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On Eros in Plotinus: Attempt at a Systematic Reconstruction (with a Preliminary Chapter on Plato)

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My gratitude goes some way back to those high-school teachers who introduced me to the study of philosophy and the classics. They are the first in a small group of people who through the years helped to spark and kindle my interest in these fields by handing me some of the tools necessary to cultivate them. Last in the order of time within this group is Adriaan Peperzak: in the past few years he has been for me an example of thoughtful scholarship and of supportive and friendly mentorship, both as a teacher and as the director of this dissertation. Thanks also to my readers: Hugh Miller, Mark Waymack, and especially Gregory Dobrov for his help in reviving my study of ancient Greek and kindly answering grammatical queries on texts by Plato and Plotinus.

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But most of all I wish to thank Elaine, my wife. Through her support, patience, and, simply, her being there, she has been showing me how many forms love can take in practice. Without her I would still be working on this; perhaps I would have never started.

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To my wife
Οὐκοῦν τὸ γε τῷ ὄντι φίλον οὐ φίλου τινὸς ἐνεκα φίλον ἐστίν;

—Plato

Καὶ ἕως τί ἐστιν ἀνωτέρω τοῦ παρόντος,
αἱρεται φύσει ἄνω αἱρομένη ύπὸ τοῦ δόντος τὸν ἐρωτα.

—Plotinus
PREFACE

...la philosophie: sagesse de l’amour au service de l’amour.

—E. Levinas

1 Questions

As an academic endeavor, a dissertation should provide a contribution—ideally an original one, but realistically a fairly ordinary one often enough will do—in a given field of knowledge on a given subject matter.

But when the field of knowledge is philosophy, when the subject matter of the academic endeavor is love, and when within this endeavor the ultimate object of love is argued, if seldom experienced, to be an infinite “erotic” power—the power of love: love as the greatest and simplest power—from which originates the whole of reality, can there be much doubt about the insufficiency of even the purest form of knowledge not so much to grasp such an object cognitively, but to relate to it correspondingly, or as the nature of the object itself requires? How can knowledge constitute the veritable path—the privileged μέθοδος—to that which, in order to be approached for what it is, by its own nature does not withdraw from intelligibility altogether, but rather demands that intelligibility be rooted in love? Can it be that when that which comes under investigation

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1 Levinas (1978, 253), translated in Levinas (1981, 162): “Philosophy is the wisdom of love at the service of love.”

2 From this point on, the adjective “erotic” (and the related adverb “erotically”) will be used to mean “pertaining to eros” in the broad Platonic (and Plotinian) sense of the term, a meaning which may include but is not restricted to the sexual sphere.
is love and, with it, its ultimate intentional object, or the \textit{sumnum desideratum} as both the origin and the end of all loving, the lucidity of detached vision—an unaffected vision: a vision without love—falls short of the very intelligibility which vision claims to bear as its proper fruit?

Conversely, a love that remains unquestioned, soberly uninquisitive with regard to its own nature: how sincere can it be about what it loves (or merely \textit{claims} to love)? Should we take into consideration a love which in principle refuses reflectively to distance itself from the factual immediacy of its own propensity toward a beautiful object? What are we to think of a love that impatiently shrinks from pondering whether the immediate object of its passion is ultimate? And even a love that somehow has come to realize or merely to be persuaded that the infinity of its truly final object requires love itself to become infinite: can it still be called love if at the same time it shuns the duty—a lover’s duty, doubtless—of constantly purifying itself for the sake of the beloved; if it indefinitely postpones the task of perseveringly renewing the awareness of its own limits—the ever insufficient drive of its erotic conatus—with regard to its final object; if it continues to ignore the necessity—a paradoxical necessity but a necessity nonetheless—of having to diminish in breadth and grow in intensity as it gradually draws closer to its \textit{desideratum}?

Does a love which, once achieved its end, stops loving, truly achieve its end?

\textbf{2 Plan of the Reconstruction}

I maintain that Plotinus’ reflection is, among other things, an argumentatively sustained answer to these many questions. The goal of the present study is to show that
what I merely maintain to be the case may actually be the case. In order to determine this, the obvious method is to examine the available evidence, that is, to investigate, within the limits of my abilities, Plotinus’ arguments in his writings, what have come to be known as the Enneads.

My claim is not that Plotinus’ understanding of love—of ἔρως, hence his “erotics”
— is immediately available as a system to the cursory reader with little effort, nor that it is free of all (apparent?) contradiction. The unusual difficulty of the Enneads—unusual not in comparison to the relative ease of ordinary readings, but to the ordinary difficulty of the average philosophical text—precludes this categorically. Thus, the claim is rather that if one can speak at all of a Plotinian erotics, this can emerge only as a laborious interpretive reconstruction from a plurality of arguments and statements which, despite their thematic heterogeneousness and prima facie lack of consistency, can be found to form a generally coherent picture, or a system. The present study is an attempt at such an interpretive reconstruction.

My treatment of the subject will unfold in two steps, comprising a total of four chapters. The first step (Chapter One and Chapter Two) investigates Plotinus’ connection to Plato with regard to our main theme, eros. The second step (Chapter Three and

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3 “Erotics”: like “logic,” “physics,” “ethics,” “metaphysics,” etc.—and, in Plotinus, encompassing them all. From now on, I will simply transliterate the term ἔρως (simplified without the long quantity: eros).

4 I wrote “generally coherent,” rather than simply “coherent,” because I am not fully persuaded that Plotinus’ understanding of lower matter (at once viewed as the necessary substrate of the sensible universe, as the necessary end point of the process of derivation, and as radical evil), and particularly the thorny issue of its generation, has been met by an interpretation that does away with all the difficulties. On this topic see Subsection 3.4.3, where I address some of the most relevant interpretations of the status of lower matter and try to support the plausibility of my doubts textually and argumentatively.

5 On the use of the term “system” see Chapter One note 61.
Chapter Four) is my systematic reconstruction of Plotinus’ view of *eros* as a key to understand his metaphysics.

Chapter One (Plato: The Ascent of Love in the *Symposium* and Some Related Texts) introduces virtually all the elements that will be found relevant in Plotinus’ assessment of love through a reading of Socrates’ speech in Plato’s *Symposium* and some related texts from the Platonic corpus. These texts may be understood as the soil from which Plotinus’ reflection will eventually sprout. Since the dialogical form of Plato’s works seems to be intrinsically resistant to attempts at constructing a system out of the dialogues and since Plotinus’ own reading of Plato is often quickly dismissed as fantastic or at best inaccurate, Section 1.2 will introduce my direct analysis of the relevant Platonic texts with a general discussion of two questions. First—the thorny question of Platonic hermeneutic—how should we read Plato’s writings? Second, can we say that Plotinus’ reading of Plato presents in any way an accurate or fair interpretation of what takes place in the dialogues? The next three sections of Chapter One (i.e., 1.3, 1.4, and 1.5) provide an interpretation of Socrates’ speech in the *Symposium* (with particular emphasis on the so-called Ascent Passage) and a few other texts from the dialogues that I believe are closely related to it. The main point of this interpretation is to highlight some of the elements that will be central to Plotinus’ understanding of *eros* and which, I suggest, may be already dormant in Plato’s text (in particular the hierarchical division of reality and the necessity for the soul to ascend through the levels of this hierarchy in order to come to face Beauty or the Good).

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6 See Chapter One note 4 on the meaning of the term “dialogues.”
Chapter Two (Plotinus as Interpreter of Plato: A reading of *Enneads* III.5 [50] *On Eros*) is rather analytic in character, in the sense that it aims at presenting a relatively close reading of a relatively short Plotinian text. The chapter opens with a brief discussion of how Plotinus reads Plato in general, and (Platonic) myths in particular (Section 2.2), a discussion that should be read in connection with Section 1.2. This discussion is followed by an overview of treatise III.5 [50] of the *Enneads*, which is entirely dedicated to the interpretation of Plato’s understanding of *eros*, with particular focus on the story of Eros’ birth in the *Symposium* (Section 2.3). The chapter closes with some observations on the nature of *eros* as presented in *Enneads* III.5 [50] (Section 2.4). Notably, I will argue that for Plotinus human experience affords several qualitatively different manifestations of love (summarily classified as pure, mixed, and deviant *eros*), but what is most proper to the essence of *eros* in its pure form as presented in this treatise is its directedness to the Good.

I put forth my tentative systematic reconstruction of Plotinian *erotics*—the second step—in the remaining two chapters of this study, Chapter Three and Chapter Four. In contrast with Chapter Two, the nature of these two chapters is synthetic. This means that instead of providing a close reading of a single text, I draw and interpretively rearrange material for my conclusions from the entire Plotinian corpus. The main goal of these chapters is to show how the notion of *eros* is operative through the whole of Plotinus’ metaphysics both in the process of derivation of all reality from one single source—the One—and in the soul’s journey of ascent or return to it.⁷ For this reason, Chapter Three

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⁷ A similar thesis was cautiously adumbrated by Armstrong (1967, 261–262). To my knowledge, besides the precise commentaries on treatise III.5 [50] *On eros* by WOLTERS (= Wolters 1984) and HADOT (=...
and Chapter Four should be taken as two parts of the same diptych with *eros* as their guiding theme and the One as both the origin and terminus of all *eros*.

Chapter Three (Plotinus’ Metaphysics of Love: The Derivation of all Reality from the One As Erotic Procession) opens with a treatment of the issue of the derivation of multiplicity from a single simple source, which for Plotinus is the One. *Eros* is employed as a key concept to understand this issue. I argue that according to Plotinus, both the derivation of all reality from one single principle and its unfolding are regulated by *eros*. More specifically, the source of the procession of all reality is understood as a simple “erotic” power: an *eros* which the One bears to itself and only to itself, and at the same time is productive of otherness. The derivation of reality is thus conceived as an overflowing of *eros* productive of *eros*. However, while in the One *eros* is self-contained, or aims at nothing other than itself, in all derived reality *eros* brings with itself a directedness to something other than itself, namely to the One understood as the Good.

