of the underlying reality of the self. Ha'iri Yazdi claims that mystical awareness is also a form of knowledge by presence, since, in an emanationist cosmology, the One is present to the self in the same way that the self is present to itself (*ibid.*, 140).

In my view, excluding the element of mystical experience from the philosophical ascent impoverishes Gerson's account of the latter. It seems incontrovertible that Plotinus himself requires this element in order to make sense of the notion of awareness of the One. He expresses this most clearly when he describes how the One is to be apprehended:

[Our] awareness of that One is not by way of reasoned knowledge or intellectual perception, *as with other intelligible things*, but by way of a presence superior to knowledge. The soul experiences its falling away from being one and is not altogether one when it has reasoned knowledge of anything; for reasoned knowledge is a rational process, and a rational process is many ... One must therefore run up above knowledge and in no way depart from being one, but one must depart from knowledge and things known. (VI 9,4,1-4, italics mine)

In other words, the mode of awareness of the One is qualitatively different from that used to perceive intelligible realities and represents, for Plotinus, an even higher philosophical attainment. Nevertheless, even perceiving intelligible realities below the level of the One can be construed as mystical, according to the definition arrived at in chapter 1, where the mystical is seen to include immediate awareness of intelligible objects such as the Forms as well as the experience of union with the ultimate source of reality.²⁸

3.2 Feminist criticisms of the Platonic account of knowledge: do they apply to Plotinus?

Given 1) that Plotinus places such importance on the necessity of taking the rational path to the final goal of union with the One and 2) the historically common philosophical practice (e.g. Plato, Aristotle, Hume, Kant) of asserting or implying that women have inferior rationality, an obvious question is whether this path is, in principle, open to women. I begin by considering some feminist arguments that the Platonic account of knowledge and of the path to its attainment reflects an androcentric perspective. These are that the ideal of rationality itself is masculine; that the association of homosexuality with the Platonic ascent excludes women, and that soul/body dualism and the knowledge/experience dichotomy discriminate against women as knowers. I then assess how far these arguments are applicable to Plotinus,

²⁸ Bussanich (1994) has argued that there are in fact three 'levels' of Plotinian mysticism, in which the objects of the experience are, respectively, the cosmos, the intelligible world and the One.

and whether resources may be found in his philosophy to answer or at least mitigate the force of these challenges.

3.2.1 The argument that the Platonic ideal of rationality is ‘masculine’

The historical construction of ‘rationality’ has been seen by psychoanalytic feminists in particular as mutually implicated with the construction of masculinity. I discussed above (§1.3.1) Lloyd’s thesis that the philosophical ideal of rationality has been constructed over and against allegedly non-rational qualities associated with women, such as nurturance, emotion, and a close association with the body and matter, and that women are thereby excluded from the ideal (1984, 3-16). Lloyd sources this construction of rationality not only in the Pythagorean table of opposites (op. cit.), but also in the way in which Plato develops the form-matter distinction in his epistemology.²⁹ Lloyd, like Cavarero (see §2.1.1), claims that Plato sharpened the distinction between the world *qua* rational, knowable by rational minds, and the world *qua* material, to be transcended in the search for rational knowledge. This refinement of earlier theories, in conjunction with his comparison of form with a father, and matter with a mother (*Timaeus* 50d), leads Lloyd to attribute to Plato a model of knowledge that is ‘implicitly associated with the extrusion of what was symbolically associated with the feminine’ (1986, 4-5). Similar claims involving aspects of rationality have been made in relation to Plato’s alleged contribution to soul/body dualism (Spelman 1982) and the knowledge/experience dichotomy (Code 1981), both of which I discuss later in this chapter.

Another dichotomy sometimes highlighted in feminist literature, although not in relation to ancient philosophers, is that of reason and intuition. The reason for this

²⁹ Strictly speaking, there is no conception of matter in Plato’s dialogues. Form is contrasted with the perceptible, with body, with appearance, and with what changes, in different connections.

omission is, no doubt, that for Plato, Aristotle, and Plotinus, intuition (*nous*) is not opposed to reason (*logos*) but is its highest expression. Attributing intuition to the ‘feminine’, in opposition to logic and the ‘masculine’, is a relatively recent development: for the ancients, intuition was the privileged kind of knowledge, achieved only by the most godlike. On the interpretation of some psychoanalytic feminists, this association with suprarationality and divinity meant that intuition could only be a masculine trait (Griffiths and Whitford 1988, 7). Does this mean that the ancient philosophers’ privileging of intuitive knowledge is congenial to those feminists who claim that intuition is a distinctively female or feminine way of knowing?³⁰ Nineteenth century American feminists Fuller and Gage extolled women’s intuition as a unique and undervalued intellectual capacity. According to Fuller (1971, 103), this capacity enables women to ‘seize and delineate with unerring discrimination’ the connections among various life-forms that surround them; Gage (1980, 238) adds that the intuitive faculty does not ‘need a long process of ratiocination’.³¹ More recently, referring to ‘maternal knowing’ and in particular a mother’s let-down reflex in response to a baby’s cry, Miller-McLemore writes: ‘I know by knowing the feelings of the other physically because they are paradoxically both mine and not mine, a continuity in difference rather than a polar opposition or an enmeshed symbiosis. I know by an affective connection that moves toward differentiation, not by comparison, contrast, and critique or by some idealized oneness or union with the child. I know immediately ...’ (1992, 241). While these thinkers might not recognise in Plotinian intuitive knowledge the kind of intuition they have in mind, nor might Plotinus acknowledge the validity of intuition that lacked the

³⁰ The modern demotion of ‘intuition’ from suprarational to non-rational and its association with the feminine has been discussed elsewhere. On the place of intuition in Descartes and Spinoza, see Lloyd (1989, 122-124); on the problems with alleged ‘women’s ways of knowing’, see Code (1991, 252-9).

³¹ I am indebted to Lorraine Code for the references to Fuller and Gage (Code 1991, 13-14).

requisite preparatory steps of reasoning, all recognise the importance of a kind of knowing that is immediate and non-propositional. In any case, Plotinus, by thus prioritising intuitive knowledge, reverses the hierarchical dominance of the rational over the non-rational that some feminists have found objectionable.

3.2.2 The argument that homoerotic imagery in the Platonic ascent to knowledge conceptually excludes women

The association of homoerotic imagery with Platonic epistemology is read by some feminists as implying women's conceptual exclusion from making the ascent to the Forms. Fox Keller (1985), Okin (1979), and Pierce (1994) claim that homoeroticism is an essential element in Plato's account of the achievement of knowledge of beauty in the *Symposium* and the *Phaedrus*, in contrast to heterosexual love. In the *Symposium*, Diotima explains to Socrates that men and women are drawn together by bodily beauty to give birth in the hope of achieving immortality through their progeny. This she describes as an inferior kind of generation because bodies are mortal: true immortality comes when a man begets eternal wisdom and virtue in the soul of a younger man to whom he has been drawn erotically (206c-210c). While Okin merely attributes this preference for homosexuality to the social context in which Plato was writing (viz. the elevation of love between men and the lowly position of women), Fox Keller and Pierce offer a more subtle account of the epistemological significance of homosexual love. Fox Keller describes it as 'a union of kindred essences' (Fox Keller, 1985, 27); Pierce, as the abolition of separateness between subject and object, since the lovers' experience 'is not inferred' (as in heterosexual experience) but 'immediate', thus providing an appropriate starting point for ascending to knowledge of the Forms (Pierce, 1994, 33-4).

Insofar as homoeroticism is understood as a) male and b) a necessary preparation for Platonic knowledge, these writers' concerns might be plausible. With regard to a), however, Pierce herself argues that the homoerotic model is equally applicable to lesbian *eros*, and that Plato's epistemological method in principle excludes *heterosexuals*, rather than *women* (1994, 29). With regard to b), the claim is at odds with the tenor of the passage in question and moreover, as I shall go on to show, finds no resonance in Plotinus's interpretation of that passage. As far as the *Symposium* is concerned, Diotima explicitly states that the ascent from loving one beautiful body to loving all beautiful bodies involves leaving behind 'this wild gaping after just one body' (*Symposium* 210b). If a 'union of kindred essences' is necessary for Platonic knowledge, as Fox Keller suggests, this is by definition not a *bodily* but a *soul* union. Esteem for the body must be superseded by esteem for the soul, the generation of wisdom therein (210c), and the continued ascent to true beauty (211b). Fox Keller's and Pierce's claim is not, of course, that homoerotic experience is necessary to the ascent itself, but that it provides a better analogy with immediate knowledge of the Forms than does heterosexual experience. The implication is that only those who have had the experience could truly appreciate the analogy, but if this were the case, one would also have to say that, for example, only charioteers could understand the analogy of the winged horses in the *Phaedrus*. Such a position gives little credit to the powers of the human imagination.

For Plotinus, the issue of homoerotic imagery does not even arise. In his treatise *On Love*, he argues that the desire to generate indicates a lack of self-sufficiency, and that the superior activity is therefore altogether *non-productive*: '[The] man whose love of the beautiful is pure will be satisfied with beauty alone ... That, therefore, which does not want to generate suffices more to itself in beauty' (III

5,1,38-39, 46-47). In other words, rather than privileging the homoerotic model of generating knowledge over the heterosexual model of ‘sowing for perpetuity’ as Plato appears to, Plotinus’s ideal of kinship with beauty transcends the notion of generation altogether. Even in his treatise *On Beauty*, which is his main commentary on the above-mentioned passage in the *Symposium*, Plotinus speaks in a general and gender-neutral way about the attraction to bodies as preliminary to the ascent, without privileging a particular sexual orientation (e.g. I 6,1,7-8; 8,7-9). It is possible that Plotinus makes this change because of his alleged distaste for homosexuality,³² but more likely that he considers himself to be capturing the spirit of Plato’s views. In any case, this particular objection to Platonic knowledge works even less against Plotinus than it does against Plato.

3.2.3 The argument that Platonic soul-body dualism discriminates against women as knowers

It has been widely claimed that Platonic dualism discriminates against women by associating maleness with the mind or soul, femaleness with the body, and privileging the first pair over the second. Perhaps the most explicit form of the argument, and the clearest attempt to link the soul-body dichotomy to women’s alleged inability to think, is that advanced by Spelman (1982). Spelman claims that Plato’s distinction between the body and the soul as avenues of mere opinion and knowledge respectively and his tendency to associate women with the former signifies ‘a conceptual connection’ between his ‘misogyny’ and his ‘somatophobia’: ‘[The] body is seen as the source of all the undesirable traits a human being could have, and women’s lives are spent manifesting those traits’ (ibid., 118). His depiction

³² See, for example, Porphyry’s claim that Plotinus, on hearing a speech defending Alcibiades’ sexual advances towards Socrates, ‘repeatedly started up to leave the meeting, but restrained himself’, and afterwards asked Porphyry to write a refutation (*Life*, 15,7-18).

of women as easily overpowered by their emotions (*Phaedo* 60a, 112d; *Apology* 35b; *Republic* 395d-e, 605c-d; *Timaeus* 42b-c) and epitomising ignorance of real knowledge because they are deceived by their senses (*Theaetetus* 171e; *Republic* 557c) leads Spelman to conclude that for Plato, women's lives are 'quintessentially body-directed' and effectively lacking in the power of reason (Spelman 1982, 119-120).

Spelman's argument can be criticised even apart from whether it holds true for Plato. In the first place, she does not specify what she means by 'a conceptual connection' between Plato's attitude to the body and his attitude to women. If she means that his concept of the body covers all and only women, this is patently false, since he clearly does not deny that men and non-human animals have bodies. If she means merely that he tended to link his concept of woman with his concept of the body, this really tells us no more than that he happened to have that unfortunate habit, most probably reflecting popular prejudice: it does not imply that he regarded the connection as essential. Indeed, that he could have regarded the connection thus is belied by his proposal in the *Republic* that women should receive the same education as men to equip them to become guardians, since 'men and women are *by nature* the same with respect to guarding the city' (*Republic* 455e – italics mine).³³ Since it is claimed in the *Republic* (376c) that a propensity for philosophy is an essential feature of the 'guardian nature', and since it is here allowed that women share in this nature, Plato could not without inconsistency hold that woman is essentially body-directed, if this is taken to preclude her being capable of developing her (philosophical) soul.

Besides this problem, Spelman clearly underestimates the difficulties in determining what Plato himself thinks or urges us to think, as if his 'real' views can

³³ Spelman acknowledges the apparently radical nature of this proposal elsewhere (1988, 32), but argues that only those women with a 'manly' soul qualify.

be straightforwardly sifted from among those of the characters of his dialogues. Over against Spelman, there is much to suggest that Plato embodies throughout his corpus the doctrine about learning that he invites us to in the *Meno* and elsewhere: that learning involves the active participation of the learner. Thus the true message of any dialogue is not found in the explicit pronouncements of the interlocutors, including even Socrates: rather this true message is for readers to determine for themselves, through their own careful creative reflection. From the point of view of Plato's effect on the subsequent tradition of western philosophy, the distinction between his 'real' views and the explicit pronouncements of interlocutors in his dialogues may seem irrelevant, since in any case later Platonists, such as Plotinus, undertook to interpret and systematise what they took to be doctrines emerging from the dialogues, and the Neoplatonist interpretation of Plato predominated in the west until the 19th century (Gatti 1996). However, in the light of this systematising, it is in my view noteworthy that the derogatory comments about women that lead Spelman to call Plato 'misogynist' do not find their way into any 'Platonic' doctrine that Plotinus formulates. Plotinus's writings contain no disparaging claims about women's intelligence, and at least one empirical consideration points, albeit not conclusively, away from his holding any such view. Porphyry names three women in Plotinus's immediate circle who had 'a great devotion to philosophy', as well as the 'young lads and maidens' of his household, whose education he undertook (*LoP* 9,1-12). On the other hand, Plotinus does not take up the theme of the women guardians, for which Plato has been described as 'the first feminist' (Lucas 1973, 161).³⁴ Indeed, Plotinus's writings betray little interest in political and social relationships as such, so it is impossible to find direct evidence there of his views about women.

³⁴ For a refutation of this claim, see Annas 1996.

Nevertheless, since Spelman's claims epitomise a persistent, if not always well-formulated concern of most feminists (other than liberal feminists) that an epistemology based on soul-body dualism lends itself to sexist interpretation, it is worth asking whether an analysis of Plotinus's account of knowledge either supports or undermines this view. I argue that apart from some slight modifications on the received Platonic view, his account is substantially the same, and therefore someone who reads Plato's body-soul dualism as *ipso facto* excluding women will likely read Plotinus in the same way.

While Plotinus follows Plato in privileging the soul over the body in the acquisition of knowledge, his distinction between the two is arguably less disjunctive. In the first place, on Plotinus's account, nature and the body 'proceeds' from Soul, just as Soul proceeds from a higher reality, Intellect, and Intellect from the One (see §2.1.3). There is thus a continuity of procession or 'reflection', to use a Plotinian metaphor, from the first Principle to the multiplicity of the sensible world. Each successive level of reality is an image or reflection of its predecessor, and its generation is a necessary process. According to Plotinus, the soul's casting its reflection on a body is no more a fault than having a shadow, since 'if it [the body] did not exist the soul would have nowhere to illuminate' (I 1,12,24-26).

Secondly, whereas Plato denies any equivalence between sense-perception and knowledge and insists that only the latter is an activity of the soul (*Theatetus* 158a), Plotinus, as noted above, holds sense-perception to be a power of the lower part of the soul, in conjunction with the body (I 1,6,8-15), while reasoning and intuitive intelligence belong to the higher part of the soul (I 1,7,13-14).³⁵ There is, moreover, some evidence that Plotinus modified his views about the relationship between soul

³⁵ For a fuller discussion of the originality of Plotinus's view of sense-perception, see Blumenthal 1971, 67-79.

and body in the course of writing his treatises, and that the sharp separation of functions accorded to each became progressively more blurred.³⁶

However, even if body and soul appear in some parts of the *Enneads* as gradations on a continuous scale rather than as opposed parties, it must be admitted that Plotinus's attitude towards the body as an avenue of knowledge appears predominantly negative. While in certain contexts, as I have discussed above (§2.2), Plotinus *does* describe bodies in more appreciative terms, this is not the case where his concern is the attainment of knowledge. Far more prevalent, in these contexts, are references to the body as a hindrance and a fetter, impeding the soul's proper activity (e.g. I 2,5,1-11; VI 9,10,2-3). For feminists who seek to articulate an embodied epistemology, Plotinus has little obvious appeal.

3.2.4 The argument that the Platonic knowledge/experience dichotomy discriminates against women.

This argument is really an extension of the previous one, but I treat it separately because I think it raises an issue that is highly pertinent to Plotinus *qua* rational mystic, namely the role of experience in the mystical climax of his rational path. Code (1991) claims that pervasive stereotypes about women as illogical, irrational, and having access only to experience, combined with the stipulation in certain epistemic communities that knowledge must transcend the particularities of experience, undermine the credibility of even professional women. According to Code, the Platonic view that knowledge requires freedom from the senses' deceptiveness has contributed to a hierarchical distinction between 'knowledge' and 'experience' parallel to the mind/body, reason/emotion, and male/female dichotomies, making it difficult for women to be taken seriously as knowers (ibid., 222-243).

³⁶ See O'Daly (1971).

The point I am interested in is whether the dichotomy between knowledge and experience that concerns Code does in fact parallel the mind or soul/body distinction for a rational mystic like Plotinus, and how the answer to this question might affect a feminist reading of his account of knowledge. A difficulty in trying to compare Code's knowledge/experience dichotomy with Plotinus's use of these concepts is that Code does not supply precise definitions. However, in the context of her mention of Plato, it is fair to assume that she intends a Platonic conception of knowledge as non-sensory and intellectual, and experience as essentially sensory and practical, and that she sees these connotations being carried over in the current distinction, according to which knowledge confers authority where experience cannot. Code sees similar assumptions governing the current theory/practice dichotomy (*ibid.*, 242), and indeed Plato's use of the actual term that is translated as 'experience' invariably concerns the practice of an art or craft. I shall argue that i) Plotinus does not 'dichotomise' between knowledge and experience either in his teaching method or in his philosophy, and ii) that his aesthetic path is experiential.

I have discussed above (§3.1.1) the two levels of experience that feature in Plotinus's philosophy, and the intimate relationship between his conception of knowledge as direct intuition and his conception of allegedly non-sensory experience. From this discussion, it emerged that Plotinus does not posit them as opposites, and if anything experience is the more authoritative. It could be objected, of course, that experience divorced from embodied sensations is unrecognisable as anything we might understand by the term today. There are in my view, however, two other aspects of his philosophical method that should be considered before any such judgement is made, namely his use of imagery and his 'aesthetic' route to unified knowledge.

Plotinus's frequent use of figurative language in his philosophical discussions has been seen as providing affective content to his teaching, and thus anticipating a key concern of feminist pedagogy. Vassilopoulou argues that his employment of images, metaphors, analogies and mythic elements to clarify difficult concepts evokes the personal experience of his students and enhances the success of his communication with them (2003, 131-2). Reference has been made above to a number of such images and metaphors, for example in Plotinus's comparison of the continuity of the levels of reality to sunlight, rivers, and a lifetime, and in his use of the metaphor of concentric circles to illustrate the relationship of souls to the One (§2.1.3; §2.3.2). As evidence that this method of teaching was in fact successful, Vassilopoulou cites Porphyry's claim that Plotinus accustomed his students 'by progressive study to derive increasingly striking mental images' (*LoP* 1,14-5). Presumably, the students would have had to refer to their own experience, practical or otherwise, for the resources to generate such images. Thus, experience and knowledge are intertwined in Plotinus's teaching and in the reflective skills he sought to develop in his students.

The other aspect of Plotinus's philosophical method that, in my view, shows the importance he attached to experience is his exposition of what I shall call the aesthetic ascent. For Plotinus, the ascent to ultimate reality has an aesthetic dimension, epitomised in his interpretation of Plato's 'ladder of love' in the *Symposium*. In the same way that consideration of manifestations of unity leads Plotinus to awareness of the One as paradigmatic unity, consideration of beautiful objects leads him to awareness of the paradigmatic beauty of which these are manifestations. The purpose of Plotinus's investigation of beauty is to discover what makes things beautiful. Beginning with common intuitions about sensory manifestations of beauty, he argues

that what attracts us in beautiful bodies and music cannot simply be (as was generally thought) proportion and good colour, since this would exclude visual entities that are without parts, such as gold or sunlight, and single sounds. It would also fail to explain how a face can be beautiful with one expression but not with another, even though the proportions of its parts remain unchanged (I 6,1,8-41). Neither does he think good proportion is a sufficient condition for non-sensory beauty, such as that of characters, virtues, and branches of knowledge. The unspoken premise here is that these things, as well as being beautiful, are also good.³⁷ However, as he points out, if beauty is just proportion, and proportion just ‘concord and agreement’, even *bad* ideas could then meet the conditions for beauty (I 6,1,41-53). To avoid this conclusion, Plotinus is forced to look for another source of beauty.

Plotinus’s explanation of the presence of beauty is closely connected with his explanation of how we recognise what is beautiful. Material things, he says, are beautiful by ‘sharing in a formative power which comes from the divine forms’ (I 6,2,28-29), in other words by *participation* in the paradigmatic Forms, including the Form of beauty. Non-sensory beauties *are* Forms, which are by definition beautiful insofar as they are identical with the divine Intellect (I 6,6,13-17). Since the soul, as Form, has the same nature as the Form of beauty, it recognises manifestations of beauty through ‘kinship’ (I 6,2,2-11). This recognition of a kindred nature explains, for Plotinus why the soul has a strongly affective response to beauty: ‘[The] soul ... when it sees something akin to it ... is delighted and thrilled and returns to itself and remembers itself and its own possessions’ (I 6,2,8-11). The implication here is that seeing instances of beauty serves as a powerful reminder of the soul’s divine nature (‘itself’) and of its proper objects of contemplation (‘its own possessions’), the Forms.

³⁷ Cf. I 6,6,23: ‘...for God, the qualities of goodness and beauty are the same’.

The emphasis on experience is particularly strong in Plotinus's account of recognising non-sensory beauties. Whereas in the case of sensory beauties, the soul's 'seeing' depends on sensory faculties, the 'seeing' of non-sensory beauties depends, according to Plotinus, on having 'accepted the beauty of ways of life and kinds of knowledge and everything else of this sort' (I 6,4,7-9). I take this to mean not just verbal assent to the fact that such things *are* beautiful, but assimilating oneself to such ways of life and kinds of knowledge. In any case, recognition of these kinds of beauty is, for Plotinus, an experience of intense of delight:

[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. (I 6,4,13-16)

According to Plotinus, these experiences are most available to souls that are 'more passionately in love with the invisible', just as lovers are especially 'stung' with love for beautiful bodies (I 6,4,18-22). Grasping 'true', that is non-sensory, beauty thus includes, for Plotinus, an intense affective component of love (*eros*).

The pursuit of paradigmatic beauty points, however, to a goal beyond the non-sensory beauties of souls and Forms. Closely following the *Symposium* account, Plotinus shows how the desire of souls for the Good must inspire a longing for union that surpasses love for all other beauties, which are merely derivative:

If anyone sees [the Good], 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 ... All these other things are external additions and mixtures and not primary, but derived from it. (I 6,7,13-19,24-25)

The language Plotinus uses here, charged with *eros* and passion, strongly suggests the kind of rapturous experience that, as noted above (§1.3.2), has sometimes been

associated with female mystics and downgraded as inferior to the kind of mysticism that is speculative, serene, and unemotional. While no feminist would want to endorse the evaluative distinction, those who seek to reverse the prejudicial ranking of reason over emotion could take heart – literally – from Plotinus’s evident endorsement of *eros* and passion for the highest Good.

Furthermore, Plotinus makes an addition to the aesthetic itinerary mapped out in Plato’s ‘ladder of love’ that may be interpreted as particularly affirmative for marginalised individuals and groups (such as women). It is stated at *Symposium* 210c-e that to achieve the vision of the Good, a lover must be led to look from beautiful bodies to the beauty of activities, souls, laws, customs, and kinds of knowledge, and thence to ‘give birth to such ideas as will make young men better’. Plotinus omits the last-mentioned stage from his account, and instead asks the practical question, ‘How then can you see the sort of beauty a good soul has?’ (I 6,9,7-8). His answer is:

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 much ... 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’. (I 6,9,8-16)

In other words, Plotinus claims that recognition of one’s own inner beauty is prerequisite for recognising it in others, let alone being able to engender beauty and goodness in them. The soul must resemble its objects in order to find them beautiful: if it does not, it must work at revealing its own beauty. His emphasis on attending to oneself before trying to help others may be seen as good ‘therapy’ by feminists who are concerned with helping women develop a sense of autonomy and self-worth.

Conclusions

Having provided an exposition of key elements of Plotinus's rational mysticism, namely the interaction of knowledge and experience in the philosophical ascent and how the climax of the ascent requires the transcending of even intuitive thought, I considered four feminist criticisms relating to the Platonic account of knowledge. In response to the claim that the Platonic construction of rationality is 'masculine', I argued that Plotinus's privileging of intuitive knowledge over discursive reason may be seen as reversing the order of dominance of the rational over the non-rational that some feminists have found to have sexist implications. The claim that homoerotic imagery in the Platonic ascent excludes women I showed to be irrelevant to Plotinus, who avoids such imagery. In the case of Spelman's argument that Plato's soul-body dualism discriminates against women as knowers, I argued that although Plotinus's view of the body as an avenue of knowledge is predominantly negative, there is no evidence that the distinction in his case is gender-coded. Finally, I considered Code's claim that the knowledge/experience distinction functions prejudicially against women, and argued that Plotinus, by ultimately privileging experience over knowledge, again reverses the hierarchical distinction.

CHAPTER 4: PERFECTING THE SOUL: OTHERWORLDLY OR CONDUCTIVE TO ENGAGEMENT?

Does Plotinus's rational mysticism contain the conceptual resources to fund an engaged social and environmental ethic? According to his eudaimonistic ethical theory, the soul must be purified of its attachment to the body and bodily affections in order to engage the most godlike activity, intellection (I 2,3,11-21). Thus purified, the soul is able to complete its ascent to contemplation of the One: 'This is the life of gods and of godlike and blessed men, deliverance from the things of this world, a life which takes no delight in the things of this world, escape in solitude to the solitary' (VI 9,11,48-51).

On the standard interpretation, Plotinus is not regarded as a significant contributor to the field of practical ethics. Whatever the indications of his actual practice (his biographer, Porphyry, draws attention to Plotinus's kindness and his humanitarian concern), the *Enneads* are virtually silent on the subject of social responsibility. According to my interpretation, however, his metaphysics and his teaching on virtue together provide motivation for an ethical orientation of global scope. After outlining what is typical and what is distinctive about his eudaimonism, I explain why it leads him to place so much emphasis on intellectual virtue and why this involves being unaffected by the emotions (§4.1). I then consider whether criticisms by contemporary scholars of his ethics as self-centred and otherworldly are justified. To the extent that they are, I ask whether Plotinian ethics can be compatible with feminism's commitment to social justice, as well as with ideals such as care and empathy (§4.2). In the following section, I put forward the proposal that his doctrine that all souls are one, in conjunction with his account of the virtues, provides a

foundation for ethical engagement compatible with such ideals (§4.3). I acknowledge, however, that this proposal would not find favour with feminists for whom identification with the body is important, nor with some feminist critics of the notion of an ‘expanded self’ (as articulated, for example, by deep ecologists) (§4.4).

4.1 Plotinus’s eudaimonistic ethic: cultivating the self-sufficient soul

At first sight, Plotinus’s account of training in virtue for the philosophical ascent appears to involve a radical withdrawal from anything recognisable today as ethical engagement. This is partly because his ethical presuppositions are shaped by the eudaimonistic tradition with a different conception of the human good from those underlying most modern ethical theories, and partly because of his own interpretation of *eudaimonia*. By way of explanation, I briefly compare and contrast his eudaimonism with that of Aristotle, whose ethical theory is a paradigmatic example of eudaimonism.

4.1.1 How virtue contributes to the human good

According to Aristotle, the highest good, that for which action is undertaken, is wellbeing (*NE* 1097a18-b7). Since he defines the function of human beings as the expression of reason and the superior expression of reason as virtue, human wellbeing, in his view, consists in a life expressing virtue (1098a7-17); the highest expression of virtue is *theoria* or contemplative study (1177a1-2, 11-19). However, while wellbeing for Aristotle is primarily a state of the soul, it depends to some extent on the presence of certain ‘external’ goods such as prosperity and friendship (1099a32-b10). While not easily disturbed by outward events, wellbeing will be shaken by ‘many serious misfortunes’ (1101a1-13). Furthermore, since the human being is ‘a political animal’, the human good is achieved in a communal setting, not in

a solitary life (1097b7-12). Thus, for Aristotle, the human good involves the body as well as the soul.

Plotinus agrees with Aristotle that the best human life will necessarily involve the use of reason, on the ground that something irrational (such as sensory pleasure) cannot be better than reason (I 4,2,21-27). For the human being, then, wellbeing consists in actualising the potential for reasoning and true intelligence, and requires the practice of virtues proper to the sphere of intellect (I 4,4,7-11; I 1,10,8-9). However, unlike Aristotle but like the Stoics, Plotinus holds wellbeing to be independent of ‘incidental’ circumstances, such as bad luck, pain, sickness, grief, or even unconsciousness, and therefore invulnerable to misfortune (I 4,5-16). This is because, in his view, wellbeing, as the human good, belongs to the soul alone, not to the soul-body composite (I 4,14,4-7). Far from endorsing Aristotle’s view that sociality is necessary for wellbeing, Plotinus apparently sees the ultimate human good as self-sufficient.

