

2. Neo-Platonism

Built on the framework of general platonic thinking, Neo-Platonism was developed in the second century along the lines of teaching of Ammonius Saccas and brought to fulfillment by Plotinus (205-270) and his star pupil, Prophyry (233-304). (AD) It involved platonic symbolism with cross-cultural ideas that are both gnostic and eastern in orientation. Christians defining their god had to contend with it and their delineations of the qualities of the Divine Being necessarily had to be distinct from the Neo-platonic ideal. We may summarize it in a few important points:

a. God

God is an emanating source of all things. He is indefinable, unalterable and impersonal. He does not change and is not changed by the virtue of the emanations. He is a self-continuing and self-sustaining source. He may not be truly known although vague concepts of his existence may be sensed in the mystical ideal. He is utterly detached from us and our world and cares mighty little about either. God is an ephemeral ideal in this philosophy and therefore is completely apart from the things that bug us or perplex us. He is totally "out of it" and the aim of the religious implications is to get us out of it as well.

b. Mind

Mind is the second force in the world after God and it corresponds to Plato's forms in a very rough sense. Mind reflects the emanations and by mind one may grip bits of them.. Mind in us is enormously limited by our essentially physical being and our attachment to the things about us. It is present but greatly shielded from effective service by a host of stuff which if we could loosen from our beings would allow us to be subject to mind in a meaningful way.

c. Soul

Soul is the third force. It is the heart or the nature of the universe. There is a sense in which one, as a person, is a division of this great "world-soul". We are cut out of "soul-cloth" so to speak. But lest this make us feel too good about ourselves or our lot, soul exists at two levels:

(1) higher soul..a more transcendent form corresponding to mind whereby the party involved is able to perceive some of the concepts of mind...

(2) lower soul...a more immediate form approximating our nature and more occupied with stuff such as dinner, promotions, etc.

The higher aspects of soul are seen in our mind--vaguely and the lower aspects are seen in the body...very easily. The individual soul is a "piece" of the oversoul and so marked with these same properties. We easily give too much attention to the lower soul.