RESEARCH ARTICLE

Self and selfishness in Late Antiquity: Plotinus on *oikeiōsis*

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Abstract

Plotinus' understanding of self is formulated largely in dialogue with the Stoics. In early works he categorically rejects the Stoic notion of the *hēgemonikon* ('leading part' or 'commanding faculty') of the soul. In this paper, I show how, in light of a general dissatisfaction with the Stoic account of self articulated in his early work, Plotinus deals with the Stoic notion of *oikeiōsis* ('appropriation'). I argue that Plotinus' understanding of *oikeiōsis* develops across the period during which he uses it. In his middle writings, Plotinus engages with Stoic *oikeiōsis* by exploring how it functions in contexts related to selfhood. In his later writings, he shows, on the one hand, how the concept of *oikeiōsis* can be Platonized, such as to account for the relation of the self to the Good, and, on the other, how the Stoic understanding of *oikeiōsis* is untenable for many of the same reasons that he rejects the Stoic notion of the *hēgemonikon*. Ultimately, Plotinus thinks that Stoic understandings of the *hēgemonikon* and *oikeiōsis* are untenable because they lead to something that could be characterized as 'selfishness'.

Keywords: Plotinus; Neoplatonism; Stoicism; *oikeiōsis*; soul; self

I. Introduction

No contemporary scholar would dare categorize Plotinus, who is now regarded as the 'founder' of Neoplatonism, as a Stoic, but this is precisely what Simplicius, the sixth-century Neoplatonic commentator of Aristotle, seems to have done.[1] Plotinus was profoundly indebted to Stoic thought,[2] but he was also consistently critical of it. It was not only obvious metaphysical differences between Platonism and Stoicism that led Plotinus to grapple with Stoicism.[3] In many places he subjects particular Stoic doctrines to explicit and sustained scrutiny, for example, his discussion of Stoic notions of total mixture (*Enneads*

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[1] Simplicius, *in Cat.* 306.13–14 Kalbfleisch (1907): Ἐκ δὲ τούτων συνακτέον ὅτι Πλωτῖνος καὶ οἱ ἄλλοι οἱ ἀπὸ τῆς τῶν Στωικῶν συνηθείας. See the translation in Gaskin (2014) 39. The comment is part of an extended polemic against Plotinus' understanding of Aristotle's categories.

[2] Porphyry (*Life of Plotinus* 14.4–5) says of Plotinus' writings that they are 'full of concealed Stoic and Peripatetic doctrines'. See Graeser (1972) and Eliasson (2008). See also Remes (2011), particularly chapter 4, 'Sculpting your self: self-determination, self-control and self-constitution' 179–212, and Coope (2020) 47–94.

[3] For a useful outline of fundamental differences between Stoicism and Plotinus' thought, see Merlan (1967) 129–32.

II.7 (37)),[4] or his rejection of a corporealist understanding of soul (IV.7 (2).2–8[3]). Yet Plotinus' interactions with Stoic thought are often much more subtle.

Plotinus' view of self is to a large extent articulated through his engagement with Stoic psychological and ethical thought.[5] Crucially, he rejects outright the Stoic understanding of the *hēgemonikon* ('leading part') of the soul.[6] This rejection, I suggest, forms the foundation of his view of Stoic thought on the self. But Plotinus is less clear on what to think about Stoic notions of *oikeiōsis* ('appropriation'). In fact, having ignored the concept in his early work, he begins to explore it in his middle works. He seems to arrive at something of a mature position on *oikeiōsis* in his later work. This paper is dedicated to unravelling Plotinus' (the pun is almost unavoidable) appropriation of Stoic *oikeiōsis*. I argue that he provides nuanced discussions of *oikeiōsis* precisely because he sees great value in this notion. However, Plotinus struggles to avoid what he perceives to be the pitfalls of Stoic notions of self, while forging a version of *oikeiōsis* adequate to his own Platonic metaphysics. This paper examines how Plotinus received, criticized and transformed the Stoic notion of *oikeiōsis*.[7]

II. Background

i. Plotinus on the Stoic hēgemonikon and the self

The Stoics asserted that the highest part of the soul is the *hēgemonikon*.[8] It represents a 'core' of self, which can be distinguished from other parts of the self that are less truly one's own.[9] Viewing the self as multilayered and characterized by no such identifiable centre, Plotinus vehemently rejects the Stoic understanding of the *hēgemonikon*.[10] In IV.2 (4).2[11] he writes, 'To say that the ruling principle [*hēgemonoun*] is a part of the soul is to speak without critical reflection: for how will they [i.e. the Stoics] divide the soul, and say that one part is different from another, and one is the ruling principle [*hēgemonoun*]?' (IV.2 (4).2.12–16). He proceeds to mount a number of arguments, largely concerned with the nature of perception, to show why he thinks the Stoic notion of the 'ruling part' does not work. Plotinus concludes with an explicit rejection of the idea that the soul is to be understood as located at a 'centre' (*kentron*), writing, 'If the soul was altogether one, in the sense of being altogether indivisible and a self-contained unity, and altogether escaped from multiplicity and divisibility, then nothing which soul took hold upon would ever be ensouled as a whole: but soul would set itself, so to speak, at the centre [*kentron*] of each living being and leave the whole mass of it as soulless' (IV.2 (4).2.35–39). Plotinus does

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[4] For the text of Plotinus' *Enneads* see Henry and Schwyzer (1964–1982). For an analysis of Plotinus' rejection of Stoic total mixture in an earlier writing see Chiaradonna (2006).

[5] Although there is no single Greek term that corresponds to the English 'self', the concept has become widely thematized in research on ancient Greek thought. See for example Sorabji (2006), Gill (2006), Reydams-Schils (2005) and Remes and Sihvola (2008). On Plotinus' understanding of self, see Remes (2011), Aubry (2008) and Mortley (2013). On the relation between Stoic notions of self and Plotinus see in particular Remes (2011) 99–110.

[6] This important point has been overlooked in studies of Plotinus on the self. See both Remes (2011) and Mortley (2013).

[7] If, given the current state of scholarship on Plotinus, it is now rare to see him referred to as a 'syncretist', the critical element in his thought still deserves more attention than it has received. This paper will contribute to the development of a subtler picture of Plotinus' methods of dealing with the thought of other philosophers.

[8] Aetius 4.21.1–4 (*SVF* 2.836) in Long and Sedley (1987) 1.315–16, 2.314.

[9] See Reydams-Schils (2005) 15: 'On the level of Stoic *theory*, the "self" is the ruling principle in a human soul, the so called *hēgemonikon*, or the mind, which represents a rational and unified consciousness'. Reydams-Schils proceeds to assert that the Stoic model of soul is the 'most unified soul model in ancient thought' (16). Interestingly, in his criticisms of Stoic thought, Plotinus asserts precisely the contrary.

[10] Already Dodds talked about the Plotinian self in terms of a spotlight that moves around. See Dodds (1960) 1–7 particularly 6.

[11] This *Ennead* is labelled IV.1 (2) in Armstrong's translation.

sometimes use language that suggests the existence of different parts of the soul, but he is more often concerned with providing arguments for the unity of soul. I suggest that we should avoid as much as possible talking about a 'centre' or 'core' of the self in Plotinus' thought.[12]

Plotinus' ambiguity concerning Stoic *oikeiōsis* can be better understood against the background of his rejection of the Stoic notion of the *hēgemonikon*. Although attracted to the powerful altruism in the Stoic model, Plotinus ultimately cannot endorse the Stoic position on *oikeiōsis* because he does not accept the Stoic account of the nature of the self centred around a *hēgemonikon*. Stoic *oikeiōsis* takes for granted a clearly defined centre around which one builds relations. In the absence of such a centre, the Stoic model breaks down.

ii. Plotinus' reading of Plato's oikeion

Plotinus' encounter with the Stoic theory of *oikeiōsis* is entangled with his reception of Plato's discussions of the *oikeion* (that which is 'proper', 'appropriate' or 'fitting') in the *Lysis*, the *Symposium* and the *Republic*. Plotinus finds in the Stoic notion of *oikeiōsis* a sophisticated theory that he brings to bear on his reading of Plato.

In the *Lysis*, Socrates questions two youths, Lysis and Menexenus, about friendship. Towards the end of the dialogue he asks them:

> 'And if one person desires another, my boys, or loves him passionately (*eran*), he would not desire him or love him passionately or as a friend (*philein*) unless he somehow belonged [was *oikeios*] to his beloved either in his soul or in some characteristic, habit, or aspect of his soul'.
>
> 'Certainly', said Menexenus, but Lysis was silent.
>
> 'All right', I [Socrates] said, 'what belongs to us by nature (*to … phusei oikeion*) has shown itself to us as something we must love'. (222a; tr. Lombardo in Cooper (1997))

As is typical of early Platonic dialogues, the reader does not know if Plato himself endorses this argument or not.[13] It is left to the reader to evaluate the question concerning the role of the *oikeion* in love and friendship.

The *Symposium* provides further indications of Plato's view on a similar theme. The *oikeion* arises in the speeches of both Aristophanes and Agathon, to which Diotima responds.[14] Although she does not reject the possibility that the *oikeion* plays some role in love, Diotima accounts for love as the offspring of Poros (Plenty) and Penia (Poverty). She indicates that love cannot *simply* be accounted for in terms of the *oikeion*. Love involves desire for that which one lacks; that is, for that which does not 'belong' to one. If indeed the *oikeion* does play a role in love, then it certainly does not provide an exhaustive account of it.

The *oikeion* appears at the end of *Republic* book 1, returns in book 3, plays an important role in book 4 and continues to echo in book 10. It is decisive in the account of justice developed in the *Republic*.[15] As Charlotte Murgier has pointed out, the central importance of the *oikeion* in the *Republic* is already in place by the end of book 1.[16] His initial account of

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[12] Remes talks of a 'core' with reference to the Plotinian self (for example, Remes (2011) 105, 111, 120). If there is a 'centre' of the Plotinian self, it is only provisional, leading ultimately beyond the self. Nevertheless, Remes' account of Plotinus' thought on self is largely consistent with that which I present here.

[13] Many commentators suggest that Plato rejects the final argument. However, Penner and Rowe (2005) 212 have suggested that Socrates' account of friendship in the *Lysis* is ultimately self-interested. See also Nichols (2009).

[14] See Corrigan and Glazov-Corrigan (2004) 135–36.

[15] See Murgier (2017).

[16] Murgier (2017) 74 says of the final argument in book 1 that 'it brings out the conceptual connection between the notions of *oikeion*, *aretē* and *ergon*—a connection that turns out to be crucial for the rest of the work'.

justice refuted, Thrasymachus turns his argument around, claiming that injustice serves one better than justice. Justice, he complains, makes one lose one's belongings (*oikeia*); so, in his view, it is injustice that serves better to protect the self (344c4–6). Socrates undermines Thrasymachus' argument by showing via analogy that what truly 'belongs' to one is the proper function of the soul in virtue:

Soc.:   And could eyes perform their function well if they lacked their peculiar virtue (*tēn hautōn oikeian aretēn*)[17] and had the vice instead?

Thras.:   How could they, for don't you mean if they had blindness instead of sight?

Soc.:   Whatever their virtue is, for I'm not now asking about that but about whether anything that has a function performs it well by means of its own peculiar virtue (*tēi oikeiai aretēi*) and badly by means of its vice? (353c)

This argument forms the basis for the further development of the notion of justice in book 4.

Plato addresses the *oikeion* in his discussion of the education of the guardians in books 2 and 3 of the *Republic*. Education in music and poetry has a place in the curriculum of the guardians insofar as it grounds our feeling of 'kinship' for the good:

Aren't these the reasons, Glaucon, that education in music and poetry is most important? First, because rhythm and harmony permeate the inner part of the soul more than anything else, affecting it most strongly and bringing it grace, so that if someone is properly educated in music and poetry, it makes him graceful, but if not, the opposite. Second, because anyone who has been properly educated in music and poetry will sense it acutely when something has been omitted from a thing and when it hasn't been finely crafted or finely made by nature. And since he has the right distastes, he'll praise fine things, be pleased by them, receive them into his soul, and being nurtured by them, become fine and good. He'll rightly object to what is shameful, hating it while he's still young and unable to grasp the reason (*logos*), but, having been educated in this way, he will welcome the reason when it comes and recognize it easily because of its kinship (*oikeiōtēs*) with himself. (401d5–402a4; tr. Grube revised by Reeve in Cooper (1997))

Here Plato, sounding almost Stoic, gives *oikeiōsis* an unambiguously positive role (unlike in the *Lysis*). However, the suggestion that aesthetic appreciation serves as a propaedeutic to rational ethics proper is foreign to Stoic thought.[18]

The *oikeion* figures prominently in the concept of justice elaborated in *Republic* book 4. Plato coins the term *oikeiopragia* ('doing one's own': 434c) to capture the way that parts of a whole relate to one another so as to promote the Good.[19] Overall, the *Republic*, in contrast to the *Lysis* and the *Symposium*, gives a positive role to the *oikeion*. However, when in book 4 Plato develops the *oikeion* in justice in terms of 'doing one's own' and contrasts it with 'meddling' (*polupragmonein*), he generates a context very different from that surrounding Stoic *oikeiōsis*. This is reflected in contrasting approaches to political and social theory: where Plato's asks, 'How do we make a whole function better?' the Stoics ask, 'How do wholes emerge from dispersed elements?'