To understand why Plotinus thinks human wellbeing must be self-sufficient in this way, we must revisit his conception of human nature. In the treatise ‘What is the living being, and what is man?’, Plotinus investigates the ownership of sensation, feelings, actions, opinions, reasoning, and intellectual acts. He wants to determine which of these belong to the body-soul composite (‘the living being’) and which to ‘man’ (*anthrôpos*), in other words the higher part of the soul (as discussed above, §2.2), as the essence of the human being (I 1). Assuming that the higher part of the soul is a kind of Form, immortal and unchanging, he argues that it cannot be subject to movement or change as a result of being affected by something on a lower (in the sense of more dispersed) level (I 1,2,6-14). In view of his goal of advancing towards increasingly unified knowledge, Plotinus would regard as hindrance anything that

pulls the soul towards dispersion. For this reason, on his account, the soul must not admit sensation, feelings, or actions, opinions, and reasoning based on these, since all of these states or activities involve movement of a more dispersed kind (I 1,2,15-28). Accordingly, he attributes ownership of sensation, feelings, and consequent opinions, reasoning, and actions to the body-soul composite (I 1,4-5), and ownership of intellectual acts, including the perception of intelligible objects, and consequent opinions, reasoning, and actions to the higher part of the soul that remains separate from the composite (I 1,7,9-14). Such movement as is involved in these latter activities comes from a higher level, that of intellect, and is therefore presumably more unified and unifying. Thus, for Plotinus, the soul's wellbeing is necessarily independent of the composite and therefore of all external goods, since these affect only the composite.

4.1.2 Levels of virtue

Plotinus actually distinguishes four levels of virtue: *natural*, *civic*, *purifying*, and *intellectual*. Since he says little about natural virtues other than that they are prior to wisdom and require wisdom to perfect the character, I shall confine my discussion here to the three levels of virtue that, in his view, need to be acquired, as opposed to existing naturally. Since Plotinus himself does not always clearly distinguish purifying virtues from intellectual ones, however, I shall use the generic term 'higher virtues' in subsequent discussions. The specific virtues Plotinus discusses are the Platonic virtues of wisdom, courage, self-control and justice (*Republic IV*).

Civic virtues

For Plotinus, the civic virtues are the Platonic virtues applied to the body-soul composite and acquired through habit and training (I 1,10,12-13). At the level of the composite, wisdom is 'practical wisdom, which has to do with discursive reason';

courage ‘has to do with the emotions’; self-control ‘consists in a sort of agreement and harmony of passion and reason’; and justice ‘makes each of these parts agree in “minding their own business where ruling and being ruled are concerned”’ (I 2,1,16-21). I take it that ‘these parts’ refers to the parts of the soul just mentioned, namely passion and reason, so that justice is about ensuring that reason and passion occupy the correct places relative to one another (i.e. ‘ruling’ and ‘being ruled’ respectively). The effect of the civic virtues, then, is to produce ‘order ... arrangement and harmony’, through limiting human desires and correcting false opinions (I 2,1,46-52; 2,14-18). However, apart from calling these virtues ‘civic’, Plotinus does not elaborate on their application in the social sphere; perhaps he assumes that his readers have already reached a level of proficiency in that area. In any case, his expressed purpose is to investigate how the virtues make us godlike (I 2,1,4-7). His conclusion is that civic virtues make us godlike only insofar that they make it possible for the body-soul composite to participate in the order, arrangement, and harmony that constitute virtue ‘here’. Those same principles, while originating in the realm of Intellect, are not instantiated there: at that higher level, there is no need of civic virtue, since there are no fears or desires to be moderated, nor false opinions to be corrected (I 2,1.46-53; 5, 6-22).

Purifying virtues

At the next level are the virtues that Plotinus sometimes refers to as ‘purifications’ (I 2,3,9f; 4,1f; 5,1f), citing a discussion at *Theaetetus* 176a-b in which the virtues of the philosopher are described. At this level, according to Plotinus, the virtues help to separate the soul from its corrupting entanglement with the body and orient it towards intellect:

[The soul] will be good and possess virtue when it no longer has the same opinions [as the body] but acts alone – this is intelligence and wisdom – and does

not share the body's experiences – this is self-control – and is not afraid of departing from the body – this is courage – and is ruled by reason and intellect, without opposition – and this is justice. One would not be wrong in calling this state of soul likeness to God, in which its activity is intellectual, and it is free in this way from bodily affections. (I 2,3,14-21 – *bracketed insertions mine*)

Purification of this kind means that the soul is no longer subject in the same way as before to pleasures, pains, passions, desires and fears. These affections may continue at a lower, bodily level but without impinging on the soul and disturbing its equilibrium (I 2,5,2-22). Even the irrational part of the soul will want to conform itself to the rational part, Plotinus believes, just as someone living next door to a sage profits from the contact and tries not to cause upset (I 2,5,22-32). A person thus purified can only do what is right and will not sin; however, the more important concern is 'not to be out of sin, but to be god' (I 2,6,1-2). Any remaining trace of involuntary impulse is a sign that a different (i.e. lower) kind of virtue is operating; at the highest level of virtue, a person has become divine (I 2,6,3-9).

Intellectual virtues

At the highest level, the virtues relate wholly to the dynamics between the soul and the intellect, rather than to the soul's relationship with the body. Once again, Plotinus looks at each virtue in turn and tries to show what it is in the person who has become divine:

Wisdom, theoretical and practical, consists in the contemplation of that which intellect contains; but intellect has it by immediate contact. There are two kinds of wisdom, one in intellect, one in soul. That which is There [in intellect] is not virtue, that in the soul is virtue. What is it then, There? The act of the self, what it really is; virtue is what comes Thence and exists here in another. (I 2,6,13-17)

[The] higher justice in the soul is its activity towards intellect, its self-control is its inward turning to intellect, its courage is freedom from affections, according to the likeness of that to which it looks which is free from affections by nature: this freedom from affections in the soul comes from virtue, to prevent its sharing in the affections of its inferior companion. (I 2,6,23-28)

At this level, wisdom no longer involves the use of discursive reason, but consists in the ‘act’ or actualisation of the soul as intellect, and is therefore purely contemplative. Likewise, the other virtues describe the orientation of the soul towards intellect, to which it has become more and more similar by achieving purification. For this reason, the resulting state of wellbeing is indeed independent of outward circumstances, since the soul has removed itself from their influence.

Are the levels of virtue progressive or successive, in Plotinus’s view? In other words, are the lower levels of virtue manifested at the higher levels, or left behind? Plotinus states that whoever has the higher virtues ‘must necessarily have the lesser ones potentially’, but that the converse is not necessarily the case (I 2,7,11-13). Whether the possessor of the higher virtues actualises the ‘lesser’ virtues is a more complicated question for Plotinus, and requires an individual answer for each virtue. However, his general view is that since the possessor of higher virtue has separated himself as far as possible from his lower nature (i.e. the soul-body composite), the need for limiting the desires characteristic of that lower level no longer applies: he ‘will not live the life of the good man which civic virtue requires’ (I 2,7,24-25). This is not, of course, an assertion that the possessor of higher virtue will be immoral, as Plotinus makes clear elsewhere: to the question of whether one can be a wise man and a dialectician *without* the lower virtues, he answers that ‘it would not happen; they must either precede or grow along with wisdom’ (I 3,6,16-18). The levels of virtue should therefore be seen as a progression in which the lower levels form the habit of virtue in the soul-body composite, enabling the higher part of the soul to turn its resources towards actualising the higher virtues.

4.2 ‘Otherworldliness’ and self-sufficiency versus social justice and caring

While understandable in view of the goal of achieving union with the One, Plotinus’s account of virtue has been seen, not surprisingly, as ‘otherworldly’. Dillon, for example, finds the Plotinian ethic even more ‘self-centred and otherworldly’ than most other Greek ethical theories of his day. Highlighting Plotinus’s belief that the true soul is impervious to passions and emotions, and claiming that assimilation to the divine is Plotinus’s sole preoccupation, Dillon concludes that although such an ethic may serve for a sage of late antiquity, it offers little practical guidance for the common person (Dillon 1996, 315-332). While he makes a compelling case based on Plotinus’s explicit speculations on ethical subjects,³⁸ I shall argue that this gives only a partial picture of Plotinian ethics and that some of Plotinus’s metaphysical views need to be taken into view for a more balanced account.

Annas is doubtful about the coherence of the Plotinian ethic even for the sage. She claims that, for Plotinus, the life of the higher virtues and that of the lower virtues are incompatible: the wise person’s desire to transcend the messiness of worldly life betokens an escapist attitude that pulls against the Platonist’s avowed ideal of virtue as moral goodness (Annas 1999, 66-71).³⁹ Endorsing Dillon’s comments about otherworldliness, she interprets Plotinus’s insistence that the possessor of the higher virtues will not activate the lower virtues as evidence that he promotes flight from everyday life. In her view, the civic and intellectual virtues express divergent conceptions of what is worthwhile (engagement with the world and flight from it, respectively), and therefore cannot both be pursued at once (ibid., 68-71).

³⁸ Dillon confines himself almost entirely to the first *Ennead*, which (according to Porphyry’s editorial judgement) contains the treatises most concerned with ethical topics.

³⁹ See also Baltzly (2004, 302-303). Baltzly agrees with Annas and Dillon about the ‘unworldly’ strand in Plotinus, but acknowledges other readings may be possible.

My immediate response to Annas's claim that the higher and lower virtues are in tension with each other is that while this may be true for Plato, it does not appear to be the case for Plotinus, given his interpretation of civic virtue. Whereas Plato discusses at length the implementation of civic virtue in the ideal state, Plotinus avoids this interpersonal aspect of civic virtue and focuses solely on the intrapersonal aspect, namely how to establish order and harmony in the body-soul composite (see discussion above, §4.1.2). Thus, while Plotinus must surely agree that civic virtue is conducive to harmonious social engagement, this is not the reason he gives for practising it; rather, for the person making the ascent, it is preparation for the higher levels of virtue, and thus does not express the particular divergent conceptions of what is worthwhile that Annas has claimed.⁴⁰

Admittedly, dissolving the alleged divergence of ideals in this way seems to confirm the view, not limited to Dillon and Annas, that the Plotinian ethic promotes flight from the world. Kristeva (1987) has drawn an unfavourable comparison between Plotinus and Plato in this respect, describing the Plotinian ideal as 'autoerotic' and 'narcissistic' compared to the Platonic ascent. The latter, as described in the *Symposium*, begins with love for another and issues in other-directed activity (such as making laws); in Kristeva's understanding of the Plotinian ascent, however, the individual creates himself on the model of a divinity whose love is self-directed (ibid., 113).

⁴⁰ See however Smith (1999), who offers a different way of reconciling the lower and higher virtues. Among other considerations, he cites Plotinus's recommendation to emulate the World Soul, which is described as both transcendent and yet not disengaged from the physical world, as evidence that, in Plotinus's view, contemplation is not incompatible with external activity (II 9,13,30; III 4,4; Smith 1999, 233-5). In addition, Smith argues from Plotinus's reference to the good man who can continue to live on the level of intellect while suffering in the bull of Phalaris (I 4,13,6-9) that contemplation does not preclude awareness of the empirical world.

Although Kristeva's criticism, in my view, rests on a misunderstanding of Plotinus's understanding of 'divinity', namely as a personalised being rather than as the ground of unity, it nevertheless illustrates the tension that is likely to be felt by many feminists between Plotinus's ethical ideal and the kind of ethical ideal deemed necessary for combating injustices such as gender discrimination. The issue is not that there is at present a single ethical ideal (other than the negative one of ending discrimination against women, if that can be described as an ethical ideal) uniting all feminists, but that if candidates were invited for submission, the Plotinian ideal would most likely be rejected. His levels of virtue represent an ascent in the direction of greater harmony and unity in the intelligible sphere, an ascent that, according to his system, necessitates separation *in some sense* from the material sphere, characterised as it is by dispersion. The material sphere is, however, where we all have to live and get along, and an ethic that appears to attribute so little value to this realm of existence appears irrelevant to the problems concerning most people today, let alone marginalised people.

In particular, the Plotinian ideal would seem to be at odds with ideals such as care and empathy that many feminists have seen as foundational to an adequate ethical theory (see e.g. Noddings 1984; Gilligan 1993; Jaggar 1995; Tronto 1989).⁴¹ Noddings, for example, bases her 'feminine' approach to ethics on 'the recognition of and longing for relatedness', taken as a basic fact of human existence, and the relation of caring as foundational to ethical behaviour (Noddings 1984, 1-3). For Noddings, an ethic based on caring arises out of women's socialisation and experience as

⁴¹ I am aware that the ethic of 'care' has itself been the focus of feminist criticism for a number of reasons. In particular, it is seen as endorsing allegedly feminine traits developed under oppressive conditions (see e.g. Card, 1995; Houston, 1987). According to Card, 'Histories of exploitation lead us to identify with service, to find our value in our utility or ability to please' (1995, 80). Nevertheless, traits such as care and empathy have been seen by many feminists as inadequately represented in other ethical theories such as consequentist and deontological ethics.

caregivers, and is characterised by attentiveness to particular cases and responsiveness based on genuine empathy (1984, 8,14). While acknowledging ‘virtue’ as the guiding ethical ideal, Noddings wants to differentiate this from “‘the virtues’ described in abstract categories’ and pursued in isolation (ibid., 80). Hence she claims that the ‘virtue’ of her ethical ideal is ‘built up in relation. It reaches out to the other and grows in response to the other’ (ibid., 81). It is not immediately obvious how an ethic such as Plotinus’s, urging practice of the virtues to perfect intellectual contemplation, is compatible with these ideals.

4.3 Motivating ethical engagement in Plotinus’s rational mysticism

Although the Plotinian ethical ideal appears far removed from that of an ethic based on caring, it is not self-evident that the two ideals are incompatible, either in theory or in practice. The question I wish to address now is whether there are, in fact, resources within other parts of Plotinus’s philosophy, such as his metaphysical framework, that can mitigate the apparent tension. After surveying other attempts to motivate ethical engagement in Plotinus’s philosophical path, I shall advance a proposal of my own that, in my view, provides a principled metaphysical foundation for an ethic based on caring and empathy, albeit one that may only appeal to those feminists who are prepared to accept the notion of the soul.

4.3.1 Attempts so far

Defenders of Plotinian ethics have generally appealed to the evidence of benevolence and gentleness in his actual practice, as described by his biographer, and/or to the implications of his description of an interconnected universe. Hadot, for example, presents Plotinus’s explicit view of the virtues as largely concerned with personal spiritual formation, but relies on Porphyry for evidence of the practical

outworking of a contemplative life, focusing on the quality of gentleness in Plotinus's dealings with his students, disciples and friends (Hadot 1993, chs. 5 and 6). Miles, in addition to endorsing Plotinus's benevolent practice, suggests that his description of an interconnected, interdependent community of living beings can serve as a basis for engaged ethical action (Miles 1999, 166, 171-173). Miles, however, does not specify how ethical engagement follows from interdependence.

A similar motivational gap appears in Armstrong's interpretation, despite his more specific applications of Plotinian interconnectedness to current world problems, in particular that of the growing gap between humans and the non-human environment (Armstrong 1976, 188). First, he suggests that reflection on the living organic unity of the universe to which we belong can help to correct our tendency to imagine we can exploit and even improve our world, as a lump of inert matter, for our own benefit (1976, 192). Second, the intellectual ascent leads the individual to the discovery that the boundaries of the self are coextensive with the boundaries of the (intelligible) cosmos. Since the intelligible is the inner reality of the sensible, selfhood becomes membership of the most inclusive community conceivable. This discovery, Armstrong thinks, can work against tendencies to isolation and exclusiveness that separate humans from one another and from nature (1976, 195). Thus Armstrong, like Miles, assumes without further justification that the changed perceptions will suffice to correct tendencies towards exploitative or divisive action.

Among those who have tried to give a more detailed analysis of Plotinian ethics, O'Meara claims that there are complementary ethical trajectories of 'escape' and 'giving' implied by Plotinus's metaphysical system. According to O'Meara, the ethic of 'escape' from involvement with the material world corresponds to the ascent to the One, and is directed to those in the preparatory stages. The ethic of 'giving',

corresponding with the ‘descent’ from the One, is directed to those who have successfully achieved the goal, and involves communication of the vision to others whether through legislative activity or personal example (O’Meara 1993, 108-9; 2003, 74-6). In O’Meara’s view, the ‘giving’ ethic reflects the ‘overflowing’ nature of the One and the organising, perfecting function of soul as a cosmic force, and issues in ‘the care and improvement of our lives and of the world in the light of wisdom’ (1993, 110). On his interpretation, ‘giving’ naturally follows from the vision of the One. However, the passage he quotes in which Plotinus speaks of communication and lawgiving (VI 9,7,20-26) goes on to acknowledge, without judgement, the possibility that some contemplators may prefer to ‘remain always above’, thinking civic matters ‘unworthy’ of them (VI 9,7,26-28). Hence, in my view, the link between unified vision and concerned action in O’Meara’s account is still unclear.

Going still further to motivate ethical implications of Plotinus’s metaphysics, Blakely claims that the Enneads contain a response to current environmental concerns comparable to the position of deep ecology (Blakely 2004, 2). Like O’Meara (whom he does not cite), Blakely points to what he calls ‘the descent vector’ in Plotinus’s conceptual framework to argue that the productive giving of the One calls for an ethical response from human souls to the cosmos as an organic unity. In Blakely’s view, it is possible to derive from Plotinus’s cosmology a ‘non-anthropocentric, pro-environment position’ that has much in common with tenets of deep ecology as set forth by Naess (1989). These tenets include a holistic view of nature as an interconnected and interdependent whole; the extension of human ‘self-realisation’ to include the flourishing of the ecosystem; human identification with the environment; and a recognition of the aesthetic richness of the world that ‘*naturally* generates sensibilities that support creative care’ (Blakely, 1989, 4-7 – italics mine). While

acknowledging that Plotinus does not explicitly promote environmental concern, Blakely finds warrant for a comparable stance in Plotinus's cosmological principles, such as that the universe is 'all bound together in shared experience like one living creature' (IV 4,32,5), and that 'each thing in the All ... contributes to the whole' (IV 4,45,1-5 – elision mine).

The problem that neither Blakely nor Naess satisfactorily overcomes, in my view, is how identification with the ecosystem leads to an ethical orientation towards it. Naess assumes that 'the greater our comprehension of our togetherness with other beings, the greater the identification, and the greater care we will take' (Naess 1989, 175, quoted by Blakely).⁴² Blakely, like Miles and Armstrong, points towards relevant features of Plotinus's metaphysics that can inform and enrich the way we ordinarily view our relations with the human and non-human world, but fails to demonstrate the conceptual link between holistic vision and ethical motivation. I believe this is because Blakely, like the other interpreters I have mentioned, has not attempted to connect Plotinus's holism with his account of the virtues.

4.3.2 A new proposal: virtuous practice in relation to sharers of one soul

What I wish to explore here is how Plotinus's doctrine that all souls are one, in conjunction with the virtues, could provide a coherent basis for ethical concern. I begin by explaining how he arrives at this doctrine about the soul, and why on its own this doctrine does not seem to have any particular ethical implications. I then show how supplementing his doctrine of one soul with his account of the virtues provides the ethical motivation that is missing from other interpretations I have discussed.

⁴² As Plumwood points out in her critique of Naess's model, identifying the self with nature carries no normative implications for the relationship between humans and nature: if I am indistinguishable from the rainforest, its needs become mine, but if the converse is also true, the rainforest stands to forfeit my protection (Plumwood 1991, 12-13).

Plotinus advances his arguments for the oneness of souls as part of an attempt to address certain problems in the Platonic doctrine of soul.⁴³ In particular, he is concerned with the relationship between human souls and the universal soul: do the former come from the latter, as some Platonists claimed, or do both come from a common source?⁴⁴ The souls of heavenly bodies were believed to be essentially embodied; if human souls sprang from the world-soul, they would presumably be of the same nature. However, human souls differ from the world-soul in being only contingently embodied: they are believed to survive bodily death (IV 3,1-7). His conclusion is that both derive from a prior Soul, which is indivisible in the intelligible world, but divisible in the physical world; hence the relationship of individual souls to the world-soul is like that of siblings rather than filial (IV 2,8-12; IV 3,6,14).

Among the arguments Plotinus advances for his claim that all souls are one is an empirical argument based on what he calls ‘universal sympathy’. We are able to empathise with one another’s pain, and enjoy the company of those we love; people are able to affect others far away from them by means of spells, magical acts or even just a quiet word (IV 9,3,1-9). Admittedly, we do not commonly share experiences and perceptions with other people, but this is because we inhabit different bodies, which hinder communion (IV 9,2,1-5; VI 9,8,30-31). Differences of perception, experience, and desire among individuals arise from the differing body-soul composites and are compatible with sameness of soul (IV 9,1,15-2,13). Giving the analogy of perception in a single body, Plotinus says that experiences in one part are not necessarily perceived throughout the whole, even though the whole may be

⁴³ See Armstrong’s introductory note in *Plotinus IV*, 26-27. For Stoic influences on Plotinus’s doctrines of universal sympathy and the unity of souls, see Graeser 1972, especially chapters 2 and 7, and Gurtler 2002, 241-276.

⁴⁴ Plotinus acknowledges that Plato (at *Philebus* 30a-b) suggests the derivation of human souls from the universal soul, but claims that the purpose of this passage is merely to show that the universe is ensouled, and that elsewhere (*Timaeus* 41d) Plato makes it clear that the ‘mixture’ used for human souls is different from that used for the universal soul.

affected. Similarly, the fact that we sometimes lack awareness of others' experiences and perceptions does not mean that they do not affect us (IV 9,2,8-23). Thus, for Plotinus, the separateness of individuals is relatively superficial, arising at the level of bodies but disappearing at the level of the soul. While embodied experience differs from person to person, there is sufficient commonality of experience to lead Plotinus to count this as evidence of shared soul.

While identifying with a shared soul might be seen as a basis for certain ethical stances, there is no principled way of specifying which of these stances would be the appropriate one without further premises. It would be logically possible to conclude, from an isolated reading of Plotinus's doctrine of the soul, that because souls are more one when they are undivided by bodies, maximal destruction of bodies would help to restore souls to their primal unity (unwittingly, this may turn out to be our species' most significant legacy). Of course, this would hardly be in line with the overall tenor of Plotinus's thought and practice: the more plausible conclusion is surely that thinking of ourselves as alternative manifestations of one soul provides a basis for concern and caring. But what conceptual support is there for such a conclusion in the light of Dillon's claim that Plotinus is only interested in assimilation to the divine?

The answer, in my view, is the mutual interaction of the practice of virtue with the apprehension of the unity of souls. Given Plotinus's aim of teaching and reminding people of their true nature as souls (V 1,1,23-29) and his claim that all souls are one, divided only by bodies, it is reasonable for him to recommend ways to counteract the influence of the body on the soul. This, as I have shown above (§4.1.2), is the purpose of practising the higher virtues, which he describes as 'stripping [the soul] of everything alien', so that it can have 'fellowship with that which is akin to it' (I 2,4,7-8; 14). While the primary reference of 'that which is akin' in the passage cited

is the intelligible realities (the Forms), these are generally taken to include the forms of individuals (see e.g. Blumenthal 1971, 112-133). Thus, applying the higher virtues restores the soul's awareness of its communion with other souls, which, for Plotinus, include those not only of humans but also of all other animate beings and of the earth itself. Since Plotinus also insists that the possessor of higher virtues would not be without the lower virtues (I 3,6,16-18), which pertain to harmonious practice at the level of the soul-body composite (I 2,1,46-51; 2,14-16), awareness of communion at the higher level is necessarily accompanied by a virtuous orientation at the level of the soul-body composite.

How might the Platonic virtues inform practice in the light of awareness of communion with other ensouled beings? Presumably, practical wisdom would lead to correct reasoning about actions and their consequences, taking into account the needs and interests of others, be they human or non-human others. Both self-control and courage would moderate demand for natural resources, self-control through limiting greed, and courage through limiting fear. Considering how much militarism is motivated by greed and fear, applying the virtues could have enormous implications for the availability of resources for peaceful purposes. Justice, in regulating the relationship of reason to passion, would reduce violence and promote healthy societies and environments. In other words, the virtues necessary for achieving awareness, far from representing a flight from responsibility as Dillon and Annas claim, are conducive both to recognising the interconnectedness of all that lives and to acting in a way that seeks to promote the well-being of all.

4.4 Some problems with a ‘shared soul’ ethic from various feminist perspectives

4.4.1 De-identifying with the body

Some feminists would argue that ceasing to identify with the body is too high an ethical price to pay for restoring awareness of interconnection. Radical feminists such as Daly (1978, 194) and Griffin (1978, 226) have celebrated the identification of woman with the body in order to subvert what they see as the hegemony of patriarchal values in Western thought (while also resisting the polarisation between conceptual pairings such body and soul). Ethicists of care, such as Noddings (1984), Ruddick (1989), and Gilligan (1982) have claimed that embodied experiences and emotions, such as those associated with maternal practices, are needed to provide a basis for moral understanding and theorising. Each of these thinkers would thus have cause to be suspicious of an ethical theory that seeks to deflect attention away from the body.

Although Plotinus warns against becoming enmeshed in the desires and dictates of the body, he does not regard the body, or the soul’s association with it, as intrinsically harmful. Against the Gnostics’ contempt for the material world, Plotinus affirms its beauty and goodness and argues that it could not exist if it were, as the Gnostics claim, cut off from the divine world (II 9,16,10-13). In his view, then, the material world and the bodies it contains are inseparable from the intelligible beauty and order that give rise to them. Furthermore, he criticises the Gnostic counsel to flee the body and contrasts his own doctrine thus: ‘This would be like two people living in the same fine house, one of whom [i.e. the Gnostic] reviles the structure and the builder, but stays there none the less, while the other does not revile, but says the builder has built it with the utmost skill, and waits for the time to come in which he will go away [i.e. die], when he will not need a house any longer’ (II 9,18,4-9). In addition to these positive evaluations of the body, Plotinus claims that the cause of the

soul's descent is to set in order what comes after it (i.e. the body), and that ordering the body contributes to the perfection of the universe by actualising the soul's hidden powers (IV 8,5,1-38). In thus acknowledging the importance of the soul's connection with the body, Plotinus is far from disparaging embodiment.

On the other hand, it is undeniable that Plotinus wishes to orient the soul towards what he regards as the higher reality of intellect rather than towards the body. Attributing to the soul a middle position between the two, he recognises a tension between the attractions exerted by each; his concern is that the 'descended' part of the soul (that which joins in the soul-body composite) should not hinder the contemplation of the higher part (IV 8,7-8). Hence, his apparent negativity towards the body should be understood as a rhetorical device for directing the soul's attention 'upwards' towards unity, rather than 'downwards' towards dispersion.

4.4.2 Disregard for individual particularity

Discarding the individual perspective of embodiment altogether might seem a misconceived project, especially in an ethical context; to a modern way of thinking, the very need for an ethic arises from our existence as discrete beings (and thus, in Plotinian terms, divided by bodies). For many feminists, respecting individual particularity is of fundamental moral importance. Friedman, for example, claims that while equal respect is owed in virtue of 'our common humanity', the value of individuals as irreplaceable, unique beings can only be appreciated through recognising their distinctness (Friedman 1995, 72-3). Grimshaw criticises the promotion of relationality or 'boundary-loss' as a feminine ideal both because of its negative effects on personal development and because it obliterates the sense of the other's (and one's own) distinct needs (Grimshaw 1986, 182-3). A similar concern leads Plumwood to criticise the 'indistinguishability' of the self from nature in deep ecologists' normative accounts of the expanded self because, in her view, it threatens

to undermine the basis of the ability to care appropriately for other, distinct beings (ibid., 12-14). Thus, for these feminists, embracing Plotinus's notion of a shared soul appears incompatible with the respect for particularity they see as necessary both for ethical attitudes and practice and for women's autonomy.

In response to the concern about disregard for distinctness, I need to qualify what I have said above (§4.3.2) about Plotinus's view that the separateness of individuals is due to embodiment. There appears, in fact, to be some tension in Plotinus's thought regarding the individuality of souls prior to their association with bodies. He claims on the one hand that soul is inseparable and indivisible in the intelligible world, even though it contains the nature for division (IV 2,8-12). On the other hand, he denies that 'the multitude of souls came into existence because of bodily magnitude', affirming rather that they were already 'both many and one', not potentially but actually (VI 4,4,38-42). Before embodiment, according to Plotinus, 'we were ... men who were different, and some of us even gods, pure souls and intellect united with the whole of reality' (VI 4,14,17-20). He also claims that matter itself possesses no essential differentiation, but receives it from form (VI 3,2), and since soul plays the role of form in relation to matter, this further suggests a difference between souls prior to their contact with bodies (O'Meara 1993, 67). Finally, in Plotinus's view, 'each soul comes down to a body made ready for it according to its resemblance to the soul's disposition' (IV 3,12,37-38). Thus, it cannot be the case for him that differing dispositions are entirely due to embodiment.

What determines these differences at the higher level? Plotinus claims that each individual soul is a universe containing all the levels of the intelligible universe and can choose on which level it will live according to its ruling principle (III 4,3,21-27; 5,1-10). Depending on how well or ill it lives its chosen life, it will return after

death to a correspondingly higher or lower level of life (III 4,6,8-22). It seems that Plotinus is more concerned with preserving moral accountability than with the consistency of his account of origins. At any rate, he clearly thinks souls as such have significant differences, differences that presumably are evident from the choices they make as to the level of life they will enter. Hence, there is reason to think that exchanging the perspective of the soul-body composite for that of the soul is not, for Plotinus, the negation of distinctness.

Even if distinctness is preserved in the notion of a shared soul, however, it is questionable what room there is for autonomy in any political sense of the word. Plotinus himself condemns the ‘independence’ (*autexousia*) and ‘self-movement’ (*kineisthai par’ auton*) of souls that have forgotten their origin and have become falsely enchanted with inferior (earthly) things (V 1,1,1-22). On the other hand, he upholds the soul’s ‘acting alone’ (*monê energoi*) in the sense of ceasing to be influenced by the body (I 2,3,12-15). It be argued that for a soul thus divested of bodily concern, acting autonomously has no relevance to political liberation.

One line of response would be to say that, for Plotinus, autonomy in the social realm is simply incommensurable with the kind of autonomy he has in mind. That being the case, nothing follows either negatively or positively for the status of a woman in her embodied life from her pursuit of Plotinian autonomy. The actual lives of mystics and ascetics in other traditions may give us reason to think that the person who has achieved independence from the ‘tyranny’ of the body is in fact more autonomous with regard to other people’s opinions and demands than the person who is enslaved to her own appetites and desires. On the other hand, the view of the body as ‘tyrannical’ might itself be seen as a social construction and part of an irremediably sexist worldview. In any case, there remains a tension between relationality and

autonomy within feminist ethics; whether Plotinus offers a satisfactory resolution is less clear.