The communication of all *eros* from the One is also what allows derived reality to structure itself hierarchically in the fully formed hypostases of Intellect and Soul, and in the sensible universe. The unfolding of each hypostasis is itself understood as a threefold erotic process: first, the superabundance of erotic energy proceeding from the higher hypostasis; second, the erotic reversion to the generating hypostasis; third, the communication of (increasingly diminished) erotic energy that will constitute the first

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Hadot 1990), of which I will make abundant use in Chapter Two, there are only two monographs on *eros* in Plotinus, both in French: Lacrosse (1994) and Pigler (= Pigler 2002). Lacrosse (1994), to which I will occasionally refer, focuses on the type of *eros* that is proper to each hypostasis. Pigler focuses on the systematic role of *eros* in the process of derivation of all reality from the One, or, as she puts it in the subtitle of her book, the structuring of the intelligible world. I will refer to Pigler’s insightful work frequently in Chapter Three.
stage of the next hypostasis, until with lower matter the erotic power of reversion comes to a halt.

Chapter Four (Plotinus’ Metaphysics of Love: The Return of the Soul to the One As Erotic Ascent) shifts the focus of the discussion to the movement inverse to the process of derivation: the traditional theme of the return of the soul to the One qua Good, here conceived of as the universal final cause. This theme is again investigated from the perspective of *eros*. In particular I will argue that for Plotinus the very possibility of being erotically directed toward a universal final cause (as found, for example, in Aristotle) remains unintelligible unless one views the final cause as also the origin of the *eros* directed toward it. Thus, the One is the Good not only because it is universally desired but because it is at the same time the origin of the *eros* by which it is so desired (Section 4.2). The remainder of the chapter is dedicated to investigate the process of attunement of the individual soul to the Good. This process, technically referred to as the Ascent, takes place as a fundamental disciplining of the soul’s affective commitments, or of its *eros*. The goal of the Ascent, whose major presuppositions, features, and stages I present in the sections following 4.2, is increasingly to narrow the gap that separates the individual soul from the final aim of its desire, the Good, until this gap is reduced to a bare minimum and the soul, transformed into pure *eros* for the One, comes in contact with its *desideratum*.

In the Epilogue of this study I sketch the outline of two possibly problematic aspects of Plotinus’ thought and quickly breach the question of the relevance of his philosophy for the present.
3 Practical Indications

Before I turn to the work itself, in this last section of the Preface I will provide some practical indications for the reading of the material ahead.

(1) Divisions of the text and internal references. The text of this study is variously divided in chapters, sections, and subsections. I will reserve the terms “chapter,” “section,” and “subsection” to indicate these divisions of the text precisely. Although such divisions may on occasion reflect the argumentative flow of the material, typically within a given chapter, their main purpose is merely that to facilitate internal reference. Examples of internal references are “Section 2.1” and “Subsection 1.5.2,” where the first number indicates the chapter, the second, the section within that chapter, and the third, the subsection within that section.

(2) Footnotes. References to footnotes include the chapter number (e.g., Chapter Three note 9), unless the footnote is located in the same chapter in which the reference occurs, in which case only the number of the footnote is given (e.g., note 112).

(3) Abbreviations. All abbreviations I used are listed at pages xxi-xxii below.

(4) Bibliographical references. Directions on how to find references to all sources used in this study are given in the opening Notice of the Bibliography on page 496.

(5) Plato’s works: citations, editions, translations. Unless otherwise indicated, the Greek text of Plato is that of Burnet (1899–1907), cited according to the traditional Stephanus pagination (Estienne 1578) and Burnet’s line numbering; the numeration of the Epigrams follows Cooper (1997). The translations are mine, unless stated otherwise. References to all editions and/or translations of Plato’s works used in this study are listed
in the section of the Bibliography titled “Plato.” In Chapter One the works of Plato are usually cited without the name of their author (thus, Symposium 202a3 = Plato, Symposium 202a3); elsewhere, Plato’s name is added.

(6) Plotinus’ works: citations, editions, translations. Unless otherwise indicated, Plotinus’ Greek text is cited from the editio minor of P. Henry and H.-R. Schwyzer (HS2), and the English translation is by A. H. Armstrong (ARMSTRONG);8 the translation of Porphyry’s Life of Plotinus (VP), which is included in most complete editions and translations of the Enneads, is also from ARMSTRONG, while the Greek text is the one found in the volume edited by L. Brisson, J.-L. Cherlonneix, and others.9 The text of the Enneads is quoted according to the traditional numeration of ennead, treatise (first in Porphyry’s order, and then in chronological order within square brackets), chapter, and Brehiér’s lines10 (e.g., I.1 [53] 1.1–2).11 References to all editions and/or translations of

8 Notably, in Chapter Two the translations of passages from Enneads III.5 [50] On eros are mine, unless otherwise stated.
9 Brisson et al. (1992).
10 Bréhier (1924–1938), followed by Henry and Schwyzer in both of their critical editions, HS1 and HS2.
11 Creuzer (1835, III, 200, 202), followed by Guthrie (1918), inverts the chronological order of the two first treatises of the fourth Ennead, thus labeling “IV.1 [4]” what in HS1 and HS2 is IV.1 [21], and “IV.2 [21]” what in HS1 and HS2 is IV.2 [4] (cf. Cilento 1947–1949, II, 475). Analyses of the manuscript evidence for treatises IV.1 [21] On the essence of the soul 2 and IV.2 [4] On the essence of the soul 1 have established that these two treatises should be read in reverse order (according to information provided by Porphyry in VP 25.12–15, 4.28–29, 63–65, and as the titles just assigned to them indicate). Therefore, treatise 21 in the chronological order should be, not the first, but the second treatise of the fourth Ennead: IV.2 [21] On the essence of the soul 2; vice versa, treatise 4 in the chronological order should be, not the second, but the first treatise of the fourth Ennead: IV.1 [4] On the essence of the soul 1. Accordingly, HS1 and HS2 print IV.1 [21] and IV.2 [4] in reverse order, but maintain the traditional numeration of the treatises. By contrast, some later editions renumber them as IV.1 [4] and IV.2 [21] (e.g., Cilento 1947–1949; ARMSTRONG). For practical reasons, in my references I will follow the traditional numeration maintained by HS1 and HS2 (cf. the introduction to IV.1 [21] in IGAL); thus, as already indicated in this note, the full labels of these two treatises are: IV.1 [21] On the essence of the soul 2, and IV.2 [4] On the essence of the soul 1. For further details on this issue see Henry (1938, 16), the notes ad loc. for the titles of these treatises in HS1 and HS2, and the introductions to these treatises in virtually all editions and/or
Plotinus’ works used in this study are found in the section of the Bibliography titled “Plotinus.” A chart with Porphyry’s traditional arrangement and titles of the *Enneads* and their chronological order as they appear in his *Life of Plotinus* 4–6 and 24–26 is provided in Appendix A for the reader’s convenience. In Chapter 2, beginning with Section 2.3, *Ennead* III.5 [50] *On eros* is usually cited only by chapter and line number (thus, 2.3 = Plotinus, *Enneads* III.5 [50: *On eros*] 2.3); in *Chapters* 3 and 4 Plotinus’ *Enneads* are generally cited without author and title (thus, VI.9 [9] 1.5 = Plotinus, *Enneads* VI.9 [9: *On the Good or the One*] 1.5); everywhere else the name of the author is added (thus, Plotinus IV.3 [27] 3.3 = Plotinus, *Enneads* IV.3 [27: *On difficulties about the soul* I] 3.3).

(7) *Pre-modern sources: citations, editions, translations.* Unless otherwise indicated, the text of pre-modern works is cited according to the editions and translations listed in the section of the Bibliography titled “Pre-modern Authors.” When more than one translation of a given work is listed in that section of the Bibliography, each time I will indicate which translation I am using.

(8) *Citations of passages in Greek.* In reporting Greek texts verbatim, I capitalize the first letter of the word immediately following the Greek period (“.”) and question mark (“;”) for no other reason than that I find this to be easier on the eye, particularly in longer passages (for a similar practice with Plotinus’ text, cf. Henry and Schwyzer’s *editio maior*: HS1). Line numbers of longer passages cited in Greek are given in square brackets within those passages. In the translations of these passages, line numbers are also provided in square brackets, but obviously they correspond only approximately to
the division of the text in the original; when the word order of the translated text departs considerably from that of the original, line numbers are omitted in the translation.

(9) Untranslated material. Translations of material from works in modern languages other than English and unavailable in English are mine; this material is left in the original when appearing only in the footnotes.

(10) Strings of references. In strings of references to Plato, Aristotle, and Plotinus, typically appearing in the footnotes (e.g., Plotinus I.7 [54] 1.13–15, I.8 [51] 2.4–5, III.8 [30] 11.11, V.5 [32] 12.40–50, 13.1–5, VI.7 [38] 24.13–16, 29.9–10, 41.28–31), these references are given in accordance with the order of Thrasyllus’s canon for Plato (cf. Burnet 1899–1907; Cooper 1997), of the traditional order found in the commentators of the first six centuries A.D. for Aristotle (cf. Bekker 1831–1870, I–II; Barnes 1995), and of Porphyry’s thematic division for Plotinus (cf. Appendix A). In the rare cases in which I do not follow these orders, references appearing first in a given sequence are considered more relevant to the point under discussion than those appearing later (with the exception of sequences occurring in terminological queries, in which the terms are usually listed alphabetically and each term constitutes a separate sequence).

(11) Capitalization of some technical terms. Throughout this study, I capitalize several English terms (e.g., Beauty, One, Intellect, Principle of Prior Simplicity, etc.) when these are used somewhat technically. Here is a list of the places where I indicate matters of capitalization: in Chapter One, pages 32 and 48 and note 161; in Chapter Two, notes 27 and 46; in Chapter Three, notes 9 and 10, and pages 224 and 236; in Chapter Four, pages 290 and 334 and note 62.
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ABSTRACT

This study is an attempt at a systematic reconstruction of Plotinus’ understanding of *eros* or love in two basic steps, corresponding to Chapters One–Two and Three–Four respectively.

