

The Value of the Present Moment in Neoplatonic Philosophy

DANIELLE A. LAYNE
Gonzaga University

ABSTRACT: In the spirit of Pierre Hadot's analysis of the value of the present moment in Hellenistic philosophies on happiness, the following argues that the Neoplatonic tradition heralded a similar view about the soul's well-being. Primarily, the value of the present moment in Plotinus focuses on his arguments regarding the immortal soul's desire for eternity that is lived in the 'actuality of life' right now. In contrast, the following analyzes the later Platonists and argues that Proclus offers a more practical and thick understanding of human happiness in relation to the present. Overall, for Proclus the good is revealed in the connective nature of the present moment, a good discovered in the soul's temporal activities.

I. INTRODUCTION

Focusing his attention on the Epicureans and the Stoics, Pierre Hadot brilliantly unpacked the structural analogy underlying the Hellenistic "experience of time," i.e., that despite their profound differences, each school argued that happiness can only be found in the present moment and cannot be delayed for some other time.¹ Romantically appealing to Goethe's *Faust* and the verse "Only the present is our happiness," Hadot argued for the following parallels in the Epicurean and Stoic valorization of the present moment:

- 1) Each school privileged the present to the detriment of the past and, more importantly, the future.² For the Epicurean only present pleasures can be experienced and as such if your happiness is dependent upon the past or the future, then your happiness is an idle fantasy and will never be experienced or felt in its propriety.³ Similarly for the Stoic, attention should be paid simply to the present moment since only this moment is "up to us" as the future has not yet come and the past is definitively fixed, unbending

to our desire for things to be otherwise.⁴ It is only in this moment that one can act in accord with nature, accepting providence and recognizing the will of divine reason immanent to all things.

- 2) Both schools of thought paradoxically suggested that one instant of happiness is equal to an eternity of happiness, i.e., happiness “does not depend upon duration.”⁵ Here, the Epicureans insisted that the pleasure of the gods are available to us right now as the gods experience no more time than us. Mortal and immortal only experience the present. The same could be said for the Stoic who alongside Chrysippus would cry, “If a person has wisdom for one instant, he is no less happy than he who possesses it for all eternity.”⁶
- 3) The third moment of contact, for Hadot, demanded a reevaluation of the present instant, leading to a transformation in one’s comportment toward death. For the Stoic death is imminent and thus we have a duty to recognize that this “now” has weight and meaning, regardless of our impending demise. Nature has cared for us by finding room for even our failings, embracing each thought, feeling and action into her perfect form. In this moment, then, our consciousness can expand from its finite particularity into the infinity of the cosmos and, as a consequence, we are brought into contact with the totality of all things.⁷ On the side of the Epicurean, we are not to fear death but to “Receive each additional moment of time in a manner appropriate to its value; as if one were having an incredible stroke of luck.”⁸ Radically other to the Stoic conception of providence, for the Epicurean the cosmos and its infinite expanse, the fact that you are alive right now, was not ordained, was not planned, and, as such, there is no reason underlying all things. Rather, this moment is an incredible and undeserved gift that will only be squandered if filled with unnecessary anxiety about one’s own mortality. You will die, but do not waste this living moment in futile wishing for more time; what you have been given is already precious.⁹
- 4) Finally, the most important aspect in the Stoic and Epicurean shared experience of the present moment, for Hadot, is that both schools emphasized that their members come to a radical conversion in their way of life. This conversion, while hinging on fundamentally different comportments to being, profoundly singular styles of life, leads not to mere knowledge of the value of the present moment but rather encourages the care of the self in the lived experience of the now. For Hadot, this Hellenistic affirmation is propounded with Nietzschean ecstasy insofar as for both schools this one, single, unique presence resonates and echoes with resounding value in which “all of eternity has been approved, redeemed, justified, and

affirmed.”¹⁰ In other words, each moment is the *topos* of lived beauty, of profound revelatory happiness and, due to this, both schools invited its disciples to experience the joy of existence, the “yes” to life, right now.

Overall, for Hadot, the Hellenistic schools have a view of human happiness that reminds followers that despite suffering and confusion, violence and death, change and turmoil, there is room for the good, be it absolutely unmixed pleasure (Epicureans) or a sense of belonging to the infinitely ordered cosmos (Stoics). Indeed, as explicitly materialistic and corporeal philosophies, Hadot contrasts such reverence for the present moment with the Platonists insofar as Hadot regards these Hellenistic philosophies as situating the good *in*, rather than outside, the sensible world. Remarkably though, and in contradistinction to Hadot’s own conclusions regarding the Platonists, philosophers like Plotinus and Proclus also praised the value of the present moment. In other words, despite decisively rejecting Epicurean and Stoic materialism, the later Platonists affirm, with similar Hellenistic fervor, the significance of the present for human flourishing. Yet, in opposition to Stoic and Epicurean insistence on human finitude and corporeality, the Neoplatonic tradition, in the spirit of Socrates’s remarks in the *Theaetetus*, heralded the idea that human happiness lay in “assimilating oneself to god as far as possible.”¹¹ Put otherwise, the human good lies in the soul’s self-movement, a movement that constitutes the soul’s immateriality, indivisibility and immortality—a movement that is lived in the *reality* of the present. This said, the Neoplatonists themselves differ in their understanding of the concrete value of the present moment. As we shall see, in Plotinian terms, the soul’s well-being resides in its capacity to transcend time, to escape the world of process altogether by uniting with the eternal, the wholly real, which is not coming-to-be but always “is.” While in opposition to this conception of the human good, Proclus argued that the soul’s flourishing comes in its own temporal acts that reveal the providential benefice gracing the world of becoming and temporality itself. Yet, despite their opposition, the good of the human being, its capacity to “become like a god” is available in the present moment.