4.4.3 No solution to ‘otherworldliness’?

If defending Plotinus’s rational mysticism against the criticism of otherworldliness depends on accepting his metaphysical assumptions, it could be objected that the solution I have proposed, namely linking virtuous practice with the tenet that all souls are one, is still otherworldly. Admittedly, for some feminists, challenging the secularity of much mainstream Western philosophy is part of a broader critique of post-Enlightenment patriarchal thought (e.g. Irigaray 1985; Warren 1993). Even for those feminists who see reclamation of the notion of ‘the sacred’ as indispensable for reconceptualizing relationships with the natural world, however, the domain of the sacred is precisely the domain of bodies (Warren 1993, 130). The Plotinian ascent appears to leave that domain far behind. Even if one were to substitute a term such as ‘consciousness’ for ‘the soul’, the concern about otherworldliness is not greatly helped: the pursuit of ‘higher states of consciousness’ can also appear to be a form of escape from terrestrial existence. My purpose, however, is not to demonstrate that Plotinus’s rational mysticism *as it stands* is a viable option for contemporary activists but rather to highlight its orientation towards a unified vision of reality, in the belief that such an orientation is compatible with the ideals of caring and empathy. Moreover, in stressing the practice of virtue as the way to achieve such an orientation, Plotinus in my view leaves open the possibility for ethical engagement in a this-worldly sense, even if that is not his avowed purpose.

Conclusions

I set out to examine whether Plotinian ethics are compatible with a feminist commitment to social justice, and with the ideals of caring and empathy. While acknowledging that Plotinus's discussion of the virtues is entirely oriented towards perfecting the soul for the ascent, and is to that extent otherworldly, I argued that principles within his metaphysical framework offer a rationale for a more global application of his ethical theory. In particular, I proposed that his doctrine that all souls are one, in combination with the virtues and with the soul-identification that is central to his rational mysticism, supports a virtuous stance towards all ensouled beings.

I acknowledged difficulties such an ethic might present to feminists for whom identification with the body is important to resisting patriarchal values, those who view the body as an important source of knowledge, and those for whom the perspective of individual embodiment is crucial to recognition of boundaries between the self and others. There appeared to be no clear way to overcome these difficulties, apart from referring the last criticism to Plotinus's statements that souls prior to embodiment are in some sense individual. Finally, I considered whether recourse to the notion of a shared soul as a basis for a holistic ethical stance overcame the original concern about otherworldliness, and argued that while the specifics of the proposal might not be transferrable to a modern context, the orientation towards greater unity and the practice of virtue supports an engaged practice.

Transition to Part 2

In the next three chapters, I revisit the three main areas of feminist concern I have identified in connection with rational mysticism: the implications, for gender equity, of, respectively, hierarchical metaphysics, a 'masculine' account of knowledge, and an ethic of self-

perfection. The assumptions underlying these concerns appeared to clash with those underlying Plotinus's rational mysticism, but as I argued in chapters 2-4, the tensions are mitigated and, in some cases, dispelled on closer examination of his metaphysical positions. Will the same be true of Kashani? The considerable similarities between their respective accounts of the rational-mystical path suggest an affirmative answer to this question. On the other hand, consideration of additional influences on Kashani might lead us to expect that his rational mysticism would be conceptually predisposed towards sexism. Not only does he rely more heavily on Aristotelian classifications than does Plotinus, but his teleology is set within a Koranic worldview with an unmistakable emphasis on divine transcendence. Both of these sources (Aristotle and the Koranic worldview) have been seen by some feminists as promoting gender bias, although some other feminists dispute this. I survey and discuss these responses in order to give background to the questions I shall be asking in relation to Kashani's metaphysical theories.

PART II: KASHANI

CHAPTER 5: HIERARCHIES OF ACTUALISATION

The primary focus of Kashani's rational mysticism is the achievement of knowledge of the true 'self', through contact with the divine Intellect. Like Plotinus, Kashani presupposes a hierarchical framework of reality in which the individual soul has its origin and through which it must 'ascend' on a journey of return. In this chapter, I explore the grounds for feminist criticisms of gender-biased hierarchies in Aristotle's metaphysics, Islamic cosmology, and monotheistic discourse, and whether the sexist elements criticised are integral to the respective conceptual frameworks (§5.1). I then examine aspects of Kashani's metaphysics in the light of these criticisms, beginning with his conception of the nature of ultimate reality and of the God/world relationship (§5.2). The investigation continues with a consideration of whether his philosophical account of the structure of reality implies hierarchy of a dominating or an actualising kind (§5.3). Finally, I ask whether his metaphysical framework has implications for the inclusion or otherwise of women in his conception of 'the human goal' (§5.4).

5.1 Background to Kashani's metaphysical system

5.1.1 *How sexism is associated with Aristotelian frameworks*

Whether sexism is integral to Aristotle's metaphysics is a matter of debate among feminists. It has seemed to some that his derogatory comments about women, in the *Generation of Animals* and the *Politics*, in particular, signal an anti-female bias that is deep-lying to his philosophical framework (see e.g. Horowitz 1976; Okin 1979; Spelman 1983; Lange 1983; Tuana 1994). Others have suggested that his sexism is in principle separable from his underlying metaphysic (see e.g. Cook 1996; Deslauriers

1998; Witt 1998; Modrak 1994). A brief examination of the arguments on both sides will serve to elucidate the meaning of the claim that gender bias is intrinsic to a philosopher's metaphysics. I shall first outline Aristotle's major political and biological claims involving gender, and then indicate some of the ways in which feminist critics have viewed these claims as either fundamental or peripheral to his metaphysical framework. Having done this, I shall be in a position to compare the 'genderedness' of Kashani's hierarchical metaphysics with that attributed to Aristotle. I shall in fact argue that while Kashani's hierarchical metaphysics may have gendered associations, it does not carry the sexist overlay that is so evident in Aristotle. (This conclusion, incidentally, lends support to the claim that Aristotle's sexism is, in principle, detachable from the rest of his philosophy, to the extent that his metaphysics and Kashani's are similar.)

Aristotle argues that, in a state, it is natural that some should rule and others be ruled: for example, men, masters, and fathers should rule, respectively, women, slaves, and children (*Politics* 1253b5-11; 1260a5-12). To justify this conclusion, he alleges that the latter three groups are inferior with respect to their deliberative faculty: '[Almost] all things are ruled according to nature. But the kind of rule differs ... [for] the slave has no deliberative faculty at all; the woman has, but it is without authority, and the child has, but it is immature' (1260a9-15). The paradigm of 'natural' rulership, according to Aristotle, is the soul, in which the rational part 'naturally' rules the irrational part (1260a4-7). Likewise, the soul 'naturally' rules over the body; but where this fails to happen, as in the case of animals, slaves and women, Aristotle thinks it mutually advantageous that such beings submit to those whose soul fulfils its ruling function (1254a6-9, b15-30). That men are the natural rulers of women in this way is asserted at several places without an explicit

justification being given (see e.g. *Politics* 1254b13-14, 1259b3; 1260a10-11; *NE*1138b7-10).

The other major source of Aristotle's sexist comments is in his biological writings. Here, a combination of empirical observation and *a priori* principles of causation leads him to formulate a theory of reproduction in which the male contribution is superior to that of the female, even though he holds that males and females are 'both the same in species' (*GA*730b34). Applying his theory of hylomorphism to the phenomenon of sexual reproduction, Aristotle claims that the male provides the form of the offspring, while the female provides the matter (*GA*730a26-27); that the form is 'better and more divine than the material on which it works' (732a4); and that the male provides in addition the moving cause and the final cause, whereas the female provides only the material cause (729a9-11; 732a3-7). The biological basis for this difference in generative contributions is, according to Aristotle, a difference in body heat: because of their greater heat, males are capable of 'concocting' their semen to a further stage than are females, whose menstrual blood, though analogous to semen, is not brought to sufficient heat to become seminal (726a31-728a30). For this reason, he describes the woman as 'as it were an impotent male ... owing to the coldness of her nature' and the fact that her menstrual fluids lack 'the principle of soul' (728a17-21; 737a27-29).

Some feminist commentators have suggested that Aristotle's view of women's inferiority reflects his cultural context but does not itself arise from his philosophical commitments. Witt, for example, argues persuasively that while Aristotle uses political language in associating specific genders with matter and form, the respective locations of form and matter in male and female is not intrinsic to his theory of hylemorphism, but rather 'reflects the value accorded to men and women in

Aristotle's culture' (Witt 1998, 129). Deslauriers further contends that Aristotle, whilst committed to the claim that one sex must be deficient relative to the other (since he thought that only one parent contributes form, and is *ipso facto* superior to the other who contributes matter), does not attempt to give philosophical reasons why the *female* is the deficient sex (Deslauriers 1998, 140-141). Deslauriers herself tries to reconstruct how Aristotle might argue that women contribute matter and not form, based on his view that females are less hot and therefore less able to concoct semen to the stage where it produces form, and that less well concocted semen is more 'material' than well concocted semen. However, as she points out, the argument assumes what it sets out to prove, adding weight to her claim that political bias influenced Aristotle's gendering of form and matter (157-158).

Other feminist critics have claimed that the sexism of Aristotle's biological and political theories is implicated in a more fundamental way in the hierarchical or teleological aspects of his metaphysics. Spelman's analysis focuses on Aristotle's use of a normative metaphysical hierarchy (the natural authority of the rational over the irrational part of the soul) to clarify and support a normative political hierarchy (where certain classes of persons are entitled to rule certain others). Spelman points out that since Aristotle tries to justify his claim that women are naturally subordinate to men by 1) appealing to the 'natural' rule of the rational over the irrational part of the soul and 2) attributing a (natural) lack of authority to women's rationality, he ends up with the self-contradictory position that 'women are by nature unnatural' (Spelman 1983, 22). This claim is incontrovertible; however, Spelman also makes the more dubious assertion that Aristotle 'built the particular relationships of authority he wished to justify on the basis of the metaphysics into the metaphysics itself', since 'when he describes the ruling and subject elements in the soul, he immediately recurs

to the language of persons and politics' (25-26). However, illustrating the concept of a 'ruler-ruled' relationship between parts of the soul by means of a political analogy does not obviously amount to providing a metaphysical 'basis' for the political theory. In my view, Spelman herself invites a charge of self-contradiction here, since her first claim points to the *inconsistency* of Aristotle's sexism with his stated metaphysical view of the natural rule of the rational part of the soul (a claim which she presumably endorses as applied to human beings in general), while her second claim lambasts him for couching this same metaphysical claim in political language. On the basis of the first claim alone, it would appear that Spelman in fact endorses the view that Aristotle's sexism is not only extrinsic to but in tension with his metaphysics.

Okin, on the other hand, attributes Aristotle's sexism to a combination of 1) his empiricism, 2) his practice of defining entities according to their functions, and 3) his hierarchical classifications (Okin 1979). These features of his philosophy, Okin claims, lead him to the view that all but the highest class (i.e. fully rational men of leisure) are defined by their function in relation to others (ibid., 89). Accordingly, she sees Aristotle as perceiving woman to be 'fundamentally an instrument for breeding men', and attributing to women the amount of reason required by their position in the hierarchy as permanent subjects (ibid., 83, 90-91). According to Okin, Aristotle's 'functionalist treatment of women' is based on his assumed hierarchy, 'in which woman is "naturally" placed in an inferior position' (ibid., 92). However, as evidence for this view, Okin cites a passage in the *Rhetoric* where Aristotle describes as 'more noble' those qualities that proceed from 'a naturally finer being: thus a man's will be nobler than a woman's' (*Rhetoric* 1367a17-18). This, surely, is just another instance of gratuitous sexist prejudice rather than confirmation that his hierarchical metaphysics in some way *depends* on women occupying a subordinate position,

especially given his commitment to the essential 'sameness' of men and women as members of the same species.

These divergent feminist interpretations of Aristotle offer some indication of the complexity of the relationship between hierarchy and gender in his biology, politics and metaphysics. It is beyond the scope of this dissertation to adjudicate in the debate as far as Aristotle himself is concerned, but the mere fact that his metaphysics are open to such widely differing interpretations suggests that it is overly simplistic to read deep-lying sexism into frameworks of the kind he propounds. In the case of Aristotle, there is a case for arguing that the coherence of his overall conceptual framework is compromised by the intrusion of sexist elements, and this has an important implication for assessing the relevance of the feminist concern with hierarchical metaphysics to a neo-Aristotelian philosopher such as Kashani. Briefly, unless there is independent evidence of sexist assumptions playing an integral role in Kashani's metaphysics, there is no warrant for assuming *a priori* that his Aristotelian leanings predispose his metaphysics towards sexism.

5.1.2 Koranic cosmology: sexist, non-sexist, or gendered?

It has been claimed by some feminists within the Islamic world that the Koran and/or its interpreters promote a hierarchical cosmology and ontology that discriminate against women in various ways. First, the present world (including the existing order of society) is seen as ontologically subordinate both to God and to the hereafter, and second, women are seen as ontologically subordinate to men. I consider first Sabbah's claims of sexism in the cosmological positions of what she calls 'orthodox Islam' (Sabbah 1984), and the responses of Hassan (1992), Wadud (1994), Murata (1992), and Barlas (2002), that sexism entered only at a later level of interpretation. I contend that while Sabbah's criticism appears to rest on an overly

patriarchal interpretation of the Koran, the others in different ways fail to identify or address adequately the fundamental difficulty in avoiding such interpretations.

According to Sabbah, sexual inequality is a basic premise in the sacred text, playing 'a determining role in the application of power in the sacred construction of reality' (Sabbah 1984, 70). In the first place, she claims that cosmology in 'orthodox Islamic discourse' (her term for the Koran and the *Sunnah*),⁴⁵ is structured by the hierarchical relationship between God and believer:

The relationship of domination ... ties two elements (here God and the believer) in a relationship of dependence structured in such a way that any attempt by the dominated element to re-establish equilibrium is perceived as opposition, subversion, and questioning of the existing hierarchy. (Sabbah 1984, 67-8)

Sabbah goes on to claim that this same structure is replicated in the prescribed relationship between men and women (and children), reflecting both the order of creation and an increasing distance from the divine being (1984, 74). The Koranic verses on which she bases this view concern the creation of 'helpmeets',⁴⁶ from and for men (*Koran* 30:20) and instructions for the regulation of society, which are addressed exclusively to men (as opposed to verses concerning acts of worship, which are addressed to men and women equally). In consequence, she concludes, humans are 'ranked by age and sex according to a discriminatory pyramid', with women and children 'created to serve, not God directly, but the adult male human being; only through him do they serve God' (Sabbah 1984, 74).

Other feminists, however, have seen the alleged male/female hierarchy as a sexist intrusion that entered the Koranic paradigm only at the level of later traditions (*ahadith*) and exegesis (*tafsir*). Hassan (1991) offers a systematic critique of the traditions that claimed divine authority for the subordination of woman to man. These

⁴⁵ The practice of Muhammad and his companions, viewed (together with the Quran) as the source of Islamic laws.

⁴⁶ This is the term Pickthall (1976) uses in his translation; Arberry uses the neutral term 'spouses'.

traditions, she argues, were chiefly based on the issue of woman's alleged creation from Adam's rib, a story that is not only absent from the Koran but conflicts with the Koranic statement that woman and man were created equal and simultaneously (ibid., 65-82). Similarly, Wadud (1999) argues that tendencies in Koranic exegesis to make distinctions between women and men in respect of their essential natures, or to prescribe an exclusive, transcultural definition of male and female roles, arose from later interpretations by (invariably male) scholars rather than from the text itself (ibid., 3-10). Wadud instances Sabbah as one who has tended to conflate text with interpretation (ibid. 13, n.4). Neither Wadud nor Hassan criticises the hierarchy of God and creation, or the ideal of divine transcendence.

Portraying God as dominating and patriarchal (elsewhere Sabbah speaks of God's 'mastery' and 'possession' of the world) is, of course, only one of many possible interpretations, as Murata (1992) and Barlas (2002) have argued. Murata interprets the Sufi philosophers of the Islamic 'sapiential' tradition as redressing what they perceived as an imbalance in the dogmatic theological focus on divine attributes (1992, 8). Where many theologians emphasized the 'masculine' attributes of majesty, dominance, and wrath, the sapiential or 'wisdom' tradition affirmed the primacy of 'feminine' attributes of God, such as mercy, beauty, and compassion (ibid., 9). According to Murata, hierarchical gender relationships are a metaphysical 'given' underlying and permeating Islamic cosmology, analogous to the 'yin' and 'yang' of Taoist and Confucianist cosmology (ibid., 322). For the sapiential thinkers, on her interpretation, 'masculinity' and 'femininity' are 'complementary' polar principles within each human individual, within the Divine, and in the relation of the human to the Divine (ibid., 8-17). Although the masculine pole of God has verbal precedence over the feminine in order to establish the primacy relationship of divine sovereignty

over creation, the feminine principle has ontological priority, insofar as God's mercy is said to precede God's wrath (ibid., 79). I return to this view later when assessing the implications of Kashani's metaphysical hierarchies (§5.3.3).

The idea that gender is intrinsic to God has been seen as problematic, however, even on the dipolar construal. Barlas (2002) contends that whether the 'masculine' or the 'feminine' side of God is emphasized, the result is an anthropomorphising of the Divine, a position for which she finds no sanction in the Koran (2002, 103). Indeed, on her reading, the Koran rejects both the idea that God is father/male *and* that men's rule over women is coextensive with 'God's Rule' over humans (ibid., 106). In her view, confusion of the word 'God' with what it signifies (God), together with social constructions of masculinity and femininity, have led Muslims to 'masculinise' God (ibid., 103). However, Barlas herself continues to speak of God's 'Rule' and 'Sovereignty' – terms frequently used in the Koran to describe God's relationship to the world – as if these could signify a different kind of relationship from that signified in the political realm.

The problem with Koranic language about divine sovereignty that Barlas has diagnosed correctly, in my view, is that such language tends to be interpreted both anthropomorphically and androcentrically. What she has not succeeded in doing, perhaps because it is conceptually impossible, is to show how words like 'sovereignty' or 'rule', let alone references to God as 'He', could have meanings that are devoid of human connotations, male or otherwise. To claim, as she does, that 'God's recourse to human language is meant only to communicate with us in words we can understand, not to delimit God's Reality' (ibid., 105), evades the difficulty. If our understanding of human language is, as it surely must be, conditioned by experience, which in turn is conditioned by gendered language, how is it possible to

break free from the conditioning to access the ‘Reality’ beyond the words purporting to describe it, or even to recognize the direction in which the words are pointing?

Another cosmological distinction Sabbah attacks is that between earth and Paradise. She claims that the Koranic affirmation of two distinct universes reinforces a hierarchy in which earthly life is ‘devalued and made subordinate to an imaginary space’ (1984, 77). In her view, this polarisation of earthly and sacred discriminates against women, both by ‘confiscating’ female procreative power, which is assigned to the sacred realm (i.e to God as the creator), and by debasing the earthly realm with which women and physical pleasures are associated (ibid., 72-7). The latter claim is based on texts such as *Koran* 3:13: ‘Decked out fair to men is the love of lusts – women, children, heaped-up heaps of gold and silver, horses of mark, cattle and tillage. That is the enjoyment of the present life; but God – with Him is the fairest resort’. While the perspective of such a text is unashamedly male, I find nothing in either this passage or any of the others cited by Sabbah to suggest an ontological association of women with the earth, other than in the minds of some men. The text quoted appears, in other words, to describe male psychology rather than a female essence. Nevertheless, the tendency for religious texts such as the Koran to be *understood* as promoting a two-world ontology fuels a persistent feminist concern with ‘otherworldliness’ in cosmologies that distinguish between a physical and a spiritual world. I discussed this concern above (§4.1.1, §4.2) in relation to Plotinus’s thesis that human well-being lies in contemplating the intelligible world, a position some have labelled otherworldly. The major difference I discern between the Platonic intelligible world and the Koranic ‘hereafter’ is that the former is a requirement of reason (according to a Platonic worldview), while the latter is primarily a requirement of divine justice. In the latter case, the idea that earthly life is of instrumental value

only, as a preparation for life after death in a heavenly realm, is seen by some theorists as implying that the present world is inferior to the hereafter (Sabbah 1984; Jantzen 1998).

Koranic references to 'this world' and 'the world to come' (e.g. 3:143) are easily construed as denoting a spatio-temporal distinction, even though the Koran depicts the quality of life in the hereafter as 'eternal' (10:27-28) and Paradise as 'the unseen' (19:63). It is, of course, possible to interpret 'Paradise' and 'Hell' as symbolic representations of the consequences, for good or ill, of human actions (whether these consequences are experienced in a human lifetime or subsequently). However, such a reading does not easily fit with the belief that a) the text of the Koran is the revealed word of God, and b) God, as revealed in the Koran, rewards and punishes people in the hereafter.

Since Kashani subscribes to both the Koranic worldview and that of Neoplatonism, with its fusion of Platonism and Aristotelianism, it might be thought that these differing perspectives would give rise to some tensions within the cosmology that underlies his rational mysticism. Does he keep the perspectives separate or attempt to reconcile them in his account of reality and the human goal? How does he articulate the nature of ultimate reality, the relationships obtaining within the metaphysical structure of the reality, between the material and spiritual/intellectual realms, and (normatively) between men and women? Does his account of the goal of human existence differ according to whether he is speaking from a Koranic or Neoplatonist perspective? What conclusions can be drawn from the answers to these questions for the gender-inclusiveness or otherwise of his cosmological theories?

5.2 Kashani's conception of the nature of ultimate reality: oppressive or enabling?

In this section, I examine the implications of Kashani's conception of ultimate reality for power relations between the genders. I ask how his Islamic presuppositions influence the goal of his rational mysticism, and whether he anthropomorphises the source of reality in a way that would tend to provide conceptual support for male dominance (§5.2.1). I then investigate whether Kashani conceives of the relationship between ultimately reality (God) and the world in terms of transcendence or immanence, incomparability or similarity, and what consequences this has for gender relationships within his cosmology (§5.2.2).

5.2.1 Is gender implicated in Kashani's conception of the Divine?

For Kashani as a Muslim, the ultimate reality is God, revealed in the sacred text of the Koran and in the created world. In the Arabic of the Koran, God is referred to in the masculine gender, although the Koranic 'divine names' are commonly interpreted as representing both genders, as discussed above (§5.1.2). In Persian, however, there is no gender: the singular third person pronoun, *û*, is neutral. In translating from the original, Chittick has merely observed conventional usage in supplying masculine pronouns for God. Admittedly, Kashani sometimes uses the short Arabic exclamatory prayers, such as 'high indeed is He!' (*HIP* 145), in which the verb form indicates the masculine gender of the referent, God; the same is true of Kashani's quotations from the Koran referring to God. However, following conventional usage in these ways does not show, by itself, that Kashani's conception of God is masculine, particularly as his Persian writing is not gender-inflected.

It is plausible to think that Kashani shares with other members of the sapiential tradition the view that the divine nature, as revealed in the Koranic ‘divine names’, includes ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ poles (see above, §5.1.2). According to Murata’s interpretation of the tradition, the masculine ‘names’ or attributes of God are those associated with *tanzih* or ‘divine incomparability’, while the feminine attributes are those associated with *tashbih* or ‘divine similarity’ (1992, 49, 53; see also discussion below, §5.2.2). The masculine names have verbal precedence over the feminine in order to establish the primacy of God as ruler in relation to creation, and for the maintenance of social order, even though the feminine names are ‘more fundamental’ (ibid., 55, 79). Kashani’s use of divine names reflects this same order of precedence that Murata finds typical of the tradition. That is to say, he more frequently employs masculine names such as ‘King’ (*HIP* 131), ‘Author’, ‘Creator’, ‘Majestic’ (152), ‘Exaltation’ (157), ‘Appointer’, ‘Commander’ (192), and ‘Lord of the worlds’ (288) than feminine names such as ‘the Nurturer’ (244), ‘the All-merciful’ and ‘the Compassionate’ (137). That he uses these feminine names, however, and with some frequency, is evidence that his conception of God includes the feminine pole as represented by divine names of *tashbih*.

In Kashani’s philosophical writings, there is little indication that he thinks of God in personal terms at all. Kashani frequently refers to God as ‘the First’ or ‘the Real’ to designate God as the originator and paradigm of reality.⁴⁷ In *The Book of the Everlasting* (the principle work in which Kashani articulates his cosmology in Koranic terminology), he states that humans need to have knowledge of 1) ‘the encounter with the Real and reaching certainty concerning His oneness’, and 2) ‘the creation of the world and the human’ (*HIP* 197-8). By ‘the encounter with the Real’,

⁴⁷ For background to and analysis of the concept of God in Islamic theology and philosophy, see Netton (1989).

Kashani intends both the ‘inescapable return’ that all must make ‘at the commencement of the resurrection’ (that is, after death), and what is sometimes referred to in the tradition as the ‘voluntary return’. This is the realisation that ‘no moment and no place is without God’ (198), with all that such a realisation implies for conduct of one’s life. ‘Certainty concerning His oneness’ refers to the primary tenet of Islam, *tawhid*, which is the assertion that God/Reality is one. Thus Kashani places the highest importance on the knowledge of the oneness of ultimate reality.

Affirming the unicity and uniqueness of God/Reality has, for Kashani, a number of philosophical implications, of which I detect the following. First, it leads him to maintain that God, as the ultimately Real, is not an appropriate subject for philosophical discussion. Second, it requires him to explain how a unity can give rise to a multiplicity of existents in reality. Third, it motivates his conception of human perfection as unifying the objects of knowledge. I discuss the first implication in this section, the second in §5.3, and the third briefly in §5.4 in connection with the human goal, and in more detail in chapter 6 where I focus on Kashani’s theory of self-knowledge.

If Kashani holds that God is the ultimate reality, why does he think it inappropriate to discuss the concept of God? His explanation seems at first glance to have more to do with theological correctness than with philosophical reasoning:

All creatures admit and confess – some through certainty, reality, and insight, and some through following authority – that the Real (high indeed is He beyond similarity and likeness!) is incomparable with howness and whyness and that He has no need for place and location; [and] that there is nothing to be discussed concerning Being and Ipseity. (*HIP* 146)

In other words, Kashani does not presume to apply the tools of analysis to the concepts of the existence (‘Being’) and essence (‘Ipsity’) of the Real, since he holds that there is no basis for comparing the Real with anything else. In taking this stance,

he appears to be upholding the conservative theological position of *tanzih* or divine incomparability, a position that was seen as necessary to avoid the error of declaring God ‘similar’ (*tashbih*) to created things (*Koran* 16:89-90). Arguing for the ‘existence’ of God or enumerating the divine attributes could be seen as applying human concepts analogously to God, and thus comparing God to created things.

However, it seems unlikely that considerations of theological orthodoxy are the prime motivation for Kashani’s disclaimer. The reference to ‘following authority’ in the passage quoted suggests already that it is an inferior way of arriving at knowledge and not one that Kashani himself would engage in. Rather, in my view, he avoids philosophical discussion of the Real for the same reason that Plotinus engages in apophatic discourse regarding the One (see above, §3.1.2), namely to avoid imposing the limitations of human thought on ultimate reality. This stance does not prevent him, any more than it prevents Plotinus, from speaking kataphatically of the divine on other occasions.

Although Kashani does not discuss the concept of God, he makes frequent reference to God in ways that imply ultimate agency, sometimes in personal terms. In contexts where he engages in Koranic hermeneutics (most notably in *The Book of the Everlasting*), Kashani speaks of God in terms of personal agency, both as the creator and sustainer of the universe and as in direct communication with human beings (*HIP* 198-202). In such contexts, Kashani stresses God’s direct self-revelation through the written ‘book’ (the *Koran*) and the ‘book’ of creation (‘the horizons and the souls’) (201-2). In most philosophical contexts, however, Kashani refers to God using impersonal terms such as ‘the First’, ‘the Real’, ‘the Essence’, ‘the Ipseity’, or ‘the Radiant’. Here he chiefly represents God’s agency in terms of the divine Intellect’s illumination of the human intellect (e.g. *HIP* 151, 257, 262). Thus, gender and

personal agency seem to be implicated in Kashani's conception of the Divine only in the context of his Koranic writings, where, as I discuss further below, there is reason to think that both genders are implicated.

5.2.2 The God/world relationship: incomparability or similarity, transcendence or immanence?

Theological formulations of the nature of God's relationship to the world have been seen to determine individuals' experiences of the divine or sacred (Katz 1978; Raphael 1994). According to Raphael, where such formulations a) arise from an androcentric and patriarchal perspective and b) draw a sharp distinction between creator and creaturehood, women and men will experience the divine differently because of their respective social roles (1994, 518). Although religious experience as such is not my focus here, Raphael's comments are relevant, *mutatis mutandis*, to a consideration of female participation in Kashani's rational mysticism. I have already shown that Kashani affirms as the ultimate reality the creator God as revealed in the Koran; if, in addition, he construes the God/world relationship as one of dominance, it seems reasonable to infer that women's experience of the encounter with ultimate reality would be overdetermined in the direction of submissiveness. Whether this is or would be the case actually is of course an empirical matter, beyond the scope of this dissertation. My concern here is rather to assess whether and to what extent Kashani's conception of the God/world relationship reflects an androcentric or patriarchal perspective.

Parallel formulations in the Islamic tradition and the Christian tradition offer two possible avenues for evaluating Kashani's conception of the God/world relationship. A critical distinction in Christian theological doctrines, as mentioned above (§2.4), is that between divine immanence and divine transcendence. As I noted

there, positing a connection between the conception of divine transcendence and male dominance has motivated recent attempts by feminist theologians (among others) to offer alternative formulations in terms of divine immanence (see e.g. Jantzen 1998; Johnson 1993). In the Islamic tradition, however, the parallel critical distinction is between divine incomparability (*tanzih*) and divine similarity (*tashbih*), as mentioned above (§5.2.1). Although some commentators on the Islamic tradition maintain or imply that these distinctions are equivalent (e.g. Nasr 1964), I consider them separately in relation to Kashani's understanding of the God/world relationship because, in my view, they have different implications when assessing the androcentricity of a theory.

Divine incomparability/similarity

While the position of divine incomparability or *tanzih* emphasises discontinuity between the world and God, the position of divine similarity or *tashbih* emphasises their continuity. The position of *tanzih* was maintained by dogmatic theologians such as those of the Asharite school, who insisted that there is an unbridgeable gulf between the finite (created) realm and the infinite God (Nasr 1964, 10). The rationale for *tashbih*, the position emphasised by mystical philosophers of the Aristotelian, Hermetic, and Illuminationist schools, is that positing completely distinct orders of reality (God and creation) would amount to polytheism, a denial of *tawhid* (ibid., 8). Although, as mentioned in chapter 1, Kashani does not admit to a formal affiliation, it would be plausible to infer from the similarity between ideas expressed in his paraphrases of pseudo-Aristotelian and Hermetic texts and those of his own works that he shares, at least to some degree, the perspectives of these schools of thought. In any case, there are indications that besides upholding the uniqueness and incomparability of God, he also upholds the contrasting position of divine similarity.