The first step highlights Plotinus’ connection to Plato. In Chapter One, first I argue that Plotinus’ way of reading the dialogues is faithful to Plato’s intention insofar as it is an active engagement in the practice of philosophy advocated in the dialogues; I then try to show that some important elements of Plotinus’ understanding of *eros*, most notably the differentiation of levels of reality in the soul’s ascent to Beauty and the view of goodness as self-diffusive, are already present, somewhat implicitly, in Plato. Chapter Two is a focused overview of Plotinus’ treatise on *eros* (*Enneads* III.5 [50]), the text in which he offers a threefold classification of love as pure, mixed, and deviant through a sustained interpretation of Plato’s views on the topic, with particular focus on the myth of Eros’ birth in the *Symposium*.

The second step is my systematic reconstruction of Plotinus’ view of *eros* as a key to comprehend his metaphysics. In Chapter Three I show how the notion of *eros* is essential to understand both the derivation of all reality from a unique simple principle or universal efficient cause (the One) and its structuring in decreasing levels of unity and intensity of *eros* (the hypostases of Intellect and soul, the sensible world, and pre-cosmic matter). What the One gives to all derived reality is love for the One qua other, an energy
which decreases as its distance from its *desideratum* increases. Similarly, in Chapter Four I focus on the importance of *eros* to understand the inverse process: the return or gradual ascent of the individual soul to the One, now viewed as the Good or universal final cause. At each stage of the ascent (purification, intellification, and union), the individual soul experiences an increase in both unity and intensity of *eros*, until at the end of the journey, stripped of all that is alien to it, the soul is transformed in one single reality: *eros* for the One.
CHAPTER ONE:

PLATO: THE ASCENT OF LOVE IN THE SYMPOSIUM

AND SOME RELATED TEXTS

Τὸ μὲν οὖν ταῦτα διασχυρίσασθαι οὕτως ἔχειν ὡς ἐγὼ διελήλυθα, οὐ πρέπει νῦν ἔχοντι ἀνδρί· [...] τοῦτο καὶ πρέπειν μοι δοκεῖ καὶ ἄξιον κινδυνεύσαι οἰομένῳ οὕτως ἔχειν—καλὸς γάρ ὁ κινδύνος...

Τὴν ψυχήν, Ἀγάθωνα φιλῶν, ἐπὶ χείλεσιν ἔσχον· ἤλθε γὰρ ἡ τλήμων ὡς διαβησομένη.

—Plato

1.1 Introduction

Socrates’ speech in the Symposium is one of the seminal texts that shaped Plotinus’ view of what I will be referring to as love or desire. For this reason, I thought it appropriate to begin this study with an introductory chapter dealing, not so much with a general account of Plato’s understanding of love (if there ever was one, and if we will ever be in a position to grasp it adequately), as with a tentative interpretive sketch of some of the basic ideas about love which I believe may be safely derived from Plato’s writings, particularly the Symposium. Prospectively these ideas are also an anticipation of some of the elements which will become central to my reconstruction of Plotinian

1 Plato, Phaedo 114d1–2, 4–6: “No reasonable man would insist that these things are as I have described them: [...] but for the one who thinks in this way, I believe this is fitting and a thing worth risking—for the risk is a noble one.” Plato, Epigrams 6 (= Anthologia Palatina V.78): “When I kiss Agathon, my soul is on my lips; | for it comes, the poor thing, hoping to cross over to him” (translation by J. M. Edmonds and J. M. Cooper, in Cooper 1997, slightly modified). For indications on how to read the references to editions and/or translations of Plato’s works see Section 3 of the Preface.
“erotics” (cf. Preface note 3) in the next three chapters. Parts of Socrates’ second speech in the *Phaedrus* and of books VI and VII of the *Republic* are also particularly instrumental to this end and will be included in the discussions of this chapter. I begin my account with some general remarks on the complex issue of Platonic hermeneutics (i.e., how should we read a Platonic dialogue?) and the related question of whether Plotinus provides us with a sound interpretation of Plato’s writings (1.2). The main purpose of the first section is to clarify in what sense I think Plotinus’ reading of Plato, while obviously far from meeting the standards of modern philology, may still be considered a philosophically acceptable interpretation. Some preliminary clarifications about Plato’s choice of the term ἔρως and the mythical figure of Eros in the *Symposium* (1.3) and a sketch of the argument of Socrates’ speech in that dialogue (1.4) will follow. I put forth the main argument in the last section of the chapter (1.5) through a series of critical observations on the so-called Ascent Passage which I deem particularly relevant to our main topic.

### 1.2 Reading the Dialogues: Is Plotinus Misinterpreting Plato?

We may frame the broad issue of Platonic hermeneutics in the terms of the *incipit* of Sextus’ *Hypotypōseis*: “The natural result of any investigation is that the investigators either discover the object of search or deny that it is discoverable and confess it to be inapprehensible or persist in their search.”

Relatively little effort is required to see how a

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2 The same question can be asked of other figures in the tradition of Platonism, including Aristotle (cf. Gerson 2005a).

3 Sextus Empiricus, *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* I.1: Τοῖς ζητοῦσί τι πράγμα ἢ εὑρέσειν ἔπακολοουθεῖν εἰκός ἢ ἄρενησιν εὑρέσεως καὶ ἀκαταλεψίας ὁμολογίαν ἢ ἐπιμονὴν ζητήσεως.
writer of essays or of treatises could fit this classification. But Plato wrote dialogues; and while he does speak to his readers insofar as he is the author of the dialogues, it is not immediately clear where he stands on many issues. It was probably also this lack of immediate transparency that grounded, from antiquity, two major lines of interpretation

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4 In the case of spurious works, sometimes included in collections of Plato’s works (e.g., Burnet 1899–1907; Cooper 1997), insofar as he is the inspiration behind them. To avoid equivocation, the term “dialogues” here indicates, besides Plato’s works written in the dramatic dialogue form, those in which the dialogue form is either rather marginal (i.e., Menexenus, and more so Timaeus, Critias, and the very likely spurious Clitophon and Epinomis), or absent (i.e., Letters and Epigrams).

5 If for obvious reasons we exclude likely genuine letters from this calculation, whichever they may be, we find Plato explicitly referring to himself only three times in the entire Platonic corpus, that is, twice in the Apology (34a1 and 38b6) and once in the Phaedo (59b10). A remark by Simmias reported by an anonymous commentator well captures the likely condition of the readers of the dialogues: “Plato himself, too, shortly before his death, had a dream of himself as a swan, darting from tree to tree and causing great trouble to the fowlers, who were unable to catch him. When Simmias the Socratic heard this dream, he explained that all men would endeavor to grasp Plato’s meaning; none, however, would succeed, but each would interpret him according to his views, whether in a metaphysical or physical or any other sense” (Anonymous Prolegomena to Platonic Philosophy I.1.29–35). We find Montaigne still toying with the same idea of the anonymous commentator as late as 1575, in his famous Apologie de Raimond Sebond: “Voyez demener et agiter Platon. Chacun, s’honorant de l’appliquer à soi, le couche du costé qu’il le veut. On le promeine et l’insere à toutes les nouvelles opinions que le monde reçoit; et le differente l’on à soy-mesmes selon le different cours des choses. On fait desadvouer à son sens les meurs licites en son siecle, d’autant qu’elles sont illicites au nostre. Tout cela viflement et puissamment, autant qu’est puissant et vif l’esprit de l’interprete” (Essais II.12 = Montaigne 1962, 571). In a similar way, but while remaining open to the possibility of explaining Plato, Plotinus (IV.8 [6] 1.26–28) writes: “What, then, does this philosopher say? He is obviously not saying the same thing everywhere, so that one can easily know what his intention is.”

6 Some may consider the expression “lack of immediate transparency” as either simplistic or euphemistic. Tigerstedt, in an excellent study on the general interpretation of Plato to which I owe a significant portion of the information gathered in this section, soberly remarks that “there is no agreement among scholars as to the real nature of Platonic philosophy”; and as he laments the tendency of some Plato scholars to read the dialogues while dogmatically assuming to know already what Plato thought, he concludes: “As so often, the outcome of individual dogmatism is skepticism” (Tigerstedt 1977, 21). Today, almost forty years later (Tigerstedt 1977 was actually ready for publishing in 1973), consensus on how to read Plato (and hence on his philosophy) is still lacking. This is not unexpected, but the situation seems at least less murky than it used to be. Recently, in his introduction to a collection of previously published studies, Thesleff (2009, xiii) remarked that despite the interpretive chaos characterizing modern Platonic scholarship, certain common trends can be observed. In particular, he emphasizes six major shifts: (i) the importance attributed to their literary and dramatic character; (ii) skepticism concerning the possibility of establishing a fixed chronology; (iii) awareness of oral discussions within the Academy which are likely reflected in the dialogues; (iv) the possibility of a “coherent doctrinal basis in the oral discussions”; (v) the question surrounding the dialogue form and Plato’s audience; (vi) the reciprocal benefit gained by “historicist” (focusing mainly on the context) and “modernist” (reading the dialogues with modern philosophy in mind) interpreters of Plato. I will briefly and loosely touch on all these points in what follows.
of the Platonic text which we may conventionally agree to call doctrinal (or dogmatic) and aporetic (or skeptical) respectively. Briefly, in their extreme forms, the former approach takes the dialogues to express Plato’s genuine views (transmitted not in straightforward statements or in treatises, however, but precisely in dialogical form, which, one may argue, for Plato is the form or genre particularly fitted to philosophical discourse), while the latter reads them as mere attempts to explore any given issue without Plato ever committing himself to expressly endorse a definitive position.