To understand both the Neoplatonic value of the present moment and the important difference between Plotinus’s and Proclus’s conception of it, we shall, in the first half of this essay, follow Hadot’s sketch of the value of the present moment in Plotinus’s analysis of the well-being of the soul, showing how for Plotinus the present moment 1) was to be privileged to the detriment of the past and future, the “was” and “will be”; 2) could not be measured by duration; 3) transforms one’s comportment toward death and; 4) demands a certain way of life. Ultimately, we shall conclude alongside Hadot that Plotinus’s happiness tends toward a kind of escapism from this world insofar as the present moment is the locus of noetic contemplation wherein we ascend to the transcendent Intellect. However, in contrast to such escapist tendencies in later Platonism, the second part of this paper will then turn to Proclus and how he advanced a way of life that redeemed

activity in the present moment, activity that need not appeal to a kind of flight from the temporal world. Rather, what will matter in Proclus's understanding of the value of the present moment is the recovery of the soul's connective power to draw together and unify the present with what was and what will be, showing how the soul's well-being is not in some other world outside of time but intimately attached to the vital movement, the dance of time itself. Overall, for Proclus, the present is not lived in some other world, but in the here and now and, as such, this late Platonist draws the seemingly otherworldly tradition of Neoplatonism into closer proximity with the practical ways of life more often associated with the Hellenistic philosophers.

II. PLOTINUS AND THE VALUE OF THE PRESENT MOMENT

Plotinus clearly valued the present moment to the detriment of the past and future. Principally, Plotinus's understanding of time is heavily indebted to his reading of Plato's *Timaeus* where time is defined as the "moving image of eternity."¹² Utilizing this definition, Plotinus conceives of time as the *life* of the soul while eternity is the life of that which always "is," the life of the divine Intellect.¹³ In opposition to time, eternity is defined as life *simpliciter*, without otherness, and, as such, is "not a thinking or life that goes from one thing to another but is always the selfsame without extension or interval."¹⁴ Plotinus continues:

[S]ee[ing] all this one sees eternity in seeing life that abides in the same, and always has the all present to it, not now this, and then again that, but all things at once, and not now some things, and then again others, but partless completion, as if they were all together in a point, and had not yet begun to go out and flow into lines; it is something which abides in the same in itself and does not change at all but is always in the present, because nothing of it has passed away, nor again is there anything to come into being, but that which it is, it is. (trans. Armstrong)¹⁵

Time, in contrast to eternity, is "[T]he life [ζωή] of soul in a movement of passage from one way of life to another"¹⁶ and "as an image of eternity" it is the unfolding or succession of being versus the complete and immediate veracity of being. Time, in the end, "runs around" its center "letting some things go and attending to others. . . . For around soul things come one after another: now Socrates, now a horse, always some one particular reality; but Intellect is all things."¹⁷ Eternity is the life of absolute being, undivided and unextended. Time, on the other hand, is the life of the soul that moves, lives and thinks successively from one distinct moment to another, never truly possessing or uniting with the object of its thought, absolute real being or the good from which it sprung. Plotinus writes that the "extension of time means the dispersal of a single present" and so soul must think, be, and live in succession, in parts.¹⁸ It contemplates not all

at once but incrementally and thus the life of the soul is erotic.¹⁹ It is an “always on the way to being”; it becomes but never “is” insofar as its being or life must be made manifest in time. The life of the soul is a constant seeking versus a having of being, an always anticipatory heralding of that which it hopes to be—absolute being as opposed to temporal being. In the soul’s longing for being, it projects itself into the future, always desiring eternal versus temporal life, eager to achieve well-being or true being for always. It is this transcendent or divine life of Intellect that the soul truly desires, not its own temporal life that never truly “is.” In contrast, Plotinus believes that “the real longing (ἔφεσις) [of the soul] is for that which is better than itself. When that is present within it, it is fulfilled and at rest, and this is the way of living it really wills (βουλητός).”²⁰ Further describing the soul’s desire for absolute life not found in time but only in eternity, Plotinus valorizes the present moment, writing:

[T]he desire of life seeks existence, it will be the desire of the present, if existence is in the present. Even if it does want the future and what comes after, it wants what it has and what it is, not what it has been or is going to be; it wants what is already to exist; it is not seeking for the everlasting but wants what is present now to exist now. (trans. Armstrong)²¹

Overall, for Plotinus, time tempts the human soul into a sea of dispersion, into a never-ending series of discrete “nows” admitting of destruction, a future “no longer.”²² Insofar as we desire happiness and well-being and well-being is identified with absolutely real being, Plotinus argues, in tune with Hadot’s first conception of the value of the present moment, that “[happiness or well-being] must not be counted by time but by eternity; and this is neither more nor less nor of any extension, but is a ‘this here’ unextended and timeless.”²³ Put otherwise, we do not come into contact with real being in the past or the future but only right now as active intellectual contemplation occurs in the indivisible immediacy of the present, in the immediacy that always “is.”²⁴