Before examining in more detail how Kashani demonstrates these positions, however, I draw attention to an interpretation of their consequences that is, in my view, at odds with Kashani's rational mysticism. According to Murata and Chittick (1994), *tanzih* is associated with the use of reason, and tends towards an increasing emphasis on the 'otherness' or distance of God, while *tashbih* is associated with 'unveiling' (the Sufi term for direct revelation), and emphasises the 'sameness' or nearness of God (ibid., 251-4). In their view, rational processes 'lead naturally to greater stress upon analysis and difference', hence focusing only on God's otherness leads to denial that the universe has any relationship with God, and ultimately to atheism or agnosticism (ibid., 252). Conversely, they claim that focusing only on God's sameness can lead people to 'forget that the Real is different from the world' and ultimately to obliterate the distinction between good and evil (ibid., 256). As I shall explain in detail in chapter 6, however, I discern in Kashani's philosophical interpretation of *tawhid* a rational process that leads inexorably to awareness of a unity underlying reality, and hence is both synthetic *and* conducive to awareness of the omnipresence of God. (An interesting question, of which space prevents further discussion here, is the relationship between this synthetic function of reason and 'unveiling'.)

Another indication of *tashbih* that I discern in Kashani's cosmology is in the thesis that the world manifests the attributes of God. Two attributes that receive particular mention are 'light' and 'life'. Kashani interprets the Koranic statement 'And the earth shall shine with the light of its Lord' (*Koran* 39:69) as referring to the illumination of the human intellect by the divine Intellect (*HIP* 150). Elsewhere, he likens the relationship of souls to physical bodies to that of God to souls: just as souls are 'alive and sparkling' through God, so are bodies through souls (*HIP* 211). He also

states that the world is ‘alive through the life of God, but God needs no life through which to live’ (*HIP* 212). If all that lives does so ‘through the life of God’, God is incomparable in virtue of being the life-giver who is dependent on no prior life-giver. At the same time, living through the life of God confers a fundamental similarity on living things, albeit a dependent one.

A further, and related, indication of *tashbih* that I discern in Kashani’s theory of the God/world relationship is his view that human beings are capable of becoming godlike. Indeed, he applies the epithet ‘divine’ to a number of entities other than God, including commandments (*HIP* 131), mysteries and realities (132), *theoria* or contemplation (147), light (150), confirmation and guidance (194), inspiration (212), science (262), and the fourth and highest class of human beings, whom he calls ‘clear ones, the intelligent, the divine ones’ (289). Most of the items on this list are presumably ‘divine’ in virtue of being given by God, or, in the case of *theoria* and divine science (theology), having God as their object. But what about ‘the divine ones’? These are the human beings Kashani describes as having attained the highest level of awareness and intelligence (*HIP* 289). As Chittick points out, the term *ta’alluh* (‘being like unto Allah’) is often used by Muslim philosophers to denote the goal of the philosophical quest, although typically qualified by a phrase such as ‘to the extent of human capacity’ (Chittick 2001, 44, 73). Thus, Kashani’s view that humans can become god-like through manifesting the divine attribute of intelligence further exemplifies the position of *tashbih* in his cosmology.

Divine transcendence/immanence

As discussed earlier (§2.4), Christian theology has distinguished between conceptions of the divine as *transcendent* - remote, omnipotent, omniscient - and as *immanent* – immediately present, indwelling, continuous with creation. Since my

comments immediately above on aspects of the God/world relationship expressing divine incomparability apply in large measure to the concept of divine transcendence, I shall not repeat them here. Instead, I state why I understand divine immanence to be different from divine similarity, and why divine immanence is scarcely applicable to Kashani's cosmology.

It is the asymmetry of the God/world relationship in the conception of *tashbih* that, in my view, differentiates it from the position of divine immanence, at least as characterized in the process theism of Whitehead (1978 [1929]) and Hartshorne (1970). According to Whitehead, 'It is as true to say that the World is immanent in God, as that God is immanent in the World ... It is as true to say that God creates the World, as that the World creates God' (Whitehead 1978 [1929], 348). For Kashani (as for any Muslim), the second part of this statement would make no sense in terms of either his Koranic or his philosophical understanding of God's ontological priority. However, one might detect hints of something like the first part of the statement when Kashani states (paraphrasing Ghazali) that God's knowledge 'encompasses all things' (*HIP* 119), and in the following quatrain:

O you who search to find the encounter
another time beyond the heavens.
God is with you, His great throne is your heart –
If you don't find Him in self, where will you find Him? (*HIP* 129)

While neither text individually expresses symmetry in the God/world relationship, taken together they can be seen to express a degree of mutual immanence, albeit qualified by the transcendence implied in the references to God's all-encompassing knowledge and to the 'great throne'.

Looking at Kashani's cosmology in the light of these distinctions, it emerges that he conceives of the God/world relationship as involving both

incomparability/transcendence *and* similarity/immanence. While he sometimes refers to God in terms associated with maleness or patriarchal power, he more often emphasises the divine attributes of light, life, and intelligence as manifested in created beings. There is no obvious reason to think that the first two attributes have gendered connotations; the third is more controversial, as I shall discuss in chapter 6, although I shall argue that some of the controversy rests on misunderstandings.

5.3 Kashani's 'levels of existence': a hierarchy of domination or actualisation?

In addition to affirming the Koranic conception of God's creation of the world, Kashani seeks to give a rational account of the derivation of multiplicity from the original unity (God). As discussed in relation to Plotinus (§2.2), hierarchical frameworks of reality have been seen to offer conceptual support to rankings within society, and in particular between genders. I argued above (§5.2) that Kashani's conception of the God/world relationship, though sometimes articulated in male imagery, is not inherently linked with a 'ruling male' paradigm. I now consider whether the same is true of his philosophical account of the structure of reality, starting with a brief exposition (§5.3.1), then assessing whether the metaphors he uses (§5.3.2) and the activity/receptivity distinction (§5.3.3) provide conceptual support for a hierarchy of domination or one of actualisation.

5.3.1 Levels of existence

Like Plotinus, Kashani describes the derivation of reality in terms of a 'descent' from the First or universal Intellect, through levels of existence ranked according to their increasing 'distance' from the divine origin. The more a level reflects the unity of the source, the 'higher' it is in the framework of reality. For Kashani, the divine or

‘First Intellect’ is the immediate creation of God, just as for Plotinus the universal Intellect is the first stage of emanation from the One. In Neoplatonic terms, Kashani enumerates four descending ‘levels’ that account for the ‘origin’ of existence:

The levels from the Intellect down to the elemental substances [i.e. via soul and heaven] are numbered as the ‘origin’ of existence ... The levels of kingship decrease through the four levels that are Intellect, soul, heaven, and elements. Thus the Intellect is higher in level than the soul, the soul is higher than heaven’s body [i.e. the celestial spheres], and heaven is higher than the elements ... The eminence and height of the level of each arises from proximity to the Real [i.e. God]. (*HIP* 182 – bracketed insertions mine)

Thus, according to Kashani, existence unfolds progressively from a single source (the Real), which however is described as having no level, ‘since “levels” arise in relation to the coming of beings from Him and their returning to Him’ (*HIP* 182).

Corresponding to the levels of ‘origin’ in Kashani’s framework are the levels of ‘return’, which he describes in terms of the capacities or ‘potencies’ of the human being. Metaphysically speaking, the human is, for Kashani, the highest of four ascending (in terms of complexity) groups of compound substances, the others being mineral, vegetal, and animal substances. The human has the capacities of the other three groups in virtue of their forms, and an additional capacity that the other groups do not possess:

The level of the plant is higher than the mineral, since it possesses the potency of the mineral substance and also the potency of the motion of increase. The level of the animal is higher than the plant, since it is greater than it through wanting and yearning, which are the trace of the first Soul. The level of humans is greater than the animal level through talking and intelligence, which are the radiance of the First Intellect. (*HIP* 182)

By becoming ‘intelligent’ or aware, human beings manifest not only the capacities of the preceding levels but also the distinctive human capacity for knowledge, and thereby participate in the ‘return’ to the divine source of knowledge.

Knowledge, or awareness, is Kashani's main criterion for ranking. This is evident in another distinction he makes in the levels of existence: 'being' and 'finding'. He uses separate Persian terms to indicate these two senses of 'being' to draw attention to different ways in which things exist in the world: 'The difference between being and finding is that there may be being without finding, like the being of the elemental and mineral bodies, which are without finding. But there is no finding without being' (*HIP* 274). In other words, 'being' is common to all existents *qua* existents, but 'finding' implies a greater intensity of being that entails awareness. Accordingly, Kashani ranks 'finding' higher than mere 'being'. He then subdivides each level into 'potential' and 'actual': an example of 'potential being' is the existence of the tree in the seed, which is brought to 'actual being' (a fully grown tree) through 'bodily nature'. Included in the levels of potential and actual being are elemental and mineral bodies, plants, and (non-human) animals (from other discussions, these categories each occupy their own ascending levels). 'Potential finding' belongs to the human soul or self, in virtue of its distinctive capacity for knowledge, while 'actual finding' belongs to the soul that is actualised as, and through, intellect (274). Actual finding is thus an intensity of being that is sheer awareness. This, for Kashani, is the highest level of existence, the level at which, as explained above, human intellects are said to unite with the First Intellect.

5.3.2 Kashani's use of metaphor in describing the hierarchical structure of reality

In Kashani's various accounts of the metaphysical structure of reality, I discern five distinct types of metaphor he uses to articulate the hierarchical relationships between components of the structure. First and most obvious is the metaphor of *height*, already encountered in the consideration of 'levels of existence' (see above, §5.3.1). The other four, which I examine next, are metaphors of

governance, motherhood/parenthood, light, and the organic metaphor of *root and branch*. I assess the implications of each in relation to Eisler's distinction between 'actualisation hierarchy' and 'domination hierarchy' (Eisler 1998: cf. p.21 above). As mentioned above (§1.3.1), Eisler uses the first to refer to hierarchies of systems involving a progression toward a higher, more evolved level of function, in contrast to the second, which she uses to refer to systems of human rankings based on coercion. I argue that although some of Kashani's metaphorical descriptions of the structure of reality use *terms* connoting dominance, the hierarchies described in each involve the notion of actualisation and are therefore to be seen, in terms of human development, as enabling rather than oppressive.

Governance

Like Aristotle, Kashani uses political metaphors to describe the relationship between the levels of existence in his metaphysical framework. As discussed above (§5.1), Aristotle likens the relationship between the rational and the irrational parts of the soul to that of the ruler to the ruled, men to women, and masters to slaves. In addition, his theory of sexual reproduction attributes the superior contribution, form, to the male parent, and the inferior contribution, matter, to the female. In both instances, he assumes a gender hierarchy that corresponds with a metaphysical hierarchy. Kashani however takes his analogies for metaphysical hierarchies from government rather than the marital sphere. In *The Making and Ornaments of Well-Provisioned Kings*, a manual for people in positions of leadership, Kashani defines the relationships between the various levels of existence in terms of 'kingship':

The king of the elemental substances - which are water, earth, wind, and fire - is nature, which preserves the being of each in its own specificity ... The 'nature' of the heavenly substances and bodies is called the 'soul'. The soul is king over the heavenly bodies and substances, and the soul is the vicegerent of the First Intellect, whereas the Intellect is king over the soul. The relation of Intellect's

kingship to the soul is the same as the soul's to nature. The Ipseity of the Real - majestic and high is He! - is the innovator and holder of the Intellect. (*HIP* 181)

In this passage, 'kingship' and its correlative term, 'vicegerency', define the relative positions of the levels in the hierarchy: thus the 'soul' (here denoting the First or Universal Soul, as in Plotinus's system) is king in the sphere of nature while also being in a position of vicegerency or stewardship with regard to (the Universal) Intellect. While Kashani's metaphors of governance are drawn from the prevailing models of his times (i.e. male rulers), he neither ascribes a specific sex to the ruled-over entities nor draws parallels with marital relationships in the way that Aristotle does.⁴⁸

Motherhood/parenthood

The sole domestic (and female) metaphor that appears in Kashani's cosmology is the analogy of this world (Earth) to a mother and humans to her children:

This world is like a kind mother for humans, and the plants and beasts are her breasts. Just as a mother eats the edibles that are not fitting for her infant and gives them to it through milk, the world also takes the earth, wind, fire, and water that people cannot eat, turns them into plants and animals, and gives them to people. (*HIP* 200-201)

Other representatives of the tradition speak explicitly of the four elements as the 'mothers' and the heavens as the 'fathers'; from these parents are born the 'progeny', the three kingdoms of minerals, vegetables and animals (Chittick 2001, 332 n. 56). While the 'heavens' in Kashani's usage may be, as Chittick suggests, analogous to the 'upness' of the spiritual domain (2001, 37), the distinction Kashani draws between Earth and heavens is not the same as the one he draws elsewhere between the sensible and the spiritual realm, insofar as the heavens are also part of the sensible world. In any case, for Kashani both the Earth and the heavens are knowable as such only in

⁴⁸ I discuss the metaphor of kingship more fully below (§7.3).

respect of their forms. Thus in likening the Earth to a mother, Kashani is not setting up a gendered contrast between matter and form, as does Plato (see above, §2.2), such that 'mothers' are associated with the first and 'fathers' with the second. Furthermore, the description is self-evidently about providence for basic human needs; 'Mother' Earth is portrayed here as nurturing rather than dominant.

Light

Like Plotinus, Kashani uses the metaphor of the diffusion of physical light to describe the relationship between the divine Source and the multiplicity of existents. Kashani frequently refers to the divine Intellect as 'the radiance of God (e.g. *HIP* 151, 165, 181) and speaks of the (human) soul as 'a divine light' which is bright through 'self', a reference to the actualised intellect (252). While the metaphor of illumination may not sound hierarchical, Kashani clearly combines 'light' and 'levels' in his philosophical account of creation: 'The First Intellect is a vicegerent of God in sending forth being, which is the shining of His light, to the levels lower than it, as far as the fourth level, which is the elements' (182). Elsewhere he speaks in even more strongly hierarchical terms of the souls of those who have reached the highest level of perfection being 'lost in the overmastery and domination of the universal, divine light' (262). So even light appears to have overtones of hierarchical dominance for Kashani.

However, such language needs to be evaluated in the context of Kashani's overall thesis about the relationship of the human to the divine source. Since, as I argued above (§5.2.2), a significant aspect of Kashani's understanding of this relationship is similarity to the divine through manifesting the divine attributes, the implications of 'overmastery and domination' by divine light are surely unobjectionable. Despite the terminology, I see this application of hierarchical

language as a prime instance of actualisation hierarchy, insofar as Kashani holds that the human intellect is actualised through contact with the divine light (I return to this topic below, §5.4)

'Root and branch'

Arguably Kashani's favourite comparison in describing the relationship between levels of existence is the organic metaphor of 'root' and 'branch'. As a metaphor for hierarchy, 'root and branch' reverses the 'top down' directionality implied in Kashani's metaphors of height, governance, and light. The aptness of 'tree' symbolism for explanations of phenomena in the natural world has led a current writer to remark that 'if trees did not exist, scientists would have to invent them' (Young 1989). Be that as it may, Kashani readily employs the root/branch metaphor to explain the relative position of components of his metaphysical framework. I provide examples in the following table:

<i>Root</i>	<i>Branch</i>	
God	'Signs' (in creation)	(HIP 164)
Universals	Particulars	(270)
First Intellect	Individual intelligence	(184)
Soul	Existent things (vegetable, animal, human)	(279)
Soul	Bodily potencies	(283)
The cosmos	The progeny	(275)
The four elements	The progeny	(180)

In each case, the 'root' is analogous to something ontologically prior and causally responsible for the 'branch', which is said to exist 'through' the root. In addition, the 'roots' are closer to unity, the branches towards multiplicity. However, because each branch exists through its root, the more unified entity sustains its multiple 'offshoots' and guarantees interconnections between them. Thus, tree symbolism enables Kashani to articulate relationships of ontological priority and causal dependency between

levels of existence, as well as (indirectly) lateral interconnections between entities on the same level. The root/branch metaphor, like that of motherhood, suggests a creative and nurturing rather than a dominating relationship between the entities in question.

5.3.3 Activity and receptivity: a gendered distinction?

In addition to the metaphors mentioned in the previous section, Kashani uses a number of distinctions connoting activity and receptivity to characterise the interrelationships within his metaphysical framework. The active/receptive distinction has been seen in other contexts to have gendered connotations: it will be recalled that Plato and Aristotle likened the relationship of active form and receptive matter to that of male and female (see above, §5.1.1 and chapter 3). In the sapiential tradition, as Murata (1992) has demonstrated, it was customary to describe relationships between cosmological levels in terms of activity and receptivity, with explicit gender associations. Unlike other philosophers Murata discusses in this connection, however, Kashani gives little explicit indication that he associated the distinction with gender. Such evidence as I find suggests that where he does make such an association, biological sex difference is not his intended referent.

Like other philosophers of the sapiential tradition, Kashani conceives of the soul as (ideally) receptive to the higher reality of intellect, which is active in relation to the soul (Murata 1992, 256-266, 317). While Kashani posits ascending levels of receptivity and activity without making gender ascriptions, Ibn al-‘Arabi, Ruzbihan Baqli and Jalal al-Din Rumi refer explicitly to the soul as female and intellect as male. Murata argues that exegetical mistakes arise when the terms ‘male’ or ‘female’ in these sources are understood simplistically as negative or positive, without considering that there are positive and negative masculine and feminine qualities within actual men and women. The soul should strive to be ‘active’ (masculine) in

subduing appetite and anger, but ‘receptive’ (feminine) towards the intellect and God. Intellect, on the other hand, must be ‘active’ in controlling the soul, but ‘receptive’ towards God. Hence, in Murata’s view, the active/receptive and masculine/feminine polarities primarily reflect an intrapersonal rather than an interpersonal dynamic (ibid., 316-319, 322-323).

What evidence is there, apart from analogy with other Muslim philosophers, that Kashani’s portrayal of intellect as active in relation to soul as receptive reflects a gendered distinction? A hint of it appears in a poem entitled ‘Petition’, where the author pleads with a dignitary to attend to the message of salvation:

The bride of intellect will stay behind the veil forever
if aspiration aims for needs and ties itself down with greed. (*HIP* 142)

Assuming that ‘bride of intellect’ is the soul, the implication of these lines is that the soul should be receptive (unveiled) towards her bridegroom, the intellect, rather than chasing (material) possessions. Although Kashani here appears to ascribe (by implication) genders to the soul and the intellect, in order to show a normative relationship between them, it would be far-fetched indeed to read anything more than descriptive analogy into his reference to ‘the bride’. In any case, even if the soul is ‘feminine’ in this context, the ascription is a relative one: elsewhere, Kashani describes the soul as ‘actor’ in relation to the body, the ‘acted-upon’.

The only other indication of Kashani’s gendering of the soul/intellect distinction is in a quatrain on manliness. Here it is interesting to note that, for him, being ‘manly’ is associated with manifesting qualities more commonly thought of as ‘feminine’:

Small in your own gaze, then you’re a man.
Commanding your own soul, then you’re a man.
Kicking the fallen is not to be manly –

take the hand of the fallen, then you're a man. (HIP 135)

Although intellect is not mentioned explicitly here, it is in my view legitimate to assume that, for Kashani, the only entity fit to act upon or 'command' the soul would in fact be the intellect. On this interpretation, one might plausibly infer that the 'soul' here is analogous to 'woman', whose normative relationship to 'man' is receptive. In any case, however, it is clear that 'man' for Kashani does not simply mean 'biological man'. While self-control is recognised as a cardinal virtue of manhood in Greek thought, humility, mercy, and compassion are striking additions to the conception of what it is to be a 'man'. Kashani's conception of manliness thus appears to support Murata's thesis that gender ascriptions in the tradition refer primarily to intra-personal gender relations rather than to biological men and women.

Feminists of all stripes are likely to object, for different reasons, to the premise that the feminine principle is normatively receptive in relation to the masculine principle. Liberal and socialist feminists resist the notion of essentially gendered natures of human beings, and presumably would resist *a fortiori* the idea of gendered cosmic principles. Radical and psychoanalytic feminists, on the other hand, while accepting the idea of gendered natures, resist the idea that these are hierarchically organized. However, in hypothesising the dipolar nature of intellect, soul, man and woman, Murata claims that when the intrapersonal hierarchy is in order, the interpersonal hierarchy will manifest justice – much as Plato argues in the Republic. This of course reflects an ideal seldom realised in actual societies, as Murata admits. She thinks, however, and perhaps with justifiable realism, that it is a more persuasive ideal for Muslim societies, being endemic to their own tradition, than is the Western egalitarian model, which is seen by many as alien and hostile to Islamic values

(Murata 1992, 1-4). Even if one is not prepared to accept this view, however, Kashani's dipolar conception of 'manliness', in the context of the intellect/soul, active/receptive discussion challenges any straightforward association of the active principle with the usual connotations of masculinity.

5.4 Could the 'human goal' include female humans?

Does Kashani's normative conception of 'the human being' genuinely include both male and female humans, or is it imbued with androcentric presuppositions? Is there reason to think that his conception of the human goal, as the conclusion of a rational-mystical path, is open to women as well as men? The conception of the human essence as nothing but the rational soul, and of human perfection as transcending the body and death in the attainment of eternal omniscience, have been criticised for androcentric bias (Jantzen 1998). I consider Kashani's conception of human nature and the human goal in the light of this criticism, and argue that, theoretically at least, exclusion on the basis of a bodily characteristic such as sexual difference would pose serious inconsistency.

5.4.1 What is a human being?

For Kashani, the term 'human being' (Persian *mardumî* – gender neutral) is primarily a prescriptive ideal. To be human, in his view, is not just to have the physiology of a human being, such as 'upright stature, hairless skin, broad nails, and going on two feet', or the dispositions of 'want, hope, fear, sense-intuition, anger, and greed'. To call such a one 'human', he says, is like calling an immature green shoot 'wheat' before it has produced its characteristic grain. Rather, he maintains, the essence of humanness is the human soul, with its distinctive potential for knowledge and awareness; only one who actualises or is on the way to actualising this potential is

worthy of the name ‘human’ (*HIP* 246-7). On Kashani’s account, actualisation occurs when the soul ‘joins with intelligence’ and becomes one with it: ‘the name soul falls away from it and it is called “intellect”’(253). In this actualised state, the human being *qua* intellect attains security from ‘annihilation’ (176). Thus his conception of the human being goes beyond the empirical ‘givens’ to the goal of human existence, namely the actualisation of intelligence and awareness for eternity.

If awareness is the human goal, of what does Kashani think humans should seek to become aware? I have already discussed above (§5.2.1) his Koranic response to this question, namely the oneness of God/reality. In terms of the rational-mystical path, he defines the object of the quest as ‘knowledge of self’. Like ‘human being’, the term ‘self’ for Kashani connotes an ideal rather than the empirical self of experience, and refers primarily to the actualised human soul. In still more technical terms, he equates knowledge of self with an awareness of ‘the universal of universals’ such that the knower is identical with the object of knowledge (270). Since I discuss in detail in chapter 6 Kashani’s conception of self-knowledge, I shall not anticipate that discussion here but focus instead on an implication of the human universal *qua* subject and object of awareness that counts decisively, in my view, against conceptual exclusion of women from the ‘human’ goal.

For Kashani, as for Aristotle, universals are the essences or ‘reality’ of things as provided by their genus, species and differentiae (‘divisions’ and ‘attributes’) (*HIP* 273-274). Since Kashani equates the human essence or universal with the human soul’s capacity for intelligence, *bodily* characteristics such as sex difference can only be accidental to the essence. Since, in addition, Kashani nowhere states or implies, as does Aristotle, that women’s capacity for intelligence is weaker than that of men, there is no reason to think that he posits a difference in *soul* between biologically

male and female human beings. Hence, if the human goal is knowledge of, and knowledge of oneself as identical with, the universal of universals, including the human universal, there is no logical reason for women to be excluded from the goal.

5.4.2 Is Kashani's conception of the human goal masculine?

Establishing that women are not logically barred from inclusion in Kashani's conception of the human goal is necessary but by no means sufficient for establishing that the conception itself is compatible with a feminist vision of human actualisation. I do not mean to imply that there is any single such vision; from the discussion of different feminist perspectives at §1.3, it was obvious that there are many feminist visions, including the pursuit of equal opportunities, the promotion of feminine values, and women's separatism. The feminist vision I shall consider here is Jantzen's conception of 'becoming divine' as the human goal (1998), by way of indicating both differences and similarities between her understanding of the phrase, from a psychoanalytic feminist perspective, and Kashani's. In doing so, I raise the question of whether Kashani's formulation of the human goal is inclusive of both male and female perspectives.

According to Jantzen, the conception of the divine undergirding Western civilisation provides a goal for men but not for women (1998, 12-15). Jantzen has in mind the conception of God as a divine male being 'who in his eternal disembodiment, omnipotence, and omniscience is the epitome of value' (ibid., 10). Jantzen claims that this conception of the divine is heavily conditioned by a 'masculinist' concern with mortality (symbolized by women as the birth-givers) as something to be transcended, and with salvation in an after-life (ibid., 129-141). In her view, women need a 'divine horizon' that affirms their investment in the processes of giving birth and nurturing life and allows them to perfect themselves

according to a feminine perspective. Jantzen proposes a reconceptualisation of the divine as ‘creative possibility for fecundity and flourishing’, in order to shift the emphasis from mortality and a disembodied after-life to natality and the present, embodied life (ibid., 15, 156-170).

Jantzen’s view of ‘the human condition’ is considerably more optimistic than is Kashani’s. Jantzen assumes that the natural human state is good, if only we are ‘allowed to develop normally according to the potentialities latent in natality’ (ibid., 162 - my italics). On her construal, goodness is linked with ‘the natural ability to flourish’ (ibid., 162). The idea of ‘potentialities [for good] latent in natality’ is one that Kashani certainly endorses, citing the Koranic verse which speaks of the *fitra* or ‘innate disposition’ of humans: ‘So set thy face to the religion, unswerving, in keeping with the innate disposition of God according to which He disposed the people’ (*Koran* 30:30, quoted by Kashani, *HIP* 201). However, he would differ from Jantzen in her view that humans will naturally realise their innate goodness if left to themselves. For Kashani, as discussed above (§5.4.1), the actualisation of the distinctive human potential depends on a struggle to dominate the animal appetites and potencies and achieve unified awareness of reality – in other words, the rational-mystical path. Thus, in his view the human goal involves effort.

In my view, the conflict between Jantzen’s assumption about innate human goodness and Kashani’s view that achieving the human goal requires effort shows a gap in Jantzen’s theodicy. If human goodness is a natural consequence of ‘normal development’, at what point in human history did things go wrong? In any case, however, the view Jantzen is attacking is the doctrine of ‘original sin’ typically associated with early Christian theology and not applicable to the Koranic view of human beings that Kashani endorses.

Jantzen's conception of becoming divine is, of course, based on an assumption that appears to be incompatible with Kashani's cosmology. She adopts the Nietzschean/Feuerbachian premise that 'God' is a projection of human characteristics, a position from which she then argues that women need to do 'some deliberate projecting of our own' onto the divine (Jantzen 1998, 88f).⁴⁹ For Kashani on the other hand, God is unquestionably 'the First', logically and ontologically prior to created beings: the human being is a 'mirror' of the divine. If the metaphor of projection has any application to Kashani's cosmology, it could only be in the reverse direction: God's attributes could be said to be 'projected' onto creation (provided that one is not thereby imputing to God a particular psychological motivation).

Is there room within Kashani's account of the human goal for women to aspire to divine characteristics that reflect women's experience as birth-givers and nurturers? Leaving aside the problems involved in Jantzen's own assumptions about gender, her concern about the 'masculinism' of traditional conceptions of becoming divine seems apt to Kashani in respect of his focus on mastering the body and attaining immortality through actualising the intellect. On the other hand, insofar as divine attributes are ideals for human aspiration, there are instances of feminine divine attributes to be found in his writings (see discussion above, §5.2.2). References to 'the Nurturer' (*HIP* 244), 'the All-merciful, the Compassionate' (137), and to God's 'gentleness' (178) and 'beauty' (131) suggest that there are indeed, in Kashani's conception of the divine, ideals for those women and men who wish to emulate such characteristics. Admittedly, he does not specify these attributes explicitly in connection with the human goal; however, insofar as he upholds manifesting 'noble character traits' as a

⁴⁹ See also earlier discussion of Feuerbach and projection at §2.4.3.

necessary condition for reaching the goal, the ‘feminine’ attributes would certainly be included.

Conclusions

Against a background of Aristotelian and Koranic metaphysics and ways in which these have been seen, in varying degrees, to harbour gender bias, I examined three key aspects of Kashani’s metaphysics: his conception of the divine nature, the levels of existence, and the human goal. I argued that although he abjures direct discussion of the divine nature, his Koranic writings suggest a balance between the poles of divine incomparability and similarity to creation, and thus of masculine and feminine attributes. In examining Kashani’s use of metaphors expressing hierarchy, I concluded that all of these tended toward the aim of actualisation rather than dominance.

I then discussed the relation between gender and the active/receptive distinction in Kashani’s metaphysics, and found that while there was slight evidence that he follows his tradition’s gendering of ‘activity’ as masculine and ‘receptivity’ as feminine, he does not associate the genders with biological sex but with intrapersonal gender polarities. Finally, I argued that his conception of the human goal is conceptually gender-inclusive insofar as Kashani nowhere suggests that women’s intellectual capacity differs from that of men, and insofar as the goal implicitly includes the emulation of feminine as well as masculine divine attributes. The fact that the goal does not include reference to women’s experience as birth-givers may be seen as problematic by some psychoanalytic and radical feminists, but not by most liberal or socialist feminists.

