

## Neoplatonism

Neoplatonism is a school of thought, or mystical philosophy, based on the writings of Plato, that took shape from the third century to the sixth century. The founder of Neoplatonism is considered to be Plotinus (ca. 205–270 CE), whose teachings influenced the features of Neoplatonism until Roman Emperor Justinian closed the Platonic Academy in 529. Plotinus' writings and the form of Neoplatonism that he inspired can be traced back to the era of Hellenistic syncretism. One major component of this amalgamation that influenced Neoplatonic thought was the incorporation of Jewish scriptures into Greek academic and intellectual groups. The combination of the story of Genesis and Plato's *Timaeus* engendered an increase in cosmological theorizing that ultimately led to the work of Plotinus. Plotinus' philosophical writings were extremely influential in shaping later Christian, Jewish, and Gnostic mystics and metaphysicians over the course of several centuries.

### *Plotinus*

Plotinus' writings asserted that all objective matter, material, or existence represented the outwardly expression of an intrinsically introspective deity known as the One or the Good. Plotinus put forth the idea that the One was a completely transcendent and supreme force that was indivisible and could not be multiplied. Furthermore, it surpassed any classification of "being" and "nonbeing." Plotinus claimed that the objects of human existence and experience create the notion of "being," but the One transcends any of these earthly objects, and as a result, surpasses the concepts that humans derive from them. Plotinus also argued that the One could not be molded or categorized as any existing thing, nor could it be considered to comprise the sum of all things.

Many early medieval Christian thinkers and theologians were influenced by the major principles of Neoplatonism. The early writings of the Christian theologian Augustine of Hippo, for example, reflected a Neoplatonic influence. In particular, Augustine adhered to the notion that the absence of good was the source of evil, and that the absence of good arises from human sin.

### *The Reemergence of Neoplatonism*

After Emperor Justinian shut down the Neoplatonic Academy during the first half of the sixth century, the philosophies of Plato and Plotinus were absent from the intellectual circles of Western Europe until the Renaissance. During the mid-fifteenth century, several Italian thinkers and philosophers, such as Marsilio Ficino and Pico della Mirandola, began to unearth and translate the writings of Plato and Plotinus. In addition to translating Plato's and Plotinus's works into Latin, Ficino composed his own writings and commentaries on these ancient texts. The revival of Neoplatonism during the Renaissance reflects some of the broader social and cultural transformations occurring throughout the period, as thinkers throughout Europe began to revisit classical texts and adapt them to their own worldviews.