Plotinus also argues in affinity with the Epicurean and the Stoic positions that present well-being is equivalent to an infinite amount of happiness in time, reminding his readers that happiness is not a mere feeling or state of the soul. Rather, it is an unhindered *activity* of the soul;²⁵ it is the soul in its *actuality*, and, as such, once the soul has achieved the intellectual vision that constitutes its actuality, it does not need more time. To explain, Plotinus draws an analogy to seeing a particular object: “If in the longer time he gained a more accurate knowledge of [intellect], then the time would have done something more for him. But if he knows it just the same all the time, the man who has seen it once has as much.”²⁶ He emphasizes that longer lasting happiness does not exist as “any moment only has what is present; past pleasure is gone and done with” and, by inference, future pleasure has not yet come.²⁷ For Plotinus, “One ought not really to

talk about 'longer' at all, because it means reckoning that which does not exist any longer with that which does. But as regards well-being it has a boundary and limit and is always the same."²⁸ The boundary of well-being is an unqualified noetic vision which is not increased with more time. Insofar as one would measure the complete or absolute by an infinite sequence of partiality, an unlimited amount of time would still only be an always-on-the-way-to-being, a sort of promissory note never to be repaid which never quite grasps the object of its desire. In other words, more time, regardless of its length, would be of no more worth than the fullness of the unextended present.²⁹

Plotinus's understanding of the levels of the soul, i.e., the lower soul, the rational soul and the intellectual soul, the last of which remains "undescended" or above at the hypostasis of Intellect, is also integral for understanding the value of the present moment, particularly with regard to its comportment toward death.³⁰ Overall, regardless of the goings-on of the body-soul composite or even the consciousness of rationality, the soul that remains above is only disinterestedly aware of the world of process below.³¹ In noetic contemplation, then, the soul is ultimately identical with the divine Intellect, thinking its contents as itself, becoming a god who patiently awaits unification with the One, a state that Plotinus reportedly achieved four times.³² This new vantage point, where "each one of us is an intelligible universe,"³³ helps reinforce the soul's superiority to the world of process, corporeality and finitude.³⁴ The soul at this level transcends mortal life, recognizing that a part of itself is untouched and unscathed by the imperfection and misfortunes of temporal life. In other words, the Plotinian doctrine of the undescended soul, arguing that the reality/being/actuality of the soul abides or remains in the transcendent realm of Intellect, suggests that the soul's desire for absolute being is already sated and is eternally at rest in the present moment. Due to this we discover that all temporal strivings of the soul, i.e., the soul's restless longing to obtain absolute being and its corresponding projects in time, are merely futile and, perhaps, pitiful images of what it already unknowingly possessed in its noetic life. As such the soul is compelled to distance itself from its imperfect striving and become aware of the god, the intellect, that constitutes its being and transcendence. This is the opportunity that the present moment allots to us, i.e., the recognition that we are already eternally embraced by absolute being and reality regardless of our corporeal finitude.

Ultimately, this concept of achieving well-being and happiness via noetic contemplation and, eventually, unity with the One, brings Plotinus to insist that his followers don the philosopher's cloak, devoting themselves to quiet contemplation "in the flight of the alone to the Alone,"³⁵ awaiting the grace of the One as one would wait for a sunrise.³⁶ For Plotinus, the true sage will escape this temporal world, enacting his well being in coming to think and therein reunite with absolute, active, eternal life available to us in the reality of the present moment.

III. PROCLUS AND THE GOOD OF TEMPORAL LIFE

Setting aside the first three of the four characteristics of Hadot's thesis regarding the value of the present moment, the remainder of this essay focuses on Proclus's fundamentally contrasting way of life from the one encouraged by Plotinian philosophy. To begin, it should be immediately noted that Neoplatonism is not a monolithic school whereby all adherents followed Plotinus in positing the contemplative life as the height of human happiness. Proclus's position on the well-being of the soul and its relationship to the present moment, in particular, suggests a deeply different comportment to temporality than that taken by Plotinus and, as such, a profoundly divergent way of life. In opposition to Plotinus, Proclus argued that the soul has fully descended,³⁷ and therein definitively rejects the idea that the soul's well-being would reside in the *transcendent* life of Intellect, i.e., in eternity. As Proclus rhetorically wonders: "But if, whenever what is best in us is perfect, the whole of us is also happy, what is to prevent us all being happy people right now presuming that our highest part is always in intellectual activity and always close to things divine?"³⁸ Put otherwise, if the superior life of soul were absolutely in the Intellect, we would be absolutely happy insofar as the veracity of such a life would saturate our existence and would be self-evident therein. Since such self-evident happiness eludes the soul, Proclus argues that there must be some other good for the human soul, some other form of happiness than noetic contemplation.

To be sure, Proclus's own account of the possible good of the present moment in time rather than outside it begins by first recalling the Neoplatonic doctrine of *sympatheia* where all participatory beings from the first, i.e., Being, to the last, i.e., particular bodies, partake in the kinship or likeness that constitutes the possibility of communion, or contact with the originative cause of all things, the One or the Good. As Proclus argues in the *Elements of Theology* §129, "The divine character penetrates even to the last terms of the participant series, but always through the mediation of terms akin to itself." In short, then, since the procession of being moves from like to like,³⁹ souls, regardless of their full descent (their not abiding or remaining in Intellect), are not entirely lost insofar as "the divine does not stand aloof from anything, but is present for all things alike."⁴⁰ This connection between first things and last things, for Proclus, is constituted by that which is prior to or before Intellect, i.e., *pronoia*, the providence or processive power of the One/Good that constitutes the unity and benefice bestowed on all things, a good found even at the level of the corporeal.