CHAPTER 6: ALL-EMBRACING SELF-KNOWLEDGE

In this chapter, I examine whether Kashani's conception of self-knowledge (the goal of his rational mysticism) is in principle open to women. At the end of chapter 5, I argued in general terms that the ideal of unified knowledge or 'finding all things within self' transcends accidental differences such as gender, because the objects of knowledge are universals – species and genera, rather than particulars. However, this claim relates to what is known, rather than to the knower or the mode of awareness. In this chapter, I analyse the concept of self-knowledge in Kashani's rational mysticism and argue that Chittick's interpretation tends to favour a conception of self-knowledge that under-represents the breadth of Kashani's conception (§6.1 and §6.2). I then discuss a number of feminist concerns arising from a conception of self-knowledge as knowledge of universals and consider what resources may be found in Kashani's epistemology for responding to these concerns (§6.3).

6.1 Kashani's conception of self-knowledge

It is important to distinguish between Kashani's conception of self-knowledge and the current technical meaning of the term. For modern philosophers, 'self-knowledge' refers to knowledge of one's own sensations, desires, intentions, thoughts, and beliefs.⁵⁰ To understand Kashani's conception of self-knowledge, we need to grasp the specific meanings he attaches to the two components of the term, 'self' and 'knowledge', as well as the mechanism of 'conjunction' with the divine Intellect through which self-knowledge occurs.

⁵⁰ See, for example, Wright, Smith and Macdonald, eds. (1998).

6.1.1 Defining 'self'

For Kashani, 'self' is not an empirical concept, referring to a particular individual, but a universal, prescriptive ideal. As seen above (§5.4), he analyses the human being as the highest level of existence, comprising the levels of minerality, the vegetal soul, the animal soul, and the distinctively human, rational soul that has the potential for intelligence (*HIP* 182). When this potential is actualised, the soul becomes an 'intellect' (253). Kashani equates the soul, and more particularly the soul actualised as intellect, with the self:

By the word soul we mean the same as what we mean by the word root, the word reality, the word essence, and the word self ... when we say 'the soul of the human', we mean by it the human root, reality, and essence through which the human is human ... anyone 'human' in name from whom the trace of these traits [of virtue and knowledge] is witnessed, plainly seen, and actual, or potential and nearly actual, is suitable and appropriate for this name. (*HIP* 246-7; bracketed insertion mine)

In other words, Kashani defines human selfhood in terms of what sets a human being apart from other living creatures – the distinctive human potential for virtue and knowledge. 'Self' thus is a normative conception of what a human being, *qua* member of the human species, should strive to become, rather than a designation of an actual, particular individual.

The self-as-intellect has two aspects or levels, indicated by the reference (in the passage quoted above) to 'traits'. These levels are the practical intellect, concerned with conduct, and the theoretical intellect, utilised in *theoria* or reflection (*HIP* 223). Kashani sometimes represents these two aspects of intellect in Persian terms that translate as 'working intelligence' and 'seeing intelligence' respectively (Chittick 2001, 62-3). The use of these everyday terms, the vividness of which emerges in Chittick's translation, emphasises Kashani's understanding of the self's activity as integrating conduct with contemplation.

Kashani's conception of the self corresponds, in my view, to what Plotinus posits as the highest or 'undescended' part of the soul. As discussed above (§2.1), Plotinus distinguishes the higher, reasoning part of the soul from the lower, animating part which forms a composite with the body (*Enneads* I 1,7). I understand Kashani to make an equivalent distinction between the rational soul and the *anima* or animal soul as the source of the body's life and movement (*HIP* 156, 172). However, Plotinus makes a further distinction, within the higher part of the soul, between a part that is the (historical) subject of awareness in the sensible world and a part that remains eternally contemplating in the intelligible world, whether or not 'we' (as historical beings) are conscious of the fact (*Enneads* I 1,10,6-8; 13,1-9). While there is reason to think he identifies the true self with the latter, highest part of the soul, he does not do so consistently.⁵¹ Kashani on the other hand appears to equate the self only with the latter, insofar as, for him, the self is the soul whose potential intellection is actual.

6.1.2 Defining 'knowledge'

Kashani defines 'knowledge' as 'the apparentness of things in the self' (*HIP* 290). Since the 'self' is the actualised intellect, the concept of knowledge at issue here is the awareness of intelligible objects, as distinct from the perceptual awareness that discerns sensory objects. As with Plotinus, the intelligible objects or 'intelligibles' are universals, while the perceptible objects are particulars (278).

The synthetic function of knowledge in Kashani's rational mysticism cannot be over-emphasised. As mentioned above (§5.2.1), he states that 'reaching certainty concerning [God's] oneness' is one of the most necessary sorts of knowledge for human beings (*HIP* 197). Asserting the oneness of God (*tawhid*) is the primary tenet

⁵¹ For further discussion of Plotinus's conception of the self, see Gerson (1994, especially chapter 7 on 'Human Psychology'); and O'Daly (1973).

of Islam. Kashani gives the Persian translation of the Arabic *tawhid* as *yaki kardan*, ‘to make one’, a phrase that covers making a compound out of several ingredients as well as unifying things in thought through classification. For Kashani, philosophy has a dimension similar to *tawhid*, namely analysing existents into categories and synthesising the categories into increasingly general classes until a single, all-embracing class, ‘the universal of universals’, is reached (270).

What, for Kashani, is the ultimate object of knowledge? I suggest that while at least two statements point to his holding that the object of knowledge is something other than the Real, this conclusion seems to be undermined by other statements to the contrary. This may indicate, of course, that Kashani thinks knowledge of ultimate reality is disclosed progressively, and that until certain intermediate stages have been attained, awareness of the Real is impossible. In any case, since Kashani most frequently expresses the final goal of philosophy as ‘knowledge of self’, it seems likely that he regarded this as a necessary if not sufficient condition for encountering the Real.

In the first place, as discussed above (§5.2.1), Kashani on principle avoids philosophical discussion of the Real. Of course, this does not preclude the possibility that the Real may be apprehended with a different, non-discursive kind of knowledge or awareness, and as will be seen presently, a suggestion of this is present in some passages. Nevertheless, given his high view of philosophical reflection as preparation for the encounter, it is reasonable to suppose that Kashani posits an ultimate object of the philosophical quest that *is* a fit subject for discussion.

A second reason for thinking Kashani does not intend the Real as the final object of reflection is his endorsement of the Koranic emphasis on the ‘signs’ in creation as the only way by which humans may find knowledge of God. Kashani

devotes much of *The Book of the Everlasting* to commenting on the Koranic verse that states: ‘We shall show them Our signs in the horizons and in their souls until it becomes clear to them that He is the Real’ (*Koran* 41:53). According to his interpretation, the elements, the various classes of living beings, the senses, the rational capacities, and the Arabic letters and numerals are all manifestations of the divine power or ‘sovereignty’, each with its analogue in the human being (*HIP* 200-209). The manifestations, not the Real *per se*, are the object of reflection here.

On the other hand, Kashani occasionally speaks as if an ultimate vision of or union with the Real is possible. He affirms, for example, that recognition of the Real can only take place when the knower ceases to be a separate individual and becomes merged with the divine light:

O Lord, Your magnificence prevents recognition of You. All those who find the way back to your Presence through the radiance of Your light, which is intelligence, fall by that light outside the darkneses of sense-intuition, sensation, body, and nature. At every instant, the things inviting them to love that Presence increase. But, until they lose the lamp of their own existence in the universal sun and become wholly it, two-ness will not disappear and recognition of the reality will not be obtained. (*HIP* 146)

The notion of losing ‘the lamp of existence’ in ‘the universal sun’ is reminiscent of Sufi texts such as that of Jami (d. 1492), describing the state of union with the Divine: ‘the light of the understanding ... is extinguished in the dazzling light of the Eternal Essence’ (Jami, *Nafahat al-Uns*, 527, quoted in Smith, 1973, 217). Is the referent of Kashani’s ‘universal sun’ the Divine Essence, or the divine Intellect? Given that Kashani frequently speaks of the divine Intellect in terms of ‘light’ and ‘radiance’, it is perhaps more plausible to assume that this is what is meant here, although it could also be argued that the sun, as the source of light, is being used as a metaphor for God.

In addition, Kashani warns that once a person has become aware of the oneness of God through knowledge of the signs, the knowledge itself must be discarded:

[The knowledge of the signs] is like a mirror – if you do not bring it before the face, you will not be able to see the face. But if you do find the way to the face with the mirror and you fail to put the mirror out of your hand, you will affirm two visions and leave aside oneness ... Once you know and recognize, you must put aside the signs and the marks so as not to be an associator. (*HIP* 211)

Being ‘an associator’ refers to the Koranic prohibition against associating other gods with God (*Koran* 17:23), hence Kashani’s caution against holding onto knowledge of the signs once their destination has been reached. As with the earlier reference to overcoming separateness, he appears to affirm here the possibility of direct awareness of the Real.

However, even if, as these passages seem to suggest, Kashani holds that God is the ultimate object of awareness, he does not argue for this position. In this respect, his account of the goal and climax of philosophy differs from that of Plotinus, for whom the One is the necessary climax of thought, while transcending conceptualisation (see discussion of this above, §3.1.2). On the other hand, by positing the oneness of God (tawhid) as one of the most necessary sorts of knowledge, Kashani may also be seen as positing the source of unity as the ultimate object of awareness.

6.1.3 Conjunction with the divine Intellect

Although the pursuit of knowledge in Kashani’s rational mysticism aims at achieving unified awareness, it does not ostensibly lead to an experience of union with God. According to Kashani, the act of unifying the objects of knowledge brings the human intellect into proximity to God through contact or ‘conjunction’ with the divine Intellect (*HIP* 130, 199). Of the three varieties of Islamic mysticism distinguished by Fakhry (1971), as discussed in chapter 1, namely the philosophical,

the visionary, and the unitary, Kashani in my view most obviously embraces the first, has some affinity to the second (viz. his intimations of the Real as the ultimate object of awareness), and avoids the third. This is not to say, however, that unitive experience is absent from his philosophical trajectory. Like the philosophical mystics discussed by Fakhry, such as al-Farabi and Ibn Sina, Kashani accepts some form of the theory of contact or ‘conjunction’ (*ittisal*) with the transcendent Intellect, while appearing to equate conjunction with union, as will be shown below. However, unlike the so-called ‘drunken’ Sufis such as al-Bastami and al-Hallaj, Kashani lays no direct claim to identity with God or to annihilation (*fana*) of the self in God. For this reason, his rational mysticism appears at first to pose less threat to individuality than that of Plotinus.

According to al-Farabi, the human intellect reaches its maximal perfection when it arrives at the ‘closest degree to’ the Active Intellect (the tenth in a series of emanations from the First Cause of the universe, conceived as governing the sublunary world and as the main intermediary between humans and God). Al-Farabi denied any possibility of union between a human intellect and the Active Intellect, claiming instead that, in rare cases, the human intellect, having reached the level of ‘acquired intellect’, becomes as ‘matter’ to the ‘form’ of the Active Intellect and may receive divine revelation through it (Waltzer 1985). Ibn Sina, on the other hand, conceived of conjunction with the Active Intellect as occurring whenever human thought takes place, and therefore did not want to construe conjunction as union, since that would imply the instant possession of all intelligible thoughts whenever a single thought was entertained. However, he spoke of the possibility of the ‘permanent conjunction’ of the human soul with the Active Intellect after death (Davidson 1992).

Kashani, in my view, reaches somewhat different conclusions about the nature of conjunction. His cosmology takes a simpler form than that of al-Farabi and Ibn Sina, and does not apparently include the multiple ‘intellects’ emanating from the First Intellect. Neither does he posit additional levels of the human intellect besides the potential and the actual intellect. Like al-Farabi, Kashani holds that conjunction is realised only after an individual has reached a state of perfection: ‘[One] of the marks of human completeness is seeing their own joinedness with unconditioned existence, which is the light of the Divinity’ (*HIP* 185). As seen earlier, the light of the Divinity (the ‘radiance of God’) is another name for the First Intellect, so Kashani is referring here to joining with Intellect. That he thinks this is a more substantial union than either al-Farabi or Ibn Sina countenanced is evident at the end of Kashani’s short essay on *Tawhid*, in which he mentions levels of practice and reflection that comprise the assertion of unity:

Then one level remains, which is the utmost end of tawhid. This level is that they do not recognize the knower of the unconditioned existent and the unconditioned existent itself as two things – that one of them should be knower and the other known. Rather, knower and known are one in the unconditioned existent. (*HIP* 130)

That Kashani thinks this level is attainable in this life, and not only after death (as Ibn Sina maintained), is implied in another passage in which he contrasts the epistemological effects of conjunction, for those who attain it, with the kind of knowledge most people content themselves with:

The mark of reaching and joining with the radiance of the first Intellect is that certainties come to predominate. Although the vast majority of people are aware of knowledge and its howness only through following authority and recounting, there is certainty for individuals who have this joining. In knowing they become independent from the assistance of the senses and the instruction of anything other than intelligence. (*HIP* 184)

In sum, his conception of knowledge involves the human intellect joining with the First Intellect in such a way that 1) the former receives illumination directly from the latter and 2) the former ceases to recognise itself as other than the latter.

6.1.4 'Self-knowledge'

Given Kashani's conception of the self as the actualised intellect and knowledge as the intellect's awareness of universals, the combination of the two terms suggests at least two possible meanings within his epistemological framework. Is 'self-knowledge' a) the awareness that the (true) self is the actualised intellect, or b) the actualised intellect's awareness of, and awareness of being identical with, universals? As I shall show presently, while both meanings are implicated in Kashani's account of self-knowledge, b) represents a higher level of attainment than a). However, as I go on to argue (§6.2), Chittick's interpretation of Kashani's conception of self-knowledge tends to equivocate between a) and something more like knowing the true nature of the empirical self. A consequence of this is that he presents Kashani's analyses of existents as referring primarily to the structure of the human soul and only secondarily, if at all, to that of the cosmos. Reading Kashani in this way, in my view, under-utilises the potential of his conception of self-knowledge as 'universal awareness' for generating ecological and social responsibility – even though Chittick shows himself sympathetic to such an aim (Chittick 2001, 66).

The achievement of self-knowledge is, for Kashani, both epistemological and ontological. It is both the culmination of a 'spiritual journey' or series of stages of reflection, and the attainment of the highest ontological level, 'actual finding' (see above, §5.3.1). Accordingly, he posits a series of stages through which a human moves from the level of potential finding to actual finding. These are the 'rungs of perfection' in the treatise so named, and show the order in which Kashani thinks a

person can most naturally advance in grasping the realities of things and bringing them into an ultimate unity of awareness. I summarise these stages as follows:

1. Awareness of the realities of the cosmos, its states, potencies and progeny
2. Knowing the reality of these things and knowing how they are known
3. Knowing what awareness and knowing are: finding things in self through self
4. Knowing that what is known in and through self is nothing but self
5. Awareness of the relationship of universal awareness to particular awareness
6. Knowing that the universals are a finite, ordered series, increasing in generality to the universal of universals, through which everything is known
7. Knowing and being the universal of universals (*HIP* 269-270).

It will be seen that these stages mark transitions through levels of analysis and classification, from the particulars to universals, to a kind of ‘meta-analysis’ where the analyst realises that he has become identical with the ultimate object of knowledge. Having learned how to rank the universals in levels of increasing generality, he comes to an upper limit, which is ‘universal awareness’ or awareness of self:

The universal of the universals is the origin of all the other universals, the first of the known things, and the utmost end of all. Thus being aware of it one can be aware of what is below it, and with it the levels of existence come to an end ... [The] one aware of and knowing the universal of the universals is not a universal below it and less than it in generality and compass, nor is he one of the divisions ... Rather, the knower of the universal of universals is nothing other than the universal of universals. He who is aware of it is not aware of something belonging to self, but rather, he is aware of self. (*HIP* 270)

This, for Kashani, is the ‘the perfection of all perfections and the final goal of all final goals ... the unification of the intellecter, the intellect, and the intellected’ (270). The

knower who has become identical with the universal of universals has thus achieved the ultimate knowledge of self as sheer awareness of unified reality.

6.2 How self-knowledge relates to rational mysticism

In my view, Kashani's conception of self-knowledge typifies rational mysticism as I have defined it, that is, as the climax of a path of reasoning culminating in an experience of contact or union with what is conceived to be the ultimate reality. Plotinus, as discussed in chapter 2, conceives of the climax as union with the One. In the case of Kashani, however, as discussed above (§6.1.3), union or conjunction takes place not with the Real but with the divine Intellect. Through engaging in exercises of analysis, classification, and synthesis, the human soul becomes a 'knower of self', joining with the divine Intellect in such a way that it becomes identical with the intelligible objects that the divine Intellect contains. Furthermore, for Kashani as a Muslim, self-knowledge is the most complete philosophical expression of *tawhid*, the Islamic assertion of the unity of Reality: all things are synthesised or 'made one' in the self as an actualised intellect.

How are exercises in analysis and classification, and the ascent through levels of knowledge, supposed to have such a transformative effect on the individual who undertakes them? Is it the case for Kashani that such activities are in and of themselves beneficial, such that an entomologist establishing the genus and species of the dung beetle, for example, or naming its parts, is somehow blessed or divinised by doing so? Or do only certain objects of analysis and classification count, perhaps only those specifically mentioned by Kashani, such as degrees of existence, immaterial beings, very general categories of living things, and grades of knowledge? Why, in any case, does he think that classifying and ranking such things leads a person

towards the mystical-philosophical goal of self-knowledge? I address these questions in turn.

Insofar as all analysing and classifying involves recognising connections, similarities, or differences between the entities involved, it is for Kashani an act of ‘theoretical *tawhid*’. Clearly, much depends here, as with Plotinus, on the fundamental premise that what is more ‘one’ is better than what is dispersed or fragmented. In the case of Kashani, this premise could be seen as a direct implication of *tawhid*: proximity to God is the measure of the goodness of anything. Thus, unifying things in thought qualifies as an activity reflecting the oneness of God and therefore instrumental to the transformation that makes a person more godlike.

An example of one of the classificatory exercises Kashani describes shows how he thinks it is possible to unify things in thought. Speaking of ‘the religion’s ulama’ (by which I understand him to mean the philosophers and sages of the Islamic tradition), Kashani describes the method of classification that leads ultimately to a single category, the ‘unconditioned existent’:

They make one and they see as one all the sensible individuals, of whatever species they may be, through the species of these individuals ... In the same way, they look upon the many species – such as humans, four-footed things, crawlers, and flyers, as one through the genus ‘animal’ and ‘living’. They see the growing things as one through the animate body ... the animate and the inanimate body as one through the compound body ... the compound body and the simple body as one through unconditioned body ... body and soul as one in that they are substance ... substance and nonsubstance – like the accidents – as one through the existent ... the many existents – without leaving aside any existent whatsoever – as one through the unconditioned existent. (*HIP* 130)

It is not difficult to see how such an activity, and any subsidiary exercise in classification, can be considered both as an assertion of the unity of reality (*tawhid*) and also as leading to mystical awareness, perhaps of the kind Stace classes as ‘extrovertive’, that is, perceiving an underlying unity through a multiplicity of objects (Stace 1960, 62).

Are Kashani's references to things in the external world purely allegorical? Although Chittick is of the view that Kashani and others in the Islamic tradition are typically giving an analysis of the human soul when they analyse the world (Chittick 2001, 46), this does not seem to me to be borne out consistently by the texts in Kashani's case. In only one of his works, *The Book of the Everlasting*, is this purpose explicit.⁵² The theme of that work is deciphering the 'signs' of God in 'the horizons' (the cosmos) and 'the souls' (humans) as preparation for the encounter with God (see above, §5.3.1); the method involves allegorical interpretation of concepts and verses in the Koran. Here Kashani likens plants growing up from the earth towards the heavens to rational speech rising up from the organ of taste to the organ of hearing (*HIP* 204), and the 'lamp' of God's light in the heavens and the earth (*Koran* 24:35) to the illuminating presence of the soul in the body (*HIP* 210). In these examples, cosmology is clearly being used to illustrate psychology (in the sense of a theory of the human soul).

However, in Kashani's more analytic philosophical works, the analyses of macrocosmic reality appear to be just that, as in the passage from the 'Essay on *Tawhid*' quoted above. The steps of classification mentioned there follow the same basic pattern that is found in Aristotle's *Categories*, with the exception of the division of animals into 'humans, four-footed things, crawlers, and flyers'. According to Chittick, the purpose of this latter division is to represent certain potencies of the human soul as manifested by these types, rather than to give a biological taxonomy (Chittick 2001, 51). It is true that Kashani makes precisely this use of the typology in *The Book of the Everlasting*, where he likens the characteristics of the four-footed

⁵² Although *The Makings and Ornaments* also provides an allegorical analysis of the self, the object of comparison is the political realm rather than the cosmos, so I am not including it in the present discussion.

things, crawlers, and flyers respectively to the ‘bonds’ of (spiritual) blindness, deafness, and ‘upside-downness’ (*HIP* 226). However, in other mentions of the four types of animals, as in the passage quoted above, I suggest Kashani is simply adopting (with modification) the Koranic division of animals into those that ‘walk on their bellies’, those that walk on two legs, and those that walk on four (*Koran* 24:45). In that case, it is plausible to read the above passage at face value as a method of discerning a unity of all that exists within the cosmos.

The advantage of such a reading, in my view, is that it shows more clearly how self-knowledge, according to Kashani’s conceptualisation, transforms the perspective of the knower. Since Kashani holds that a) the unified structure of the cosmos is an object of knowledge for the intellect and b) the self as the actualised intellect is identical with the objects of its knowledge, it follows that self-knowledge entails the identity of the unified structure of the cosmos with the self. Awareness of the unified structure of the cosmos begins with exercises in analysis and classification, and ends in synthesis. Insofar as the empirical self adopts the perspective of the ‘ideal’ self, the bounds of selfhood are extended to embrace the entirety of existence.

6.3 Feminist concerns arising from a conception of self-knowledge as knowledge of universals

In chapter 3, I considered feminist objections that the Platonic account of knowledge discriminates in various ways against women as knowers, and argued that most of these objections, whether or not they hold against Plato, are difficult to substantiate in Plotinus. I argued for this position both on the negative grounds that Plotinus’s writings are devoid of remarks implying that women are less rational than men, or that body and soul are gender-inflected, and on the positive grounds that

Plotinus privileges an experiential type of knowledge with a strongly affective component as the soul approaches the climax of the ascent to the One. Furthermore, as I argued in chapter 2, Plotinus's emphasis on the immanence of the One and his descriptions of the continuity of the levels of reality alleviate concerns arising from the association of male power with a conception of the divine as utterly transcendent. Hence, I concluded that some of the most distinctive features of Plotinus's rational mysticism, namely the experiential and affective quality of the ascent to knowledge and the goal of union with the One within, are compatible with a gender-inclusive stance.

The position with Kashani is somewhat different, both because he says little about the experiential aspects of the ascent to knowledge and also because he does not appear to posit an ideal of union with God but instead focuses on self-knowledge as the goal of philosophy, preparatory to the final encounter with God (see above, §5.3.1). As demonstrated in the previous section, Kashani's conception of self-knowledge involves the soul's direct grasping of universals in such a way as to encompass the whole of (knowable) reality. While this is also a crucial stage in Plotinus's account of the ascent, I believe its significance is greater for Kashani's rational mysticism insofar as it is, for him, the ultimate step of philosophical activity, whereas for Plotinus it must be transcended by anyone who would grasp the One. For this reason, I shall raise in this chapter some feminist concerns with the conception of self-knowledge as knowledge of universals (which would also apply to Plotinus's conception of 'intuition', as defined above, §3.1.1), and assess the cogency of these concerns in relation to Kashani's epistemology. First, in view of women's alleged preference for particulars over universals, I enquire whether the pursuit of universals is a 'male' ideal, and how Kashani's conception supports or negates this claim

(§6.3.1). Second, in response to feminist calls to reinstate the body as a worthy avenue of knowledge, I consider whether Kashani's conception of the self as purely intellectual excludes implicitly certain classes of human beings from the possibility of self-knowledge and is therefore sexist (§6.3.2) or elitist (§6.3.3). Lastly, I discuss whether Kashani's conception of self-knowledge as knowledge of universals implies a loss of individuality (§6.3.4).

6.3.1 Universals – a male pursuit?

That privileging universals is a 'male' way of thinking has been claimed by a number of socialist and psychoanalytic feminists, often citing Chodorow's analysis of early sex-role socialisation (Chodorow 1978). According to Chodorow, the development of masculine identity depends on individuation and psychological separation from the typically female primary caregiver, experienced as 'opposite', whereas feminine identity is formed in a context of ongoing attachment to the mother, experienced as similar (1978, 166-7). This theory has generated claims that early infantile development accounts for different ways in which men and women approach knowledge (e.g. Gilligan 1982; Flax 1983; Fox Keller 1985). According to Flax, male development is grounded in a need to deny the power of women and all that is symbolically associated with them, including the body and the passions (Flax 1983, 253-5). To this act of 'repression' she attributes the development, among male philosophers, of a conception of reason as disengaged from the body and the impermanence of the material world. On her psychoanalytic reading of Plato's theory of knowledge, '[the] eternal, unchanging forms assure freedom from the cave, the womb, the unending cycle of birth and death, the realm of necessity and of women (mothers)' (1983, 258). In the realm of moral knowledge, Gilligan concludes from developmental theory and empirical observation that women's understanding tends to

be ‘connective’ and contextual, issuing in concern for particular others, whereas men’s tends to be ‘separative’ and abstract, framed in terms of rules and rights (Gilligan 1982, 19). These authors thus posit a causal connection between the social roots of male identity formation and the propensity for abstract thought.

Tempting as such hypotheses are, however, they have been seen to rest on controversial assumptions about the link between gender identity formation and patterns of thought.⁵³ While it may indeed be the case that boys born into patriarchal societies experience a need to repudiate identification with their female caregivers, this is surely contingent on a particular set of social arrangements and on a uniform response to those arrangements. Supposing the premise about male tendencies toward separation is granted, however, an explanation is still needed as to why some women and not all men become abstract thinkers.

However, even if it is impossible to justify the claim that abstract thinking, such as that involved in knowledge of universals, is a male trait, the underlying concern with the ‘separative’ thinking that seems to Flax and others to characterise much of Western philosophy still merits attention. I take it that the issue here is the ethical implications of the pursuit of abstract knowledge – the idea that focusing on universals as the true objects of knowledge diverts attention from particular individuals as objects of knowledge and moral concern. Viewed in this light, Kashani’s ideal of self-knowledge as the awareness of universals initially appears to epitomise abstract thought.⁵⁴ The exercise of analysis and classification seems to

⁵³ For critical discussion of the use of psychoanalytic premises in feminist epistemology, see Hawkesworth (1989, 542).

⁵⁴ Chittick prefers to use the term ‘disengaged’, rather than ‘abstract’, to translate the Arabic term *mujarrad* in this context, since the literal meaning has to do with being peeled or stripped, whereas ‘abstract’, in his view, tends to connote something that is unreal and therefore unimportant. This, however, is not quite the connotation of ‘abstract’ that is at issue in Flax’s critique.

involve a progressive distancing of the knower from the concrete, embodied particulars to the abstract forms, and finally to the ultimate abstraction, the universal of universals.

On the other hand, the synthetic aspect of *tawhid* or ‘making things one’ in Kashani’s conception of self-knowledge suggests connection rather than separation. It is difficult to read far in Kashani’s writings without encountering one of the many ‘chains of being’ he describes. Not only does he frequently use the organic metaphor of root and branch to describe the relationship between elements of his cosmological structure (as discussed in above, §5.3.2), but his analyses of the characteristics of human beings underscore qualitative connections with everything animal, vegetable and mineral. It is true that these connections are understood as hierarchical as well as lateral, but the perspective is far from detached.

Once again, although Chittick interprets these chains of being as descriptive of the inner realities of the human being rather than the phenomena of the natural world as such, it seems likely for at least two reasons that Kashani’s view of the latter provided his model for the former. First, his descriptions of natural phenomena suggest detailed observation, and second, he states that the knowledge incumbent on the human being includes ‘the knowledge of the creation of the world and the human’, signs of which are to be seen ‘in the heavens and the earth’, as the Koran repeatedly emphasises (*HIP* 197-198). Not only has he observed the world around him, but he urges his readers to do the same. Thus the discernment of relationships between things in the cosmos is fundamental to his theory of self-knowledge. I discuss possible ethical implications of Kashani’s synthetic view of self-knowledge below (§7.1.2); however, insofar as his epistemology can be said to ground his ethical

perspective, I see no reason to think that that perspective would be of the ‘separative’ kind that Flax and Gilligan associate with a ‘male’ orientation to life.

6.3.2 Is Kashani’s ideal of self-knowledge body-denying, and if so, is it sexist?

How does Kashani’s view of the self as intellect affect the gender-inclusiveness of his philosophical vision? It would appear that his emphasis on actualisation of the intellect as the pinnacle of human perfection implies a negative evaluation of the body and whatever is associated with it. This has certainly seemed to be the case for many rationalist philosophers and has been a major source of feminist criticism, given the historical tendency to associate the body with femaleness. As Code has pointed out, the philosophical tradition has often judged women ‘unfit for the abstract life of pure reason’ on the grounds of their ‘purported incapacity to rise above the practical, sensuous, and emotional preoccupations of everyday life’ (Code 1991, 28-9). As I noted above (§3.2.3), derogatory remarks in Plato’s dialogues associating women with body-directed lives, combined with the Platonic view of the unreliability of sensory knowledge, have been taken to imply that women cannot aspire to the kind of knowledge that is the goal of philosophy (Spelman 1982). As in the case of Plotinus, however, such remarks about women are virtually absent from Kashani’s writings, and therefore there is no explicit correlation between his views of the body and his view of women’s fitness (or otherwise) for knowledge.

However, such a correlation may also be implicit in the very absence of women from the texts, as Malti-Douglas (1991) has argued in connection with Arabo-Islamic literature covering the period in which Kashani wrote. Malti-Douglas criticises what she sees as misogyny and denigration of the body in allegorical narratives used pedagogically by several medieval Islamic philosophers, including Nasir al-Din Tusi (d. 1274), who were near contemporaries of Kashani. According to Malti-Douglas,

the *Salaman and Absal* narrative illustrates the problematic status of women and the body for male philosophers in the Arabo-Islamic milieu. As examples, she cites the parthogenetic birth of the king's son, Salaman, and his enforced separation from the beautiful Absal, his erstwhile wetnurse and later lover, in order to be fit to take over his father's kingdom. In Tusi's allegorical interpretation of this story, the king represents the active intellect, Salaman the rational soul and Absal the bodily faculty. According to Malti-Douglas, the allegorical meaning 'proceeds according to consciously applied rules, such as the female's being the equivalent of the physical corporeal faculty'.