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[17] Murgier points out that the notion of *oikeion* here is non-redundant; that is, it does not simply mean the same as the genitive.

[18] With reference to this very passage, Brennan (2007) 159–62 argues that the account of the *oikeion* in the *Republic* influenced the Stoic account of *oikeiōsis*. He develops these ideas further in Brennan (2012) 115–18.

[19] This positive account of justice starts at 433a and is elaborated in terms of *ta hautou prattein kai mē polupragmonein* before Plato introduces the term *oikeiopragia* at 434c.

Plotinus considers himself a Platonist primarily because he adopts what he takes to be Plato's account of the Good. As we will see, the crux of the disagreement between Plotinus and the Stoics on the question of *oikeiōsis* lies precisely in their divergent accounts of the Good. The differences between Platonic and Stoic accounts of the Good have decisive implications for their accounts of selfhood. Where for Stoics *oikeiōsis* plays a key role in their model of a centralized self, one which can through *oikeiōsis* expand its realm of concern and attachment to encompass all of humanity, the Plotinian self is fundamentally de-centred. For Plotinus, the Good, which is ultimately beyond the self, is also simultaneously the true centre of the self.

iii. Oikeiōsis *in Stoic thought*[20]

The term *oikeiōsis*, derived from the Greek root *oikos* meaning 'house', refers in Stoicism to processes of making things one's own. Stoic *oikeiōsis* is associated both with fundamental attachments to self and the capacity to broaden one's range of attachments to others. These relations can extend so far as to embrace all of humanity and even the cosmos. Although relevant textual sources are distressingly sparse, *oikeiōsis* clearly plays a crucial role in Stoic ethics and philosophy of the self. Some scholars have argued that *oikeiōsis* provides the very foundations for Stoic ethics and political philosophy.[21]

If the adjective *oikeion* in its common, non-technical sense means 'belonging to', 'familiar' or 'proper, suitable and appropriate for', *oikeiōsis* refers to the process by which things come to be such.[22] We can thus translate *oikeiōsis* as 'coming to belong', 'familiarization' and, of course, 'appropriation'.[23] In Stoic thought, *oikeiōsis* serves to explain how one relates to one's self and to the surrounding world including other human beings.

At a basic level, *oikeiōsis* is an innate and preconscious attachment to the embodied self. Stoics invoke this level of *oikeiōsis* to explain certain normal animal behaviours, such as the instinct to protect one's body. A useful summary is found in Cicero's *On Moral Ends*:

> Every animal, as soon as it is born (this is where one should start), is concerned with itself, and takes care to preserve itself. It favours its constitution and whatever preserves its constitution, whereas it recoils from its destruction and whatever appears to promote its destruction. In support of this thesis, the Stoics point out that babies seek what is good for them and avoid the opposite before they ever feel pleasure or pain. This would not happen unless they valued their own constitution and feared destruction. But neither could it happen that they would seek anything at all unless they had self-awareness and thereby self-love. So one must realise that it is

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[20] This summary makes no original contributions to scholarship on Stoicism. For a good general account of *oikeiōsis* in Stoic thought, see Brennan (2007). For more extensive discussion see Engberg-Pederson (1990), Radice (2000), Kühn (2011) and Tsounia (2019) 75–166.

[21] For example, Pohlenz (1940) and Engberg-Pederson (1990).

[22] Hierocles the Stoic (probably second century AD and not to be confused with the fifth-century Neoplatonic thinker), who provides one of the best extant accounts of *oikeiōsis*, begins his *Elements of Ethics* speaking precisely about the *prōton oikeion*.

[23] The translation of *oikeiōsis* by 'appropriation' has misleading negative connotations. In contemporary English the word 'appropriation' suggests illegitimate expropriation or alienation (*allotriōsis*) of something from someone else. These connotations are incompatible with the Stoic sense of *oikeiōsis*. There is no single English term that can render the Greek in any completely satisfactory way. It was sometimes rendered in Latin by *conciliatio*. Because of the connotations of the word *propre* 'appropriate', 'one's own' which find echo in the French term *appropriation*, the negative connotations are somewhat attenuated. In German the word *eigen* 'one's own' means essentially the same as *oikeion* and is found in Heidegger's neologism, *Eigentlichkeit*, usually translated as 'authenticity'. For a discussion of the relationship between existential notions of authenticity and Plotinus' understanding of the *oikeion* see Mortley (2013) 79–93. Kühn (2011) 238–39 argues for translating *oikeiōsis* by 'attachement'.

self-love which provides the primary motivation (*principium ductum esse a se diligendo*). (3.16; tr. Woolf in Annas (2004) 69–70)

In *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, Diogenes Laertius outlines the relationship between *oikeiōsis* and *allotriōsis* ('alienation', 'estrangement' or 'rejection'):

> They say that an animal's first impulse is to preserve itself, because nature from the start makes the animal attached to itself (*oikeiousēs hautōi tēs phuseōs ap' archēs*) … for every animal the first thing that belongs to it (*prōton oikeion*) is its own constitution and its consciousness thereof (*tēn hautou sustasin kai tēn tautēs suneidēsin*). For it is not likely that nature would estrange the animal from itself (*allotriōsai*), nor that she would create it and then neither estrange it from itself nor make it attached to itself (*mēte' allotriōsai mēt' oikeiōsai*). Accordingly, we are left to conclude that nature, in constituting the animal, made the animal attached to itself; for in this way it repels what is harmful and pursues what is appropriate. (7.85; tr. Mensch in Miller (2018) 251)

I refer to the innate and preconscious level of Stoic *oikeiōsis* as 'personal *oikeiōsis*'. Although it does involve self-love, personal *oikeiōsis* also includes a tendency to socialization.[24]

The transition between self-love in personal *oikeiōsis* and love for others in social *oikeiōsis* is most obvious in parenthood, Cicero explains:

> Now the Stoics consider it important to realize that parents' love for their children arises naturally. From this starting-point we trace the development of all human society … Thus our impulse to love what we have generated is given by nature herself as manifestly as our aversion to pain. This is also the source of the mutual and natural sympathy between humans, so that the very fact of being human requires that no human be considered a stranger to any other. (3.62–63; tr. Woolf in Annas (2004) 123–26)

Personal *oikeiōsis* is, then, completed in the mature Stoic by a second level of *oikeiōsis* involving a conscious and deliberate process of modifying one's view of the world and one's relationships to others. This second level of *oikeiōsis*, constituted by philosophical practice aiming to overcome egotism, exclusive self-love and chauvinistic attachment to close kin, is 'social *oikeiōsis*'.[25]

Hierocles offers a vivid illustration of social *oikeiōsis*.[26] He invites readers to imagine themselves at the centre of a set of concentric circles. These circles represent one's relations to self and others such as family, friends, countrymen and, ultimately, humans in general. The distance of the circles from the centre is in inverse relation to the strength of

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[24] Reydams-Schils (2005): 55–56 points out that personal *oikeiōsis* includes a social element and is not entirely 'self-directed'. Long (1996) 250–62 argues that 'self perception [is] the foundation of personal *oikeiōsis*' (254) on the basis that 'Stoic *oikeiōsis* identifies selfhood (in other words, the perspective we today call subjectivity) as the foundation of any animal's life' (253).

[25] Because of the connection between duties and social *oikeiōsis,* it has also been called deontological *oikeiōsis*.

[26] The passage is preserved by Stobaeus in his *Anthology*. See text and translation in Ramelli (2009) 90–93. Hierocles represents a good source for better understanding Plotinus' appropriation of Stoic thought, insofar as (1) Hierocles was working in a period just prior to Plotinus' lifetime (indeed Hierocles seems to be a contemporary of Numenius, whom Plotinus was accused of plagiarizing); (2) Hierocles worked in Egypt where Plotinus studied philosophy; (3) Hierocles gives a rich account of self, a topic which was of great interest to Plotinus; (4) Hierocles seemed to have a very good reputation as a person, a fact that suggests that a philosopher such as Plotinus should have heard of him and been disposed to take him seriously; and (5) many elements of Hierocles' vocabulary show up in Plotinus (for example, *oikeiōsis*, *sunasithēsis*, *suneidēsis*). Certain passages in Plotinus may even respond directly to Hierocles. See Remes' discussion of Hierocles and Plotinus on *sunaisthēsis* ((2011) 99–110). On Hierocles, see Inwood (1983).

the attachments to self and others. That is, smaller circles are 'stronger' than larger ones. Family, for example, is represented by a small circle close to the self. Our task in the exercise of social *oikeiōsis* is to bring more distant circles inward by, amongst other practices, changing the way we address others.[27]

Social *oikeiōsis* is at play in Stoic cosmopolitanism.[28] Yet Stoics also understood *oikeiōsis* to be a means by which to realize the imperative to 'live in accordance with nature'.[29] In fact, relations formed in both personal and social *oikeiōsis* are 'natural'. Social *oikeiōsis* is grounded in the more obviously 'natural' personal *oikeiōsis*.[30] Nevertheless, the rational capacity by which in social *oikeiōsis* the Stoic reworks immediate attachments produced by primary *oikeiōsis* is also 'natural'. Hence, Stoic ethics can be considered a variety of 'ethical naturalism'.[31] In sum, Stoic thinkers use the term *oikeiōsis* to refer both to a primary and *unconscious* attachment to the self that is present even in non-rational animals (personal *oikeiōsis*) and to the *conscious* rational process of rearranging attachments (social *oikeiōsis*).[32]

The notion of *oikeiōsis* is central to Stoic 'philosophy of the self'.[33] For Stoics, *oikeiōsis* is simultaneously the manifestation of a natural order grounding the self and a key moment in prescriptive ethics. The prescriptive element in social *oikeiōsis* clearly permits us to talk about self-constitution in Stoic thought concerning the self.[34] I suspect that this aspect of Stoic *oikeiōsis* theory was particularly attractive to Plotinus, given his interest in self-constitution and 'sculpting the self'.[35]

iv. Middle Platonic thought on oikeiōsis

Plotinus' critique of Stoic *oikeiōsis* probably represents a further development of earlier Platonist thought. Certain Middle Platonic thinkers associate *oikeiōsis* with appetite.[36] And

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[27] Hierocles apud Stobaeus 4.671.7–673.11 = Long and Sedley 57G. See also Ramelli (2009) as well as Bastianini and Long (1992). Other key texts documenting Stoic notions of *oikeiōsis* are to be found in Cicero (*Fin.* 3.16) and Seneca (*Letter to Lucilius* 121). The most thorough examination of Stoic *oikeiōsis* to date is Radice (2000).

[28] See Laurand (2005).

[29] *Cf.* Diog. Laert. 7.87. Long (1996) 202 draws attention to the fact that Zeno's original formulation was simply *zēn homologoumenōs* 'living harmoniously', while the more specific version including reference to nature is due to his successors.

[30] Cicero takes pains to clarify how *oikeiōsis* relates the imperative to 'live according to nature' throughout book 3 of *On Moral Ends.* On the relationship between the two levels of *oikeiōsis*, see Schmitz (2014) 124–200. See also Ramelli (2009) lxiii–lxiv.

[31] See Boys-Stones (2014) and Brennan (2014). It is rather striking the extent to which some of the ideas at work in Stoic thought on *oikeiōsis* overlap with developments in contemporary care ethics. See, for example, Noddings (1984) or more recently Brugère (2019).

[32] Hierocles divides *oikeiōsis* according to its different objects into two groups which are further subdivided, resulting in a total of four types: interior *oikeiōsis* includes (1) that directed towards the self (*eunoētikē*) and (2) that directed towards one's constitution, while exterior *oikeiōsis* consists of (3) that which is directed to the external good (*hairetikē*) and (4) that which is directed towards other people (*sterktikē*) (*Elements of Ethics* 9.1–10 = Ramelli (2009) 24; *cf.* xli).