In short, all things are graced by providence and, therein, despite corporeality and death, the human soul at all levels of its existence (be it intellectual, rational or corporeal respectively) bears within it the possibility of a unified and boniform life. Now relating this providential activity to Proclus's account of the soul's temporality and its own well-being, we should first stress the soul's place as the *intermediary* between the eternal and the temporal. Proclus sees the soul as the

link of likeness between these two disparate forms of life—the eternal life of Being and the temporal life of Becoming. Strikingly, the soul for Proclus is eternal in one respect but temporal in another. As he defines in §191, the soul is that which has an “eternal existence but a temporal activity”⁴¹ or, again, in his *On Providence*, the soul’s “substance is stable and better than becoming,” but has “an activity that is *always* becoming.”⁴² Accordingly, then, soul, by virtue of its *being*, is like its cause, imitating eternal nature in its immortality, self-movement and self-constitution. Nevertheless, despite this *being*, the immortal/self-constituted soul has its own unique *life* or activity that “proceed[s] to generate those things which it is capable of producing, imitating in its turn the originaive principle of the universe.”⁴³ In other words, like its proximate and originaive causes, the Intellect and the Good, the soul too will become a cause, creating effects that resemble itself but, insofar as the soul is distinct from the Intellect, it will produce, create and constitute its good in living a temporal rather than eternal life.

For Proclus, the life or activity of the soul must be distinct from its being as otherwise there would be nothing preventing the soul from being Intellect itself, whose being and activity are, indeed, identical.⁴⁴ In other words, unlike Plotinus, the soul’s life or activity will belong not to eternity but, rather, to the unfolding of its being in becoming, an unfolding that marks the soul as that which divides what is simple, circling or dancing around the Intellect rather than becoming one with Intellect. As he writes at *in Parm.*, 808.1–17:

Soul has not been granted thoughts that are established on the level of eternity, but she aims at grasping the full actuality of Intellect; and in her striving for this perfection and for the form of comprehension that belongs to that one and simple being she circles around Intellect as in a dance, and as she shifts her attention from point to point, she divides the undivided mass of Forms, looking separately at the Form of Beauty, and separately at the Form of Justice, and separately at each of the others, thinking them individually and not together. (trans. Morrow and Dillon)⁴⁵

As that which divides or contemplates being in succession, the vital part of the soul’s good will be diffused and extended in temporal processes, in such acts as discursive rational thought or, more practically, activities that bear witness to the soul’s connective life, as that which is eternal in one sense and temporal in another. In short, the soul’s unique being and life reveals the connection, the sympathy, extending itself to all things and in doing so reveals the soul as eternal, as neither subject to the “was” nor to the “will be.” Nonetheless, the soul also shows itself as connected to and living in all the parts of time, be it past, present or future. Put otherwise, the soul in its temporal acts reveals itself as the *always already* erotic bridge between being and becoming, whose being is absolute but whose life is temporal. This eroticism is expressed in the *connective* power of the present moment, a connective power that is to be contrasted with those philosophers like

the Stoics, Epicureans or even Plotinus who isolate the present moment from the past or the future. In short, the soul both reveals the contact, the erotic psychic bind between temporality and eternity as well as the connection that the present always maintains with the past and the future.

To understand this unique conception of the value of the present moment and its connective power, it should be understood that for Proclus the past and the future, insofar as they are parts of time, participate in being and, as such, are real. In other words, as the unfolding of Eternity, each part of time is an emanation from reality, expressing in its movement the beauty of absolutely simple being, wherein the past, present and future are bound together in an infinitely repeatable circle.⁴⁶ Notably, Proclus suggestively describes this as the intellectual dance of time. He writes at *Ennead* III 28.1–14:

It seems to me that those who properly cognized time's nature thusly named it '*chronos*' which is sort of '*choro-noön*,' since they wished to say that time is like intellect dancing. Perhaps they shortened the name to '*chronos*' as a disguise. Or perhaps it was because it is simultaneously stable and dancing, remaining stable by means of one aspect of itself, but dancing by means of another aspect (as if time has a half that is intellect and a half that is dedicated to dancing).⁴⁷ (trans. Baltzly)

In short, time and all its parts are erotic images of eternity, each constituting a kind of reality despite not fully or absolutely being but instead becoming. For Proclus, the present moment is the "connective" principle of time while the "was" indicates the "perfective" order of time and the "will be" the "revelatory" order of time,⁴⁸ and, as such, time is not something that needs to be escaped, as reality and the good are present to it. Rather, one must comport oneself to the reality of time seeing it not as a mechanistic, deterministic force empty of all being, whereby things are simply haphazardly pushed along. Time, like Eternity, is a providential gift, a good. As such, the individual soul is charged with revealing, in the connective present, the unified life of the world of Becoming, the connection between what "was" and what "will be" as moving or unfolding images of Eternity. While discussing how Time is "in constant community of existence with the being of the model," i.e., how Time absolutely is what it is in its lived dynamism, Proclus expands in his *Commentary on the Parmenides* 1230.1–19 on the divisions of time and how those entities like soul, which participate in time, reveal the infinite in the extension and subsistence of the present moment.

There should be no cause for astonishment if, in taking the three divisions of time, after mentioning being and having come to be and being about to be, he has added also coming to be; for this signifies continuance in procession and subsistence, not just simple existence, as do the verb to be and being, and it is for this reason that he has added in this verb also as being proper

to those things which participate in time. And perhaps also the expression “what already is” means to him that which is seen prior to all motion in the present moment as imaging what is in the eternal; whereas “coming to be” signifies that which is extended along the infinity of time. For the eternal is all together at all points in both the partlessness and the infinity of eternity because eternity remains in the same state in its infinity, whereas that which partakes in time is always in the present instance, but it comes to be according to the infinity of time; wherefore time is in one respect partless and in another respect infinite.⁴⁹ (trans. Morrow and Dillon)

Overall, for Proclus, individual souls participating in time must do the work of ordering themselves in accord with the eternal and absolutely unchanging cyclical movements of time, taking the cosmos as a paradigm for the never-ending “dance” that constitutes their lot.⁵⁰ In this, the soul makes manifest the erotic bond gracing all of reality in the *connective present* that holds within it the past and the future rather than the singular and narrow reality of the isolated present moment constitutive of the more Hellenistic and Plotinian view of the “now.” In other words, unlike the Epicurean and Stoic affirmation of the present in its corporeal priority or Plotinus whose divine soul ascends to the Intellect in the singularity/simplicity of the present, Proclus’s divine soul ascends by doing the work of revealing the intellectual dance of time itself and the connective power that constitutes the present moment, a connection that reveals the providence gracing the temporal life of that which was, is and will be as opposed to simply reserving the soul’s flourishing to the being of right now.