The focus of Malti-Douglas's concern is not, however, the conscious association of woman with the body, so much as an unconscious or unacknowledged fear of female power that, in her view, underlies the narrative. In the king's desire for asexual procreation, she sees a male fantasy of a world without women; Absal is 'defined through her body', first as nurturer, then as seducer; and the necessity for *Salaman* to be separated from her shows that the female 'must be excluded from the male universe of governing and ruling' (1991, 99-100). Thus, for Malti-Douglas, women signify, by their absence or negative presence in these narratives, a threat to male power. While there is no direct evidence that Kashani himself wrote in this genre,⁵⁵ Malti-Douglas's critique raises the question of whether Kashani's view of the body implies anything about his view of women that might affect their ability to attain self-knowledge.

One factor that might lead us to suppose that Kashani takes a negative view of the body is its position in his cosmological hierarchy. As discussed earlier (§5.3.3),

⁵⁵ A commentary on one of these narratives, *Hayy ibn Yaqzan*, has been attributed to Kashani (Nasr 1986, 256-257), although Chittick (2001, 27) expresses doubt that Kashani was the author of this manuscript, given both the lack of evidence and Kashani's independence of mind.

Kashani defines the relationships between body, soul, and intellect in terms of activity and receptivity, or form and matter. Where these distinctions appear in Aristotle and in the Islamic intellectual tradition, they tend to be correlated with the male/female distinction (see above, §5.3.1). However, not only does Kashani not use his attributions of activity and receptivity, or form and matter, to make sexist judgements, but these attributions are relative, not absolute: the soul is active in relation to the body, receptive in relation to the intellect, and even the body is ‘form’ relative to the ‘matter’ of its composition (*HIP* 238, 286).

The only evidence I find that Kashani associates women with the body is the context of giving counsel to ‘the Brethren’ or seekers of wisdom. Here he urges persevering ‘like a man’, and not making it a habit ‘to seek the body’s comfort like women’ (*HIP* 131). While this looks like a sexist empirical observation, it would also be possible to understand it in terms of the ‘negative femininity’ that, as discussed above (§5.3.3), represents part of the intrapersonal polarity of gender principles. That is to say, Kashani’s reference to ‘women’ could be taken as denoting not biological women but male or female human beings who allow their love of comfort to override their striving for the goal. As I indicated in the afore-mentioned discussion, such an interpretation does not remove the problematic nature of what is being assumed in the first place about masculinity and femininity; it does however shift the focus of the discussion from interpersonal to intrapersonal relationships and thereby undermines a simplistic association of the body with women.

While it is true that Kashani regards the body (indeed, the entire corporeal world) as receptive or acted-upon (*HIP* 238), this does not mean that he demeans it. Admittedly, he urges seekers towards a ‘spiritual and intellectual separating’ from the body in order to achieve human status (258), and counsels against reflection on

‘bodily things ... and the comforts of sensory life’, since these will distract the soul from awareness of what is real (135). On the other hand, he shows great interest in classifying different types of bodies and in the lessons to be learned from studying the characteristics and powers of bodies (149-152, 223, 256-259, 282-283). He also describes body and soul (anima) as a perfect unity, each requiring the other for completion:

Together the body and anima are complete and perfect, and they are not separate. The body and anima together are the body, and the anima and body together are the anima. When you see the body with the eye of reality, it is the anima, and when you see the anima with the eye of correlation, it is the body. (quoted in Chittick 2001, 84)

These views are not incompatible, of course: it is possible to regard the body as a source of instruction and as a complement to the soul, while still holding that it is ontologically inferior and a potential danger to the soul’s progress towards becoming intellect. Yet the idea that body and soul stand in a position of mutual need of the other, combined with Kashani’s generally exalted view of the soul, suggest a fundamentally positive assessment of the body.

In fact, it is not so much the body itself that is at issue for Kashani in either case, but a person’s attitude towards it. He depicts as ‘dreamers’ those who are preoccupied with their bodily form, contrasting them with the ‘wakeful’ who recognise that bodies are but signs pointing to a greater reality:

[The] common people among the creatures who have come into this bodily form are like the waking who have gone to sleep and become preoccupied with various sorts of dreams, thus forgetting wakefulness. But the elect among them are like those who in sleep remember their wakefulness by way of the clear evidence of God’s signs. Their state is as if they have a place on a hill between this world and that world, guiding the common people among the creatures to God’s signs so as to call them back from the this-worldly dream to the that-worldly wakefulness. (*HIP* 227)

Since Kashani holds the perceptible world to be, for seekers of knowledge, a ‘passageway’ and not a ‘resting place’, he warns that fascination with sensory objects

can induce forgetfulness of the destination, which is the world of intelligible reality (239). The idea that the material world is an illusion is not, of course, unique to the Neoplatonic perspective that Kashani is articulating; it is found also in Hinduism, Buddhism, and Zoroastrianism. What is striking here is its juxtaposition with an Islamic worldview in which creation, while dependent, reflects the goodness of the Creator.

Part of the difficulty for modern readers of Kashani is to keep in view that the sense of ‘world’ that is at issue here is not the physical world *per se* but our perception, even projection, of what is out there. The advances of modern science have enabled us to establish a great deal of factual data on the material constitution of what we call ‘the world’, but for Kashani and the Platonic tradition, whatever we can know about the material nature of what we see ‘out there’ is dependent on the possibility of giving coherence to what we see, which in turn depends on there being a rational structure to the universe. Since this rational structure is taken to be fundamental to the possibility of our being able to know anything at all, the structure is taken to be more real than the things that come into view as a result of the use of our senses. For this reason, it would be simplistic to dismiss Kashani’s view of the body and the material world as negative and discriminatory, and especially as arising from a fear of female power.

6.3.3 Is the focus on intellect in Kashani’s goal of self-knowledge elitist?

Even if Kashani’s account of self-knowledge is understood in terms of giving coherence to what is perceived rather than privileging knowledge *per se* over perceptibles *per se*, it might nevertheless be thought that the very ability to give the kind of coherence he envisages depends on an above average education and aptitude for philosophy. Since, for Kashani, practical intelligence is subordinate to theoretical

intelligence, even those who have acquired a high level of beautiful character are considered 'deficient' until they actualise the 'higher' potential of theoretical intelligence (*HIP* 262). In a stratified society like Kashani's, it would appear that only an elite minority could achieve his rational-mystical goal of self-knowledge. This would be a problem in particular for socialist and liberal feminists, for whom access to education and equal opportunities for self-development are of paramount importance.

It could, of course, be argued that when Kashani speaks of different classes of humans, he is really speaking of characteristics and tendencies to be found in every human being. Chittick suggests as much in his discussion of hierarchy in Islamic philosophy:

The philosophers often discuss proper social order on the analogy of the balanced human microcosm, which brings together all the parts of the world in a harmonious whole. ... One important related discussion, with which [Kashani] often occupies himself, is the division of human beings into types that play different roles in society according to the degree to which they actualise or fail to actualise the human potencies. By studying the nature of human activities, we can discern the various qualities that we carry in ourselves, and we can judge how we and others measure up to the ideal of human perfection and fully actualized intelligence. (Chittick 2001, 61)

While discernment of inner qualities may be the purpose behind Kashani's typologies, the implied evaluations of the various classes would tend to confirm rather than challenge the status quo with regard to social hierarchy. The seeker of knowledge may have the freedom to choose which analogous 'level' of human possibility to inhabit, but the inhabitants of the actual levels, in Kashani's society, would not. To base an evaluation of inner qualities on essentialist judgements about classes of people appears to reinforce stereotypical thinking.

While it is perfectly legitimate for Kashani to direct his teaching towards the people he thinks will benefit most from it, his attitude towards the majority may seem

insensitive to factors that may be beyond individuals' control, such as the class they were born into. If even craftspeople and tradespeople are 'deficient', however admirable in respect of their artisanry (*HIP* 261), there would appear to be no way for them to fulfil their human potential while continuing to support themselves and their families. This is not because the potential for intelligence is lacking in these groups of people, but because the opportunity for actualising it is unavailable to them.

In Kashani's defence it can be pointed out that his decision to write in Persian, the *lingua franca*, rather than Arabic, the language of scholars, is at least a step in the right direction. As he states in the conclusion of *The Rungs of Perfection*, a request to translate the book (originally written in Arabic) into Persian led him to realise that it would be more readily understandable to Persian speakers: '[The] profit of the shine of its radiance would be increased for the potency of *theoria*' (*HIP* 271). The target audience for that particular work, as Kashani states at the start, is neither the majority of humans, who have failed to develop their specifically human potential, nor the complete human who has already achieved the final goal, but 'the folk of the middle level'. These seekers have already made some progress on the path but are not among those who are content to remain 'in the ditch of possibility', as Kashani nicely puts it; rather they are eager to press on to the goal of perfection (246). Similarly, he addresses *The Book of the Everlasting* to listeners and readers who would be impatient with 'long talking and much writing' and who may not 'know the science of composing arguments or recognise its law' (*HIP*, 194, 233). It can thus be seen that he aims to make his message more accessible to those who are keen and less highly educated than the most scholarly, even if the vast majority of humans are excluded.

6.3.4 Does the conception of self-knowledge as knowledge of universals compromise individuality?

Some feminists have been concerned about the implications for individuality in the conception of an ultimate reality that subsumes individuals into an undifferentiated unity. As discussed above (§2.4.4), Frankenberg claims that a panentheistic ('all in God') model of the divine idealises unity and connection in a way that can function repressively for women. I argued there that this criticism was not, in fact, applicable to Plotinus, since he does not consider the derived realities to be constitutive of the One (as they are in panentheism), in such a way as to deprive them of individuality. On the other hand, in promoting union with the One as the goal of philosophy, Plotinus can also be seen as discouraging the pursuit of individuality. In view of the fact that Kashani's philosophical goal is not union with God but self-knowledge as knowledge of universals, I examine whether this has any significantly different implications regarding loss of individuality.

It might be thought that seeking to know and to become identical with universals negates individuality. As stated above (§6.1.1), Kashani's conception of the self as the actualised intellect has little in common with current, everyday notions of the self as the individual, empirical subject of experience. In fact, this latter notion of self functions as a distinctly inferior state: according to Kashani, 'a soul that has particular awareness has remained in the rank of nature', while 'the soul that has universal awareness has joined with the intellect' (*HIP* 175). Although 'particular awareness' properly refers to knowledge of particulars, and 'universal awareness' to knowledge of universals, the latter, as discussed above (§6.1.3), includes the notion that the knower is identical with universals. In my view, it is therefore legitimate to infer that knowledge of particulars includes the knowledge of oneself (that is, the

empirical self) as a particular. Thus it would appear that Kashani's goal of self-knowledge negates the project of empirical, individual self-knowledge that, for many women and marginalised people, is seen as empowering and liberating. Not only does he regard 'particular awareness' as an inferior kind of knowing to 'universal awareness', but he also claims that 'knowing' human individuals (those whose intellects are actualised) are 'all one through intellect, no matter how many they may be' (*HIP* 156). While this state of unity or community might be good for 'connection', it does not bode well, at first glance, for individuality.

On the other hand, given Kashani's religious belief in the accountability of the individual and his many exhortations to self-perfection, the goal of self-knowledge could not undermine the notion of personal individuality without inconsistency. His conception of self-knowledge as preparation for the encounter with God (discussed above, §5.2.1) clearly implies that the individual remains morally significant. In his analogy of the knower of self to a king, Kashani's prescriptive ideal of the 'complete human' is clearly a distinct and distinctive individual: 'When self becomes cognisant of self, it is cognisant of the most complete human and capable of preserving him in his completeness' (*HIP* 192). The notion that self-knowledge 'preserves [the knower] in his completeness' suggests that the individual endures through time. Moreover, Kashani claims that this endurance extends beyond the present lifetime: 'Subsistence, permanence, sempiternity, and foreverness are all among the divisions of unconditioned existence. By knowing these, the knower encompasses all – I mean subsistence, permanence, and sempiternity' (241). In other words, Kashani holds that the knower of universals persists eternally. While this claim no doubt goes rather beyond Frankenberg's concern, it nevertheless supports the view that self-knowledge as knowledge of universals does not negate individuality.

Conclusions

I have demonstrated that, for Kashani, self-knowledge is the synthesis of intelligible objects, corresponding to the Islamic assertion of *tawhid*. A consequence of this, I argued, is that his conception of self-knowledge implies the discernment of relationships with all the objects of knowledge. I then considered whether this conception of knowledge is gender-inflected, in view of feminist allegations that privileging abstract knowledge and denying the body's epistemic authority reveal masculine bias. I argued that, for Kashani, knowledge of universals, while involving abstraction, also involves awareness of connection, and therefore should not be seen as fostering a separative orientation as has been claimed. I further argued that although Kashani privileges the soul over the body as a knower, this is not, for him, a gender-coded distinction insofar as he does not identify the body with a particular sex.

While acknowledging that Kashani's conception of human perfection as necessarily intellectual may appear elitist, I argued that he at least took steps to expand the scope of his potential readership by choosing to write in the vernacular instead of the language of scholars. Finally, in response to a concern that his conception of self-knowledge entails a loss of individuality, I argued that this outcome would be incompatible with his statements about ultimate personal accountability for actions.

CHAPTER 7: THE IMPORTANCE OF THE PRACTICAL INTELLECT

To what extent is Kashani's rational mysticism compatible with an ethically engaged orientation to life? Like Plotinus, he specifies the importance of moral training as preparation for the goal of philosophy. Plotinus's account of the virtues, as I demonstrated in chapter 4, gave little explicit indication of what might constitute ethical social engagement, perhaps because he assumed that his readers would have sufficient knowledge in that area already. His focus, in any case, is the soul's ascent, and thus what he has to say about the virtues is oriented to perfecting the soul. For this reason, his ethics have been seen as otherworldly, although, as I argued, there are other resources in his philosophical framework for deriving a more engaged ethical practice. How does Kashani's ethical system compare? I examine why it might and might not be considered otherworldly (§7.1). I then consider possible implications for social justice in his model of the just ruler as an analogy for self-governance (§7.2). Finally, I examine what implications, if any, Kashani's rational mysticism has for the liberation of oppressed groups and individuals (§7.3).

7.1 Is Kashani's rational mysticism compatible with ethical social engagement?

Kashani's rational mysticism, like that of Plotinus, could be seen as otherworldly insofar as its chief object of concern is the perfection of the human soul. Whether Kashani is speaking of the human goal in terms of self-knowledge or in terms of the encounter with God, the focus of his attention appears to be a realm of existence that is other than the present, material world. His repeated counsel to detach

contemplation from ‘sensory affairs’ or ‘the particular world’ looks like an invitation to abdicate practical responsibilities (*HIP* 132, 151, 239). In response to such charges against Plotinus, I argued that, when combined with his doctrine that ‘all souls are one’, his advocacy of virtuous practice and of identifying with the soul provide a rationale for other-directed concern (§4.3.2). Although it is likely that Kashani, as a Neoplatonist, also assumed the unity of souls, it is not explicit in his writings. In any case, however, I shall argue that there are other reasons for refuting the charge of otherworldliness, both in what I refer to as ‘the preparatory stage’ of the rational mystic’s path and in Kashani’s conception of the achieved state of self-knowledge.

7.1.1 Virtuous practice as preparation for self-knowledge

Kashani’s teaching on virtue has a similar objective to Plotinus’s: both see it as necessary preparation for the soul’s ascent on the rational-mystical path. However, Kashani’s ethical prescriptions have a more obvious social application than do those of Plotinus. While Plotinus stresses the cultivation of courage, temperance, wisdom and justice as intellectual virtues, Kashani, like other Islamic philosophers, gives more explicit content to what Plotinus would call the ‘civic’ aspect of virtue. He does not seem to assume in all his readers a high level of prior knowledge, and gives quite specific instruction about cultivating good habits of conduct with reference to social interaction. Insisting that ‘[the] complete felicity of religion is conditional upon noble character traits’ (*HIP* 133), he offers detailed and practical advice on the life necessary for wisdom. Besides specifying the Aristotelian virtues of ‘generosity, munificence, truthfulness and constancy’ (185), Kashani mentions a number of Koranic virtues pertaining to family relationships, social duties, and personal integrity.

How does ethical practice relate to self-knowledge? As shown above (§6.1.1), Kashani posits ascending levels of intellectual activity, the practical and the theoretical. According to Kashani, cultivating virtue (which he associates with the practical intellect) is necessary to turn a person's reflection from the distractions of the sensory life, from things that are inherently transient and unstable, to what is real and eternal: the intelligible qualities and universals present in the intellecting soul. This task, he claims, requires sustained effort:

Now that it is known that arrival at this objective [i.e. knowledge of self] can be by means of reflection, incontestably we should take the path of repelling the blights of reflection. What is gainful in this respect is to undertake several practices that will help admirable character traits and avoid character traits opposed to them. This is constancy in the practices of good and the sayings of truthfulness. (*HIP* 136 – bracketed insertion mine)

The 'blights of reflection' Kashani mentions are 'the things demanded by appetite and wrath', and 'pondering the comforts of sensory life'. Such hindrances can be overcome, he believes, through perseverance and the cultivation of good character traits (135-6).

Kashani's ethical prescriptions include references to virtues prized in Greek philosophy as well as Koranic ones. In *The Makings and Ornaments*, he lists the virtues of 'generosity, munificence, truthfulness and constancy' (*HIP* 185), the first three of which (and perhaps the fourth by implication) are to be found in Book IV of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*. A corresponding list of vices in *The Rungs of Perfection* includes greed, miserliness, deceptiveness and treachery (*HIP* 260). In two collections of maxims (*The Testament of the Sages* and *Advice to Seekers of Wisdom*), Kashani urges practice of Koranic virtues such as perseverance, gratitude, mindfulness of death, observance of the Sharia (Islamic law, concerned with the implementation of justice), and acting beautifully towards one's parents. He also warns against procrastination, tormenting anyone (even an ant), oath-taking, cursing

orphans and widows, obstinacy, and pride (131-134). Clearly, these prescriptions have an immediate and highly practical relevance to social conduct.

Furthermore, in describing the ‘marks of perfection’, Kashani emphasises equilibrium between extremes in the ‘lower’ potencies, in a way that is strongly reminiscent of Aristotle’s definition of virtue as a ‘mean’ (*NE* 1106b15-28):

The wrathful potencies dwell in equilibrium between pridefulness and abjectness, faint-heartedness and recklessness, rebellion and subjection, and vengefulness and indifference. In the same way, the appetitive potencies are between the craving of avarice and the aversion of not-wanting, between being bound back by miserliness and being let loose by extravagance. (*HIP* 266-7)

It is plausible to assume that demonstrating equilibrium between the extremes presupposes a social context in which the undesirable responses might be provoked; the complete human, in Kashani’s view, has the wisdom to navigate a middle course between excess and deficiency.

Striving to perfect one’s character is, for Kashani, striving towards fulfilment of one’s specifically human nature. As discussed above (§5.4.1), this means actualising the distinctive human potential for knowledge and awareness. Kashani makes clear, however, that awareness needs to be translated into practical action:

[Humans] have the specificity of giving the intellect’s meanings to talking and doing. Thus through ‘practice’ they write on the outside the intellectual forms that they see depicted in themselves, and through ‘talking’ they speak them and make them evident. (*HIP* 183)

Which ‘intellectual forms’ (objects of intellectual knowledge) does Kashani have in mind here, and how are they to be written ‘on the outside’? Since he goes on to speak about the need for intelligence to govern the bodily potencies and character traits and hold them in balance, it appears that he has in mind the forms of virtues:

This giving harmony to and governing the work of each potency found by intelligence is called ‘courtesy’ and ‘good breeding’, as in the eating, sleeping, seeing, hearing, talking, and doing of the man of intelligence. When the ethical virtues such as generosity, munificence, truthfulness, and constancy are collected

through the governing of intelligence, this is a mark of intelligence's power and potency. (*HIP* 185)

Thus, for Kashani, actualising the practical intellect through ethical conduct is integral to fulfilling one's nature as a human being.

While Kashani does not draw a sharp distinction between lower and higher virtue in the way that Plotinus does, he delineates levels of moral attainment between the extremities of deficiency and perfection in a way that suggests, in my view, a parallel distinction. As discussed above (§4.1.2), Plotinus describes as 'civic' or 'lower' the virtues pertaining to the soul-body composite, while the 'higher' virtues pertain to the soul's orientation towards intellect. Kashani's analysis concerns the *practitioners* of virtue rather than the virtues themselves, and begins with those people who are below the level of virtue altogether. These are the 'unpraiseworthy deficient ones', in whom there are no traces of theoretical or practical intellect; such people have not advanced beyond fulfilling the potencies of the vegetal or animal souls. If bestial appetites or aversions dominate their human potential, they exhibit bad character traits such as greed, meanness, deception and arrogance (*HIP* 260). 'Admirable deficient ones' are those in whom the practical intellect has come to dominate the lower potencies. These humans range from craftsmen and artisans, who exhibit harmony in their work, to ascetics and worshippers, who actively strive to develop virtuous character traits. Insofar as these people are striving to exemplify virtue of character and workmanship, the hallmarks of the practical intellect, they may be seen as practising the equivalent of Plotinus's civic virtues.

Ranking higher, but still within the category of the 'admirable deficient', are the seekers of knowledge: those who have actualised the practical intellect and are seeking to actualise the theoretical intellect. The highest rank of all is that of the

complete humans, such as saints and prophets, who belong to ‘the best and the pious, in practice, character and knowledge’ (*HIP* 262). These few have reached the level of being identical with the universal of universals (see above, §6.1.4): at this level, they ‘encompass’ all things through ‘encompassing’ the universals (262). In both of these latter groups, the practice of virtue on a social level is assumed, and the greater perfection to which they aspire (or have already attained, in the case of the few complete humans) is the perfection of knowledge, corresponding to Plotinian intellectual virtue.

Does the perfection of knowledge imply disengagement from social interaction? Admittedly, Kashani counsels withdrawal from certain activities, people, and situations that might undermine the quest for knowledge:

[The seekers] must keep far from every judgment concerning whose truthfulness and truth certainty cannot be reached through thought. They must avoid listening to those talks and recountings in which there is the possibility of lie, as well as mixing with the folk of poetry and those who seek speech’s outward embellishment without watching over the meanings. They must not speak with the folk of dialectic, whose purpose is to defeat the opponent through talk, even if the talk is far from truthfulness. (*HIP* 268)

(It is interesting to note, in passing, Kashani’s disapproval of ‘the folk of dialectic’, presumably professional philosophers with no interest in the transformative purpose of philosophy.) However, these warnings are probably no more than precautionary concern for vulnerable seekers of knowledge who could be deflected by careless talk. They do not indicate, in my view, that Kashani advocates total or permanent withdrawal from society.

It might be thought, however, that Kashani’s counsel to turn reflection from sensory to non-sensory objects implies disengagement from society. His injunction against contemplating and striving for ‘bodily and sensory perfections, embellishments, and adornments and the beastly and predatory enjoyments’ (*HIP*

268) is understandable in the context of aiming for perfection. However, the more radical detachment implied in his urging to ‘cut off ... *theoria* from sensory affairs absolutely ... to divest the body and dismiss the senses’ for the sake of knowledge (132) seems incompatible with any kind of social interaction. If reflection on non-sensory objects is meant to be a permanent state, it is difficult to see how a person engaging in such a practice could continue to function in any recognisable way as a human being.

In my view, however, such an outcome of reflection would be inconsistent with the rest of Kashani’s philosophy and with his religious convictions. As already shown, his counsel to perfection of knowledge implies everything else that pertains to perfection of being, the practical as well as the theoretical. This is also apparent in his translation of a pseudo-Aristotelian dialogue, *The Treatise of the Apple*, in which ‘Aristotle’ states that justice and truthfulness (in other words ethical practice) bring clarity to ‘seeing’ and therefore increase intelligence (*HIP* 105-6). Similarly in *The Makings and Ornaments*, Kashani states that actualising intelligence issues in ‘courtesy’ (Persian *farhang*, Arabic *adab*), a term implying ‘proper and beautiful deportment and correct behaviour’ (*HIP* 185; Chittick 2001, 31). Furthermore, as discussed above (§6.1.2), reflection on the ‘signs’ of God in the created world is integral to Kashani’s account of arriving at unified knowledge of reality. Hence, it seems that Kashani’s injunction to detachment from reflection on ‘sensory affairs’ cannot mean complete or permanent sensory detachment. It could either mean temporary detachment from sense-perception, perhaps during periods of meditative exercise, or, alternatively, detachment from the *belief* that the senses provide the ultimate truth about their objects.

7.1.2 Virtuous practice as outcome of self- knowledge

In the case of Plotinus, I countered the charge of his ethics being otherworldly and self-centred by appealing to his doctrine that all souls are one, divided by embodiment. I argued that, on the hypothesis of common possession of a single soul, Plotinus's teaching on de-identifying with the body through practice of virtue provides an avenue to overcome the barriers to communion and cooperation here and now (see above, §4.3.2). While Kashani may assume, but does not make a claim about the identity of the First Soul with individual souls, he does make the parallel claim about intellects (as does Plotinus), stating that 'the intellect is one even though the intellecters can be many' (*HIP* 156). In other words, the soul that has become actualised as intellect is one with all other actualised intellects. The aim of reaching a state in which there is no separation from other intellects adds particular cogency to the practice of virtue, since on this account what we do to others we ultimately do to our (true) self.

An obvious objection to this interpretation of the ethical implications of realising unity with other intellects is that ethically relevant action involves bodies, not – or not just – intellects. As I shall argue presently, Kashani's conception of the perfected intellect explicitly includes the perfection of the practical intellect, and hence of virtuous practice in relation to embodied individuals. However, to limit the sphere of ethical responsibility to only those other individuals who have actualised their intellects would be contrary to the spirit of his teaching on virtue as discussed above (§7.1.1).

However, in my view a more comprehensive basis for metaphysical unity arises from Kashani's conception of self-knowledge. As discussed above (§6.1.4), knowledge of self involves finding all things within the intellect through becoming

aware of the universal categories and attributes. In this way, the knower of self grasps the metaphysical connections between him/herself, as a microcosm, and all the levels of existence, from the elemental through to the human. Furthermore, as I argued earlier (§5.3.2), Kashani's favoured imagery of root and branch to express the relationship of universal to particulars and cosmos to progeny emphasises the organic nature of our interconnections with the natural world and with other living beings (*HIP* 275-9). This bears out Chittick's observation that the Islamic intellectual tradition understands the human world and the natural world as a unity, and sees 'the whole human race as the external manifestation of the potencies and possibilities of the human soul' (2001, 66).

While it is far from obvious from a modern perspective that having a unified vision of reality implies, let alone guarantees, an ethical orientation, such an orientation is implied, I believe, in Kashani's conception of perfection of knowledge as being practically as well as theoretically oriented. This is clear in his statement, discussed above (§7.1.1), that the forms (including the forms of the virtues) in the intellect must be written 'on the outside', i.e. implemented in practice. Since, according to Kashani's view of self-knowledge, the knower is identical with all the universals or forms, actualisation of the intellect cannot but include actualisation of the virtues. A clear precedent for this view is to be found in Aristotle.⁵⁶ In Plato and Plotinus, the view is implicit, but nowhere stated as explicitly as in Kashani's writings.

It might yet be objected that if unified knowledge of universals is to serve as a basis for ethical attitudes, there is no principled way of excluding a plethora of

⁵⁶ See e.g. *NE* 1144a30: 'Intelligence, this eye of the soul, cannot reach its fully developed state without virtue ...' and *NE* 1144b32-32: '... we cannot be fully good without intelligence, or intelligent without virtue of character' (Irwin's translation).

‘irrelevant’ universals (or their instantiations) from the sphere of moral concern. Even ‘relevant’ universals, one might add, such as the form of ‘human being’, include far more than any one person can reasonably be expected to care about. In my view, the answer to this objection is that exercising the practical intellect would surely determine such matters. Given Kashani’s broadly Aristotelian view of the virtues, one might suppose that he concurs with Aristotle’s account of practical intelligence, as for example in the area of friendship, where Aristotle states that ‘no one can have complete friendship for many people’ (*NE* 1158a11).

Furthermore, from an Islamic perspective, manifesting the attributes of God ‘to the extent of human capacity’ allows for human limitations (see discussion of divine similarity above, §5.2.2, and Chittick 2001, 73). Although Kashani does not expound the theme of manifesting the divine traits as much as did other Islamic philosophers such as Ibn al-Arabi, it is nevertheless present in his references to developing ‘noble character traits’, as discussed above (§7.1.1). Manifesting the divine traits within the limitations of the human condition could begin in a local community and radiate outwards. Kashani’s injunctions towards generosity and justice and against torment of one’s fellow creatures and ‘breaking the broken,’ if applied even locally, could transform relationships between human beings and between humans and their environment. If, in addition, the development of such virtues and eradication of such vices helps to develop an awareness of connection, ethical practice and a unified vision may be seen to be mutually sustaining.

7.2 Is Kashani's 'kingship' model compatible with social justice?

Is Kashani's rational mysticism compatible with aspirations to create a more just and equitable society? I argued above (§7.1) that his path to self-knowledge requires virtuous social practice in the preparatory stage, and furthermore that it issues in awareness of interconnections in such a way as to promote ethical conduct, given the attitudes fostered by actualising the divine character traits. His model for establishing order in the human soul in the quest for self-knowledge, however, is the well-governed feudal kingdom, hardly a compelling image for any modern egalitarians, let alone for socialist feminists. Insofar as Kashani endorses the existing social hierarchy as a blueprint for self-governance, his whole discussion of kingship proceeds from premises that appear incompatible with the ideal of human equality. While of course it would be anachronistic to expect to find him endorsing anything like a modern liberal democracy, we are entitled to ask what conception of justice is implied in his model of the well-ordered soul and what relevance the model can have outside its original context.

7.2.1 Kashani's conception of kingly justice

Kashani directly addresses issues of justice in his vision of the perfect king and his trenchant criticism of contemporary rulers. In *The Makings and Ornaments*, he reflects both on good governance in the individual and the political sphere, and on what currently passes for kingship in the latter and how far short of the ideal this falls.