[33] One might prefer here the expression 'philosophical anthropology'. I realize that some thinkers would draw the line between premodern and modern thought precisely by noting how the former employs the notion of soul where the latter uses notions of self. However, I think that we cannot simply avoid the word 'self' in discussion without seriously misrepresenting the content of ancient thought.

[34] It is this aspect of the Stoic *oikeiōsis* doctrine that can be understood to ground an alternative to Aristotelian thought concerning the self. That is, social *oikeiōsis* downgrades the importance of the immediate community, a move that can be seen as an alternative to Aristotle's insistence that the state creates the conditions in which the moral self develops. However, some have argued that the Stoic *oikeiōsis* doctrine is, in fact, an offshoot of a Peripatetic idea; see Brink (1956) 123–45.

[35] See Plotinus I.6 (1).9, 7–25. See Remes (2011) 179–212.

[36] See Boys-Stones (2014) 297–320 and 298–300. On the *Anonymous Commentary* and Hierocles see Ramelli (2009) xliii–xliv.

we find an explicit critique of Stoic *oikeiōsis* in the *Anonymous Commentary on the Theaetetus*.[37] The author writes:

> As for those who derive justice from *oikeiōsis*, if they say that this *oikeiōsis* is equal in relation to oneself and to the most distant Mysian, their position would maintain justice. But it is not agreed that *oikeiōsis* is equal, because it is contrary to what is evident and to our very self-consciousness. For *oikeiōsis* towards oneself is natural and non-rational while that towards one's neighbours, although natural, does not occur without [the use of] reason. At any rate, when we recognize wickedness in people, we do not only blame them, but feel alienated from them (*allotrioumethai pros autous*); yet, they, despite having committed wrong, do not accept what follows, and are unable to hate themselves. (V.24–VI.2)[38]

The anonymous commentator seems to rehearse a school argument when he writes: 'In the cases of both craft and virtue, the difference of a single number suffices to annihilate one or the other. This is why Plato did not derive justice from *oikeiōsis*, but rather from "assimilation to god", as we shall demonstrate' (VII.9–20). The commentator's point seems to be that the bonds of *oikeiōsis* are too uneven to ground the Good of the Platonists, which, on this analysis, should be universal in an unqualified sense. Although Plotinus would certainly be sympathetic to this argument, it is not found in his work. On the other hand, the reference to Plato's *Theaetetus* finds echo in Plotinus' treatment of *oikeiōsis*.

Middle Platonic thinkers rejected accounts of the Good based on *oikeiōsis*. George Boys-Stones sees this rejection as coinciding with an effort to ground the virtues in an account of the Good.[39] Plotinus agrees that without reference to the form of the Good, *oikeiōsis* cannot account for ethical value (this is precisely the point he makes in VI.7 (38), examined in section III.iv below). However, Plotinus' discussions of *oikeiōsis* do not make significant reference to the notion of virtue.[40]

This brief foray into Middle Platonic thought reveals that by Plotinus' day there was significant discussion of *oikeiōsis* amongst Platonists. The fact that there is little overlap between Plotinus' discussion of *oikeiōsis* and that of his Middle Platonic predecessors indicates that what Plotinus does say about *oikeiōsis* is original and the result of careful deliberation. Plotinus seems to be much more receptive to Stoic thought than his Neoplatonic predecessors (a fact which could contribute to explaining the nature of the comment by Simplicius cited at the beginning of this paper).

v. Alexander of Aphrodisias on oikeiōsis

Plotinus used the works of Alexander of Aphrodisias in his courses.[41] Although Alexander, a Peripatetic, frequently criticizes the Stoics, he is also, like Plotinus, heavily indebted to them. In his *Ethical Problems,* Alexander scrutinizes Stoic *oikeiōsis* in light of the Stoic position according to which life is an indifferent (*adiaphoron*), not a good.[42] Alexander argues that the Stoic *oikeiōsis* doctrine is inconsistent with the view that life is an indifferent:[43]

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[37] Bastianini and Sedley (1995).

[38] This and subsequent translations from the *Anonymous Commentary on the Theaetetus* are my own.

[39] See Boys-Stones (2014) 319–20.

[40] In fact, although Plotinus does write about virtue, he assigns to it a subordinate role in his ethics.

[41] Porphyry, *Life of Plotinus* 14.10–14. For a detailed study of the role that Alexander plays in Plotinus' thought, see Corrigan (1996).

[42] See Diog. Laert. 7.101–03.

[43] Inwood (1985) 112 comments on this passage.

Life, too, has in itself the potentiality for living either well or badly, and is given to us by nature with a view to [our] living *well*. For it is not possible for us to possess [the actuality of] living well as soon as we come into existence; there is nothing perfect in what is incomplete, and everything is incomplete immediately after it comes into existence. [It follows, then, that life too] will be a thing to be valued with a view to the *best* of the things that can come about in us. For what is best, and the end [at which we aim], is living well, and this cannot come about without life [itself].

How is it not inconsistent to say that [life] is something to which we are endeared (*oikeiōsthai*) by nature, and that we do everything with a view to our own preservation, and simultaneously to deny that nature endears us to it as a *good*? That we are endeared to life as a good is clear both from [our] being very concerned about producing children, on the grounds that we will in a way exist in future through them, and also through [our] fearing everything we fear [all] the more because we are apprehensive that it will cause our death. (119.18–30; tr. Sharples (1990))

There is an echo of this discussion in Plotinus IV.4 (28), examined below. However, Plotinus takes issue with precisely the position that Alexander implicitly defends, namely, that the life to which we are attached by personal *oikeiōsis* is a good. Alexander's suggestion that the Stoics did not assume the full consequences of their own doctrine of *oikeiōsis* may have contributed to Plotinus' understanding of the philosophical issues related to *oikeiōsis*.

Moreover, it is plausible that Plotinus' critique of the Stoic *hēgemonikon* draws on Alexander. In a long investigation of the way in which the soul is said to be 'in' the body (IV.3 (27).9–23), Plotinus entertains that it is like a pilot in the ship (IV.3 (27).21). Plotinus writes: 'For the steersman as a voyager would be present incidentally in the ship, but how would he be present as a steersman? Nor is he in the whole of the ship, as the soul is in the body'. He is clearly following Alexander of Aphrodisias.[44] The model of the pilot seems to represent, at least in Plotinus' view, the Stoic account of the *hēgemonikon*.

III. *Oikeiōsis* in Plotinus

Although Plotinus' references to *oikeiōsis* are few and scattered throughout his oeuvre, they occur at decisive points in important arguments. The term *oikeiōsis* occurs in five Plotinian writings, texts that treat psychology (two treatises), contemplation, love and the good, respectively. In what follows, I carefully examine the arguments Plotinus develops in these passages. I point out how his dialogue with the Stoics on the notion of *oikeiōsis* (with constant reference to the Platonic notion of the *oikeion*) contributes to the articulation of a characteristically Plotinian conception of the self.[45]

Plotinus approaches the Stoic notion of *oikeiōsis* in three ways: (1) by adopting certain elements of the Stoic understanding and harmonizing them with Plato's discussion of the *oikeion*, implicitly suggesting that Stoic and Platonic philosophy are compatible; (2) by appropriating the concept of *oikeiōsis* with reference to Plato's thought on the *oikeion* while rejecting Stoic notions of selfhood; and (3) by completely reinterpreting *oikeiōsis* so that it accounts for the nature of the relationship of self to the intelligible, resulting in a conception of *oikeiōsis* that is radically distinct from the Stoic model.

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[44] Brun (1897) 15, 10. Tr. in Caston (2012) 42–43. See also Caston's n.139, in which he relates Alexander's rejection of the ship model for ensoulment to the notion to *oikeiōsis*: the basic problem for Alexander is that which perturbs Plotinus. If the soul is in the body as a distinct part, then it must relate to the rest of the being as to a *prōton oikeion*, in other words, by some process of appropriation.

[45] Having surveyed all occurrences of the term *oikeion* in Plotinus, I conclude that most are non-technical and do not allude to any Stoic or Platonic source. Only those occurring in the context of the five passages in which Plotinus explicitly mentions *oikeiōsis* are directly related to Stoic thought.

I argue that Plotinus' thought concerning *oikeiōsis* evolved through his work: he moves from a predominantly critical position *vis-à-vis* Stoic *oikeiōsis* in his middle works, where the concept first surfaces, to a more nuanced stance in his late treatises. While still dismissing Stoic notions of *oikeiōsis* and the self in his late writings, here Plotinus forges his own Platonic version of *oikeiōsis*.

The remainder of this paper is divided into five subsections corresponding to the five passages in which Plotinus discusses *oikeiōsis*. These sections are organized in the chronological order of the composition of the treatises in which the passages appear.

i. The paradox of affection: oikeiōsis *as assent (III.6 (26))*

Plotinus introduces the term *oikeiōsis* when articulating the main problem of III.6 (26) 'On the Impassibility of Things without Body'. Plotinus asks how an ethical theory aiming to maintain the self free of affections can make sense if the soul is already by nature impassive (*apathēs*). He announces the question *expressis verbis* at the beginning of chapter 5: 'Why, then, ought we to seek to make the soul free from affections by means of philosophy when it is not affected to begin with?' Plotinus responds to this paradox with two strategies: (1) by demonstrating that change (*alloiōsis*) in the soul is caused by the soul itself rather than something outside of it and (2) by showing that what appears to be change in the soul is in fact change in the body.

The central question of the treatise is predicated on a Stoic model of epistemology and moral psychology[46] and other elements of Stoic thought show up throughout the text. Plotinus insists on the importance of judgement (*krisis*) in relation to sense perception (*aisthēsis*) in the first line of the treatise and continues to use Stoic concepts throughout the work: he discusses *pathē* 'affections' in terms of *phantasiai* 'presentations' which can produce *doxa* 'opinion' and produce *tarakhē* 'disturbance' in the soul.

Although he does not think that it accounts for all aspects of moral life, Plotinus does find the Stoic model of moral psychology eminently compelling.[47] He frequently uses the terms *pathos* and *phantasia* in ways consistent with Stoic usage (particularly in his late treatises). Yet, remarkably, the key Stoic term *sugkatathesis* 'assent' occurs but once in the *Enneads* (I.8 (51).14.4).[48] This conspicuous absence is decisive for the arguments Plotinus develops in III.6 (26), because here *oikeiōsis* bears roughly the same meaning that

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[46] In its most general form, this model has it that apparent states of the soul ought to be subjected to a critical process: they are to be (1) entertained hypothetically as *phantasia* then (2) judged to be *kataleptikē phantasia* or not, and finally, if they meet the criteria, accepted by way of deliberate 'assent' (*sugkatathesis*). For primary sources, see Long and Sedley (1987) 1.236–59 and 2.238–59, sections 39–41.

[47] In fact, in many cases it seems to Plotinus to have distinct advantages over Platonic ethical models. In chapter 2 of III.6 (26), Plotinus points out certain shortcomings of accounts of virtue understood as harmony between parts of the soul: this is a criticism of Plato himself. See *Republic* 443c–444a. *Cf.* Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 1.13 on the relation between upper and lower soul, a distinction at work in Plato's accounts of the tripartite soul in both *Republic* and *Phaedrus*. To be sure, Plotinus does frequently put the distinction between higher and lower soul to work in his ethics and he does not think that the Platonic tripartite division of the soul is to be rejected. While Plotinus generally construes the virtue of the highest part of soul in Platonic and Aristotelian terms (assimilation to the divine, purification and contemplation), he thinks that the Stoics can help us discern certain aspects of the 'virtue of the highest part of the soul' even better than Plato and Aristotle. See also Remes (2011) 209.