Intersecting these two major hermeneutic poles, doctrinal and aporetic, we find a number of what we might refer to as reading strategies. Four such strategies are worth mentioning. The first is *stylometry*, a method of text study that aims at ascertaining the authorship of a given text (and more often, in the case of the dialogues, its chronological position in Plato’s literary production) through the statistical analysis of its style. The

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7 This denomination is generally accepted in contemporary Plato scholarship (e.g., Tigerstedt 1977, 13; Irwin 1995, 5–7; Cooper 1997, xxi–xxv) and is attested by Sextus Empiricus, who writes: “Plato has been described by some as ‘dogmatic’ [δογματικὸν], by others as ‘aporetic’ [ἀπορητικὸν], and by others again as partly dogmatic and partly aporetic” (Outlines of Pyrrhonism I.221; R. G. Bury’s translation, slightly modified). Cf. also Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers* III.51.


9 See L. Campbell (1867), Dittenberg (1881), Lutoslawski (1897, especially 64–193), Ryle (1966); critical works on this method are those by Thesleff (1982; 1989; see also 2009, xiv), Ledger (1989), and Brandwood (1990). The appearance of computers enhanced the practice of stylometric analysis, though not necessarily the quality of its results. For instance, stylometric studies by Morton and McLean (1966, 93–94) concluded that among the writings traditionally referred to as the fourteen Pauline epistles of the New Testament, Paul wrote only four (i.e., *Galatians, 1 Corinthians*, and most of *Romans* and *2 Corinthians*), while six other hands are detectable for the remaining ten letters. However, more recent studies show a fundamental lack of consensus on this point, not only among New Testament scholars, but more significantly among specialists in stylometric analysis (cf. Brown 1997, 587–588). This is not surprising, since every statistical analysis, regardless of the quantity and accuracy of the data collected, depends heavily on the kinds of questions one asks of these data (see Gadamer 1995, 301; for a similar point raised specifically about Lutosławski’s research on Plato, see Tannery 1899, 168–169). The
second strategy, often heavily dependent on stylometry, is a theory of historical development of the dialogues (the so-called genetic or developmental approach), whose main contention in relation to Plato is that he changed his mind over time about certain issues, and that the dialogues naturally make better sense if we take such development into account. The third strategy is what may be called a dramatic setting theory, mainly insisting that each dialogue is not only a work of philosophy but also a drama, and that as a dramatic unity it should be understood as having relatively little relation to other dialogues. Different authors disagree about the extent of this relation and about the degree of priority that the dramatic aspect should have over the philosophical aspect or vice versa.

Fourthly, one can read Plato simply by focusing on the arguments presented in the dialogues, often regardless of the context in which these arguments occur. This usefulness of stylometric analysis notwithstanding (particularly as we learn to ask better questions), I believe Robin’s judgment on this method as applied to Plato’s dialogues is balanced and still valid: “Elle permet seulement de constituer, d’une façon d’ailleurs approchée, des groupes de dialogues d’après les indices de parenté que paraît donner l’étude de la langue” (Robin 1964, 63). For a survey and assessment of the differing conclusions of stylometric analysis in the field of Platonic studies see Thesleff (1982, 67–96) and Brandwood (1990). Cf. also note 34 below.

10 See Hermann (1839), Susemihl (1855–1860), Grote (1888); see also Vlastos (1991, especially 45–80). For an excellent presentation of the genetic approach, its chief representatives, and the main issues surrounding it, see Tigerstedt (1977, 25–51).

11 For instance, Press (1993) espouses a dramatic view coupled with a non-dogmatic interpretation of the dialogues; Arieti (1991; cf. also Arieti and Barrus 2010, 1–31) supports a more radical version of the dramatic setting theory, resolutely giving priority to the dramatic over the philosophical aspect of the dialogues (see my note 28 (2) below and Appendix E.2). For a more moderate position, explicitly arguing for an integration of the dramatic and the philosophical facets of the dialogues, see Blondell (2002, especially the first two chapters, where Blondell outlines her overall approach); cf. also Randall (1970, 1–5). To a certain extent and in different ways, Rosen (1987) and, partially, Corrigan and Glazov-Corrigan (2004) are fruitful examples of the practice of this strategy as applied to the Symposium.

12 I am not aware of any author who has worked out this strategy systematically, and understandably so perhaps, for working out a coherent system from what is often taken to be a collection of relatively disconnected arguments would require a good deal of imagination. The procedure of isolating arguments from their context, however, is more or less implicitly carried out by many, whether with respect to an individual argument of a dialogue taken independently of the rest of the dialogue (e.g., the arguments for a tripartite view of the soul in Republic IV, as showed by Roochnik 2003, 10–30, especially 14–18), or
last strategy is not altogether unconcerned with historical questions and issues of style and dramatic setting, but the treatment of these problems is resolutely subordinated to the investigation of the argumentative coherence and, to a lesser extent, the originality of each work.

As I hinted above, when these strategies variously intersect the two major approaches to Plato’s text (i.e., doctrinal and aporetic) and combine with each other, they produce a wide array of more nuanced readings. So, for instance, Terence Irwin endorses a doctrinal view of the dialogues (mostly on the basis of Aristotle’s testimony) while maintaining a developmental approach to the same on the basis of a relatively fixed chronology. Others strongly criticize the findings of stylometry, the theory of historical development, as well as a clear-cut doctrinal reading, and suggest instead that Plato reproduced in writing what Socrates undertook orally, namely the open-ended practice of dialectic in which both the conclusions and the presuppositions of a given standpoint are constantly questioned for the sake of the reader’s philosophical growth. Charles Kahn’s approach is again doctrinal and favors a chronological order over others; but instead of explaining this order in terms of development, Kahn offers what he calls an ingressive interpretation, namely the notion that Plato did not alter his views in radical ways and that

with respect to all the arguments of a dialogue considered independently of the rest of the Platonic corpus (a tendency which one might detect in some supporters of the dramatic setting theory, explicitly supported, for instance, by Press 1993, 111–112). On a side note, I would like to think that we have overcome readings of Plato such as Robinson’s (1953, vi), who espouses a strictly evolutionary view of logic, leading him to assume that he knows in advance what Plato could and could not understand. For a critique of Robinson’s and of like-minded positions, see Tigerstedt (1977, 22–24); cf. also Appendix E.3 for further critical remarks; Gonzalez (1998) can be read as a reversal of Robinson’s thesis (cf. Appendix E.5).


14 See for instance Nails (1995); cf. also Gonzalez (1998), on which see Appendix E.5.
what is said in (allegedly) earlier, more aporetic dialogues (e.g., \textit{Lysis}) can be adequately grasped only in light of (allegedly) later, more doctrinal ones (e.g., \textit{Symposium} and \textit{Phaedrus}).\footnote{Kahn (1996, especially 59–65). Robin’s reading of Platonic love as it unfolds from what he takes to be the earlier \textit{Lysis} to the later \textit{Symposium} and \textit{Phaedrus} would partly fit Kahn’s ingressive reading (Robin 1964). Interpretations of the dialogues favoring the overall speculative coherence of the Platonic corpus (although differing, and at times radically so, on other issues) have also been called “unitary” (Kahn 1996, 38). Its major modern representatives include: Schleiermacher (1836, especially 1–47), von Arnim (1967), Shorey (1933), Robin (1935), Friedländer (1958), the school of Tübingen (see note 18 below); for a concise, helpful account of this approach to the dialogues see Tigerstedt (1977, 52–62). Recently, the unitary thesis has been made more nuanced, notably by Kahn (1996) himself and, most recently, by Zuckert (2009). Zuckert suggest that many of the apparent inconsistencies found in Plato can be made to cohere if we follow, not the alleged chronological order of composition of the dialogues (see note 34 below), but their dramatic dates which, she argues, can be safely derived from both internal evidence and the works of philologists, philosophers and archeologists (see Zuckert 2009, 1–48; at pages 8–9 Zuckert provides a handy table of the dramatic chronology of the dialogues spanning from 460 through 386 B.C., with the \textit{Laws} as the earliest work and the \textit{Apology} as one of the latest).} A more decidedly doctrinal approach is the esoteric one put forth by the so-called school of Tübingen. It sharply differs from other doctrinal approaches, however, in that it claims that these views cannot be distilled from the dialogues alone but, against Schleiermacher’s insistence,\footnote{Schleiermacher (1836, 9–13). In the past century, the view that if Plato can be understood at all, this must be done through the dialogues and only through the dialogues, had in Cherniss (1945) its most determined representative.} must be supplemented by Plato’s famed unwritten doctrines,\footnote{The unwritten doctrines (\textit{ἄγραφα δόγματα}) are referenced once by Aristotle (\textit{Physics} IV,209b15) and indirectly attested by other writers, for instance in Aristoxenus’ brief mention of Plato’s (in)famous lecture on the Good (\textit{Elements of Harmonics} II,30.7–9; cf. also Simplicius, \textit{Commentary on Aristotle’s Physics} 453.19–455.14). There is little doubt that these doctrines were an integral part of every Neoplatonist’s reading of Plato, as virtually all adherents to the esoteric reading (cf. next note) point out (see also Gerson, in Wallis 1995, ix; Reale 2008, VIII, 57). For a full account of the sources of the esoteric thesis, both external and internal to the dialogues, see Reale and Richard (2008).} of which the dialogues are mere reminders for an inner circle of “disciples” rather than straightforward expositions for the public.\footnote{Gaiser (1968; 1984, 31–54 for a concise treatment); Krämer (1959; 1990; 1998 for a more recent and shorter statement). There are notable convergences between the studies of these authors and the research of J. N. Findlay (1974, particularly the two appendices). The esoteric approach has found eager followers also beyond Tübingen, most notably in Milan (see particularly Reale 1997b). Again, Tigerstedt (1977, 63–91; cf. also 1974, 69–70) offers a most helpful overview of the esoteric approach. However, his critique of this approach is, if not outdated, at least partial, in that it is unable to take directly into account}
This enumeration of particular approaches to the dialogues could continue, but I trust that the samples given thus far will suffice for our purpose. Remarks on other individual approaches can be found in several of the footnotes of this section (see particularly note 28, note 29, note 48, and note 63 and in Annotations 1, 2, 3, 5, and 6 of Appendix E).