Kashani hopes that, from reading this treatise, an intelligent leader will come to understand the nature of true kingship, on the level of the soul as in the political sphere:

He will gain certainty that what has appeared to others as kingship and what they have fancied to be additional rank and level represents the utmost captivity and imprisonment ... After all, what kings recognize as good fortune is plentiful

soldiers, many weapons, flourishing treasuries, measureless arrays of raiments and ornaments, the obedience of the subjects, the makings and means of elation and diversion, and the like. When the heart is taught by and becomes intimate with such things, it becomes bound to them. (*HIP* 193)

Kashani appears not to be decrying these accoutrements of kingship so much as warning against becoming dependent on them. Yet even that insight into the ultimate inefficacy of the usual trappings of power issues a challenge to militarism and empire-building and a reminder that power and wealth can corrupt.

Integral to Kashani's conception of kingship is the notion of nurture and protection, and a conception of justice as the reconciliation of opposites. A king's work, in his view, is 'to nurture, and to nurture is to make those who are worthy of completeness reach completeness' (190). For Kashani, the essence of kingship appears in the etymology of the Persian term for 'king', *padshah*, meaning 'the root and lord of protecting and keeping' (179). He defines protection as keeping something 'far from its incompatible, since blight reaches a thing from its incompatible, either through nonbeing or deficiency' (180). His discussions of incompatibility, both here and in *The Rungs of Perfection*, contain elements of Aristotle's definitions of opposites and contradictories in the *Categories* and *Metaphysics*. According to Kashani, incompatible states such as movement and rest, or life and death, cannot exist together in the body, where the presence of one cancels out the presence of the other; only in the soul can both exist simultaneously without being destroyed (*HIP* 265). For this reason, he says, the king must not be 'incompatible with anything over which he is king' (180), and the overcoming of incompatibility comprises 'justice':

'Justice' is nothing but nullifying the incompatibility of two incompatibles. When the king's joining with intelligence is complete, he has no incompatible, and the incompatibility of all incompatible things is nullified through him. (*HIP* 188).

I take this to mean that the intellect encompasses all known things, including opposites, and reconciles them in its knowledge, analogously to the way in which the just king reconciles 'opposites' in the actual world. Kashani does not specify what form this reconciliation of opposites might take politically, though presumably it could include mechanisms for resolving disputes, as well as practical applications such as in medicine and agriculture, which he mentions in the same treatise as functions of government (185).

Kashani specifies virtues of kingship that elucidate his conception of the ideal king's justice. These include 'clemency and forbearance'; 'patience', which is 'to have capability over the appetitive and wrathful potencies'; 'humility', which is 'to show liberality and generosity to those below oneself'; and 'courage' (188). In addition, the king is to organise his subjects' livelihood so that they are enabled to actualise their potential (186-7). This suggests, among other things, the provision of opportunities for education. The virtues of kingship are, for Kashani, the fruit of intelligence, since 'nothing but intelligence is able to separate the good from the non-good' (188-190). Thus the just king, on his account, exemplifies not only self-restraint and benevolent concern but also wise discernment.

Contrasted with this portrait of ideal kingship is the abuse of power Kashani sees in the typical king. This individual, whose tendencies towards greed, wrath and ignorance exceed those of his subjects, rules like a predator, being ruled by his own predatory instincts:

All his striving and seriousness were toward satiating his greed and satisfying his anger ... gathering passing possessions ... whether through plundering, asking through importunity, or taking by force when it was not there for the taking. He satisfied his anger by force against anyone he wanted, even if the person was not suitable for force or deserving of perishment (sic). (*HIP* 193)

Kashani thus demonstrates a connection between lack of self-control and the abuse of power and position. In his view, the personal and the political are intimately connected: to rule justly, the king must first rule his own appetites and passions.

7.2.2 Implications of kingly justice for social justice

While Kashani's vision of leadership challenges the *practice* of justice in his society, it leaves untouched the social norms. Although his criterion for fitness to rule is spiritual attainment rather than military might, his assumption that the perfect ruler knows what is best for his subjects can appear authoritarian and paternalistic to a modern Western observer. Kashani maintains that some humans are unable to reach completeness or perfection, either because of deficiency in their constitution or indolence, while others may perfect only some of the human traits. The king is to govern these ones as he would his own body and lower potencies, assessing 'from what come the wholesomeness and corruption of each, from what come its perfection and deficiency, and which sort of knowledge can be used to nurture each' (191). His agents in the task of governing are military leaders, who are analogous to the intellect in virtue of their comprehensive knowledge:

Governing and bringing about the wholesomeness of the folk of excess and destruction among the subjects is done through the leaders of the army. He keeps the kingdom of his own soul wholesome through knowledge of self, and so also he should keep the work of the kingdom's subjects wholesome through the knowers among the subjects. (*HIP* 192)

In other words, Kashani thinks that the king's responsibility extends well beyond the physical to the moral and spiritual health of his people, entitling him to maintain a close watch on their behaviour and intervene as he sees fit.

On the other hand, although Kashani's ideal king has absolute power in his kingdom, he is also subordinate to a higher order of reality. Just as he is to model his

kingship on his self-governance, so his self-governance should reflect that of the intelligible order of nature:

The king should order himself according to the governing and order of the First Nature, for the growing soul never does the work of the animal soul, the work of the expelling [potency] does not appear from the attractive, the work of the attractive does not come from the expelling, and wrath does not do the work of appetite. Then he will be the true leader of the existents in their going back to the Return, and the rightful vicegerent of his own Appointor (sic) and Commander in nurturing what is below him. (*HIP* 192)

In other words, the king should take as his model the example of nature, in which power of soul performs only its allotted function and roles are not exchanged. While appeals to divine authority have been seen to legitimate and reinforce a hierarchy of domination (Sabbah 1984, 67-8), I have argued above (§5.3.2) that Kashani's conception of divine rule can be seen in many respects to foster actualisation rather than domination. The same can be said, in my view, in relation to his conception of political kingship, insofar as he emphasises the nurturing, educating, and perfecting functions of the king in relation to his subjects. While the hierarchical structure of the kingship model may have little relevance for justice in the present context, the character traits of nurture, clemency, forbearance, patience, humility, self-control, and, above all, intelligence are worthy of emulation in any political context, and are eminently compatible with social justice.

7.3 Is Kashani's rational mysticism compatible with seeking political liberation?

A central concern in any feminist consideration of a normative ethical theory such as Kashani's is its potential to empower oppressed individuals and groups. I have argued thus far that Kashani's conception of the virtuous practice required for and resulting from self-knowledge implies social engagement, and that his conception of justice as exemplified by the ideal king has much to offer even apart from the

context of the kingship model. I now discuss whether Kashani's conception of the path to self-knowledge is compatible with the aspiration to political liberation, given the hierarchical cosmology assumed in the former and the resistance to political hierarchy implied in the latter. I first consider Daly's (1985) claim that myths of transcendence based on the motif of 'separation and return' inherently fail to empower women, and explain why in my view this criticism fails against Kashani. I then consider whether adopting the kingship model of 'self-governance' implies suppression of the kind of emotions that, according to Jaggar (1983), motivate an oppressed person to assert her autonomy.

According to Daly (1985), traditional religious depictions of the human spiritual journey as separation from and return to a (paternal) divine source offer an inadequate vision of transcendence for women. In her view, as discussed previously, women's experience in patriarchal society conditions them to expect 'separation' from the parental home to be followed by 'return' to dependence in the home of a husband. By association, Daly thinks that a conception of human fulfilment as return to a divine male being traps women into yet another relationship of dependency and thereby inhibits their self-actualisation (1985, 24-5).

Although Kashani does not use paternal imagery to describe the divine source, he affirms human dependence on God (see discussions in chapter 5). Thus, when he depicts the ultimate destination as the encounter with God, it could be seen as a return to primordial dependence on a divine being for whom he often uses male imagery. However, he stipulates in his account of the framework of reality that the 'origin' refers to the levels of existence from Intellect down to the elemental substances, and the 'return' comprises the levels of mineral constitution up to the (perfected) human being (*HIP* 182). In this account, there is no gendered imagery as there was in

Plotinus, who likened the soul's love for the One to that of a girl for her father (*Enneads* VI 9,9,34-5). Furthermore, as discussed in chapter 6, Kashani describes the final goal of (human) existence as the actualising of the soul's potential for awareness (278). In other words, the movement of return with which Kashani's rational mysticism is primarily concerned is one of self-fulfilment through knowledge. Since, in addition, as I argued above (§5.4.1), there is no reason to think his conception of the human being intentionally excludes women, his vision of the human goal offers women no less than men the opportunity of actualising their human potential.

Whether actualising potential is sufficient for 'transcendence' depends of course on one's understanding of transcendence. Overcoming *internal* constraints, such as those imposed by the appetites and the wrathful potencies, is not only open to but incumbent on all Muslims, and is a position Kashani certainly endorses. However, according to Saiving, the 'sins' of women in situations of subjugation are more likely to be complicity with oppression, or self-squandering, than greed or anger (Saiving 1979, 37). Oppressed women and men, on this account, need empowering in addition to transcend *external* constraints, such as unjust social structures. However, if these structures are seen as built into the nature of reality, as appears to be the case with Kashani, there would seem to be no purchase for the idea of transcendence in a political sense.

On the other hand, as I argued above in relation to feminist criticisms of Aristotle (§5.1.1), the use of available political models as analogies need not be taken as endorsement of those models. In Aristotle's case, the objectionable models were those expressing normative dominance of husbands over wives (as well as that of masters over slaves). Aristotle's use of these models as analogous to the dominance of form over matter and his gender-coding of form as 'male', matter as 'female' was

clearly a sexist move on his part, but does not amount to building the particular social structures into his conception of reality (*pace* Spelman). In the same way, Kashani's kingship model is not an endorsement of kingship *per se*, still less of contemporary examples of kingship, but an analysis of the structure of an ideal kingdom for the purposes of clarifying intelligent self-rule.

Is a regimen of self-governance modelled on a hierarchically ordered society compatible with caring attention to the body? Adopting the stance of 'kingship' towards the body could be seen to have undesirable implications for personal wellbeing, particularly in the case of people in circumstances of oppression. Some feminist epistemologists have affirmed the importance of 'listening' to the body and the emotions, in conjunction with, rather than in total subjection to the powers of rational thought (Jaggar 1983; see also Miller-McLemore 1992). Jaggar argues for the indispensability of the emotions to knowledge, claiming that reflection on emotions such as irritability, revulsion, anger or fear is necessary for becoming conscious that, for example, one is in a situation of coercion, injustice or danger (1983, 145-165). In her view, acknowledging these discordant emotions can empower women and other subordinated groups to 'make subversive observations that challenge dominant conceptions of the status quo' (*ibid.*, 161-3). The danger with the kingship model for self-governance is that it could lead to marshalling the emotions into acquiescence with an oppressive situation.

An obvious, though not very reassuring response to this concern is to say that someone in oppressive circumstances is unlikely to have the opportunity for doing philosophy in the first place. From the perspective of Kashani's ideal king or philosopher, the idea of imposing order on the 'lower' echelons of the personality may not have problematic connotations that it could have for people who occupy the

corresponding ‘lower’ levels of society. The male philosopher presumably occupies a higher rung in the social hierarchy, having the requisite education to engage in philosophical reflection, and therefore sees no reason to challenge the social structure as such, although he may well challenge abuses of power, as Kashani himself does in *The Makings and Ornaments* (see above, §7.2.1). For a marginalised person, however, the kingship model could merely reinforce her oppression by teaching her to ignore or suppress her discordant emotions.

However, to think that emotional suppression could be the outcome of the kind of kingly rule that Kashani describes is to ignore important aspects of his description. In particular, features of kingly rule that may appear ‘paternalistic’ in relation to the political model can be seen as counteracting tendencies to suppression in the personal model. The idea that the king should be fully informed about his subjects and provide for their different needs and capacities in order to keep their work ‘wholesome’ suggests an intelligent and attentive attitude towards bodily states and functions, including the emotions (*HIP* 191). The king’s mandate to preserve the health of his subjects through ‘medicinal governing’ (192) suggests analogous concern for wellbeing in the personal model. Ignoring the signals of the body or the emotions would thus be incompatible with Kashani’s conception of kingly self-governance.

In addition, as shown in the previous section, although Kashani does not himself challenge existing political *structures*, his outspoken criticism of the *practice* of actual rulers already suggests an independent stance on his part. Furthermore, as discussed above (§6.3.3), his attempt to reach a less highly educated audience with his writings represents an expansion of the class of people for whom his rational mysticism becomes a possibility. In any case, as I have shown in the last three chapters, his conception of the path to human perfection is in principle to all human

beings, regardless of their sex. Actualising the practical and theoretical intellect and becoming a knower of self presumably provides a larger perspective in which to view the limitations of one's particular situation and to determine the wisest course of action.

Conclusions

I considered whether the focus on self-perfection and the requirement of detached contemplation from the material world in Kashani's rational mysticism is compatible with ethical engagement. I argued that Kashani, to a far greater degree than Plotinus, emphasised the importance of the actualisation of the practical intellect, in particular through virtuous practice at the social level. Furthermore, I pointed out that since Kashani's conception of self-knowledge as knowledge of universals includes both the Forms of virtues and the Forms of all living beings, it may be seen to undergird virtuous engagement both socially and environmentally.

Kashani's analogy of the ordering of the soul to the ideal kingdom provides further clues to the importance he attaches to justice both at the intrapersonal and at the political level, albeit articulated within the framework of absolute monarchy. While his political model of kingship is in some respects paternalistic, I argued that it emphasises personal integrity over military might and sets a high value on education and the well-being of the subjects. As a model for self-governance, I suggested that paternalism was an advantage insofar as it implies attentiveness towards and care for its object of responsibility, namely the body. That the model is compatible with an orientation towards political liberation is less clear, although I argued that overcoming internal constraints can be seen as a necessary precondition for challenging external constraints.

CHAPTER 8: COMPATIBILITY AND BEYOND

Is the rational mysticism of Plotinus and/or Kashani compatible with feminism? To answer this question, I launched three original lines of enquiry: How do different perspectives within feminism affect what feminists find to criticise or appropriate in the theories of historical philosophers? How do different perspectives within rational mysticism, specifically the absence or presence of a religious orientation, affect the degree of compatibility between rational mysticism and feminism? Amongst all these differences of perspective, is it possible to identify a group of feminists for whom theses of rational mysticism could have positive value? I summarise the results of the first two lines of enquiry in the table below (page 205), and amplify these results in the explanation that follows (§8.1). I then discuss implications of the analysis for our understanding of feminism and rational mysticism (§8.2). Finally, I explore how the alliance of mysticism with rationality can provide a resource for those feminists who are alienated by sexism in institutional religion and seek to develop an alternative, inclusive spirituality on rational foundations (§8.3).

8.1 Results of the enquiry

In the table following, I summarise the main concerns arising for the four designated feminist perspectives in relation to rational mysticism, and how a revisionist interpretation of Plotinus and Kashani ameliorates a number of these concerns.⁵⁷ A few words of explanation are in order at the outset, concerning coverage of topics and the degree of generalisation.

⁵⁷ To review the feminist perspectives: *Liberal feminism* is premised on the equality of the sexes with respect to the potential for rationality, regards gender traits as socially induced and malleable through education, and promotes liberal values such as autonomy and self-fulfilment. *Socialist feminism*

First, in order to avoid duplication, not every issue covered in the preceding chapters appears as a single category in the table. For example, I have examined attitudes towards the body in connection with metaphysical, epistemological, and ethical theses of rational mysticism, but a single category, ‘Platonic attitude to the body is negative and gender-coded’, appears as the relevant feminist concern in the table. Similarly, the theme of separateness/connection has been treated from more than one perspective, but features in the table only under the heading of ‘Platonic conception of knowledge is androcentric: rational, abstract, separative’.

Second, the entries in the ‘My response’ columns give only a very brief summary of Plotinus’s and Kashani’s positions, which I have shown in the chapters to be much more nuanced. For example, in describing Plotinus’s hierarchical metaphysics as ‘non-gendered’, I am ignoring the few, in my view atypical, instances where he uses a gendered analogy to describe the relation of the soul to its origin, and the fact that the Greek terms are grammatically gendered. At the risk of oversimplification, I judge these summaries to convey the most significant similarities and differences between Plotinus and Kashani on the issues specified. Where details excluded from the summaries are significant, these will be treated in the further analysis below.

Shaded areas on the table indicate incompatibility with feminist theses.

attributes gender difference to a combination of biology, socialisation, and economic forces; aims to eliminate the sexual division of labour in every sphere of life, and promotes values such as freedom in productive activity and concern for the environment. *Psychoanalytic feminism* attributes gender difference to psychosexual development, in particular to the reproduction of asymmetrical gender relations through cultural memory and/or early socialisation, and promotes ‘feminine’ values such as caring and empathy. *Radical feminism* claims that gender difference is entrenched in biology and/or culture; rejects patriarchal values, theories, and institutions, and promotes ‘female-identified’ values such as holism, spiritual connection with other humans and with the natural world, and celebration of the body.

How revisionist interpretation of rational mysticism reduces incompatibility with feminism

Which aspects of rational mysticism (on standard feminist interpretations of analogous theories) trouble feminists?	Which feminists have these concerns?				Implications of revisionist interpretation		Which feminists can now accept Plotinus?				Which feminists can now accept Kashani?			
	Liberal	Socialist	Psych.	Radical	Plotinus	Kashani	Liberal	Socialist	Psych.	Radical	Liberal	Socialist	Psych.	Radical
1. Platonic and Aristotelian metaphysics is hierarchical and gender-coded					Structure is hierarchical, but not gender-coded or gender-coded	Structure is hierarchical and bi-gendered, but not gender-coded								
2. Platonic attitude to the body is negative and gender-coded					The body is subordinate but not gender-coded									
3. Monotheistic conception of the Divine is masculine and implies dominance					Divine is non-gendered and non-dominant	Divine is bi-gendered and non-dominant								
4. Platonic conception of knowledge is androcentric: rational, abstract, separative					Knowledge is experiential, connective; highest knowledge transcends rationality									
5. Individual perspective is lost in mystical goal					Limited individual perspective is transcended									
6. Self-perfecting ethic is individualist					Self-perfection necessarily includes ethical conduct towards others									
7. Mysticism is other-worldly and irrelevant to social justice					Rational mysticism requires virtue and gives awareness of interconnectedness; together these have implications for concern with social justice									

The table shows in summary form how I have interpreted Plotinus and Kashani as providing a response to feminist criticisms of certain philosophical positions associated with Plato, Aristotle, and monotheistic theology. I now expand the summary to elucidate the degree of compatibility between rational mysticism and feminism, and the significance of the differences between Plotinus and Kashani.

1. Platonic and Aristotelian metaphysics is hierarchical and gender-coded

An issue of concern in Plato's and Aristotle's metaphysics, for at least three groups of feminists, is the apparent gender-coding (gratuitous linkage with gender) in the analysis of reality, whether in terms of 'intelligible and sensible world' or 'form and matter' (§2.1, §5.1, §5.3). The criterion of superiority in each of these contrasts is intelligibility, and insofar as the same philosophers appear to associate this quality with men rather than with women, the pairings are seen to reflect a normative social hierarchy in which men dominate women. Although liberal feminists oppose the restriction of rights on the basis of gender that such theories might be used to legitimate, opposing gender-coded analyses of reality is not a priority for them. For the other three designated groups of feminists, however, the privileging of the intelligible over the sensible is seen as either reinforcing (in the case of socialist and radical feminists) or arising from (in the case of psychoanalytic feminists) male dominance in society, and therefore inherently biased against women.

While the cosmologies of both Plotinus and Kashani are hierarchical and privilege the intelligible, there is no good reason to think that either is gender-coded. Apart from the occasional analogy to familial relationships, Plotinus does not attribute a gender to the levels of his hierarchy, nor does he identify the sensible or matter with femaleness; there is even an indication that he challenges an exclusive association of

form with the male (§2.2). Neither do his descriptions of the structure of reality use terms connoting dominance. Rather, he characterises the levels in terms of continuity from first to last (§2.1.2). In Kashani's case, while the basic structure of reality is the same as Plotinus's, there is slight evidence for the interpretation that it embodies cosmic principles of masculinity and femininity corresponding to activity and receptivity respectively (§5.3.3). To the extent that his levels of reality are gendered, it is appropriate to describe each level as bi-gendered, since each contains both gender poles. Furthermore, although he sometimes uses metaphors of dominance to describe the relationships between the levels, on closer inspection these metaphors point more toward nurture and actualisation than towards control (§5.3.2).

The absence of gender-coding in Kashani's and Plotinus's cosmologies suggest that they are compatible with a liberal feminist perspective. If the other three groups of feminists are interpreted as being opposed to hierarchy *per se*, it would be necessary to represent their perspectives as incompatible with those of Kashani and Plotinus with respect to the structure of reality. On the other hand, if these groups reject only hierarchical structures based on the notion of domination and accept hierarchies based on the notion of actualisation (see §1.3.1), then there is no incompatibility. I am assuming the latter to be the case for socialist and psychoanalytic feminists, but not for radical feminists.

2. Platonic attitude to the body is negative and gender-coded

Related to the concern about hierarchical metaphysics is the issue of negativity towards the body. The apparent hostility of Platonists towards the body has alienated the same groups of feminists as those who have criticised the 'two-world' cosmology (see §2.2, §3.2.3, §4.4.1, §6.3.2, and §7.4). Radical and psychoanalytic feminists tend to embrace the association of women with the body, while for socialist feminists,

subordinating the body to the mental faculties reflects a gendered division of labour. Both Plotinus and Kashani, in identifying the true self with the soul, view the body as not only subordinate but a potential hindrance to the soul's ascent (§2.2, §6.3.2). However, neither thinker seems to associate the body with a particular gender (apart from a single comment by Kashani suggesting that women tend to seek the body's comfort, a comment that, I argued, was directed not against biological women but against a negative feminine quality that can be found in either sex (§6.3.2)). Nevertheless, given the importance, for these groups of feminists, of affirming the value of the body in an account of human nature, even the absence of gender-coding is not sufficient to remove the incompatibility with a body-transcending philosophy.

3. Monotheistic conception of the divine is masculine and implies dominance

A third concern in the area of metaphysics, for all but liberal feminists, is an allegedly masculine conception of the Divine as the source and goal of existence, both in Plato and Aristotle and in theological models showing their influence. Insofar as liberal feminists accept the liberal principle of neutrality as to conceptions of the good (the belief that individuals should be free to pursue their own ends), they have no reason to reject a particular conception of the Divine, even though they will oppose a curtailment of rights that appeals to such a conception. Psychoanalytic and radical feminists, however, have criticised theistic models emphasising attributes such as absolute transcendence, dominance, and self-sufficiency, on the ground that these attributes represent a projection of masculine tendencies and fail to provide an adequate ideal for either gender (as discussed at §2.3, §5.4.2). It is plausible to think that any conception of a transcendent Divine is in tension with the perspective of socialist feminists, insofar as they are committed to a materialist account of reality;

but even if this is not true for all socialist feminists, they would presumably object on similar grounds to psychoanalytic and radical feminists.

Plotinus's conception of the Divine escapes this criticism in several respects. First, the continuity between the One and the derived realities, its omnipresence and non-coercive transcendence repel any notion of dominance (§2.3.1, §2.3.2). Second, although Plotinus occasionally refers to the One using masculine language, he is emphatic that the One is beyond description. I therefore described his conception of the One as non-gendered and non-dominating, and compatible at least with liberal, psychoanalytic, and radical feminist positions. Kashani's conception of the Divine, on the other hand, is informed by a dual heritage of Greek rationalism and Koranic revelation. When speaking in philosophical mode, he abstains from direct discussion of God and tends to use gender-neutral language in his references to the Real. Thus, his philosophical conception of the Divine is, like Plotinus's, compatible with all but a socialist feminist perspective. Speaking in religious mode, he often uses masculine language, indicating majesty and remoteness, when referring to God. This, however, is balanced by his references to the signs of God in creation, indicating proximity and similarity, and by his use of feminine divine names indicating nurture and compassion (§5.2.1, §5.2.2). This 'bi-gendered' conception of the Divine is represented in the table as compatible with the perspectives of liberal and psychoanalytic feminism, on the ground that neither excludes the possibility of a transcendent ideal, provided it is not exclusively masculine. However, it is incompatible with a socialist feminist perspective, which rejects such ideals, and with a radical feminist perspective, which presumably rejects any such ideal that is not exclusively female.

4. Platonic conception of knowledge is androcentric: rational, abstract, separative

The alleged androcentricity of the Platonic account of knowledge is of concern to all but liberal feminists, for whom rationality is a primary value. The claims are that Platonic knowledge devalues sensory and non-rational experience, that its 'abstractness' diverts attention from particular individuals to universals, and that it distances the knower from the objects of knowledge (§3.2.1, §3.2.4, §6.3.1). However, for both Plotinus and Kashani knowledge is experiential in the sense that it is immediate, and for Plotinus in particular, affective and aesthetic qualities are strongly implicated in his descriptions of contemplating beauty and intelligible reality (§3.1.2, §3.2.4, §6.3). Furthermore, both their accounts of knowledge stress the synthesising aspect of intuiting things as a unity: the self becomes identical with the objects of knowledge, which include the qualities instantiated by sensory objects (§3.1.2, §6.2, §6.3.1). Far from being separative, this intuitive knowledge enables a person to discern unifying connections with and between all that exists, and is thus compatible with the other three feminist perspectives insofar as they value connection. It is also compatible with liberal feminism's commitment to the ideal of rationality, since for rational mystics the rational path is the necessary precursor of intuitive knowledge.

5. Individual perspective is lost in mystical goal

It is plausible to think that mystical knowledge, in which boundaries between self and other are transcended, is incompatible with liberal feminists' affirmation of individual autonomy. However, since for both Plotinus and Kashani individuals have a responsibility to communicate the unitive vision to others afterwards, this activity presumably requires a continuing identity as an embodied individual. It is only at the higher level of contemplation that the perspective is no longer individual in the sense of being limited to the empirical self (§4.4.2). Furthermore, for Kashani, the Koranic

conception of personal moral accountability negates the idea that contemplators lose their individuality (§6.3.4). Hence, there is no incompatibility here with a liberal feminist perspective, nor with the other feminist perspectives, insofar as they are less concerned with championing individual autonomy.

6. Self-perfecting ethic is individualist

The concern with individualism in an ethic aiming at self-perfection is relevant to all but liberal feminists, who, as we have seen, value individual autonomy. While Plotinus's ethic seems on the face of it to be excessively individualist and unrelated to social practice, combining his teaching on virtue with his thesis that all share a common soul provides a basis for a holistic ethical stance (§4.3.2). From Kashani's more detailed teaching on the importance of ethical practice, it is clear that perfection in contemplation is impossible without actualising the virtues appropriate to social conduct (§7.1). For this reason, the ethic of self-perfection, as taught by Plotinus and Kashani and in the larger context of their metaphysical views, is not incompatible with any of the four feminist perspectives.

7. Mysticism is otherworldly and irrelevant to social justice

The supposed irrelevance of mysticism (and, *a fortiori*, rational mysticism) to issues of social justice is of concern particularly for liberal and socialist feminists. Underlying this concern is an assumption that mysticism is only concerned with private experience, or that, like other forms of spirituality, it encourages people to accept their outward circumstances without complaint and focus instead on an otherworldly reality. This account of mystics has however been challenged by at least two psychoanalytic feminists, who have discerned an association between the historical construction of a 'privatised' mysticism and the disempowerment of women

(§1.3.2). While one cannot generalise from these critics to the group, it is plausible to think that other psychoanalytic feminists may be sympathetic to alternative accounts of mysticism to that offered by Freud, who associated hysteria and ‘pathological’ mysticism with women. Radical feminists, on the other hand, have not only embraced the ideal of mystical connection but have also, in some cases, foresworn the attempt to reform existing structures. Hence I have represented these latter two groups as not sharing the concern of liberal and socialist feminists that mysticism is irrelevant to social justice.

Despite Plotinus’s apparent endorsement of precisely the otherworldly focus criticised by liberal and socialist feminists (see §4.1.1), his thesis that all souls are one and his commitment to the virtue of justice, among other virtues, implicitly precludes indifference in the face of injustice, even if he failed to draw this conclusion explicitly in his writings (§4.4.3). In addition, the record of his practice belies the judgement of otherworldliness and lack of concern. Kashani, on the other hand, is explicitly critical of injustice in contemporary rulers (§7.3.1). Furthermore, his theory of kingship provides a model for the responsibility of those who have actualised their human potential to help others to do likewise (§7.3.2); both he and Plotinus were doing precisely that in their writings. The all-embracing character of his and Kashani’s rational mysticism necessarily extends to judgements about appropriate action in one’s particular situation, and there is no principled reason to think that this would exclude challenging the status quo (§4.3.2, §7.1.2).

8.2 Implications of the analysis

Standard feminist readings of Greek philosophy and monotheistic theology in the areas relevant to rational mysticism reveal that the concerns of liberal feminists

are, with one exception, different from those of socialist, psychoanalytic and radical feminists. Liberal feminists are troubled by a possible loss of individual perspective and the supposed otherworldliness of mysticism, but not by an analysis of reality or knowledge that privileges the intellectual over the sensory. The other three groups are troubled by the intellectualism, insofar as this is perceived to reflect a masculine bias, but not by the privileging of connection over individualism. Neither do these groups, with the exception of socialist feminists, share the concern about mysticism's irrelevance to social justice. Thus, a preliminary finding of this analysis is that the concerns of liberal feminists relate to the 'mystical' aspects of rational mysticism, while those of psychoanalytic and radical feminists relate to the 'rational' aspects, and those of socialist feminists relate to some of each .

In the light of a revisionist interpretation of Plotinus and Kashani, the concerns of liberal feminists can be resolved, while each of the other groups has one or more remaining areas of incompatibility with either or both of the rational mystics under investigation. It remains to ask how important these areas of incompatibility are for the feminist groups in question, and to what extent the answer to this question depends on considering differing perspectives within the groups, in particular the presence or absence of a spiritual/religious/theistic perspective.

For psychoanalytic feminists, the devaluing of the body in Plotinus's and Kashani's teachings is the only remaining area of incompatibility. It is plausible to assume that the tension will be of greatest significance for those within this group who favour a materialist account of reality and human nature. However, identifying the boundaries of such a sub-group is not straightforward, given that some psychoanalytic feminists (e.g. Irigaray, Jantzen) both endorse the (psychological) need for divinity and oppose what they perceive as denigration of the body and matter

in Greek philosophy (see discussion at §2.2). The diversity of positions within psychoanalytic feminism makes it impossible to assess the importance of this issue collectively.