[48] See for example chapter 4, where Plotinus writes: 'It should, then, be obvious to anyone that the mental picture (*phantasia*) is in the soul, both the first one, which we call opinion (*doxa*), and that which derives from it, which is no longer opinion, but an obscure quasi-opinion and an uncriticized mental picture (*anepikritos phantasia*), like the activity inherent in what is called nature in so far as it produces individual things, as they say, without a mental image. That which results from these mental images is the disturbance (*tarakhē*) in the body, which has already reached the level of perception' (III.6 (26)4.18–24).

sugkatathesis has in the Stoic model of moral psychology. Since this is an extraordinary twist in usage, I provide a detailed reading to support it. Plotinus writes:

> Now we must consider the difficulties which arise about the higher parts of the soul. For how can the part which comes before that subject to affections, and the part before sense-perception, and in general any part of the soul, be unchangeable when vice and false opinions and stupidity occur in the soul? And the soul accepts things as its own (*oikeiōsis*) or rejects them as alien (*allotriōsis*) when it feels pleasure and pain, anger, envy, jealousy, lust, and in general is never quiet but always moved (*kinoumenēs*) and changed (*metaballousēs*) by every casual contact. (III.6 (26).1.21–25; tr. Armstrong (1966–1988))[49]

Plotinus here uses a Stoic model of moral psychology in the context of the Platonic understanding of the soul composed of higher and lower parts. I read the final sentence of this passage as a hypothetical answer to the question posed in the second sentence. That is, Plotinus suggests that the higher soul consciously chooses to accept or reject affections. Evidently, Plotinus regards Stoic moral psychology as particularly apt to account for conscious states of the soul.

   This hypothesis contains several components. First, Plotinus suggests that what we take to be affections are in fact *oikeiōsis* and *allotriōsis*. He uses the term *oikeiōsis* in tandem with an antonym, *allotriōsis* ('othering', 'alienation' or 'rejecting as alien')[50] and continues to do so consistently throughout the treatise. But where the Stoics talk about *oikeiōsis* and *allotriōsis* with respect to external objects, including people, Plotinus uses these terms with reference to what could be called internal objects, that is, feelings, emotions and so on, which the Stoics generally categorize as *phantasiai*. The result of this shift is that the meaning of *oikeiōsis* in this context is very close to the Stoic term *sugkatathesis*. Accordingly, *allotriōsis* should mean something like 'refusal of assent' or 'rejection'.

   Plotinus thinks the subject of this *oikeiōsis* and *allotriōsis* is the higher soul. By suggesting that one can 'perform' an *oikeiōsis* of pleasure, pain and so on, all *pathē* 'affections', internal states which in Stoic moral psychology are subject to a procedure leading to 'assent' (*sugkatathesis*), Plotinus implies that he endorses the Stoic idea that affections are the product of a rational process of dealing with experiences. By reading Stoic *oikeiōsis* as equivalent to *sugkatathesis* 'assent', Plotinus (at this point in his argument only hypothetically) 'internalizes' the *oikeiōsis* theory. He appears to be fully conscious that he is reinterpreting the Stoic theory of *oikeiōsis*.[51] But whereas for the Stoics it is the

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[49] This and all subsequent translations of the *Enneads* cited in this paper are to be found in Armstrong (1966–1988). I frequently modify Armstrong's translations where they obscure the arguments related to *oikeiōsis*. For example, in this passage Armstrong translates Plotinus' use of *oikeiōsis* and the verb *oikeiō* with turns of phrase that include the expression 'essential concern'. This obfuscates Plotinus' reference to Stoic thought, suggesting instead that Plotinus is thinking terms of Platonic care (*epimeleia*). Furthermore, the term 'essential' suggests a strong positive metaphysical claim for the attachment to life, which is precisely what Plotinus is calling into question.

[50] By using the term *allotriōsis* as an antonym of *oikeiōsis* Plotinus probably understands himself to be simply adopting Stoic vocabulary. Support for this interpretation is to be found in a passage by Plotinus' student Porphyry in which we read of the Stoic understanding of justice: 'Perception is the principle (*arkhē*) of every *oikeiōsis* and of every alienation (*allotriōsis*); the followers of Zeno make *oikeiōsis* the principle of justice (*dikaiosunēs*)' (Porph. *Abst.* 3.19 (= *SVF* 3.197)). Porphyry treats *oikeiōsis* and *allotriōsis* as a conceptual pair coined by the Stoics.

[51] Compare Fleet's useful note on this passage (Fleet (1995) 104–06). Of course, I do not agree with Fleet that Plotinus' use of *oikeiōsis* makes no reference to Stoic *oikeiōsis* theory. Fleet seems to argue that the very fact that the term *oikeiōsis* is in the plural in Plotinus' text here is evidence that it makes no reference to Stoic thought. I see no reason why the plural should exclude reference to Stoic thought. I take Porphyry's attribution of the conceptual pair *oikeiōsis* and *allotriōsis* to the 'followers of Zeno' (Porph. *Abst.* 3.19 (= *SVF* 3.197); see previous note) to be an indication that in Plotinus' milieu these terms were strongly associated with Stoicism, particularly when presented together.

hēgemonikon that is the subject of *sugkatathesis*, or as Plotinus would have it here, *oikeiōsis*, Plotinus carefully avoids this aspect of the Stoic model.

In the third chapter of III.6 (26) Plotinus returns to the question formulated at the opening of the work. He again provides a list of emotions and desires that the soul experiences and indicates that *oikeiōsis* and *allotriōsis* can account for a wide range of soul states. Having mentioned pleasure and pain, anger, envy, jealousy and lust in the first chapter, here in chapter 3 Plotinus evokes shame (*aiskhunē*), fear (*phobos*), pleasure (*hēdonē*), pain (*lupē*) and lust (*epithumia*). The passage reads as follows:

> But what about the soul's accepting things as its own or rejecting them as alien (*oikeiōseis kai allotriōseis*)? And, surely, feelings of grief and anger, pleasures, desires and fears, are alterations (*alloiōseis*) and affections (*pathē*) present in the soul and moving there.[52] About these, too, one must certainly make a distinction, in this way. To deny that alterations in the soul, and intense perceptions of them, do occur is to contradict the obvious facts. But when we accept this we ought to enquire what it is that is changed. For we run the risk, when we say this of the soul, of understanding it in the same sort of way as if we say that the soul blushes or turns pale again, not taking into account that these affections are brought about by the soul but occur in the other structure [the body]. (III.6 (26).3.1–11; tr. Armstrong (1966–1988), modified)[53]

With a hint at what had become a trope starting with Aristotle's *De anima*,[54] Plotinus indicates that the subject of *oikeiōsis* cannot simply be the soul. First, according to Plotinus, the soul has multiple parts. Second, some experiences that seem to affect the soul are in fact located in the body. Third, in the last line of the passage, the relationship between soul and body is represented as one between active and passive principles. The soul is active while the body is a place in which the activities of the soul become manifest. Plotinus avoids evoking the Stoic *hēgemonikon*. Rather, he carefully applies Platonic psychological categories (soul and body, higher and lower soul).

Plotinus further distinguishes his account from that of the Stoics when he attacks the key Stoic moral psychological notion of mental presentation (*phantasia*). For the Stoics, *phantasia* is precisely the object of judgement and assent. Plotinus writes:

> In fact, when we say that the soul moves itself (*kineisthai*) in lusts or reasonings or opinions, we are not saying that it does this because it is being shaken about by them, but that the movements originate from itself. For when we say that its life is movement (*to zēn kinēsin legontes*), we do not mean that it is alteration (*alloiōsin*), but the activity of each part is its life according to nature (*hē kata phusin zōē*), which does not go outside it. The sufficient conclusion is: if we agree that activities and life and impulses are not alterations (*alloiōseis*), and that memories are not stamps imprinted on the soul or mental pictures (*phantasias*) like impressions on wax, we must agree that everywhere, in all affections and movements, as they are called, the soul remains the same in substrate and essence, and that virtue and vice do not come into being like black and white or hot and cold in the body, but in the way in which has been

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[52] Translators have had trouble with these lines, no doubt because Plotinus expresses his argument as if the soul were subject to affection, which is precisely what the treatise aims to disprove.

[53] As we have seen, Plotinus had already announced this problematic in the first chapter (III.6 (26).21–25). Here in chapter 3 Armstrong translates *alloiōsis* inconsistently, undermining Plotinus' argument, which is structured by a clear opposition between 'movement' (*kinēsis*) and 'alteration' (*alloiōsis*).

[54] *De an.* 408b11–15 (*cf.* 417b). This passage is decisive for Plotinus' discussion here.

described, in both directions and in all respects what happens in the soul is the opposite of what happens in the body. (III.6 (26) 3, 25–36; tr. Armstrong (1966–1988), modified)

Plotinus alludes to Plato's account of justice as 'doing one's own work' (the *oikeiopragia* of *Republic* 433a–b discussed above) when he writes 'but the activity of each part is its life according to nature (*hē kata phusin zōē*), which does not go outside it'.[55] Plotinus argues that if the life functions of the soul involved genuine alteration then the Platonic principle according to which the parts of the soul ought to do nothing but their own task would be violated. This amounts to Platonizing the Stoic notion of 'life according to nature': the soul's life accords with nature precisely insofar as its parts perform their own proper function. Plotinus insinuates that *oikeiōsis* has something to do with *oikeiopragia*, suggesting that the soul can accept feelings as appropriate when they involve the right soul part doing the right thing. Plotinus elaborates this argument in order to reinforce his refutation of the idea that the soul undergoes any real 'alteration' and maintaining that the soul has its principle of motion inside of itself (referring to the definition of soul as 'self-moved' in Plato's *Phaedrus* 245c–e). Plotinus suggests that certain activities of the soul might appear like affections to a Stoic who does not recognize that the activities of the soul manifest themselves differently in different soul parts conceived according to the Platonic division.

Although one might justifiably qualify III.6 (26) as an anti-Stoic work,[56] Plotinus also subtly appropriates and remodels Stoic doctrine. He adopts the idea that affection and disturbance result from opinions and judgement, and shows how the Stoic conception of *oikeiōsis* contributes to a better understanding of the self.[57] The concept of life, generally problematic in ancient Greek philosophy, surfaces at several points in the treatise and is treated *in extenso* in chapter 6. Plotinus draws on a Platonic conception of life to correct what in his view are the shortcomings of the Stoic account of *oikeiōsis*.[58] The true *oikeion* is to be identified with the life of the soul rather than with appropriation of or assent to something external.

By reading *oikeiōsis* as *sugkatathesis* in III.6 (26), Plotinus reveals that he thinks that *oikeiōsis* is situated at the very heart of Stoic moral psychology. He thoroughly Platonizes the notion; yet there is no hint of Middle Platonic critiques of *oikeiōsis*. Plotinus proves to be a subtle and creative interpreter of Stoic thought here. In fact, his reading of Stoic *oikeiōsis* prefigures certain 20th-century understandings of authenticity.[59]

ii. Oikeiōsis, magic, emotions and self-preservation (IV.4 (28))

At the beginning of chapter 44 of IV.4 (28) Plotinus asserts that 'Contemplation (*theōria*) alone remains incapable of enchantment (*agoēteutos*)'.[60] His account of magic and enchantment is more or less naturalistic, embedded as it is in a conception of cosmic sympathy, the general outlines of which he shares with the Stoics. However, for Plotinus even everyday experiences of anger, fear and desire can be understood as 'enchantment'. When discussing magic and enchantment here, he clearly assumes that the reader has knowledge of the Stoic account of *oikeiōsis*.

[55] Indeed, Plato discusses this crucial argument in the *Republic* in terms of the *oikeion*.

[56] See Armstrong's note to the first page of the treatise in his translation and Hadot on *homologia* and *krisis pathē* in his commentary to this passage.

[57] Armstrong points this out in n.2 to chapter 4 of his translation.

[58] Bréhier understood this chapter as a commentary on *Sophist* 248e, where Plato insists that motion, life and soul must be present in being.

[59] See Mortley (2013) 88.

[60] One might be tempted to translate this by 'impervious to magic', in order to remind the reader that this passage is part of the discussion initiated in chapter 40.

