

The Late Empire (193-476) and Plotinus
Background & Study Questions
Hum 110, Reed College
Prof. Laura Leibman

Timeline: (all AD/CE)

45-64 Paul's Ministry
117 Death of Tacitus and Trajan; Roman empire at its Greatest extent
123 Apuleius Born
140 Death of Juvenal
150-60 *The Golden Ass* written-----
203 Perpetua's Martyrdom
204-52 Persecution of Christians
212 Roman citizenship for all free inhabitants of the empire
251 Gothic invasions of Empire begin
270 Plotinus Dies
312 Conversion of Constantine
330 Constantine makes Byzantium capital of empire
354 Augustine Born
397-99 Augustine's *Confessions* written
410 Rome sacked by Alaric the Goth
476 End of Roman empire in the west

1. "The third century was a dramatic moment in the life of Rome, as the very survival of the Empire seemed in doubt. It faced recurring civil wars, which decimated the ruling classes, impoverished the economic system in the regions that were battlegrounds, and weakened the frontier defenses with which the pressures of the barbarians were to be resisted. It also faced immense internal changes--social, institutional, and religious--which brought into question the very foundations of the state" (Gian Biagio Conte, *Latin Literature: A History* 593)

In her lecture on Perpetua, Nathalia suggested that Christianity was threatening to the Roman empire because it challenged the foundations of the Empire by privatizing religion. Does Plotinus' philosophy challenge or uphold the "foundations of the state"? What is Plotinus' position on Christians?

2. "In the very midst of the turmoil of the third century AD, there came a renewal which marked teaching in the Platonic tradition, a development which was to be a decisive factor in the transfer of philosophical thought from Classical to European culture. The man who instigated this renewal was Plotinus, whom historians of philosophy today regard as the founder of a new kind of philosophical movement--Neo-Platonism. This reputation is not without a certain irony in view of the fact that Plotinus himself certainly had no intention of establishing anything like a distinct new school." (Albrecht Dihle, *Greek and Latin Literature of the Roman Empire* 370).

What parallels do you see between Plotinus' philosophy and Plato's? What differences do you note? You may want to compare their views on subjects such as beauty, the soul, women, the physical world, the good, and the divine.