Moreover, for Proclus, the soul’s connective and, therein, providential activity can be extended to that which is moved externally, i.e., the sensible body or lives so entrenched with the corporeal that they no longer see the providence of their being, the connection between one moment and another, the providence of the good constituting both our past and the future that has yet to come. For Proclus, when a soul willingly extends itself to all that is below it in the realm of sensible becoming, to all that fails fully to be, such souls resemble the Good that extends to all things, becoming, as Proclus insists, “providers of the good for others.”⁵¹ According to Proclus, such providential activities that reveal the connection between the eternal and the temporal are the accomplishments of *heroes* who have the uncanny ability to bear, as Diotima insisted in the *Symposium*,⁵² the divine in all that was, is and will be. As “souls on high,” these individuals enact the love for both superior and inferior realities, and, as such, evidence the beauty of erotic activity, of temporal connection and continuity.⁵³ Due to their erotic nature, divine souls who recognize the connective/providential movement of time link the two worlds of being and becoming, the intellectual and the sensible and, as such, do the work that constitutes the flourishing of the human soul. These connective/divine souls⁵⁴ become paradigms for the value of the striving, the seeking, the



vital wanting of the good, the beautiful and the true that always seeks to move, to progress towards being, because souls, as temporal, can *always* progress, *always* stretch out toward the good that both was, is and will be.⁵⁵ To be sure, for Proclus, in the present moment souls are not absolutely united with the object of their longing, absolute being; they can only reach for it, extending themselves from what “was” into what “will be,” showing in such choreography the strange and beautiful lot of soul, a lot not to be escaped but to be lived in its providential propriety.

In conclusion, the Procline understanding of the value of the present moment is not as Plotinus would have liked, the sating of the soul’s desire by uniting it with the eternal outside of time. Rather, more in tune with the Hellenistic existential/Nietzschean “yes” to the temporal and corporeal world that Hadot described, Proclus affirms with resounding clarity the value of the erotic soul in its vital temporality, in its connective capacity between seemingly disparate terms, the eternal and the temporal, the was and the will be, showing that the parts of time are unified in the good, the actuality of our temporal lives. Overall, our temporal lives bear witness to the beauty and good of the soul’s longing, its lived desire or, in more Procline terms, its celebratory dancing that heralds the value of the divine both there and here, right now and for always.

NOTES


1. Hadot, “‘Only the Present Is Our Happiness’: The Value of the Present Instant in Goethe and Ancient Philosophy,” in *Philosophy as a Way of Life* (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell Publishing, 1995), 217–37.
2. For the purposes of this paper, we shall focus on the ethical implications of living in the present moment. As such, we shall pass over the historical debates concerning the reality of the present moment and questions regarding whether this reality is divided and consists of parts, namely, the past, present and future, and whether these are further divisible. For reference though we should know that the Epicureans would argue that time can only be divided into minima or concrete indivisible elements or moments, while the Stoic, in keeping with their basic philosophical worldview, would argue that time is infinitely divisible. The Neoplatonists on the whole would argue for time as the life of the soul in contrast to the life of the Intellect. For a thorough discussion of these issues, see R. Sorabji, *Time, Creation and the Continuum: Theories in Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983).
3. Hadot, “‘Only the Present,’” 223. Cf. Seneca, *Letters to Lucilius* 74, 27: “The life of a foolish man is fearful and unpleasant; it is swept totally away into the future.”
4. Hadot, “‘Only the Present,’” 227.
5. Ibid., 224.
6. Ibid., 228, quoting Plutarch, *On Common Conceptions* 8, 1062a. Hadot further clarifies the present moment for the Stoic, arguing that it “lacks nothing, just as a circle, whether large or small, remains a circle. The same is true of a propitious or opportune

moment of favorable opportunity: it is an instant, the perfection of which depends not on its duration, but rather on its quality, and the harmony which exists between one's exterior situation and the possibilities that one has. Happiness is nothing more nor less than that instant in which man is wholly in accord with nature." Hadot further cites Cicero, *de finibus*, 3, 14, 45, *Tusc.* 1.39.94 and Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations* 4.50.