The passage below represents the conclusion of a long discussion of magic (*goēteia*) that is undertaken in chapter 40 of IV.4 (28). Having pointed out how actions (*praxeis*) motivated by (1) the passionate spirit (*thumos*), (2) fear of suffering (*phobos*) and (3) 'carnal desire' (*epithumia*)[61] are all in some way a product of 'enchantment', Plotinus writes:

> Those [*sc.* activities (*praxeis*)] undertaken because of basic necessities (*tōn khreiōdōn kharin*), since they seek to satisfy a need of nature, obviously have the force of nature (*tēn tēs phuseōs bian*) behind them causing a fundamental attachment to life (*pros to zēn oikeiōsasan*). But if someone says that noble practical activities (*tas praxeis tōn kalōn*) are free from enchantment, or if they are not, contemplation also, which is of noble objects, will fall under enchantment, [we assert in response] that if (1) one carries out the so-called noble activities as necessary ones, and grasps that what is really noble is something else, one has not been enchanted, for one knows the necessity, and does not look to this world, and one's life is not directed to other things (*oude pros alla ho bios*), but (2) one has been enchanted in this way by the force of human nature (*tē tēs phuseōs tēs anthōpinēs bia*) and by the fundamental attachment to the survival of others, or indeed of oneself (*tē pros to zēn tōn allōn ē kai hautou oikeiōsei*), for it seems, perhaps, reasonable not to take oneself out of this world on account of this fundamental attachment (*dia tēn oikeiōsin*). (IV.4 (28).44.14–24; tr. Armstrong (1966–1988), modified)

In this passage Plotinus is concerned with *praxis*, that is, ethically significant actions, and their relation to contemplation (*theōria*). Are these ethically significant actions, he wonders, subject to 'enchantment' as are the activities undertaken simply to satisfy basic necessities of biological life? Stoics see the latter as motivated by personal *oikeiōsis* since they involve a preconscious necessary drive to preserve the self common to both human and nonhuman animals. Plotinus expresses the notion of necessity by the concepts of 'force' (*bia*) and 'attachment' (which A.H. Armstrong finds, correctly I believe, in the notion of *oikeiōsis*). He takes pains to show that the practical life of noble actions can transcend *oikeiōsis* which is, he suggests in this context, equivalent to an attachment to biological life. He traces a fine line between two ways of carrying out the very same actions: one can perform them either (1) with an awareness that they *do not* represent the ultimate horizon for human life (*bios*), or (2) with a deep attachment to biological life (*zoē*).

Plotinus asserts that the 'nature of humanity' can effectively be a cause of enchantment. At the heart of human nature as Plotinus understands it here is the *oikeiōsis* ('attachment') to life (*zēn*).[62] So Plotinus rejects any straightforward 'humanism', if we understand 'humanism' as a theory which puts the human at the centre of concern. Here Plotinus associates *oikeiōsis* with the activities of the lower soul. In more modern terms, we might say that Plotinus is suggesting that *oikeiōsis* is based on biological determinism and thus violates human freedom.

In this passage of IV.4 (28), Plotinus represents *oikeiōsis* as a narrowing and lowering of one's concern. This is contrary to the broadening of attachment that Stoic social *oikeiōsis* recommends. Is Plotinus deliberately and uncharitably misinterpreting Stoic doctrine by conflating primary *oikeiōsis* with social *oikeiōsis*? A charitable reading of the Stoics would

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[61] Motives (1) and (3) correspond to the Platonic parts of the irrational soul in the *Republic* while motive (2) has a particularly Stoic allure. I have maintained Armstrong's translation of *epithumia* here, despite what might be heard as Christian overtones, since 'carnal desire' is more vivid than the rather bland standard translation 'appetite'.

[62] Armstrong translates *zēn*, which simply means 'to live' by 'survival', a rather felicitous translation insofar as it allows the notion of *zēn*, which designates life in its most general sense, to contrast nicely with *bios* (for example, line 21 of the passage in question), which designates life in a more qualified sense, that is, 'human life', usually insofar as it is structured by human choice.

not reduce *oikeiōsis* to an unambiguous and instinctive '*oikeiōsis* for life', as Plotinus does here.

Availing himself of two distinct Greek terms for 'life', *bios* and *zoē*, Plotinus associates life at a biological or 'survival' level (*zoē*, *zēn*) with *oikeiōsis*, while connecting the more properly 'human life' (*bios*) with the ability to look beyond the biological life. At the end of the passage he suggests that suicide, permissible in certain cases according to the Stoics, may be motivated precisely by *oikeiōsis*! In other words, a narrow attachment to a certain kind of life could ultimately lead one to forfeit one's life. Plotinus takes this to be a problematic consequence of the Stoic account.[63]

In the remainder of IV.4 (28).4 Plotinus steers the discussion towards a reconsideration of the good. His basic point will be that only a complete understanding of the good guarantees freedom from 'enchantment', including the attachment to one's biologically determined self. Having equated Stoic *oikeiōsis* with an instinctive tendency towards self-preservation, Plotinus must assert not only that *oikeiōsis* fails as an account of the good, but that it undermines one's capacity to orient oneself by the true Good.

Plotinus' approach to Stoic *oikeiōsis* in IV.4 (28) is entirely critical and negative. The *oikeiōsis* we encounter here is hardly better than unenlightened self-interest. Plotinus effectively asserts that Stoic *oikeiōsis* is incompatible with a Platonic understanding of the Good, since the motivations of *oikeiōsis* correspond to the motivations which in Platonic psychology belong to the lower soul. The structure of IV.4 (28).44, moving from a discussion of *oikeiōsis* to a discussion of the Good, reinforces Plotinus' argument that the Stoic conception of *oikeiōsis* is incongruous with a Platonic account of the Good. In IV.4 (28) Plotinus suggests that it is not possible to expound the Good in terms of *oikeiōsis*.[64] Here he seems uncharitable in his treatment of Stoic *oikeiōsis*.

iii. Oikeiōsis *and contemplation (III.8 (30))*

In III.8 (30).6 Plotinus discusses the nature of the contemplative activity of the individual soul. He discusses how the soul often engages in contemplation in an oblique or circuitous manner, proceeding through action (*praxis*) back to contemplation. Here Plotinus develops the radical thesis according to which all living beings, including even plants, contemplate and aspire to contemplation as a good in itself. Behind the rather complex formulation of the theme of the treatise, Plotinus' central concern is simply to understand how knowledge is possible. The Parmenidean principle according to which 'to be and to think are the same'[65] serves as the foundation for Plotinus' main argument in this treatise.

Plotinus in III.8 (30).6 argues that knowing can be understood in terms of the 'assimilation' (*oikeiōsis*) of a *logos*. The *logos* ('rational principle' or 'rational form') serves as a bridge between being and thinking. *Logos* in Plotinus designates essentially the same thing as does *eidos* ('form'), but refers to it in its dynamic aspect, that is, insofar as it comes into or is abstracted from something. Plotinus asserts that for a *logos* to be effective in the soul it must become one with the knower. Subject and object of thought must in some sense be the same thing:

> So action bends back again to contemplation, for what someone receives in his soul, which is rational form (*logos*), what can it be other than silent rational form (*logos siōpōn*)? And more so, the more it is within the soul. For the soul keeps quiet then, and seeks nothing because it is filled, and the contemplation which is there in a state like this rests within because it is confident of possession. And, in proportion as the

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[63] Plotinus may also have Aristotle in mind here. *Cf.* Arist. *Eth. Nic.* 9.4, 1166a14–20.

[64] Or *phusis*, 'nature', for that matter.

[65] Fragment preserved by none other than Plotinus himself in *Ennead* V.1 (10).8.

confidence (*pistis*) is clearer, the contemplation is quieter, in that it unifies more, and what knows, in so far as it knows—we must be serious now (*spoudasteon*)—*comes into unity with what is known.* For if they are two, the knower will be one thing and the known another, so that there is a sort of juxtaposition, and contemplation has not yet made this pair appropriate (*ōikeōsen*) to each other, as when rational principles present in the soul do nothing (*mēden poiōsi*). For this reason the rational principle (*logos*) must not be outside but must be united with the soul of the learner, until it finds that it is its own (*oikeion heurē*). The soul, then, when it has become appropriate to (*oikeiōthē*) and disposed according to the rational principle (*logos*), still, all the same, utters and propounds it—for it did not possess it primarily—and learns it thoroughly and by its proposition becomes other than it, and looks at it, considering it, like one thing looking at another; and yet soul, too, was a rational principle and a sort of intellect seeing something else … But in men of action the soul fits (*epharmottei*) what it possesses to the things outside it. And because the soul possesses its content more completely, it is quieter (*hēsukhaitera*) than nature, and because it has a greater content, it is more contemplative. (III.8 (30).6.9–32; tr. Armstrong (1966–1988), modified)

The fact that he accounts for the relationship between knower and known in terms of *logos* suggests that Plotinus believes that the content of knowledge, even if it is not necessarily simply propositional, has at least some linguistic or quasi-linguistic structure.[66] When writing of *logos siōpōn* ('silent rational form'), Plotinus certainly has in mind Plato's notion of thought as an internal dialogue developed in the *Theaetetus*.[67] Plotinus attributes to the 'silent rational form' an active function in contemplation that extends beyond simple judgement. And it is precisely by way of a process that Plotinus calls *oikeiōsis* that the *logos* becomes active in the soul. The fact that this *logos* remains 'silent' and 'calm' permits it to function as Plotinus would have it in contemplation. So, at one level, Plotinus' use of the term *oikeiōsis* here is consistent with the usage in III (26): it means something like 'assent' (*sugkatathesis*). Moreover, this resonates with the passage of the *Theaetetus* where Plato has *doxazein* mean something similar to Stoic 'assent'.

Plotinus contrasts what appears to be a total assimilation between subject and object in the *oikeiōsis* of contemplation (*theōria*) with a much looser relationship between subject and object in 'men of action'. The less intimate connection between subject and object is referred to in terms of 'harmonization' (*epharmottei*). Plotinus argues that the more complete unification of subject and object produced in contemplation explains why the contemplative soul is 'quieter' (*hēsukhaitera*) than the soul inclined towards *praxis*.[68]

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[66] Armstrong avoids the problem of accounting for this linguistic element attributed to knowledge here by changing his translation of *logos* in mid-passage although he is faithful to the metaphor in his translation of *prokheirizetai* and *prokheirisai*, while Bréhier (1924–1938) simply chooses a more ambiguous term to render *logos*.

[67] Pl. *Tht.* 189e–190a: 'It seems to me that the soul when it thinks is simply carrying on a discussion in which it asks itself questions and answers them itself, affirms or denies. And when it arrives at something definite, either by a gradual process or a sudden leap, when it affirms one thing consistently and without divided counsel, we call this its judgement. So, in my view, to judge is to make a statement, and a judgement is a statement (*logos*) which is not addressed to another person or spoken aloud, but silently addressed to oneself (*oude phonē alla sigē pros hauton*)'. Plotinus may be making oblique reference to the Stoic distinction between *logos prophorikos* and *logos endiathetos*: Sext. Emp. *Pyr.* 1.65e73–77, and Porph. *Abst.* 3.2–3; see also Matelli (1992).

[68] In this passage Plotinus describes a dialectical process that proceeds as follows: once the soul assimilates the *logos* by a process of *oikeiōsis* (that is, the soul is united with the *logos*), then the soul, having become different from its former state, differentiates itself from the very same *logos* to which it had become assimilated. The soul sees these things as different from itself, although at a fundamental level they are not different. This occurs even though the soul is itself a *logos* and intellect. According to Plotinus, the fact that the soul sees the *logos* as other is an indication of the limitations of soul in comparison with intellect. The dialectic moves from (1) inactive *logos* in soul to (2) assimilation of *logos* to, finally, (3) differentiation from *logos* in an 'objective' contemplation that

In III.8 (30) Plotinus turns to Stoic concepts, *logos* and *oikeiōsis*, as he recasts the Aristotelian notion of 'contemplation' (*theōria*). In both III.8 (30) and III.6 (26) *oikeiōsis* designates a kind of specific judgement. However, in III.8 (30) Plotinus takes this notion of judgement into a field of concepts that is foreign to Stoicism. His use of the concept of *oikeiōsis* in III.8 (30) contains no hint of his critique of the Stoic notion in III.6 (26). Rather, *oikeiōsis* turns out to be a useful concept for explaining what in Platonism is the heart of philosophical activity. In III.8 (30) Plotinus understands 'contemplation' (*theōria*) in terms of *oikeiōsis*.

In developmental terms, III.8 (30) marks the beginning of Plotinus' attempts to apply the concept of *oikeiōsis*, which the Stoics had used to explain physical and social relations, to the explanation of how the self relates to the intelligible world of Platonic and Aristotelian metaphysics. But III.8 (30) does not yet contain a fully Platonized theory of *oikeiōsis* as does the very late III.5 (50).

iv. Oikeiōsis *and the Good (VI.7 (38))*

In VI.7 (38).15–42, Plotinus discusses his understanding of the Good. This section of VI.7 (38) reads largely as a commentary on Plato's *Republic* 508e–509b and *Symposium* 211d–212c. When he introduces the term *oikeion* into his argument, Plotinus clearly has Aristophanes' speech from the *Symposium* (189d–193d) in mind. But as the argument proceeds Plotinus nuances his treatment of the *oikeion* and reveals that his view of *oikeiōsis* relies on interaction with the Stoic account. He thinks that, when they invoke the *oikeion* and *oikeiōsis*, Plato and the Stoics are proposing answers to one and the same question: what is the Good? Plotinus concludes his discussion of *oikeiōsis* in VI.7 (38) with a decisive rebuttal of the Stoic account of *oikeiōsis*. It cannot, he thinks, provide an adequate account of the Good.

