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Neoplatonism

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A reemergence of ideas first expounded by Plato, Neoplatonism developed in Egypt in the third century under the influence of Plotinus. His disciple Porphyry expanded the philosophy, laying a foundation for Iamblichus, who created the form of Neoplatonism that enveloped the Roman world.

Marius Victorinus translated the works of Iamblichus into Latin in the decades immediately prior to Augustine's arrival in Milan. In doing so, he presented a form of Neoplatonism that could be absorbed into the church of his day, notably in his arguments for the Trinity. Augustine was clearly influenced by the Latin translations of Marius Victorinus, introduced to him by Ambrose, bishop of Milan. In his *Confessions*, Augustine describes the intellectual effect of reading "some books of the Platonists."

Neoplatonism has had a profound effect on European thinking over the past two millennia. It became the basis of higher education in the Roman Empire, addressing all fields of learning. Western Europe inherited the philosophy, as the church provided the basis for medieval thought.

It was also transmitted to Islam as a result of the overrun of Syria and Egypt, whence it reentered Byzantium and eventually rejuvenated thought in Western Europe, forming the philosophical underpinning of the Italian Renaissance.

A fundamental element of Neoplatonism is that knowledge is not an end in itself but a means to salvation. As in the gnostic philosophy that preceded it, ignorance could be equated with evil.

But even more, as the humanist movement appreciated, people "possess their own

means for salvation” (*Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, s.v. “Neoplatonism”).

As with previous forms of Greek philosophy, reason was of great importance, and irrationalism was not accepted. Hence reason and rational explanations were fundamental.

Virtue existed on various levels, and it was to be pursued to the highest level, according to Routledge, for the purpose of “becoming similar to God.”