7. Hadot, "Only the Present," 229, draws on Seneca, *On Benefits*, 7, 3, 3 and Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*, 6, 37 to make this point: "The present instant is fleeting—Marcus insists strongly on this point—but even within this flash, as Seneca says, 'we can proclaim along with God: "all this belongs to me."' The instant is our only point of contact with reality, yet it offers us the whole of reality; precisely because it is a passage and a metamorphosis, it allows us to participate in the overall movement of the event of the world, and the reality of the world's coming-to-be."
8. Hadot, "Only the Present," 225, quoting from M. Gigante, *Richerche Filodemee* (Naples 1983), 181, 215–6. 
9. See *De Rerum Natura*, III 2.972–7. For more information on the relationship between ancient theories of time and the fear of death, see Sorabji, *Time, Creation and the Continuum*, 174–80.
10. Hadot, "Only the Present," 235, quoting from Friedrich Nietzsche, *Posthumous Fragments*, Ende 1886–Frühjahr 1887, 7 [38] in *Friedrich Nietzsche, Samtliche Werke*, ed. G. Colli and M. Montinari, 15 vols. (Berlin 1960), vol. 12, pp. 307–8. 
11. See *Theaetetus* 175e–176b. Cf. *Phaedrus* 237a–b, *Symposium* 220d, *Phaedo* 117c. For further references to the familiar Platonic concept of *homoiōsis theō* (ὁμοίωσις θεῷ), see also *Republic* 613b1 and *Timaeus* 90d.
12. Plato, *Timaeus* 37d.
13. See Sorabji, *Time, Creation and the Continuum*, 138, who notes the influence of Philo, *de Mut. Nom.* 47, 267. It is important to clarify here that while time will be the life of the soul, eternity the life of Intellect, neither of these two terms will be applicable to the One. This, of course, is despite the fact that the One is sometimes described as 'everlasting' or 'always.'
14. *Enneads*, III. 7 [45] 3. 12–15. The edition and translation used in the following essay comes from A.-H. Armstrong, Plotinus, *Enneads*, Loeb Editions (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966–1988).
15. *Enneads*, III. 7 [45] 3. 15–23: ταῦτα πάντα ἰδὼν αἰῶνα εἶδεν ἰδὼν ζωὴν μένουσαν ἐν τῷ αὐτῷ αἰεὶ παρὸν τὸ πᾶν ἔχουσαν, ἀλλ' οὐ νῦν μὲν τόδε, αὐθις δ' ἕτερον, ἀλλ' ἅμα τὰ πάντα, καὶ οὐ νῦν μὲν ἕτερα, αὐθις δ' ἕτερα, ἀλλὰ τέλος ἀμερές, οἷον ἐν σημείῳ ὁμοῦ πάντων ὄντων καὶ οὔποτε εἰς ῥύσιν προιόντων, ἀλλὰ μένοντος ἐν τῷ αὐτῷ ἐν αὐτῷ καὶ οὐ μὴ μεταβάλλοντος, ὄντος δ' ἐν τῷ παρόντι αἰεὶ, ὅτι οὐδὲν αὐτοῦ παρήλθεν οὐδ' αὖ γενήσεται, ἀλλὰ τοῦτο ὅπερ ἔστι, τοῦτο καὶ ὄντος.
16. *Enneads*, III. 7 [45] 11, 43–44.
17. *Enneads*, V I [10] 4, 15–21. For more information on the relation between the soul's life, activity, time and the world of coming-into-being, see D. Majumdar, *Plotinus on the Appearance of Time and the World of Sense* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Ltd,

- 2007), and A. Smith, "Eternity and Time," in *The Cambridge Companion to Plotinus*, ed. L. Gerson (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 16–216.
18. *Enneads*, I 5 [36] 7, 14–15: Ὅλως δὲ τοῦ χρόνου τὸ πλεον σκέδασιν βούλεται ἐνός τινος ἐν τῷ παρόντι ὄντος.
 19. See José Carlos Baracat, "Soul's Desire and the Origin of Time in the Philosophy of Plotinus," in *Literary, Philosophical, and Religious Studies in the Platonic Tradition*, ed. J. Phillips and J. Finamore (Sankt Augustin, 2013), 25–42.
 20. *Enneads*, I 4 [46] 6, 17–19. See L. Gerson, "Plotinus on Happiness," *Journal of Ancient Philosophy* 6(1) (2012).
 21. *Enneads*, I 5 [36] 2.10–15: Ἡ δ' ἔφεσις τοῦ ζῆν τὸ εἶναι ζητοῦσα τοῦ παρόντος ἂν εἴη, εἰ τὸ εἶναι ἐν τῷ παρόντι. Εἰ δὲ τὸ μέλλον καὶ τὸ ἐφεξῆς θέλοι, ὃ ἔχει θέλει καὶ ὃ ἐστίν, οὐχ ὃ παρελήλυθεν οὐδ' ὃ μέλλει, ἀλλ' ὃ ἥδη ἐστὶ τοῦτο εἶναι, οὐ τὸ εἰσαεῖ ζητοῦσα, ἀλλὰ τὸ παρὸν ἥδη εἶναι ἥδη.
 22. *Enneads*, I 5 [36] 7.11–12.
 23. *Enneads*, I 5 [36] 7.25–30.
 24. *Enneads*, I 5 [36] 7.8.
 25. *Enneads*, I 5 [36] 4.4. Cf. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, VII, 14. 1153b 10–12.
 26. *Enneads*, I 5 [36] 3.3–5: Εἰ μὲν γὰρ ἐν τῷ πλείονι τὸ ἀκριβέστερον εἶδε, πλεον ἂν τι ὁ χρόνος αὐτῷ εἰργάσατο· εἰ δὲ ὁμοίως διὰ παντὸς εἶδε, τὸ ἴσον καὶ ὁ ἅπαξ θεασάμενος ἔχει.
 27. *Enneads*, I 5 [36] 4.5–6.
 28. *Enneads*, I 5 [36] 6. 17–20: Τὸ δὲ πλεῖον ἴσον οὐχ ἅμα ἐστίν οὐδὲ δὴ πλεῖον ὅλως λεκτέον τὸ μηκέτι ὄν τῷ ὄντι συναριθμοῦντα. Τὸ δὲ τῆς εὐδαιμονίας ὅρον τε καὶ πέρας ἔχει καὶ ταῦτ' ὄν.
 29. Here it may also be interesting to note that Damascius argues against the idea that the present moment ever ceases, i.e., that since time is a flow of that which comes to be, it is pointless to try and measure the present moment from its beginning and end as such a point does not exist. Simpl. in *Phys.*, 179, 30–5.
 30. For the doctrine of the undescended soul, see *Enneads*, IV 8 [6] 8. 1–3. See also *Enneads* I 5 [36] 9. 23–26 where Plotinus even argues that the good man is happy or enjoying well-being even while asleep as the activity of the intellect is unhindered. See A. H. Armstrong, "Plotinus," in *The Cambridge History of Later Greek and Early Medieval Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), 195–268. For the classic arguments of the later Neoplatonic rejection of Plotinus's psychology, see Carlos Steel, *The Changing Self: A Study on the Soul in Later Neoplatonism* (Brussels: Paleis der Academien, 1978).
 31. See *Enneads*, I 4 [46] 4.6–19 and I 4 [46] 8.9–30. See also J. Dillon, "An Ethic for the Late Antique Sage," in *The Cambridge Companion to Plotinus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 315–35. Here Dillon famously imagines Plotinus's sage as one who would be indifferent to helping an old lady cross the street.
 32. Porphyry, *Vita Plotini*, 15–17.
 33. *Enneads*, III 4 [15] 3.22.