My main goal in the remainder of this section is, not to try to settle the dispute on which of the two major approaches, doctrinal and aporetic, is more faithful to Plato’s mind,¹⁹ nor to show what reading strategies are more appropriate to understand his

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¹⁹ Could the dispute be settled, anyway? I am inclined to think that a doctrinal approach reflects the facts less inaccurately than an aporetic one, although one should constantly be on guard against the temptation of having understood exactly what the doctrines in question are (cf. Tigerstedt 1977, 103–105). Moreover, reading Plato doctrinally does not imply that he never changed his mind about anything; conversely, not all variations in the dialogues are necessarily a sign of a radical change or even of a development in his views. Similarly, my giving factual preference to a doctrinal approach does not imply that Plato never entertained genuine puzzles. However, in my opinion to claim that all that he ever entertained were puzzles, and unresolved puzzles at that, seems to contradict even the most superficial reading of the dialogues. This topic, while central to any serious work on Plato, lies beyond the scope of the present study.
works, but only to state my position about the extent to which Plotinus’ approach may constitute a fair reading, or at least not a downright misinterpretation, of the Platonic text. Very generally, and in connection with what I have said thus far about Platonic hermeneutic, we may safely acknowledge three basic tenets in Plotinus’ way of reading Plato. First, his interpretation is resolutely doctrinal. Second, he takes Plato’s thought to be a systematic unity—a unity whose systematic character, however, is mostly implicit, and as such is in need of (much) explication (see Chapter Two note 9 and especially note 11). And third, virtually none of the reading strategies outlined above were part of Plotinus’ hermeneutic repertoire. Assuming that this sketch is correct, we may ask again: Does Plotinus provide us with a fair reading of Plato?

The mere fact of asking such a question would seem like an otiose exercise, particularly after the broader Neoplatonic reading of Plato was emphatically laid to rest.

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20 Plotinus’ way of reading Plato may be said to resemble the fourth strategy mentioned above (i.e., focus on arguments) insofar as he extrapolates Plato’s statements and molds them creatively to fit his own ends. His goal, however, is always to prove that Plato—his Plato—was correct about a certain issue by explaining or making explicit some of the more obscure utterances in the dialogues (see Chapter Two note 11). His extrapolations, moreover, are hardly ever of entire arguments, but are often restricted to short citations or allusions (see Chapter Two note 21), or to doctrines generally taken to represent Plato’s genuine views.

21 Dillon and Gerson (2004, xiii) call the term, “Neoplatonism,” “an artifact of 19th-century Germanic scholarship.” (Obviously this applies also to its cognates “Neoplatonist” and “Neoplatonic,” used to describe such authors as Plotinus, Porphyry, Iamblichus, Proclus, Damascius, and others, whether taken individually or collectively as a philosophical school.) As a matter of fact, Theophilus Gale already used the expressions “New Platonicks” and “New Platonists” in 1670 (Gale 1669–1677, II, 247, passim). More than a century later, in 1791, Tiedemann speaks of “Neu-Platoniker” (Tiedemann 1791–1797, I, xxiv; cf. also III, 134), and in the same year C. S. von Seidlitz uses the adjective “neuplatonische” in a letter to Kant (Brief 490 = Kant 1900–1910, XI, 298; cf. also XVIII, 435 and 512, where the same term appears even earlier in Kant’s own handwritten notes on metaphysics). According to the Oxford English Dictionary (2011, s.v. Neoplatonism), the English term “Neoplatonism” appears for the first time in 1831 (the now obsolete “Neoplatonician” is found a year earlier, perhaps after the French “néo-platonicien”), in a translation of the third (1829) edition of Tennemann’s Grundriss der Geschichte der Philosophie (these terms already appear in German in the fourth volume of Tennemann’s twelve-volume Geschichte der Philosophie in 1803: Tennemann 1798–1819, IV, 165; cf. also VI, vii, 398 and passim). Whatever the first appearance of this set of terms might be, I share Dillon’s and Gerson’s (2004, xiii–xiv) judgment.
by E. N. Tigerstedt.\textsuperscript{22} My purpose is, not to attempt an improbable revival of a
Plotinian (or broadly Neoplatonic) interpretation of the dialogues, and even less to argue
directly that this interpretation is the correct or the definitive one, but rather to reflect,
briefly, on what it means for an interpretation of the dialogues (in fact, for an
interpretation of any text) to be fair. I will touch on the more specific issue of Plotinus’
reading of Plato in the next chapter (Section 2.2); at this juncture, I would only like
to offer some comments on the question itself.

What does it mean for a text to be read fairly, or accurately? Mainly one thing, I
take it: to be understood \textit{as much as possible} in accordance with the intention of its
author, the \textit{mens auctoris} that simultaneously shines through and is obscured by the
text.\textsuperscript{23} The fact that the author is for the most part absent does not reduce the text to a

\begin{footnotesize} as they write: “Although the prefix ‘neo-’ is intended to suggest that something significantly new is to be
found in the thought of this period, it is worth stressing that Plotinus, Porphyry, Iamblichus, and Proclus
would all have probably preferred to identify themselves as ‘paleo’-Platonists; that is, as non-innovating
expositors and defenders of Platonic philosophy.” Whenever the word “Neoplatonism” and related terms
appear in this study, one should read them while mindful of the contents of the present note. Cf. also
Chapter Two note 9.

\textsuperscript{22} In his monograph, with the programmatic title \textit{The Decline and Fall of the Neoplatonic Interpretation of
Plato}, Tigerstedt (1974, 70) declares that this interpretation was “destroyed once and for all in the
nineteenth century.” Surely enough, at least the supporters of the esoteric reading (cf. note 18 above)
would disagree with this.

\textsuperscript{23} The intention of the author shines through the text because if it were not for the text, he or she probably
would not (or no longer, in the case of dead authors) be heard. Conversely, the text clouds or obscures
the intention of the author because even the clearest of texts never conveys the intention in full
transparency, and the author is not always (or no longer) available to speak on behalf of his or her
intention. Speaking on behalf of one’s intention does not only mean to restate the intention verbatim;
more often it actually means to clarify it, to modify it, or else to admit that one no longer supports it.
These observations point to the fact that an accurate or fair reading of a text already implies the
awareness, on the part of the reader, that \textit{in particular} when the author is unavailable to speak on behalf
of his or her text (as in the case of Plato and of all ancient authors), neither the author nor the author’s
intention are completely exhausted in the text, and as a consequence it would be naïve to think that we
will ever be able \textit{fully} to unravel the \textit{mens auctoris}. Therefore, one should avoid the extreme of thinking
to be able to shed full light on the intention behind a text, or of literally “understanding an author better
than he understood himself;” to borrow an expression reported by the father of modern hermeneutics, F.
E. D. Schleiermacher (\textit{Über den Begriff der Hermeneutik} 362 = Schleiermacher 1834–1864, part 3,
mere collection of signs, but only makes the hermeneutic task harder.\textsuperscript{24} When the text is made absolute, when we have nothing but text (pure self-referential textuality, including \textit{intertextuality}), the very phenomenon of writing disappears. And this for a simple reason: because a text is always already accompanied by an intention\textsuperscript{25}—a vague

\begin{flushright}
III.362); cf. Kant (\textit{Critique of Pure Reason} A314/B370), who made a similar remark specifically about Plato and was the likely source of Schleiermacher. But one should also avoid the opposite extreme, namely the renunciation of all hope to shed \textit{any} light on the mind of the author, for after all the very existence of the text bears witness, no matter how partially and obscurely, to an intention. What I believe is of fundamental importance, however, is that the intention itself should not be understood as a self-contained item: its conceptual boundaries cannot be determined unequivocally without reference to the context in which the intention emerges through the text. In particular, I maintain that partially to understand the mind of the author means primarily to understand the position of the author on a given theme, and therefore the task of grasping the author’s intention cannot be undertaken independently of the understanding of the particular theme about which the author expressed his or her mind. In the language of H.-G. Gadamer, the father of contemporary philosophical hermeneutics, this means that if we are to grasp anything at all about the mind of the author, first we ought to understand the particular question or set of questions which are inherited within a broader tradition and to which the author’s position happens to be an answer (see Gadamer 1995, 362–379). Moreover, it means that since our own reading, too, occurs in a context, any understanding of the question or theme presented in the text will never be entirely neutral, but as Dilthey, Heidegger, and in particular Gadamer gradually clarified, it will always take place as a historical encounter between at least two different contexts, traditions, sets of presuppositions, etc., or again, in Gadamer’s own language, as a “fusion [\textit{Verschmelzung} of horizons” (see particularly Gadamer 1995, 302–307, 374–375). Finally, and perhaps most importantly (particularly in Plato’s case, as we shall see), to understand the mind of the author means that the attempt at such a comprehension should include the awareness that the author’s answer is one particular answer given to the question in one particular milieu, and that in order to comprehend this answer one is already called to become engaged in the question to which the answer is essentially related, or to become involved in the task of appropriating that answer which is found most compelling by applying (\textit{Anwendung}) it to the particular situation in which we find ourselves (see Gadamer 1995, 307–311, 315–316; cf. also 329–341. For a concise treatment of the issue see Grondin 1994, 106–123, especially 115–117). It is fair to infer that the interpretive attempt at understanding the mind of an author is more painstaking in the case of authors who do not explicitly alert us with regard to the nature of their intention (e.g., in general, authors of novels and dramas) than it is in the case of those who do (e.g., in general, authors of treatises and essays). Although normally one would expect to find Plato, as a philosopher, in the latter category, he actually belongs to the former, as the difficulty in dealing with the hermeneutics of the dialogues might confirm. (Thanks to Tiziano Tosolini for a helpful conversation on this point.)

\textsuperscript{24} It is when the intention of the author is particularly hard to determine that one more often resorts to \textit{interpretation}. And yet, despite this difficulty, interpretation should always aim at tracing the intention behind the text. Moreover, interpretation always ought to display a double movement, of approaching and of distancing: of approaching, insofar as a reference to the text is always necessary (alternately, what takes place is not interpretation but fancy); and of distancing, insofar as the interpreter says something (at least slightly) different from what is found in the text (if not, we would be speaking, not of interpretation, but of mere repetition). Cf. Peperzak (1986, 121–124).