The style of VI.7 (38).21, where Plotinus introduces the concept of the *oikeion*,[69] gives some indication of the importance he attributes to it. He passes abruptly from an aporetic to a self-consciously affirmative tone. He writes, 'let us dare' (*tetolmēsthō*) and continues rather elliptically:

> What therefore is it which is one in all these and makes each and every one of them good? Let us, then, make bold to say this: Intellect and that life (*tēn zōēn ekeinēn*) have the form of the good (*agathoeidē*) and there is desire of these also in so far as they have the form of the Good:[70] I mean 'have the form of good' in the sense that life is the activity (*energeia*) of the Good, or rather an activity from the Good, and Intellect is the activity already bounded and defined. But they are both filled full of glory and are pursued by the soul because it comes from them and again is directed to them; [the soul pursues them] as belonging (*oikeion*) to the soul, then, but not at all as good. Nevertheless, since they have the form of good, they are not to be rejected.[71] For what belongs to one, if it is not good, may indeed belong (*oikeion*), but one flees from it; for

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contrasts with the simple silent possession of the *logos*. It is the silent possession of the *logos* that exemplifies the Parmenidean unity of thought and being ('And, in proportion as the confidence (*pistis*) is clearer, the contemplation is quieter, in that it unifies more, and what knows, in so far as it knows—we must be serious now (*spoudasteon*)—comes into unity with what is known'). Plotinus talks about 'playing' at the beginning of this treatise. It is perhaps not insignificant that the notion of *oikeiōsis* occurs here in this 'serious' context.

[69] In VI.7 (38).21 Plotinus introduces the concept of the *oikeion*.

[70] I have modified Armstrong's translation of *agathoeidē* by 'in the form of the Good' to use the more obvious expression 'have the form of the Good' (with Bréhier), a more neutral rendering of the adjectival sense, and less strange than other alternatives such as 'boniform'. Another alternative that asserts the Platonic context more explicitly would be 'partake of the form of the Good'.

[71] Compare VI.7 (38) 31, 16.

other things which are distant and even lower can also move one to desire. Intense love (*erōs ho suntonos*) for them arises not when they are what they are but when, being already what they are, they receive something else from there beyond. For just as with bodies, though light is mixed into them, all the same there is need of another light for the light, the colour, in them to appear, so with the things there in the intelligible, though they possess much light, there is need of another greater light that they may be seen both by themselves and by another. (VI.7 (38).21.1–17; tr. Armstrong (1966–1988), heavily modified)

Plotinus' goal here is to outline and examine accounts of how the *oikeion* and the Good are related. According to him, the *oikeion* does not ground the Good. That which belongs to something (in other words, is *oikeion* to it) is not *necessarily* good. Plotinus explains what he takes to be the source of a misunderstanding in the Stoic position: the Stoics affirm that the Good is the *oikeion*.[72] At the beginning of his discussion of the Stoic position on *oikeiōsis* Plotinus entertains it as a hypothesis: it is possible that the soul's attraction to the intellect and the intelligible life should be explained as the pursuit of the *oikeion*.[73] According to this hypothesis, the soul recognizes the intellect as its own (*oikeion*) because the soul comes from and returns to the intellect.

However, Plotinus provides two counter-arguments to undercut the hypothesis that the *oikeion* is the Good. First, the soul may in fact flee what is its own. Second, Plotinus adds, the soul can experience an intense love for things that are not its own.[74] The *oikeion* does not suffice to account for the Good. Nevertheless, although it may not be the *cause* of a thing's goodness, Plotinus admits that the *oikeion* coincides with certain elements of the Good.

In VI.7 (38).27 Plotinus revisits the argument *contra* the *oikeion* as the Good, outlined in chapter 20. The densely argued passage reads as follows:

But what is it by the coming of which to each one it has what is fitting (*prosēkon*) for it? We shall maintain that it is a form; for form is the good which belongs (*oikeion*) to matter, and virtue is form for soul. But is this form good for that which has it by belonging (*oikeion*) to it and is its desire directed to what belongs to it? No: for what is like it belongs to it, and if it wishes the like and delights in it, it does not yet have the good. But when we say that something is good, are we not going to say that it belongs (lit. is *oikeion*)? Rather we must say that it is necessary to judge the good by what is higher than what belongs to it (the *oikeion*) and by what is better than the thing itself, to which it is potentially directed. For, since it is potentially directed to what it is, it is in need of it, and what it is in need of as something higher than it, that is its good. And matter is the neediest of all, and the last and lowest form is next to it; for it comes after it in the upward direction. But even if a thing is a good for itself, its perfection (*teleiotēs*) and its form and what is higher than it would much more be a good. (VI.7 (38).27.1–19; tr. Armstrong (1966–1988), modified)[75]

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[72] See Cicero's *On Moral Ends* for a discussion of the good in Stoic thought. In this context *oikeiōsis* unpacks the notion of 'living in accordance with nature'.

[73] Even a reader familiar with Plotinus may only realize with difficulty that he is illustrating a hypothesis he means to reject. The problem is that for the sake of argument a typical Plotinian movement (the soul's attraction to intellect) is explained entirely in the terms of a Stoic theory.

[74] My interpretation is not compatible with Armstrong's translation of this passage so I have modified it accordingly. Armstrong strains the Greek in order to avoid admitting that Plotinus believes that the soul can sincerely love things that are 'lower' than it.

[75] Armstrong translates both *prosēkon* and *oikeion* in this second line by 'appropriate'. In my view, this obscures Plotinus' argument. For the notion of *oikeion* is supposed to explain the *prosēkon*. (See also I.4 (46) for another passage in which Plotinus uses both *oikeion* and *prosēkon*.) And in the argument that follows, Plotinus understands the *oikeion* as that which *already* belongs to a thing, rather than that which could come to it as the *prosēkon*.

Since these are some of the most important and clearly formulated claims regarding the *oikeion* that we find in all of Plotinus' writings, it is worth looking at the structure of the argument in detail.

Rather than simply asking, 'What is the *prosēkon* for each thing?', Plotinus' question is convoluted: 'But what is it by the coming of which to each one it has what is fitting (*prosēkon*) for it?' The awkwardness of the sentence seems to be due to the fact that Plotinus is preparing the conceptual structure that underlies the conclusion of the passage; there he discusses the good as transcendent to the thing in question. The convoluted formulation already suggests this answer. However, in the second sentence of the passage, Plotinus asserts that a thing's form is its *prosēkon*. He provides two reasons to support this claim: (1) form is the *oikeion* for matter and (2) virtue is form for soul.

In the next line Plotinus arrives at the crux of the problem: 'But is this form good for that which has it by belonging (*oikeion*) to it and is its desire directed to what belongs to it?' No, he responds, citing a Platonic principle from the *Symposium*: desire has as its object something that it does not possess. The position that the *oikeion* and the desirable are not the same thing provides the basis for further arguments against the idea of the *oikeion* as the Good.

In the last sentence of the passage cited above, Plotinus makes a conditional concession with an argument *a fortiori*:[76] 'even if a thing is a good for itself, its perfection (*teleiotēs*) and its form and what is higher than it would much more be a good'. The conditional part of this sentence ('if a thing is a good for itself') reveals an important aspect of Plotinus' approach to the *oikeion*. In this sentence, he does not talk about the *oikeion* as something belonging to something else. Rather, he talks about a thing being a good *for itself*. In other words, Plotinus reads the notion of the *oikeion* as tautological. He seems to collapse the *oikeion* and that to which it is the *oikeion* into one another.

The contrast with Stoic thought could not be more striking. For a Stoic the *oikeion*, insofar as it implies sociality in both personal and, more obviously, in social *oikeiōsis*, points to something pertaining to the self that is not *a priori* included in the notion of self. For Plotinus (at least in this context) the *oikeion* represents the self in its narrowest sense, the self without relation to any larger social or metaphysical structure. Plotinus goes so far as to associate the *oikeion* with need and insufficiency: it indicates an absence of perfection and characterizes that which is disconnected from the whole.

However, as I have indicated above, in this last sentence of the passage Plotinus is, at least hypothetically, making a concessive argument. It involves a real concession, since Plotinus does in fact endorse the position formulated in the conditional clause.[77] He concedes that the *oikeion* is *a* good. But it is not *the* good.

Plotinus outlines his own position in positive terms stating that there is something better than the *oikeion*: 'its perfection (*teleiotēs*) and (*kai*) its form and (*kai*) what is higher than it would much more be a good'. It is not entirely clear if we should understand the two instances of *kai* as explicative (and thus translate 'its perfection, or in other words, its form, that is, what is higher than it'). I suggest that they are indeed explicative but serve also an additive function. That is, each of the three terms in the sentence, perfection, form and what is higher, takes us further away from the thing in question insofar as it can be conceived without reference to its intelligible structure.[78] The third term, 'what is higher' is decisive because the comparative 'higher' suggests that there is some element of a thing's form that transcends the thing itself. Not surprisingly, Plotinus will indeed affirm that the ultimate perfection of a thing is not its own form but the form of the Good.

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[76] *Cf.* Hadot (1988) 305–06.

[77] As pointed out by Hadot (1988) 305–06.

[78] This passage could also be read in the context of the question concerning the status of forms of individuals in Plotinus.

Having shown that the *oikeion* is not the Good, Plotinus considers the question whether something, on account of *oikeiōsis* to itself, might be good *for itself*. He does admit that a thing can be a good for itself, but not on account of *oikeiōsis*. Apparently Plotinus wishes to exclude the possibility that, even granted the existence of a transcendent Good, one might assert a level apart from it at which things have a particular goodness in relation to self. Although he concedes that something can be a good for itself, Plotinus is convinced that all goodness in relation to self is dependent on a relation to the transcendent Good.

Plotinus moves finally from the vocabulary of *oikeion* through the superlative of the term (*oikeiōtaton*) to the notion of *oikeiōsis* itself. The passage reads as follows:

> But why will anything be a good for itself? Is it because it most belongs to itself (*oikeiōtaton*)? No, but because it is the *portion of the good* in it.[79] This is why those who are pure and more good (*tois mallon agathois*) come to belong more to themselves (*mallon oikeiōsis pros autous*). It is therefore absurd to enquire why a thing which is good is good for itself, as if it would have as regards itself to get out of its own nature and not be content with itself as good. But when something is simple we must consider this question, whether, where there is absolutely no alterity, there is coming to belong to itself (*estin hē oikeiōsis pros auto*), and if it is a good for itself. (VI.7 (38).27.19–24; tr. Armstrong (1966–1988), modified)[80]

Here Plotinus unambiguously rejects the possibility that *oikeiōsis* accounts for why a thing is a good for itself (his reading of the Stoic position) and asserts instead a Platonic account of the good. He claims that a thing is a good for itself insofar as it has a 'portion' (*moira*) of good. Hence, *oikeiōsis* is only a relative good: it is good only as a consequence of the real (transcendent) Good. Plotinus thus reverses the order of explanation inherent in the Stoic account. According to Plotinus, the (transcendent) good explains how and why *oikeiōsis* occurs, and why it can be understood as good, not the other way around.

Plotinus' argument here aims to undermine the very question concerning a thing's goodness in relation to itself. Plotinus asserts that it is 'absurd to enquire why a thing which is good is good for itself, as if it would have as regards itself to get out of its own nature and not be content with itself as good'. The question is superfluous, in Plotinus' view, since to have a nature, that is a form, is precisely to be a good for oneself. So, an answer formulated in terms of *oikeiōsis* is useless. Plotinus suggests that *oikeiōsis* might nevertheless serve as a label for certain relations. But it cannot qualify as an explanation for the grounds of such relations. Plotinus has discovered that it is indeed possible to provide a rough sketch of his account of the good in terms of *oikeiōsis*. However, when he aims for maximal precision, Plotinus seems concerned that the concept of *oikeiōsis* only occasions confusion.

At the very end of the passage, Plotinus pushes the notion of *oikeiōsis* to its limits: 'when something is simple we must consider this question, whether, where in no way there is in it one part and another, there is coming to belong to itself (*estin hē oikeiōsis pros auto*), and if it is a good for itself'. Since the One and to a lesser extent the Intellect are characterized by simplicity, Plotinus asks whether it can make any sense to attribute to them a self-relation qualifying as *oikeiōsis*. Curiously, he does not explicitly reject or affirm this suggestion.