34. For Plotinus on death, see I 6 [1] 6.9–11, I 7 [54] 3.1–24 and III 2 [47] 15.20–63 where Plotinus echoes the Epicurean idea that ‘death is nothing to us’ or is “nothing terrible” insofar as the ‘lower man’ is merely the plaything of the Gods and as such we should, like the good Stoic, treat our corporeal lives as the performances of actors who may die but this is a mere temporary exit as actors “will, on later occasions, come in again to play.”
35. *Enneads*, VI 9 [9] 11.50.
36. *Enneads*, V 5 [32] 8.3–7: “So one should not chase after [unity with the One], but await quietly until it appears, preparing oneself to contemplate it, as the eye awaits the rising of the sun; and the sun rising over the horizon . . . gives itself to the eye to see.”
37. See Proclus, *Elements of Theology* (=ET) §211, where he writes: “Every particular soul, when it descends into the realm of generation, descends completely; it is not the case that there is a part of it that remains above and a part that descends.” This translation and all further translations from ET are from E. R. Dodds’s (1963) edition and translation. Cf. Iamblichus, *De anima* I 6 and I 7. See, further, Steel, *The Changing Self*, for the implications of this thesis for the later Neoplatonists.
38. Proclus, *Tim.*, III 334.10–14. (trans. Tarrant)
39. ET §§28, 29, and 32.
40. *In Tim.*, I 209.20–26
41. ET §191: Πᾶσα ψυχὴ μεθεκτὴ τὴν μὲν οὐσίαν αἰώνιον ἔχει, τὴν δὲ ἐνέργειαν κατὰ χρόνον. See further §192 and §55.
42. *De Prov.* 9. C. Steel (trans.), *Proclus: On Providence*, London: Duckworth/Ithaca, 2007.
43. ET §§25 and 27.
44. See ET §191, where Proclus argues, “Soul cannot have both eternal existence and act otherwise it would be undivided Being and intellectual; it would no longer be self-moved but unmoved. It cannot have both in time otherwise it would be a thing of process and not self-moved or constituted, its good would not be from itself.”
45. Διότι γὰρ ἐν αἰῶνι μόνον τὰς νοήσεις ἰδρυμένας οὐκ ἔλαχεν, ἐφίεται δὲ τὴν ἀθρόαν ἐνέργειαν τοῦ νοῦ περιλαβεῖν, ὀρεγομένη τῆς ἐν αὐτῷ τελειότητος καὶ τοῦ ἐνὸς ἐκείνου καὶ ἀπλοῦ τῆς νοήσεως εἶδους περιθεῖ τε αὐτὸν καὶ περιχορεύει κύκλῳ, καὶ ταῖς μεταβάσεσι τῶν ἐπιβολῶν διαιρεῖ τὸ ἀμέριστον τῶν εἰδῶν, καθορώσα μὲν τὸ αὐτόκαλον χωρὶς, καθορώσα δὲ τὸ αὐτοδίκαιον, καθορώσα δὲ καὶ ἕκαστον τῶν ἄλλων, καὶ καθ’ ἐν πάντα καὶ οὐχ’ ὁμοῦ πάντα νοοῦσα. *Proclus’ Commentary on Plato’s Parmenides*, trans. G. R. Morrow and J. Dillon (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1987). V. Cousin, ed., *Œuvres complètes de Proclus*, pt. 3 (Hildesheim: Olms, 1961).
46. See *Tim.*, 1226.35–40.
47. καὶ μοι δοκοῦσιν <οἱ> τὴν φύσιν αὐτοῦ ταύτην κατανενοηκότες οὕτως αὐτὸν ὀνομάσαι χρόνον, χορόν τινά τινα ἐθέλησαντες εἰπεῖν καὶ οἷον χορεύοντα νοῦν, συντεμνόντες δὲ τάχα μὲν δι’ ἐπικρυψιν χρόνον ὠνόμασαν, τάχα δὲ καὶ διότι μένων τε ἅμα καὶ χορεύων καὶ τῷ μὲν ἑαυτοῦ μένων, τῷ δὲ χορεύων, ὥσπερ ἐφ’ ἡμισείας ἐστὶ νοῦς καὶ χορευτικός (trans. D. Baltzly). *Proclus: Commentary on Plato’s Timaeus*, vol. V, book 4: Proclus on Time and the Stars