\textsuperscript{25} A reader favoring a \textit{hermeneutic of suspicion} (I here have in mind what Ricoeur called the masters of suspicion: Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud; see Ricoeur 1970, 32) will argue that all our readings (and, for
and nearly indecipherable intention perhaps, but an intention nonetheless. If this were not the case, the question of a fair or accurate reading of the dialogues would not even arise.

Now, what is the intention behind Plato’s text? What does he want to tell his readers? The answer to this question already presupposes a minimal understanding of what Plato is trying to do in or through the dialogues, an understanding that I take to be common to the two major approaches, aporetic and doctrinal, to the Platonic text. Plainly put, Plato wrote the dialogues in order to draw his readers into the activity of philosophizing in the conviction that this activity will improve one’s life: this, I

that matter, Plato’s own writing) are: (i) subject to the powerful anonymous influence of a collective structure (Marx); (ii) inescapably expressing a subterranean will to power (Nietzsche); (iii) ultimately tainted by wholly or partially unconscious motives passing themselves off as truth (or, in the case of Plato’s intention, as Plato’s intention) (Freud). The issue obviously exceeds the scope of this study. Here I will limit myself to observing that (i), (ii), and (iii) are important critical points that any serious reader should bear in mind constantly: the universal truth of a suspecting and skeptical attitude, I maintain, is at least pedagogical and at best heuristic (cf. note 28 (1) below). However (and what follows is so obvious that it is often overlooked precisely because it is obvious), if these critical points are meant to be absolute, then they should be self-applicable, in which case they would immediately call into question their own claim to absoluteness. If, on the other hand, they are meant to be absolute but not self-applicable, one may ask what standard is used to allow for the exception. Until this standard is provided (and duly supported by argument), all we are left with is an attitude of suspicion radically suspecting everything except itself. For a similar remark cf. Tigersted (1977, 36). A stimulating discussion of this topic, focusing specifically on the issue of truth in the history of philosophy, can be found in Peperzak (1986, 103–119, especially 110–119).

Unsurprisingly, I was unable to find a single passage in the dialogues in which Plato, speaking for himself (cf. note 5 above), explicitly states that his goal in writing dialogues is to draw his readers to philosophy. If this fact alone suffices to assert beyond doubt that we are utterly blind as to the nature of Plato’s intentions, I will content myself with the dubious pleasure of wandering in the dark. However, that to inspire his readers to practice philosophy was Plato’s reason for writing the dialogues might be established (safely, if tentatively, I maintain) from a multitude of passages, among which we may mention: Alcibiades’ speech in the Symposium (215a–222b); the entirety of Alcibiades I (whether spurious or not), especially 124b–135e; Socrates’ sketch of the philosopher-king in books V–VII of the Republic; Socrates’ own (youthful) pursuit of wisdom as he put himself at the school of Anaxagoras in the Phaedo (97b–98d), at the school of Diotima in the Symposium (201d–212c), of Theaetetus and

26 This is no less true of a strictly private journal or diary, for which the only intended reader is the writer, that is, the writer qua reader, hence qua other, or qua aim of an intention. And even when a text is written in an unknown language, deciphering that language is not an end in itself, but only the first step toward grasping the intention that gave rise to the text and of which the language is (merely) a vehicle.

27 Unsurprisingly, I was unable to find a single passage in the dialogues in which Plato, speaking for himself (cf. note 5 above), explicitly states that his goal in writing dialogues is to draw his readers to philosophy. If this fact alone suffices to assert beyond doubt that we are utterly blind as to the nature of Plato’s intentions, I will content myself with the dubious pleasure of wandering in the dark. However, that to inspire his readers to practice philosophy was Plato’s reason for writing the dialogues might be established (safely, if tentatively, I maintain) from a multitude of passages, among which we may mention: Alcibiades’ speech in the Symposium (215a–222b); the entirety of Alcibiades I (whether spurious or not), especially 124b–135e; Socrates’ sketch of the philosopher-king in books V–VII of the Republic; Socrates’ own (youthful) pursuit of wisdom as he put himself at the school of Anaxagoras in the Phaedo (97b–98d), at the school of Diotima in the Symposium (201d–212c), of Theaetetus and
To be sure, an intention of this sort is not a prerogative of Plato, but belongs to the entire Greek philosophical tradition, including Plotinus.
A word of clarification on the meaning of philosophy, or on the identity of the philosopher, in this context is in order. The difference between a scholar and a great thinker is well expressed by Leo Strauss (1995, 305–306), who, alluding to a distinction drawn by Kant in the opening lines of the *Prolegomena* (IV, 255), stresses the ability of the great thinker to change the familiar horizon of thought, whereas the scholar merely reflects on the change after this has already taken place (or as it takes place). A further distinction, one which I borrow from Hadot (2002, 1–6) and which by intersecting Strauss’ distinction between great thinker and scholar gives rise to a wide array of different characters, is that between the person who chooses and practices a way of life, and the one who also “renders explicit the theoretical presuppositions implicated in this way of life” (Hadot 2002, 76). As Hadot points out, the two poles of this distinction are also the two branches of philosophical activity as understood within the Socratic-Platonic model. Therefore, neither (good) scholars, nor great thinkers, nor unreflective practitioners of a way of life are, just by being what they are, philosophers. According to this view, what makes a philosopher a philosopher is the fact that he or she embodies in the same person the activity of reflection (which is proper to the scholar and, to a heightened degree, the great thinker) and the practice of a way of life, which is at the same time the object that his or her reflection aims at making explicit in its theoretical presuppositions (again, in the words of the spurious *Definitions* 414b8–9 cited in the previous note: ἐπιμέλεια ψυχῆς μετὰ λόγου ὀρθοῦ). Hadot and Strauss are not the only ones who have emphasized the idea that at least before modernity philosophy was understood primarily as a way of life, or a life discipline. In recent decades this idea has found expression in the slogans “care of the self” by Michel Foucault (1988, especially Part II, pages 37–68, entitled “The Cultivation of the Self”), and “care of the soul,” perhaps most radically and pervasively, by Jan Patočka (2002; 1996, 82–84, 103–105).
At first, this minimal approach to Plato would not seem to sit too well with a fairly widespread view of philosophy mainly understood as the proper name of an academic discipline which is taught professionally by scholars in most universities and, less commonly, some high-schools. In this view of philosophy, concerns about logic and epistemology are generally considered central in properly assessing the work (and worth) of a philosopher. This, however, is only partially the case with Plato. In saying this, I am not claiming that Plato is uninterested or incompetent in matters of logic and epistemology, but that in the dialogues, much like in the works of other Greek thinkers, these matters are hardly ever dissociated from his concern for the cause of philosophy understood as a fundamental practice aimed at bettering human life as a whole in the pursuit of happiness (εὐδαιμονία). Thus, in reading Plato, the question is not primarily whether what he wrote is epistemologically valuable or logically acute, but whether it is capable of drawing the reader into the very activity of philosophizing in view of improving one’s living. In any event, if, as I am inclined to think, what Plato wrote is in

32 It does not follow that different philosophers completely agreed about the particular nature of happiness, but simply that philosophy was understood, rather than only as a (relatively) logically consistent set of propositions and the rational study of nature, also (in fact, primarily) as a means to promote the best possible living for a human rational being, or as itself the activity coinciding with such best possible living (see note 30 above for references). In his commentary on the Symposium, Rosen writes: “Philosophy is a condition of the psyche and so a way of life, rather than solely a system of true propositions. The mode of writing peculiar to philosophy is the dramatic portrait of individual human types confronted by a disguised Socrates” (Rosen 1987, xlviii). And he adds about the dialogues: “As both a drama and an exercise in dialectic, each dialogue begins with the opinions of particular individuals. [...] Platonic dialogues show men of varying kinds acting out the consequences of their ignorance” (Rosen 1987, xlix). “By portraying the emergence of philosophy from opinion, the dialogue imitates the whole of human existence, which is to say that it imitates the whole simply. [...] The dialogue is the dramatic representation of the synoptic nature of dialectic” (Rosen 1987, 1; cf. Republic VII.537c7). See also Zuckert (2009, 6–7).

33 Perhaps the clearest example of this attitude in Plato is found in the Parmenides, in which we should certainly subject the complex arguments of the sages from Elea to careful scrutiny in matters of logic and epistemology, while at the same time not losing sight of the fact that these very arguments are valuable primarily as (very difficult) exercises geared toward attaining the truth (Parmenides 135c5–136c5; the
fact epistemologically valuable and logically acute, this is so not independently of its usefulness for personal improvement.

The same reasoning can be applied to readings of Plato that emphasize a theory of historical development of the dialogues, mostly on the basis of stylometric analysis (see notes 9 and 10 above). Once again, I am not trying to undermine the relevance of the results achieved by stylometry and the genetic approach, but rather calling attention to the possibility that the results of these reading strategies add relatively little to the philosophical understanding both of each dialogue taken as a dramatic unity and of the dialogues as a whole.\textsuperscript{34} This is not to say that allegedly earlier and later dialogues (for our topic \textit{Lysis}, \textit{Phaedrus}, and \textit{Republic} in particular) are of no consequence to the conclusions of the \textit{Symposium}, but that if they add something to it, they do so while foreshadowing (in the case of likely earlier dialogues) and furthering (in the case of likely later dialogues) such conclusions.