Hadot's commentary on this *Ennead* sums up concisely what is at play here:

> [T]hose beings which participate the most in the good are also those which belong the most to themselves, and therefore those which love themselves the most (27.18–19).

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[79] Here, I follow Hadot's translation. Hadot sees in the expression *moira agathou* a reference to Plato, *Philebus* 20d1, 54c10 and 60b4. Indeed, the passage in Plotinus makes little sense without reference to the *Philebus*.

[80] Compare Hadot's translation of this passage.

One can compare this with VI.8 (39).13.20–22: 'As long as a being does not have the good, it desires something else; as soon as it has the good, it desires itself'. It is apparent then that in the end the true 'appropriate', the true self, is always transcendent. To love oneself is in fact to love the good present in oneself, and thus to transcend oneself.[81]

Since the true self in Plotinus transcends the apparent self, *oikeiōsis*, if taken seriously, can only represent a paradox. There is no leading part (*hēgemonikon*) in the soul for Plotinus. The self in Plotinus is de-centred. Its best 'part' lies beyond it. For Plotinus, the Aristophanes of Plato's *Symposium*, who suggests that love is a search for the restitution of an 'original nature' (*hē arkhaia phusis*, 193d4), which, if still worldly, transcends the self, is closer to the truth than the Stoics. The Plotinian subject is ultimately less self-sufficient than the Stoic subject.[82] Plato's account of love as the offspring of Poros and Penia (*Symposium* 203b ff.) underlines how need is an essential moment in subjectivity. Only if *oikeiōsis* can be reconciled with 'need' (*penia*) can Plotinus find a place for it in his thought.

v. Platonic appropriation: oikeiōsis and erōs (III.5 (50))

In the late treatise 'On Love' (*Ennead* III.5 (50)) Plotinus provides a sustained philosophical account of love developed through the interpretation of two myths drawn from Plato's *Symposium* and with substantial reference to Plato's *Phaedrus*. The very first line of the treatise suggests that serious hermeneutic effort will be required in order to understand how love can be referred to variously as a god, a demon and a passion (*pathos*) of the soul. Here Plotinus uses the notion of *oikeiōsis* in his efforts to bridge the chasm between love as divine and complete, on the one hand, and love as human and wanting, on the other. This takes place against the more general problem of Platonic metaphysics that involves reconciling the intelligible and sensible realms. So *oikeiōsis* appears here in coordination with terms such as *mimēsis* ('imitation'), *eikōn* ('image'), *anamnēsis* ('recollection') and *metekhein* ('to participate').

Having identified three possible ways of understanding love, as god, demon or passion, Plotinus turns first to passion. The term *pathos* signals that Plotinus will begin by dealing with love in psychological terms and, what is more, one in which Stoic conceptuality furnishes the lexicon. Plotinus uses a number of terms cognate to *oikeiōsis* before introducing the term itself.[83] Let us look at the first passage in this treatise related to *oikeiōsis*:

Now concerning the affection (*pathos*) of soul for which we make love responsible, there is no one who does not know that it occurs in souls which desire to embrace some beauty, and that this desire can be either a desire of temperate people who have become close to beauty in itself (*esti para sōphronōn autō tō kallei oikeiōthetōn*), or one which seeks its fulfilment in the performance of some ugly act. But it is fitting to proceed to a philosophical consideration of the source of the principle of each of these two forms of love. And if someone assumed that the principle of love was the longing for beauty itself which was there before in men's souls, and their recognition (*epignōsin*) of it and kinship (*suggeneian*) with it and unreasoned awareness that it is

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[81] Hadot (1988) 306, my translation from the French.

[82] On autonomy in Plotinus, see Remes (2011) 179–212 and Coope (2020) 47–106.

[83] The diversity of the equivalents in modern languages that translators of Plotinus have offered of such cognate terms attests to the difficulty of interpreting the notion of *oikeiōsis* in relation to these cognate terms.

something of their own (*oikeiotētos alogon sunesin*),[84] he would hit, I think, on the truth about its cause (*tou alēthous tēs aitias*). For the ugly is opposed to nature and to God. For nature when it creates looks towards beauty, and it looks towards the definite, which is 'in the column of the good'; but the indefinite is ugly and belongs to the other column. And nature has its principle from above, from the Good and obviously, from Beauty. But if anyone delights in something and is akin to it (*esti suggenēs*), he becomes close (*ōkeiōtai*) also to its images (*eikonas*). But if anyone rejects this cause, he will be unable to say how and for what reasons the emotion (*pathos*) of love occurs even in those lovers who aim at sexual intercourse. (III.5 (50).1.10–28; tr. Armstrong (1966– 1988), modified)

There are, Plotinus says, two ways that love as passion (*pathos*) can be expressed. This is essentially the distinction between 'platonic' and sexual love.[85] Plotinus introduces terminology related to *oikeion/oikeiōsis* to explain the nature of the higher passionate love. He uses *oikeioō*, a verb that literally means 'to make *oikeion*', to designate the nature of the relationship between temperate people and beauty itself (*esti para sōphronōn auto tō kallei oikeiōthentōn*).[86] In effect, then, Plotinus asserts that the appropriate relationship with the Good is one of *oikeiōsis*. This is remarkable not only because Plotinus is giving a positive spin to *oikeiōsis*, but also because he situates it at the very heart of Platonic thought.[87]

Plotinus further explains how this process unfolds: 'if anyone delights in something and is akin to it (*esti suggenēs*), he becomes close (*ōkeiōtai*) also to its images (*eikonas*)'.[88] If we read this together with the passage discussed above (and in light of the overall programme of Plato's *Symposium*), *oikeiōsis* to the Good takes place through *oikeiōsis* to the images (*eikones*) of the good. According to this interpretation, *oikeiōsis* is not simply a condition for love but is the very process that is love.

Support for this reading is to be found in the lines that follow the passage cited above. Plotinus explains further what he means by 'kinship' (*suggeneia*):

And if they come from this beauty here to the recollection (*anamnēsis*) of that archetype, this earthly beauty still satisfies them as an image (*eikōn*); but if they do not recollect, then, because they do not know what is happening to them (*agnoias tou pathous*), they fancy (*phantazetai*) this the true (*alēthēs*). If they remain chaste there is

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[84] Note the various translations of *sunesis*. Bréhier translates 'sentiment irraisonné de cette parenté'. Bailly suggests 'compréhension, intelligence' and so on, and points to Pl. *Cra.* 412a and 411a, where it is associated with *phronēsis*.

[85] There are clear echos of Pausanius' speech here (Pl. *Symp.* 180c–185c).

[86] Armstrong translates as 'which comes from the chaste who are akin to absolute beauty'. However, by translating *oikeiōthentōn* as 'who are akin', Armstrong fails to capture the verbal sense of the perfect. In fact, a reverse translation from 'akin' back into Greek might suggest that 'akin' is a better translation for *suggenēs*. That is, the term 'akin' suggests that the lover and the beautiful are in a special relationship because of an inborn likeness.

[87] Since the actual term cognate to *oikeion/oikeiōsis* which Plotinus uses here is a verb, it seems that the relationship between the lover and the beautiful is to be understood as the result of some kind of process: a process of *oikeiōsis*.

[88] Once again the translation of the term related to *oikeiōsis* proves very problematic. For if we follow Armstrong in translating *ōkeiōtai* by 'has an affinity', this term simply reiterates the content of the term *suggenes* 'akin'. That is, although 'akin' suggests that the lover is somehow related to the beauty to which he or she is attracted, the expression 'to have an affinity' suggests something like a natural predisposition to beauty but undermines the possibility of seeing the term as designating a *process*. Furthermore, this translation weakens the importance of the term *oikeiōsis* in the argument.

no error in their intimacy (*oikeiōsis*)[89] with the beauty here below, but it is error to fall away into sexual intercourse. And the man whose love of the beautiful is pure will be satisfied with beauty alone, if he recollects the archetype or even if he does not, but the man whose love is mixed with another desire of 'being immortal as far as a mortal may', seeks the beautiful in that which is everlasting and eternal; and as he goes the way of nature he sows and generates (*genna*) in beauty, sowing for perpetuity (*eis to aei*), and in beauty because of the kinship (*suggeneian*) of perpetuity and beauty. The eternal is certainly akin (*suggenes*) to the beautiful, and the eternal nature is that which is primarily beautiful and the things which spring from it are all beautiful too. That, therefore, which does not want to generate suffices more to itself in beauty, but that which desires to create wants to create beauty because of a lack and is not self-sufficient; and, if it does create something of the sort, it thinks it is self-sufficient if it generates in beauty. (III.5 (50).1.37–50)

In this passage, the terms *suggeneia* and *oikeiōsis* are closely related. Armstrong translates the substantive *suggeneia* and the adjective *suggenēs* by 'kinship' and 'akin'.[90] No doubt Plotinus intends that his reader hear the resonance of the roots of this term: the terms *suggeneia* and *suggenēs* appear immediately after the term *genna* 'generate'. It is in terms of *suggeneia* that Plotinus reinterprets Plato's account of love in the *Symposium* as 'the desire to generate in beauty' (206c5). The term *suggeneia* had in the Greek of Plotinus' day taken on a broad range of metaphorical meanings relevant to metaphysics. Of particular interest here is the fact that *suggeneia* often refers to various kinds of spiritual kinship.[91]

  The verb *oikeioō* appears in an aorist passive form (*ōkeōthē*) only once in Plotinus' oeuvre, here in his treatise on love and in the context of the myth of the birth of Love from the marriage of Aphrodite and Kronos (or the latter's father, Ouranos):[92]

Now since Aphrodite follows upon Kronos or, if you like, the father of Kronos, Heaven, she directed her activity towards him (*enērgēse pros auton*) and was appropriated to him (*ōkeiōthē*),[93] and filled with passionate love (*erastheisa*) for him brought forth Love, and with this child of hers she looks towards him; her activity has made a real substance, and the two of them look on high, the mother who bore him and the beautiful Love who has come into existence as a reality always ordered towards something else beautiful, and having its being in this, that it is a kind of intermediary between desiring and desired. (III.5 (50).2.32–40; tr. Armstrong (1966–1988), modified)

In this passage the notion of *oikeiōsis* figures in the middle of a trio of terms which lead to the birth of Love: (1) activity (*energeia*) towards Kronos (which represents the intellect), (2) *oikeiōsis* and (3) passionate love (*erōs*). *Oikeiōsis* results from an activity directed towards the intellect, or

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[89] In this passage Armstrong translates *oikeiōsis* by 'intimacy', a rendering which captures the closeness that *oikeiōsis* is supposed to produce; but this translation obscures the Greek root entirely in a context where the root appears several times.

[90] The translation of *suggenēs* in this context is not without alternative. *Suggenēs* means literally 'generated together with'; LSJ suggests 'congenital, inborn', so Armstrong's translation by 'akin' permits a weak reading of the relation between the eternal and the beautiful where a stronger reading might be more *à propos*: for example, 'The eternal is certainly of the same kind as the beautiful'. Important here is that from a certain point of view (the construction in the text suggests that this) beauty precedes eternity.

[91] See entry in Lampe (1961).

[92] Plotinus does not seem to care which variant of the myth one adopts here.

[93] Armstrong's translation follows the context of the myth very well. However, his translation of *ōkeiōthē* by an expression involving 'feeling', that is, 'felt affinity with him', rather than opting for a translation which makes a stronger metaphysical assertion, obscures the real dynamic of the passage. *Oikeiōsis* seems to designate for Plotinus a real relationship between the beloved and the lover, rather than simply the feelings of one of the poles.

a 'turning towards' the intellect which could be understood in the standard Neoplatonic language of *epistrophē* ('turn' or 'conversion'). *Oikeiōsis* becomes the term mediating between the moment of *epistrophē* (understood by Plotinus in this context as a reorientation of *energeia*) and the actual experience of love on the part of the soul. *Oikeiōsis* gives birth to love, a substance emerging from this looking towards the intellect. Love is, Plotinus explains still interpreting Plato's *Symposium*, 'intermediary between desiring and desired'.