- (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013). *Procli Diadochi In Platonis Timaeum commentaria*, ed. E. Diehl (Amsterdam: Hakkert, 1965).
48. Proclus, in *Tim.* III 38. 12–27. See also in *Parm.*, 1235.10–1236.21. For more on the reality of the parts of time in Proclus, see A. Vargas, “Proclus on Time and the Units of Time” in *Proclus and his Legacy*, ed. D. Butorac and D. A. Layne (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2016), 83–93. For how the parts of time correspond to the lives of angels, daimons, and heroes, respectively, see E. Butler “Time and the Heroes,” *Walking the Worlds: A Biannual Journal of Polytheism and Spiritwork* 1(1) (Winter 2014): 23–44.
 49. θαυμαστόν δὲ ἔσται μηδὲν εἰ μὴν εἰς τοὺς τρεῖς χρόνους βλέπων, διὰ τοῦ εἶναι καὶ γεγονέναι καὶ μέλλειν, ἐπήνεγκε καὶ τὸ γίγνεσθαι· τοῦτο γὰρ σημαίνει τὴν ἐν τῷ προῖέναι καὶ ὑφίστασθαι παράτασιν, οὐκ αὐτὴν ψιλὴν τὴν ὑπαρξιν, ὥσπερ τὸ εἶναι καὶ τὸ ὄν, διὸ καὶ τοῦτο προσέθηκεν ἅτε οἰκείον τοῖς χρόνου μετεληχόσι. Τάχα δ’ ἂν καὶ τὸ μὲν ἤδη ὄν αὐτῷ σημαίνει τὸ πρὸ πάσης κινήσεως ἐν τῷ νῦν ὀρώμενον ὃν εἰκονιζόμενον τὸ ἐν τῷ αἰώνι· τὸ δὲ γιγνόμενον, τὸ κατὰ τὴν ἀπειρίαν τὴν χρονικὴν ἐκτεινόμενον. Τὸ μὲν γὰρ αἰώνιον πᾶν ὁμοῦ ἐστὶν ἔν τε τῷ ἀμέρει καὶ τῷ ἀπείρῳ τοῦ αἰῶνος, διότι μένει ὁ αἰὼν ἐν ταύτῳ [κατὰ] τὴν ἀπειρίαν, τὸ δὲ χρόνου μετέχον ἔστι μὲν αἰεὶ κατὰ τὸ νῦν, γίγνεται δὲ κατὰ τὸ ἄπειρον τοῦ χρόνου. διὸ καὶ ὁ χρόνος κατ’ ἄλλο ἐστὶν ἀμερὴς καὶ κατ’ ἄλλο ἀπειρος.
 50. Butler (“Time and the Heroes,” 27) describes this as a kind of divine temporality. While quoting from Proclus’s *Commentary on the Parmenides*, Butler writes: “The circuits of souls, their ‘dances’ around the intelligible, are clearly not the stuff of what we generally mean by time, but they are foundational for it. These circuits express a kind of spiritual motion. What is the motion that involves nothing external to the essence of something, nothing merely relative to it? We can think of the relations among a being’s intelligible attributes as such a motion, and primal time as such a measure. This motion forms a circle insofar as each of a being’s attributes can be inferred from the others, which is not the case for all souls, or at least not for all attributes of all souls. Divine souls qua divine, however, must have all of their attributes in this ‘circular’ fashion. For divine souls, as Proclus explains, ‘each point of its progress is both beginning and end, and is no less a beginning than an end’ (in *Parm.* 1226.37).”
 51. . §7.
 52. Plato, *Symposium* 206b.
 53. Proclus, *de malorum substantia*, §15.
 54. For the relationship between such divine, erotic souls and the Neoplatonic category of the hero, see D. Layne, “The Platonic Hero,” in *Proclus and His Legacy*, ed. D. Butorac and D. Layne (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2016), 53–68, as well as G. Shaw, *Theurgy and the Soul: The Neoplatonism of Iamblichus* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995), 132–3, and Butler, “Time and the Heroes.” We should keep in mind that Proclus advances three levels of participated souls, where the first seems to parallel our “great individual” who can ascend and descend the ladder: (1) Divine souls, who are gods upon the psychic level (as they do not transcend their station as souls); (2) intellectual souls, who participate in intellectual attendance and who are perpetually attendant upon gods and (3) the average soul, who sometimes is and sometimes is

not attendant upon the gods (*ET* §185). See also §201 which argues that all divine souls have a threefold activity in their capacity as souls, as recipients of divine intelligence and as that which is derived from the gods: "As gods they exercise providence towards the universe, in virtue of their intellectual life they know all things, and in virtue of the self-movement proper to their being they impart motion to bodies."

55. Sorabji (*Time, Creation and the Continuum*, 150) notes this similar experience of time in the Christian philosopher Gregory of Nyssa. Sorabji's exegesis and quotations of Gregory are worthwhile enough to reproduce here: "[Gregory] viewed mystical experience of God, not as something static, but as a perpetual discovery. Since the distance between the soul and God is infinite, there will always be more to understand, and the more we understand, the more we recognize that God is incomprehensible. But we will never feel satiety, because we can always progress. Thus he describes the soul as: 'conforming itself to that which is always being apprehended and discovered.' Again, [Gregory] describes the beatific vision as follows: 'Then, when the soul has partaken of as many beautiful things as it has room for, the Word draws it afresh, as if it had not yet partaken in the beautiful things, drawing it to share in the supreme beauty. Thus its desire is increased in proportion as it progresses towards that which is always shining forth, and because of the excess of good things which are all the time being discovered in that which is supreme, the soul seems to be touching the ascent for the first time'" (*On the Soul and Resurrection* PG46 and *On the Song of Songs* 5, PG44).