Thus, to claim that each dialogue ought to be taken as a dramatic unity does not immediately exclude reference at least to other dialogues in which the same topic comes

\textsuperscript{34} Rosen (1987, lxii) puts it sharply: “the significance of a given dialogue is entirely independent of its place in the development of Plato. Although scholars are widely agreed that the \textit{Symposium} is a work of Plato’s middle period, no one has ever suggested that its merits are superseded by the results of the later period.” Whatever the case may be, there is not enough external evidence (or, for that matter, internal, as Owen remarked in regard to the \textit{Laws}: Owen 1953, 79 note 4, 93 note 3) to settle the question about the order of the dialogues conclusively (cf. Thesleff 1989, 25–26; Irwin 1995, 2; Zuckert 2009, 3–5). Things become even less definite if we take the testimony of Dionysius of Halicarnassus as reliable: “Plato did not cease, when eighty years old, to comb and curl his dialogues and reshape them in every way [πάντα τρόπων ἀναπλέκων]” (\textit{On Literary Composition} XXV.265.21–24). It follows that even the best stylometric evidence remains inconclusive, and virtually every chronological list of the dialogues is at best tentative (see Thesleff 1982, 71, 83–87; 1989, 7).
under consideration. Therefore, while every detail in the Symposium, in order to be understood correctly, has to be considered both in relation to all the other details and to the central question(s) of the dialogue as this unfolds dramatically, I take it that one is encouraged, rather than forbidden, to look for Plato’s assessment of the central issue of love in other dialogues. And while it is important to emphasize that the arguments and conclusions of a given dialogue should be assessed primarily with reference to the dramatic setting within which they are put forth, it is at least likewise important to be mindful that there are other settings (that is, other dialogues or portions of dialogues) in which the same subject matter is investigated. I found nothing in Plato explicitly or implicitly suggesting that a careful comparison of the same topic as it is presented in different dramatic settings should be categorically rejected as either deleterious or useless. On the contrary, it is common practice, both for ancient authors and for a substantial number of modern representatives, not only to approach Plato’s writings doctrinally, but also to take it as expressing, through the (at least prima facie)

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35 If such reference were to be excluded, one would likely end up attributing to Plato at least as many philosophies as there are authentic dialogues (see Kahn 1996, 37), or else simply giving up all hope of approximating Plato’s mind in any way through the dialogues as we presently have them (as Corlett 2005 argues; cf. note 28 (2) above, and Appendix E.1 for my critique).

36 The classic treatment in this sense is Robin (1964).

37 In the Symposium this setting includes, among other things, a certain place (Agathon’s house), a dramatic date (416 B.C.), an occasion (the party thrown by Agathon to celebrate his first prize victory in the tragedy contest at the Lenaea: see Brisson 1998, 12–13; Hammond and Scullard 1970, s.v. “Agathon” and “Lenaea”; Nails 2002, 361), as well as certain people (both explicitly mentioned and unknown, as in the case of those who gave the speeches forgotten by Aristodemus: Symposium 180c2), and moreover these people taken at a particular time in their life (e.g., Alcibiades is no longer the promising youth whose soul can be won over to philosophy, but a grown man who, having failed to win over Socrates by physical beauty, as it appears from Symposium 219e5, has become enslaved to his own inability to effect the kind of self-improvement that he and Socrates promised to each other: Symposium 219a8–b2; cf. notes 269 and 271 below).
multifarious and unsystematic form of the dramatic dialogue, a fairly unitary and systematic thought (see note 15 above). As I already pointed out on page 9, Plotinus is no exception to this practice.  

Therefore, if we are sufficiently justified in maintaining that the intention of the dialogues is to draw their readers to philosophy, we might provisionally conclude that Plotinus fulfills this intention to the extent that he reads them in view of personal improvement, or of living a happy life, which for him, much like for all ancient thinkers (see notes 27, 30, 31, and 32 above), remains the very end of the philosophical endeavor. It is precisely in this respect that his reading of Plato is not only fair, but fundamentally faithful to Plato’s spirit, purpose, or intention.

But can we go so far as to claim that the Plotinian interpretation of Plato is philologically and historically accurate (i.e., that it grasps not only Plato’s general intention for writing, but also what he is actually saying through his characters in the dialogues)? Very unlikely, or perhaps only occasionally (cf. Chapter Two note 11).

Does this mean, then, that to study Plotinus is irrelevant for a philosophical understanding of Plato? Or, to broaden the question, must we read Plato independently of the history of his interpreters in order to understand him better? The answer to this question depends on whether one will allow problems and assumptions that were not

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38 In doing this, Plotinus carefully selects the passages or elements from Plato which are most instrumental to the construction of his own philosophical system (see Section 2.2).

39 I want to stress that the slogan “faithfulness to x’s spirit” does not imply an immediate grasp of the mens auctoris, which as such is possibly available only in presentia auctoris (as also Socrates implicitly observes in the famous passage on speech and writing at the end of the Phaedrus). Simmias’ remark about Plato’s dream quoted earlier (note 5) may be particularly true of Plato, but it does not except any author who is dead or otherwise absent.
Plato’s own to shed light on what Plato wrote.\textsuperscript{40} Simply because Plato did not raise a problem \textit{explicitly} (and the level of explicitness of a given problem within the dialogues is itself highly debatable), it does not mean that he was unaware of it or, even if he was, that he meant for that problem to go unnoticed or to be left unexplored (or, if explored, to be explored without reference to the dialogues). Similarly, simply because Plato does not seem to provide explicit solutions to some of the puzzles he raises, it does not mean that these solutions are \textit{without doubt} absent in the dialogues; it is in this context that Plato’s (alleged?) reluctance to write about the highest matters,\textsuperscript{41} as well as the relevance of the so-called unwritten doctrines (see note 17 above), cannot and should not be minimized. Finally, simply because Plato did \textit{not mean} something (and establishing beyond doubt what he did in fact mean is beyond doubt a formidable task), it does not follow that he would have rejected later developments and solutions, Plotinian or otherwise, to some of the problems which he \textit{too} either raised or developed from a tradition older than him (cf. note 56 below). An example might help to illuminate my point.

L. P. Gerson claims that a distinction developed only later in the history of philosophy, the one between essence and existence,\textsuperscript{42} is already \textit{implicitly} operative both in Plato and in Plotinus.\textsuperscript{43} D. L. Ross criticizes this claim as it is applied to Plotinus.\textsuperscript{44}

\textsuperscript{40} This condition applies \textit{particularly} to Plato because of the peculiar nature of the dialogue form, in which the author’s position is considerably harder to uncover than in, say, a treatise or a set of lecture notes. It does not mean, however, that it applies \textit{exclusively} to Plato and the dialogue form; other literary forms are not immune to this condition.

\textsuperscript{41} \textit{Letters} II.314a1–c6, VII.341c4–5, 344c1–d2; cf. also \textit{Phaedrus} 278d8–e2.

\textsuperscript{42} For a historical account of this distinction see Gilson (1952, 74–107), MacIntyre (1967).

\textsuperscript{43} The degree of implicitness is admittedly higher in Plato than it is in Plotinus. For an account of the distinction between essence and existence in Plato see Gerson (1990, 40–52); for an account of the same
The main point of Ross’ critique is that Gerson’s solution is “ahistorical,” by which he means that Plotinus is “force-fit” into an intellectual milieu that is not his.\(^{45}\) There is some truth to this, and my purpose here is not that of dismissing all of Ross’ particular criticisms of Gerson’s suggestion.\(^{46}\) What I would like to point out in this context are only the limitations of a purely historical approach to what is a distinctively philosophical issue. In other words, I wonder whether the genuinely historical understanding of a given philosophical problem, or of an idea, must positively exclude the thought that certain subsequent appropriations of that doctrine (i.e., what one might call its tradition), may be rooted in the doctrine itself, and as such are neither deleterious nor irrelevant to a proper understanding (even to a properly historical understanding) of it. I wonder, moreover, whether to see the relation of an idea to its historical developments may take more than an understanding of the historical milieu in which this idea happened to sprout, and more than a philological knowledge of the manuscript(s) in which this idea happened to be committed to writing.

Thus, that the distinction between essence and existence was not fully worked out and explicitly formulated by Plotinus (and Plato, whose works were for the most part

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\(^{44}\) See D. L. Ross (1996), the focus of whose critique is Gerson (1994).

\(^{45}\) D. L. Ross (1996, 197). A similar point could be made about Plato.

\(^{46}\) At times some of these criticisms do appear to be at least partial, however. For instance, when D. L. Ross (1996, 198–199) insists that the Plotinian argument for the existence of the One is “an application of the data of his aesthetics to the data of inner experience,” he is in part correct, but he also seems to forget those passages in the *Enneads* where the One is explicitly said to bestow existence (οὐσία, τὸ εἶναι, ὑπόστασις) on things (e.g., Plotinus VI.6 [34] 16.50, VI.7 [38] 42.11, VI.8 [39] 13.56–57, 21.32–33, VI.9 [9] 2; cf. Chapter Three note 47 for further references), passages to which Gerson (1994, 5–14) duly refers in the context of his argument.
probably unavailable to those who explicitly developed this distinction) is beyond
doubt, and to this extent Gerson is reading into Plotinus (and Plato) something that
will be explicitly developed only later in the history of thought.\footnote{Gerson does so wittingly, by the way (cf. Gerson 1994, xvii, 9).} However, if Plotinus’ (and
Plato’s) own line of questioning invites a solution that was gradually and painstakingly
clarified, however partially, only centuries later, and if this solution proves generally
adequate to meet a good number of objections moved to Plotinus (and to Plato), is it not
possible that (at least part of) the subsequent tradition understood, not necessarily the
historical milieu of those texts (and even less their textual situation, if manuscripts were
in fact unavailable), but rather their distinctively \textit{philosophical} character,\footnote{Part of the task of the historian of philosophy is to show if and how the subsequent appropriations of a
given philosophical problem are sound interpretative developments of it or mere fantasy. This already
implies that not all interpretations are the same; if they were, the very meaning of the text as bearer of an
intention and, with it, all possibility of interpretation (and, for that matter, of misinterpretation) would
disappear (cf. notes 24 and 23 above). Robinson (1953, 1–6) rightly points out five major kinds of
misinterpretation in relation to the dialogues, but I think his overall interpretive approach is flawed by a
misguided presupposition; see Appendix E.3.} or the
fundamentally philosophical questions and challenges that they raised?\footnote{By framing my views both interrogatively and conditionally, I highlight their tentative character. My
concern is not with denying the tentative nature of my position, which I admit gladly, but rather with the
tendency I sometimes perceive to separate a philosophical and a historico-philological reading as if the
two had little in common and, more importantly, to dismiss genuinely philosophical readings as simply
irrelevant when these do not seem to square with the results of philology and historiography.} (These are the
eternal questions and challenges that are at the very heart of Platonism—of philosophy
proper, in fact—and whose solutions are often hard and perhaps impossible at times to
extract \textit{merely} from the empirical contingences of the historical milieu in which they emerged.\footnote{We might recall that even someone generally reluctant to interpret Plato through Neoplatonic lenses such
as F. M. Cornford resorts to a fragment of the lost part of Proclus’ \textit{Commentary on Plato’s Timaeus} (III,
357.10–358.3 = John Philoponus, \textit{On the Eternity of the World} XI.11.364.11–365.3; cf. also I, 233.24–}

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philosophical character of questions raised (much) earlier and to propose
philosophically sound answers to them, is it then fair to call “ahistorical” a solution
which, pace all invitations to historical and philological precision, may (painstakingly)
guide us to the philosophical heart of the matter? I believe that Plato’s dialogues are
invitations to philosophize first, and to do philology and historiography only for the sake
of better understanding the philosophical issues that emerge in the text. It can even
happen that an invitation to be philologically responsible sometimes may foster the
tendency to be philosophically sterile, if only unintentionally and/or inadvertently;
mere historical and philological accuracy at times may coincide with the loss of
philosophical thoughtfulness.