Since in this passage *oikeiōsis* (expressed in the verb *ōkeiōthē*) immediately precedes passionate love, it might seem that the affinity felt for the *oikeion* represents the condition for the possibility of love, or even the grounds of love. This interpretation is supported by Plotinus' assertion in the first passage from III.5 (50) that we looked at (chapter 1.10–28), where he wrote, 'if someone assumed that the origin of love was the longing for beauty itself which was there before in men's souls, and their recognition of it (*epignōsin*) and kinship (*suggeneian*) with it and unreasoned awareness that it is something of their own (*oikeiotētos alogon sunesin*), he would hit, I think, on the truth about its cause (*tou alēthous tēs aitias*)' (III.5 (50).1.14–19). In these lines at the very beginning of the treatise, Plotinus tersely and tentatively expresses the work's main thesis: rather than a mere affection, a disturbance initiated from the outside, love is the product of the spontaneity of the soul as it encounters the intelligibility of that which is close and akin to it, and to which the soul can come closer by way of *oikeiōsis*. This represents, however, a perfectly Platonized form of *oikeiōsis*. *Oikeiōsis* ultimately plays a role in what is most characteristic of Platonic thought: the return to the Good. Plotinus has come full circle. Having criticized Stoic thought on *oikeiōsis*, he completely appropriates the theory to a Platonic context.

In Plotinus' estimation, love itself, including the love involved in sexual relations, can only be adequately accounted for in terms of a broader intelligible context. To better understand why this is so, it is worth dwelling on the expression 'unreasoned awareness that it is something of their own (*oikeiotētos alogon sunesin*)'. The term *sunesis* is polyvalent. What kind of 'awareness' is Plotinus thinking of here? *Sunesis* is sometimes associated with consciousness.[94] Indeed, it has been thought to play a key role in Plotinus' important contribution to the understanding of consciousness (and self-consciousness).[95] On the other hand, *sunesis* can also mean 'comprehension', such that Plotinus might mean it to indicate a kind of experience that is not necessarily characterized by reflexivity, which is at least implicit in a translation by 'consciousness'. The reading of *sunesis* as 'comprehension' is supported by the idea of *epignōsis* 'recognition' that figures prominently in this passage.

Plotinus gives us some indication of what he means by 'awareness' (*sunesis*) when he qualifies it as 'unreasoned' (*alogon*): he excludes the possibility that love proceeds by conscious mental exercise (as in Stoic social *oikeiōsis*). In Plotinus' account, love does not emerge from a careful and explicit survey of our relations to self and others. On the contrary, the awareness that ultimately explains love arises *alogon*, 'without reckoning' or we might gloss 'without any intellectual effort'. The term *alogon* serves, then, to explain how the experience of love, which might appear to be a mere 'affection', is in fact an expression of the unmediated affinity with the object of love.

In this context *epignōsis*, which can simply mean 'recognition', must point to something stronger, as it commonly does in patristic thought, for example, 'knowledge' or even 'divine knowledge'.[96] Here Plotinus uses the term *epignōsis* to unpack the concept of *anamnēsis*: recognition is an effect of recollection. But *epignōsis* refers to the rediscovery of a relation that already exists, rather than the establishment or development of some new relationship as *oikeiōsis* suggests.

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[94] Armstrong in his translation clearly means us to hear a note of this.

[95] Schwyzer (1960) 143–90.

[96] The *Greek Patristic Lexicon* notes that *epignōsis* can designate a kind of knowledge that grounds faith and can be involved in eschatological contexts. Plotinus' use of this term may be related to certain Gnostic uses of the term.

Although in this paper I put forward a developmental account of Plotinus' thought on *oikeiōsis*, I would like to highlight the fact that behind the development in his thought there is remarkable consistency. A clearer picture of the development in Plotinus' thought emerges when we identify those elements that remain stable throughout his works. Compare the passage we looked at in III.5 (50) to a passage from the early treatise I.6 (1) 'On Beauty', where Plotinus writes:

> So let us go back to the beginning and state what the primary beauty in bodies really is. It is something which we become aware of (*aisthēton ginomenon*) at first glance; the soul speaks of it as if it understood (*hōsper suneisa*) it, recognizes (*epignousa*) and welcomes it (*apodekhetai*) and as it were adapts itself to it (*hoion sunarmottetai*). (I.6 (1).2.1–5)

The vocabulary of *sunesis* and *epignōsis* in Plotinus' very first treatise is exactly the same as in the treatise III.5 (50). But what Plotinus had expressed in I.6 (1) with some qualification in terms of 'adaptation' or 'harmonization' (*hoion sunarmottetai*), is expressed in III.5 (50) without qualification in terms of *oikeiōsis. Oikeiōsis* seems to provide a technical term that had been wanting in Plotinus' philosophical vocabulary since early on.

Several lines down in the second chapter of I.6 (1) Plotinus returns to the vocabulary of *suggeneia*:

> Our explanation of this is that the soul, since it is by nature what it is and is related to the higher kind of reality in the realm of being, when it sees something akin (*suggenes*) to it or a trace of its kindred reality (*ikhnos tous suggennous*), is delighted and thrilled and returns to itself and remembers itself and its own possessions. (I.6 (1).2.7–11)

Immediately after these lines, Plotinus asks about the likeness between the intelligible and sensible beauty. The word he uses for 'likeness' is *homoiotēs*. At the risk of stretching the interpretation, we might remark that the *homoiotēs* in I.6 (1).2 could be understood in relation to the *homoiōsis theō* of Plato's *Theaetetus*. If this is so, then the replacement of *homoiotēs* of the early treatise by the term *oikeiōsis* in III.5 (50) suggests that Plotinus intends *oikeiōsis* to mean something like Platonic *homoiōsis*. There are of course further differences between the account of the soul's relation to intellect in I.6 (1) and that of III.5 (50) (where *oikeiōsis* comes into play), differences that might, once again, suggest some evolution in Plotinus' thought. It seems that in III.5 (50) he turns to the concept of *oikeiōsis* in search of a less self-centred and more subtle psychological account of the soul's relation to intellect.

According to Plotinus, love is distinct from the kind of relationships that emerge through Stoic social *oikeiōsis*. For Plotinus, love is not, in its most fundamental form, something intentionally cultivated. It is not a 'practice'. In fact, according to the account Plotinus develops in III.5 (50), love, at least in its primary sense, is not necessarily present at a conscious level of human experience. Love precedes consciousness (and philosophy). Yet it is present to humans in experience. Even before love is brought to consciousness it reveals fundamental metaphysical structures of reality, structures which can be understood in part by uncovering a certain kind of *oikeiōsis* at work in love.

In III.5 (50) we encounter what is ultimately a radical revision in Plotinus' approach to the notion of *oikeiōsis*. Plotinus, as it were, fuses the two levels of Stoic *oikeiōsis*, the unconscious attachment to self (which can be understood to coincide in some sense with self-love)[97] with the movement outward in social *oikeiōsis*. Love, a spontaneous and often

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[97] See Long ([1996](#)) 254, who, in arguing that Stoic *oikeiōsis* is founded on self-perception, implicitly suggests that *oikeiōsis* is a form of self-love.

unconscious movement outward, is for Plotinus attachment to the Good itself; it is, therefore, more primordial than any attachment to self. In III.5 (50) Plotinus gives to *oikeiōsis* what could, with reference to its Platonic background, be called an 'erotic' turn. Where for the Stoics *oikeiōsis* goes from philosophy of the self to politics, in Plotinus *oikeiōsis* goes from philosophy of self to love.[98] In the end, *oikeiōsis* in III.5 (50) explains the very capacity of the self to be directed towards the Good.

IV. Conclusion

The term *oikeiōsis* plays a significant role in Plotinus' 'philosophy of self'. He uses the notion of *oikeiōsis* with a range of meanings related to the Stoic technical term. But he discusses *oikeiōsis* primarily in contexts where he wishes to distinguish his thought on the nature of the self and the Good from that of the Stoics.

I shall briefly recapitulate the results of the study of the five key passages in which Plotinus discusses *oikeiōsis* before offering a synthesis. In III.6 (26) Plotinus employs the word *oikeiōsis* to mean something very close to the word *sugkatathesis* in Stoic moral psychology. However, Plotinus rejects Stoic moral psychology in this treatise because it ultimately violates a key principle to which he is deeply committed: the impassibility of the soul. In IV.4 (28) Plotinus employs the term *oikeiōsis* to designate attachments to earthly life and to one's inner circle of friends and family, attachments that in the context of his argument involve what he calls 'enchantment'. That is, in IV.4 (28), *oikeiōsis* obscures one's relation to the Good.[99] In III.8 (30), Plotinus uses the term *oikeiōsis* to explain how the soul can make a *logos* its own in contemplation. In VI.7 (38), Plotinus shows how the Stoic notion of *oikeiōsis* cannot serve as an adequate account of the good, since the good of self-relation in *oikeiōsis* depends on a higher good. Finally, in III.5 (50), *oikeiōsis* comes to designate the relation been the true Platonic lover and beauty itself. In fact, *oikeiōsis* essentially glosses the Platonic notion of *homoiōsis* to the divine.

We are now in a position to provide a rough sketch of the development of Plotinus' approach to the concept of *oikeiōsis*. The term *oikeiōsis* is a late addition to Plotinus' vocabulary occurring only in the middle and late treatises (in the late treatises the influence of Stoic ethics is very prominent). In the first treatises where he uses the term (III.6 (26) and IV.4 (28)), Plotinus is critical of Stoic *oikeiōsis* and does not recognize any use for it in his own thought. However, already in III.8 (30), he sees *oikeiōsis* in a more positive light, recognizing that it can contribute to explaining the nature of contemplation (*theōria*). In III.5 (50), the last treatise in which he uses the term, Plotinus has it play a key role in explaining the very heart of Platonic thought on the relation between the self and the Good. Yet, since in a treatise as late as VI.7 (38), Plotinus still rejects the notion that *oikeiōsis* is the Good, we cannot simply assert that his thought on *oikeiōsis* is characterized by a development from a negative to a positive usage. We discern, rather, a gradual appropriation and adaptation of the Stoic concept, always accompanied by an explicit rejection of Stoic *oikeiōsis*. The term *oikeiōsis* occurs primarily in the treatises that Porphyry puts in the third and fourth *Enneads*, works on questions concerning nature and psychology, respectively.

The Stoic illustration of *oikeiōsis* by concentric circles with the self at the hub does not fit Plotinus' thought. If there are any concentric circles in Plotinus, they radiate out from around the One. The individual self is never really an authentic 'centre'. In this sense, then, the self in Plotinus is fundamentally 'de-centred'. There is, as it were, always a higher self beyond the self of everyday experience.

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[98] One could, however, argue that there is an element of love at work in Stoic politics.
[99] This argument is developed more extensively in VI.7 (38).

To be sure, the Plotinian philosopher must seek and discover an inner unity, but it never fully belongs to us. This is why, at the end of the passage cited in the last paragraph, Plotinus concludes: 'So the soul is one and many in this way; the forms in body are many and one; bodies are many only; the Supreme is one only' (IV.2 (4).2.53–55). We might add that there is for Plotinus only one single One. Plotinus seems to suspect that the Stoic self might compete with the true One. Accordingly, introspection in Plotinus is not directed towards a centre or core around which relations are constructed. Instead, looking inward in Plotinus occurs by way of what might even be characterized as a kind of Stoic *oikeiōsis* in reverse: instead of building up and expanding relations like kinship relations, one takes them apart.

According to Porphyry's biography, Plotinus was reticent to share any elements of his biography. Yet it is precisely the 'biographical self' which is the subject of Stoic social *oikeiōsis*. The circles which are the material of the *oikeiōsis* process outlined by Hierocles correspond to those biographical realities which, we are told, Plotinus dismissed as irrelevant to philosophy. Porphyry writes: 'Plotinus, the philosopher of our times, seemed ashamed of being in the body. As a result of this state of mind he could never bear to talk about his race or his parents or his native country' (*On the Life of Plotinus and the Order of His Books*, 1.1–2). Stoic social *oikeiōsis* entreats one to better the self by reworking natural attachments. In contrast, Plotinus thinks that one is to search for the self beyond such attachments. This innermost part of the self coincides with the Good or the One which, based on his reading of Plato's *Republic*, Plotinus sees as beyond being.

As a foreigner in multicultural Rome, Plotinus perhaps thought that the recognition of beauty requires no intentional effort, that is, no effort such as that involved in extending circles in Stoic *oikeiōsis*. *Eros*, which makes possible the Platonic recognition of the Good, is not bound by biological attachments like those to a family or community. Not entirely unlike the naïve adolescent love of Romeo and Juliet, platonic love knows no respect for community boundaries. The erotic relationship is for Plotinus more truly philosophical than any relationship that can be accounted for in terms of *oikeiōsis*. This platonic love emerges from a sense of wonder that seeks beyond self by leaps rather than steps.

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