For socialist feminists, the remaining incompatibility relates to the devaluing of the body and the mere positing of a transcendent Divine, however conceptualised. While it is difficult to see how the first objection could be overcome within a socialist feminist framework, given its commitment to a materialistic account of reality, some rapprochement may be possible with regard to the second objection, given socialist feminism's connections with ecofeminism. As Jagger herself states, the Marxist/socialist conception of a dialectical unity between human and non-human nature is 'not incompatible with the radical feminist intuition of a spiritual unity between human and non-human nature' (1983, 307). Such intimations of 'spiritual unity' are sometimes associated with an immanentist or materialist account of the Divine (see e.g. McFague 2001; Irigaray 1993), which presumably would be compatible with a socialist feminist perspective. This is not to say that such accounts of the Divine would be wholly consistent with those held by Plotinus or Kashani, but rather that ruling out any compatibility between socialist feminism and rational mysticism on the grounds of its appeal to a transcendent Divine may be too stringent. At the very least, a socialist feminist who is open to the perspective of ecofeminist spirituality may be able to accept Plotinus's conception of the One as immanent throughout the cosmos.

For radical feminists, the hierarchical structure of reality and the devaluing of the body in both Plotinus's and Kashani's rational mysticism remain problematic, as does Kashani's bi-gendered conception of the Divine. This latter issue, however, could be ignored if one were to consider only Kashani's philosophical analyses and

not his more Islamic writings or his purely honorific references to the Divine. The issue for this group of feminists is not the *inclusion* of a spiritual domain but its distinction from and elevation over the material. Nevertheless, in view of the importance of spirituality, connection, and intuition for radical feminists, it could be argued that their overall perspective has significant positive overlap with rational mysticism (particularly that of Plotinus).

In view of these results, is there any principled way of deciding which of the designated feminist groups is most compatible with rational mysticism? By simply counting the remaining grey areas in the right-hand columns of the table, it looks as though liberal feminists are the most compatible with rational mysticism and radical feminists the least. However, such generalisations gloss over the diversity of perspectives within each group. One factor that seems to be of particular significance in determining compatibility is the presence or absence of a spiritual orientation. By ‘spiritual’, I have in mind a broad definition such as that offered by Smith in *The Concept of the Spiritual*: ‘Spirits are affirmative relationships between intentional beings for whom the task is set of trying to live with each other as rightly as possible’ (1988, 277). While I have shown that it is possible for a feminist belonging to any of the designated groups to embrace some aspects of rational mysticism, it seems unlikely that someone without a spiritual orientation would actually do so. The final question I shall consider is how rational mysticism can be of positive value for a spiritually-oriented feminist.

8.3 The alliance of spirituality and rationality

It might be thought that in distinguishing the perspective of spiritually oriented feminists, I am really talking about feminist theologians. This is not my intention,

although the group I am considering may well include feminist theologians (see my ‘Plotinus and Feminism: Escapism or Engagement?’, forthcoming). Two reasons why I have not emphasised theological perspectives as such in the present project are first, that the historical figures under investigation were philosophers, not theologians, and second, that the feminist concerns I wanted to compare with the theses of Plotinus and Kashani pertain to a wider domain of enquiry than theology, although conceptualisation of the divine is certainly one of the relevant concerns.

Of course, to the extent that metaphysics, epistemology and ethics also enter into the subject-matter of theology, the concerns I have raised could just as well have been raised in the context of a theological enquiry. However, a third and perhaps major reason for not doing so is that I wanted to explore the usefulness of rational mysticism to feminist philosophical perspectives that may or may not include adherence to organised religion. For many western feminists, the ideals and institutions of organised religion (especially, but not exclusively, monotheistic religion) are primary sites of male dominance. Some feminists choose to remain within these institutions, attempting to reform the practice and reformulate the ideals. Others seek alternative means of spiritual expression or abandon the attempt altogether in the name of rationality. An implication of my examination of rational mysticism, however has been that rationality, as understood by Plotinus and Kashani, is not only not antithetical to spirituality but integral to it. This, in my view, has important consequences for spiritually-oriented feminists who are disenchanted with organised religion.

Consider, for example, the effects of academic study, particularly in the area of the humanities, on women from backgrounds of institutional religion. It is not uncommon in western tertiary academic institutions for students to encounter

challenges, in the name of rationality, to their religious beliefs. Such challenges can be both liberating and deeply disturbing, undermining the entire conceptual framework in which a person has learned to interpret and evaluate experience, make decisions, and set goals. For a person who has strongly identified with her religious heritage and cultural norms, including gender-role norms, learning to question the underlying assumptions can lead initially to a sense of loss of meaning. For a woman in patriarchal society, particularly if she has been habituated to acquiescence and submission, the questioning can intensify the sense of powerlessness she may already feel but could previously justify in the name of holy writ. Not only is the rationality of her beliefs called into question, but she is confronted with the operation of gender bias in the construction of those beliefs. The erosion of belief in a male god who ordains morality and sanctions male dominance can precipitate a crisis of confidence, orientation, and ethical judgement.

In rational mysticism, such a woman can discover that rationality and a spiritual perspective are not only compatible but inseparable, whether or not the path is undertaken in a religious context. In Plotinus, we have the example of a rigorous thinker who was not in any obvious sense 'religious', for whom rationality ineluctably points beyond itself to mysticism. In Kashani, the fusion of religious and philosophical perspectives demonstrates the congruence between the Islamic principle of *tawhid* (asserting the unity of God/Reality) and the synthetic rationalist conception of self-knowledge as the awareness that reality is a unified whole. The rationalist formulation makes explicit the discernment of an interconnected reality that is implicit in the religious formulation; the latter enriches the rationalist conception (for a theist) by associating discernment of an interconnected reality with a divine source.

How does the discernment of an interconnected reality support a *feminist* position? The tension within feminism between idealising connection and idealising autonomy has surfaced a number of times in the previous chapters as I have examined the relevance to Plotinus and Kashani of criticisms on both counts. The two poles of the tension represent differing attempts to correct an imbalance perceived to have had negative implications for women. On the one hand, liberal feminists have seen the idealising of connection as undermining the possibility of women's autonomy; on the other hand, socialist, psychoanalytic, and radical feminists have seen the idealising of autonomy as a masculine tendency implicated in the historical exploitation of women and the natural world. A further implication of my arguments, however, is that the tension between these claims is resolved at a theoretical level in the rational mysticism of Plotinus and Kashani, for whom the structure of reality reflects a one:many relationship at every level. Plotinus's metaphor of concentric circles in a sphere illustrates this structure particularly clearly: each individual soul has its 'centre' at the same point as the 'centre' of all the other souls, and is thus both distinct and connected (VI 9,8,10-12, 19-22). For the feminist, keeping both the 'one' and the 'many' in view avoids the extremes of individualism and identity loss.

Feminists are, by definition, opposed to discrimination against women. Discrimination can take many forms, however, including a narrow parochialism that women of colour have detected in the attitudes and assumptions of many white, western feminists. While I have argued that rational mysticism supports an expanded perspective and an awareness of interconnectedness, I am aware that the material conditions in which such a thesis can be entertained are little more than a dream for the vast majority of the world's women and men. More work is needed to evaluate the viability of rational mysticism for generating genuinely inclusive attitudes and

practices (see my 'Plotinus and Feminism: Escapism or Engagement?', forthcoming). It is to be hoped, however, that the combination of feminist and rational mystic perspectives can help to fund more adequate responses to exploitation, suffering, and the degradation of human and non-human life.

REFERENCES

- Adamson, Peter, 2002. *The Arabic Plotinus: A Philosophical Study of the Theology of Aristotle* (London: Duckworth).
- Adamson, Peter, and Taylor, Richard C., 2005. *The Cambridge Companion to Arabic Philosophy* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press).
- Alliez, Eric and Feher, Michel, 1989. 'Reflections of a Soul' in Michel Feher, ed., *Fragments for a History of the Human Body*, Part 2 (New York: Zone), 47-84.
- Anderson, Pamela, 1998. *A Feminist Philosophy of Religion* (Oxford: Blackwell).
- Annas, Julia, 1999. *Platonic Ethics – Old and New* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press).
- Annas, Julia, 1996. 'Plato's *Republic* and Feminism' in Julie K. Ward, ed., *Feminism and Ancient Philosophy* (New York: Routledge), 3-12.
- Antony, Louise M., 1996. "'Human Nature" and Its Role in Feminist Theory' in Janet A. Kourani, ed., *Philosophy in a Feminist Voice: Critiques and Reconstructions* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press), 63-91.
- Armstrong, A. Hilary, trans., 1966-1988. *Plotinus Vols I-VII* (London: William Heinemann).
- Armstrong, A. Hilary, 1979. *Plotinian and Christian Studies* (London: Variorum Reprints).
- Armstrong, A. Hilary, 1976. 'The Apprehension of Divinity in the Self and Cosmos in Plotinus' in R. Baine Harris, ed., *The Significance of Neoplatonism* (Norfolk, VA: Old Dominion University), 187-198.
- Armstrong, A. Hilary, 1973. 'Elements in the Thought of Plotinus at Variance with Classical Intellectualism', *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 93, 13-22.
- Armstrong, A. Hilary, 1967. *The Architecture of the Intelligible Universe in the Philosophy of Plotinus: An Analytical and Historical Study* (Amsterdam: Adolf M. Hakkert).
- Baltzly, Dirk, 2004. 'The Virtues and "Becoming like God": Alcinous to Proclus', *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 26:2, 297-321.
- Barlas, Asma, 2002. *'Believing Women' in Islam: Unreading Patriarchal Interpretations of the Quran* (Austin, Texas : University of Texas Press).
- Barnes, Hazel E., 1945. 'Neo-Platonism and Analytical Psychology', *Philosophical Review* 54, 558-577.
- Barnes, Jonathan, ed. *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, Vols 1 and 2 (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press).
- Bar On, Bat-Ami, ed., 1994. *Engendering Origins: Critical Feminist Readings in Plato and Aristotle* (Albany: State University of New York Press).
- Beasley, Chris, 1999. *What is Feminism? An Introduction to Feminist Theory* (London: Sage).

- Blakely, Donald N., 2004. 'The Mysticism of Plotinus and Deep Ecology', *Journal of Philosophical Research* 29, 1-28.
- Blumental, H.J., 1971. *Plotinus' Psychology: His Doctrines of the Embodied Soul* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff).
- Bussanich, John, 1997. 'Plotinian Mysticism in Theoretical and Comparative Perspective', *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 72:3, 339-365.
- Bussanich, John, 1996. 'Plotinus's Metaphysics of the One' in *The Cambridge Companion to Plotinus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 38-65.
- Bussanich, John, 1994. 'Mystical Elements in the Thought of Plotinus', in W. Haase and H. Temporini, eds., *Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt* 36.7 (Berlin: Walter De Gruyter), 5300-5500.
- Bynum, Caroline Walker, 1991. *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion* (New York: Zone Books).
- Card, Claudia, 1995. 'Gender and Moral Luck', in Virginia Held, ed., *Justice and Care: Essential Readings in Feminist Ethics* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press), 79-98.
- Cavarero, Adriana, 1995. *In Spite of Plato: A Feminist Rewriting of Ancient Philosophy* (Cambridge: Polity).
- Chittick, William C., 2001. *The Heart of Islamic Philosophy: The Quest for Self-Knowledge in the Teachings of Afdal al-Din Kashani* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- Chodorow, Nancy, 1978. *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender* (Berkeley: University of California Press).
- Christ, Carol, 1979. *Diving Deep and Surfacing: Women Writers on Spiritual Quest* (New York: Harper and Row).
- Cixous, Hélène, [1975] 1980. 'Sorties' in *La jeune née*, reprinted in Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron, eds., *New French Feminisms: An Anthology* (Brighton, Sussex: Harvester), 90-98.
- Cook, Kathleen C., 1996. 'Sexual Inequality in Aristotle's Theories of Reproduction and Inheritance' in Julie K. Ward, ed., *Feminism and Ancient Philosophy* (New York: Routledge), 51-67.
- Cooper, E. Jane, 1996 (forthcoming). 'Escapism or Engagement? Plotinus and Feminism', *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 22:2.
- Cooper, John M, ed., 1997. *Plato: Complete Works* (Indianapolis: Hackett).
- Culpepper, Emily, 1987. 'Contemporary Goddess Theology: A Sympathetic Critique', in C. Atkinson, C. Buchanan and M. Miles, eds., *Shaping New Vision: Gender and Values in American Culture* (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press).
- Daly, Mary, [1973] 1985. *Beyond God the Father: Toward a Philosophy of Women's Liberation* (Boston: Beacon Press).
- Daly, Mary, 1978. *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism* (Boston, Mass.: Beacon Press).

- D'Ancona, Cristina, 2005. 'Greek into Arabic: Neoplatonism in Translation' in Peter Adamson and Richard C. Taylor, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Arabic Philosophy* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press), 10-31.
- Davidson, Herbert A., 1992. *Alfarabi, Avicenna, and Averroes, on Intellect: Their Cosmologies, Theories of the Active Intellect, and Theories of Human Intellect* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- Deslauriers, Marguerite, 1998. 'Sex and Essence in Aristotle's *Metaphysics* and Biology' in Cynthia A. Freeland, ed., *Feminist Interpretations of Aristotle* (University Park, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press), 138-167.
- Dillon, John M., 1966. 'An Ethic for the Late Antique Sage' in Lloyd P. Gerson, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Plotinus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 315-335.
- Dworkin, Andrea, 1974. *Woman Hating* (New York: E.P. Dutton).
- Edman, Irwin, 1925. 'The Logic of Mysticism in Plotinus' in *Studies in the History of Ideas* Vol 2 (New York: Columbia University Press), 51-81.
- Eisler, Riane, 1987. *The Chalice and The Blade: Our History, Our Future* (San Francisco: Harper).
- Fakhry, Majid, 1971. 'Three Varieties of Mysticism in Islam', *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 2, 193-207.
- Fakhry, Majid, 1970. *A History of Islamic Philosophy* (New York: Columbia University Press).
- Feuerbach, Ludwig, 1957. *The Essence of Christianity*, George Eliot, trans. (New York: Harper).
- Firestone, Shulamith, 1970. *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution* (New York: William Morrow).
- Flax, Jane, 1983. 'Political Philosophy and the Patriarchal Unconscious: A Psychoanalytic Perspective on Epistemology and Metaphysics' in Sandra Handing and Merrill B. Hintikka, eds., *Discovering Reality: Feminist Perspectives on Epistemology, Metaphysics, Methodology, and Philosophy of Science* (Dordrecht: D. Reidel Publishing Company), 245-281.
- Fox Keller, Evelyn, 1985. 'Love and Sex in Plato's Epistemology' in Fox Keller, *Reflections on Gender and Science* (New Haven: Yale University Press), 21-32.
- Frankenberry, Nancy, 1998. 'Philosophy of Religion in Different Voices' in Janet A. Kourany, ed., *Philosophy in a Feminist Voice: Critiques and Reconstructions* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press), 173-203.
- Frankenberry, Nancy, 1993. 'Classical Theism, Panentheism, and Pantheism: on the Relation between God Construction and Gender Construction', *Zygon* 28:1, 29-46.
- Freeland, Cynthia A., ed., 1998. *Feminist Interpretations of Aristotle* (University Park, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press).
- Friedman, Marilyn, 1995. 'Beyond Caring: The De-Moralization of Gender', in Virginia Held, ed., *Justice and Care: Essential Readings in Feminist Ethics* (Boulder: Westview), 61-77.

- Gatti, Maria Luisa, 'Plotinus: The Platonic Tradition and the Foundation of Neoplatonism', in Lloyd P. Gerson, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Plotinus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 10-37.
- Gellman, Jerome I. 2005. 'Mysticism and Religious Experience' in W.J. Wainwright, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 138-167.
- Genova, Judith, 1994. 'Feminist Dialectics: Plato and Dualism' in Bat-Ami Bar On, ed., *Engendering Origins: Critical Feminist Readings in Plato and Aristotle* (Albany: State University of New York Press), 41-52.
- Gerson, Lloyd P., ed., 1996. *The Cambridge Companion to Plotinus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).
- Gerson, Lloyd P., 1994. *Plotinus* (London: Routledge).
- Gilligan Carol, 1993. *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press).
- Graeser, Andreas, 1972. *Plotinus and The Stoics: A Preliminary Study* (Leiden: E.J. Brill).
- Griffin, Susan, 1978. *Woman and Nature: The Roaring Inside Her* (New York: Harper and Row).
- Griffiths, Morwenna and Whitford, Margaret, eds., 1988. *Feminist Perspectives in Philosophy* (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Macmillan Press).
- Grimshaw, Jean, 1985. *Feminist Philosophers: Women's Perspectives on Philosophical Traditions* (Brighton: Wheatsheaf).
- Gurtler, Gary M., 2002. 'Sympathy: Stoic Materialism and the Platonic Soul' in Michael F. Wagner ed., *Neoplatonism and Nature: Studies in Plotinus' Enneads* (Albany: State University of New York Press), 241-276.
- Hadot, Pierre, 1995. *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, Michael Chase, trans. (Oxford: Blackwell).
- Hadot, Pierre, 1993. *Plotinus or the Simplicity of Vision*, Michael Chase trans. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press).
- Hadot, Pierre, 1989. 'Plotinus and Porphyry' in A. Hilary Armstrong, ed., *Classical Mediterranean Spirituality: Egyptian, Greek, Roman* (New York: Crossroad), 230-249.
- Ha'iri Yazdi, Mehdi, 1992. *The Principles of Epistemology in Islamic Philosophy: Knowledge by Presence* (Albany: State University of New York Press).
- Hampton, Cynthia, 1994. 'Overcoming Dualism: The Importance of the Intermediate in Plato's *Philebus*' in Nancy Tuana, ed., *Feminist Interpretations of Plato* (University Park, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press), 217-242.
- Hartshorne, Charles, 1970. *Creative Synthesis and Philosophic Method* (London: S.C.M. Press).
- Hassan, Riffat, 1991. 'The Issue of Woman-Man Equality in the Islamic Tradition' in Leonard Grob, Riffat Hassan and Haim Gordon, eds., *Women's and Men's Liberation: Testimonies of Spirit*, (New York: Greenwood Press), 65-82.

- Hawkesworth, Mary E, 1989. 'Knowers, Knowing, Known: Feminist Theory and Claims of Truth', *Signs* 14:3, 533-557.
- Hollywood, Amy M., 2002. *Sensible Ecstasy: Mysticism, Sexual Difference, and the Demands of History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press).
- Hollywood, Amy M., 1994. 'Beauvoir, Irigaray, and the Mystical' in *Hypatia* 9:4, 158-185.
- Horowitz, Maryanne Cline, 1976. 'Aristotle and Woman', *Journal of the History of Biology* 9:2, 183-213.
- Houston, Barbara, 1987. 'Rescuing Womanly Virtues: Some Dangers of Reclamation', in Marsha P. Hanen and Kai Nielsen, eds., *Science, Morality, and Feminist Theory* Suppl. Vol. 12, *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, (Calgary, Alberta: University of Calgary Press, 1987): 237-62.
- Irwin, Terence, trans., 1985. *Aristotle: Nicomachean Ethics* (Indianapolis: Hackett).
- Jaggar, Alison M. 1995. 'Caring as a Feminist Practice of Moral Reason' in Virginia Held, ed., *Justice and Care: Essential Readings in Feminist Ethics* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview).
- Jaggar, Alison M., 1983. *Feminist Politics and Human Nature* (Totowa, N.J.: Rowman and Allenheld).
- James, William, [1902] 1985. *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press).
- Jantzen, Grace M., 1998. *Becoming Divine: Towards a Feminist Philosophy of Religion* (Manchester: Manchester University Press).
- Jantzen, Grace M., 1994. 'Feminists, Philosophers, and Mystics', *Hypatia* 9:4, 186-206.
- Johnson, Elizabeth A., 1993. *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse* (New York: Crossroad).
- Katz, Joseph, 1950. *Plotinus' Search for the Good* (New York: King's Crown Press).
- Katz, Steven T., 1978. 'Language, Epistemology, and Mysticism' in Steven T. Katz, ed., *Mysticism and Philosophical Analysis* (London: Sheldon Press), 22-74.
- Kelly, Joan, 1979. 'The Doubled Vision of Feminist Theory: A Postscript to the 'Women and Power Conference'', *Feminist Studies* 5:1.
- Kenney, John Peter, 1997. 'Mysticism and Contemplation in the Enneads', *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 71:3, 315-337.
- Kiliç, Mahmud Erol, 1996. 'Mysticism' in Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Oliver Leaman, eds., *History of Islamic Philosophy Part II* (London: Routledge), 947-958.
- Kristeva, Julia, 1987. *Tales of Love*, Leon S. Roudiez, trans. (New York: Columbia University Press).
- Lange, Lynda, 1983. 'Woman is Not a Rational Animal: On Aristotle's Biology of Reproduction' in Sandra Harding and Merrill B. Hintikka, eds., *Discovering Reality: Feminist Perspectives on Epistemology, Metaphysics, Methodology, and Philosophy of Science* (Dordrecht: D. Reidel Publishing Company), 1-16.
- Lloyd, Genevieve, 1984. *The Man of Reason: 'Male' and 'Female' in Western Philosophy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press).

- Lochrie, Karma, 1991. *Margery Kempe and Translations of the Flesh* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press).
- Locke, John, [1690] 1995. *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Kenneth P. Winkler, ed. (Indianapolis, Ind.: Hackett).
- Lucas, J.R., 1973. 'Because You Are a Woman', *Philosophy* 48, No. 184, 161-171.
- McGinn, Bernard, 1991. *The Foundations of Mysticism Vol 1* (New York: Crossroad).
- Malti-Douglas, Fedwa, 1991. *Woman's Body, Woman's Word: Gender and Discourse in Arabo-Islamic Writing* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press).
- Mamo, P.S., 1979. 'Is Plotinian Mysticism Monistic?' in R. Baine Harris, ed., *The Significance of Neoplatonism* (Norfolk, VA: Old Dominion University), 199-215.
- Merlan, Philip, 1963. *Monopsychism, Mysticism, Metaconsciousness: Problems of the Soul in the Neoaristotelian and Neoplatonic Tradition* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff).
- Miles, Margaret R., 1999. *Plotinus on Body and Beauty: Society, Philosophy, and Religion in Third-Century Rome* (Oxford: Blackwell).
- Miller-McLemore, Bonnie J., 1992. 'Epistemology or Bust: A Maternal Feminist Knowledge of Knowing', *Journal of Religion* 72:2, 229-247.
- Modrak, Deborah K.W., 1998. 'Aristotle's Theory of Knowledge and Feminist Epistemology' in Cynthia A. Freeland, ed., *Feminist Interpretations of Aristotle* (University Park, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press), 93-117.
- Moravcsik, Julius, 1992. *Plato and Platonism: Plato's Conception of Appearance and Reality in Ontology, Epistemology, and Ethics, and its Modern Echoes* (Oxford, UK: Blackwell).
- Murata, Sachiko, and Chittick, William C., 1994. *The Vision of Islam* (New York: Paragon House).
- Murata, Sachiko, 1992. *The Tao of Islam: A Sourcebook on Gender Relationships in Islamic Thought* (Albany: State University of New York Press).
- Naess, Arne, 1989. *Ecology, Community and Lifestyle: Outline of an Ecosophy*, David Rothenberg, trans., (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).
- Nasr, Seyyed Hossein, 1983. 'Afdal al-Din Kashani and the Philosophical World of Khwaja Nasir al-Din Tusi' in Michael E. Marmura, ed., *Islamic Theology and Philosophy: Studies in Honour of George F. Hourani* (Albany: State University of New York Press), 249-264.
- Nasr, Seyyed Hossein, 1982. 'Intellect and Intuition: Their Relationship from the Islamic Perspective' in *Islam and Contemporary Society* (London: Longman).
- Nasr, Seyyed Hossein, 1964. *An Introduction to Islamic Cosmological Doctrines* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap, Harvard).
- Netton, Ian Richard, 1989. *Allah Transcendent: Studies in the Structure and Semiotics of Islamic Philosophy, Theology and Cosmology* (London: Routledge).
- Noddings, Nel, 1984. *Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education* (Berkeley: University of California Press).
- Nussbaum, Martha, 1992. 'Human Functioning and Social Justice: In Defence of Aristotelian Essentialism', *Political Theory* 20, 202-246.

- O'Daly, Gerard J.P., 1973. *Plotinus' Philosophy of the Self* (Shannon, Ireland: Irish University Press).
- O'Meara, Dominic J., 2003. *Platonopolis: Platonic Political Philosophy in Late Antiquity* (Oxford: Clarendon Press).
- O'Meara, Dominic J., 1996. 'The Hierarchical Ordering of Reality in Plotinus' in Lloyd P. Gerson, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Plotinus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 66-81.
- O'Meara, Dominic J., 1993. *Plotinus: An Introduction to the Enneads* (Oxford: Clarendon Press).
- Otto, Rudolf, 1957. *The Idea of the Holy* (London: Oxford University Press).
- Pierce, Christine, 'Eros and Epistemology' in Bat-Ami Bar On, ed., *Engendering Origins: Critical Feminist Readings in Plato and Aristotle* (Albany: State University of New York Press), 25-39.
- Plumwood, Val, 1991. 'Nature, Self, and Gender: Feminism, Environmental Philosophy, and the Critique of Rationalism', *Hypatia* 6:1, 3-27.
- Raphael, Melissa, 1994. 'Feminism, Constructivism and Numinous Experience' in *Religious Studies* 30, 511-526.
- Rist, John M., 1989. 'Back to the Mysticism of Plotinus: Some More Specifics', *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 27, 183-197.
- Ruddick, Sara, 1989. *Maternal Thinking: Towards a Politics of Peace* (Boston, Mass: Beacon).
- Ruether, Rosemary Radford, 1975. *New Woman/New Earth: Sexist Ideologies & Human Liberation* (New York: Seabury).
- Russell, Bertrand, 1949. *Mysticism and Logic* (London: Allen & Unwin).
- Sabbah, Fatma, 1984. *Woman in the Muslim Unconscious* (New York: Pergamon).
- Saiving, Valerie, 1979. 'The Human Situation: A Feminine View' in Carol P. Christ and Judith Plaskow, eds., *Womanspirit Rising: A Feminist Reader in Religion* (San Francisco: Harper and Row), 25-42.
- Schmidt, Leigh Eric, 2003. 'The Making of Modern "Mysticism"', *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 71:2, 273-302.
- Schufreider, Gregory, 1994. *Confessions of a Rational Mystic: Anselm's Early Writings* (West Lafayette, Indiana: Purdue University Press).
- Sells, Michael A., 1994. *Mystical Languages of Unsayings* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press).
- Spelman, Elizabeth V., 1994. 'Hairy Cobblers and Philosopher-Queens' in Bat-Ami Bar On, ed., *Engendering Origins: Critical Feminist Readings in Plato and Aristotle* (Albany: State University of New York Press), 3-24.
- Spelman, Elizabeth V., 1982. 'Woman as Body: Ancient and Contemporary Views', *Feminist Studies* 8:1, 109-131.
- Smith, Andrew, 1999. 'The Significance of Practical Ethics for Plotinus' in John J. Cleary, ed., *Traditions of Platonism: Essays in Honour of John Dillon* (Aldershot, Hants.: Ashgate), 227-236.

- Smith, John E. 1983. 'William James's Account of Mysticism: A Critical Appraisal' in Steven T. Katz, ed., *Mysticism and Religious Traditions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 247-279.
- Smith, Margaret, 1973. *Studies in Early Mysticism in the Near and Middle East* (Amsterdam: Philo Press).
- Smith, Steven G., 1988. *The Concept of the Spiritual: An Essay in First Philosophy* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press).
- Stace, Walter, 1961. *Mysticism and Philosophy* (London: Macmillan).
- Taylor Mill, Harriet [1851] 1970. 'Enfranchisement of Women' in Alice S. Rossi, ed., *Essays on Sex Equality: John Stuart Mill and Harriet Taylor Mill* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press).
- Teloh, Henry, 1981. *The Development of Plato's Metaphysics* (University Park, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press).
- Tronto, Joan C., 1989. 'Women and Caring: What Can Feminists Learn About Morality from Caring?' in Alison M. Jaggar and Susan R. Bordo, eds., *Gender/Body/Knowledge* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press), 172-187.
- Tuana, Nancy, ed., 1994. *Feminist Interpretations of Plato* (University Park, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press).
- Vassilopoulou, Panayiota, 2003. 'From a Feminist Perspective: Plotinus on Teaching and Learning Philosophy', *Women: A Cultural Review* 14:2, 130-143.
- Wadud, Amina, 1999. *Qur'an and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective* (New York: Oxford University Press).
- Walzer, Richard, 1985. *Al-Farabi on the Perfect State: Abu Nasr al-Farabi's Mabadi' Ara' Ahl al-Madina al-Fadila: A Revised Text with Introduction, Translation, and Commentary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press).
- Ward, Julie K., ed., 1996. *Feminism and Ancient Philosophy* (New York: Routledge).
- Warren, Karen J., 1993. 'A Feminist Philosophical Perspective on Ecofeminist Spiritualities' in Carol J. Adams, ed., *Ecofeminism and the Sacred* (New York: Continuum), 119-132.
- Whitehead, Alfred North, [1929] 1978. *Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology*, David Ray Griffin and Donald W. Welbourne, eds. (New York: Free Press).
- Witt, Charlotte, 1998. 'Form, Normativity, and Gender in Aristotle: A Feminist Perspective' in Cynthia A. Freeland, ed., *Feminist Interpretations of Aristotle* (University Park, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press), 118-137.
- Wollstonecraft, Mary, [1792] 1992. *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*, Barbara Taylor, ed. (London: Everyman).
- Wright, Crispin; Smith, Barry C.; and Macdonald, Cynthia, eds., 1998. *Knowing Our Own Minds* (Oxford: Clarendon Press).
- Young, Iris Marion, 1981. 'Beyond the Unhappy Marriage: A Critique of the Dual Systems Theory' in Lydia Sargent, ed., *Women and Revolution: A Discussion of the Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism* (Boston: South End Press), 43-69.

Young, Stephen, 1989. 'Root and Branch in the Groves of Academe', *New Scientist* 23/30
December, 58-61.