29, 419.28–420.2, and II, 25.9–23) in order to make sense of the identity of the contents of the receptacle
in Timaeus 50a–c (Cornford 1937, 183–184), and to Proclus’ Commentary on Plato’s Parmenides
(VI.1039–1043) for his interpretation of the hypotheses about the One in the notoriously difficult second
part of that dialogue (Cornford 1939, 100 note 1).

51 This is not to say that the solution is necessarily correct, but that it does direct us to a key problem that is
at least implicitly present in the text. Those who deny this categorically come close to the position of the
ones who already think to know in advance what Plato had in mind, only that now they think to know in
advance what Plato did not have in mind.

52 This, I am sure, is not Ross’ purpose for criticizing Gerson.

53 Although this is no argument in favor of the soundness of a Plotinian reading of Plato (cf. note 48 above),
one may say that if Plotinus had yielded to the standards of philological precision, probably the Enneads
would have never seen the light. (We could say the same of Plato, for instance his portrayal of Socrates’
less than philologically accurate reading of Simonides’ poem in Protagoras 338e–347b, although in his
case the literary form of the dialogue perhaps already shelters him against the charge of philological and
historiographical irresponsibility.) Instead, by listening to Plato’s provocation less as a philologist than as
a philosopher, Plotinus did not only produce a true philosophical classic, but, I maintain, was both
faithful to Plato’s spirit for doing philosophy (cf. note 39 above) and was able to further some of the
issues that were only dormant in the dialogues. Again, one might object that the point here is not whether
Plotinus’ Enneads are a philosophical masterpiece, but whether they are a fair (i.e., philologically
accurate) representation of Plato’s mind. If to understand Plato’s mind means to understand neither more
nor less than what Plato understood, then there is probably little doubt that Plotinus’ reading of Plato fails
to provide a fair interpretation of some of the problems raised in the dialogues. But if to understand
Plato’s mind means primarily to heed the invitation to become involved in the process of bettering our
lives through the practice of philosophy, is it so obvious that the interpretive relation of the Enneads to
the dialogues is off the mark? Would it be so odd to imagine Plato saying “What Plotinus says is not
If all this is plausible, there is nothing to prevent us from considering Plato, not as a self-contained thinker nor as the end point of Greek philosophical speculation, but as one of the most brilliant innovators of this tradition, whose pioneering observations not only could but begged to be interpreted and, hopefully, clarified. (Could we not read the dialogical form of Plato’s philosophy as pointing also to this intention and hope?) This process of interpretation and clarification started with those who studied under Plato, Aristotle in primis, and continued in the subsequent tradition. Thus, there is nothing to prevent us from considering Platonism (or philosophy?) as a movement in a synoptic way, that is, despite its more or less obvious internal differences, as the ongoing commitment to studying, clarifying, and practicing an ideal of life which found its best expression and primary inspiration in Plato’s writings. Needless to say, philosophically Plotinus is one of the major voices in the development of this commitment.

what I said, but hearing what he says makes me ponder again what I said,” or to imagine Plotinus saying something similar of Avicenna and Aquinas? But I am aware that imagining voices will not (and should not) appease the hardcore philologist and historian, so I will leave it at that.

54 For an enlightening attempt at describing the nature of Platonism through an overview of some of the features shared by virtually all Platonists, see Gerson (2005b; see also 2005a, 44–86). For relatively different lists of such features see Merlan (1969, 1 note) and Reale (2004, IX, 275).

55 One can make a similar claim about Plato’s relation to Socrates. While it may seem that Socrates’ views presented in the dialogues do not always coincide with those of the historical Socrates (arguably more so in the so-called later dialogues than in allegedly earlier ones) and that Plato worked out for himself conclusions that Socrates might have never actually reached, a conspicuous element of continuity in the dialogues is Plato’s commitment to further the ideal of philosophical life that he and many of his generation and after him saw embodied in the person of Socrates.

56 I chose Gerson’s controversial suggestion of finding the distinction between essence and existence as already operative in Plato and Plotinus, first because this distinction spans across the history of Western philosophy beyond the Greco-Hellenistic milieu, and second because, if correct, it has the advantage of not being explicit in our two authors (hence its controversial character). I could have opted for a more focused and less controversial sample, one in which no later distinction is taken as implicit in an earlier text, but one which simply traces the conceptual development of a given set of distinctions on a given topic. One such account can be found in two studies by Denis O’Brien (1995; cf. also 1999a) on the notion of non-being (τὸ μὴ ὄν) in Parmenides, Plato’s Sophist, and Plotinus. See Appendix E.4.
This line of reasoning may be applied also to the question of whether we are supposed to find a system in the dialogues. In his *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, Hegel rejects the notion of an esoteric philosophy applied to Plato but thinks that if the notes that were taken from Plato’s oral teaching had been still available to us (as he believes they were to Aristotle), we would possess Plato’s philosophy in systematic form.\(^{57}\) Is this historically feasible, or is it mere fiction? Isn’t Hegel treating the dialogues as a mirror in which to stare at the reflection of *his own* system? Or, as Tigerstedt argues both gracefully and pungently, is it not the case that we do not find Hegel’s claim about Plato’s philosophy “ridiculous” only because “a great thinker is talking about his equal”?\(^{58}\) In short, is it true that there is no system whatsoever to be found in Plato? I would rather argue that there is, but in a qualified way.

It is not so much that Plato, like every great philosopher, *must have had a* system,\(^{59}\) as that he must at least have *aimed* at having a system. The fact that the dialogues do not display an explicit system does not necessarily mean that Plato did not *intend* to build a system, or even that he might not have actually built one *implicitly* (although admittedly a very hard one, or perhaps even impossible, to decipher).

But surely, it will be objected, what is the point of a system that either is available only as a *desideratum* or, perhaps worse, that is merely implicit and impossible to decipher? The question is legitimate, and yet I take that the (alleged) system I am arguing

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\(^{57}\) Hegel (1892–1896, II, 10–12).

\(^{58}\) Tigerstedt (1974, 69).

\(^{59}\) As also the great historians of philosophy Brucker, Tennemann, and Zeller claimed in the wake of Hegel (cf. Tigerstedt 1974, 59, 64–69; 1977, 16–17, 66–67).
for is not futile; for what I think Tigerstedt and others overlook by insisting only on the failures of the many who attempted to construct a system out of the dialogues, is the fundamental importance of being systematic for philosophy, even for philosophy understood as a dialogical unfolding. The very dialogical procedure, I maintain, aims at uncovering a system. Posing questions is for the sake of finding answers; and finding answers is for the sake of building an all-encompassing network of interconnected answers, to wit, a system. (Is a question that does not aim at an answer truly a question?)

To renounce trying to construct a (yet un-constructed) system, even if one

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60 I take Tigerstedt to express a moderate position on the issue; for this reason I spoke of “overlooking” rather than plain denial. For an openly non-systematic (and non-doctrinal) interpretation, see Gonzalez (1998, 1–16, and especially 6–10, where his position is stated clearly). I briefly assess Gonzalez’s position in Appendix E.5.

61 Is the term “system” taken to mean the representation of a totality of mutually dependent elements, oblivious of the possibility that this totality might depend, in turn, on an element which, free of all dependence, is not a part or an element of the totality but is that because of which and/or for the sake of which all elements of the totality hold together in a system? If it is, this is not what I understand by “system.” That is, if a system, in order to be a system, ought to disavow the possibility of this “transcendent” element, then this is not what I have in mind when I use the term. What I am thinking of is rather the idea that the dialectic of question and answer staged by Plato in the dialogues aims at constructing a system understood as a totality of interdependent elements, or a totality of interdependently answered questions. However, this totality is not in principle closed off to the possibility of an element that does not depend on the totality; in fact, the totality, precisely qua system, and its elements, precisely qua elements of a system, might be envisioned as pointing to this “transcendent” element, which from the point of view of the totality is grasped as the very condition of possibility of the totality in all its parts. (Similarly, when I ask whether a question that does not aim at an answer is truly a question, the term “question” means more than the mere statement or elucidation of a theme. It may very well be that the fundamental question behind all questions is one that does not aim at an answer understood thematically, but rather a more fundamental appeal to the one who is questioned, an address in which the addressee presents himself or herself as the most important element in the dialectic of question and answer: the unquestionable behind the question asked, the unthematizable behind the theme presented for discussion.) Plotinus’ One, the God of natural theology in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, Descartes’ idea of the infinite, Kant’s unconditioned, Levinas’ understanding of the Other, and perhaps Plato’s Good and even the notion of ἀρχή in Presocratic speculation (cf. Gerson 1990, 5–14, 15); despite their important differences, I take all these as instances of the same fundamental insight, that that because of which and/or for the sake of which the totality exists can be reduced neither to one or more of its elements nor to the totality itself (nor for that matter, to mere representation). Am I then fiddling with the term “system” and using it pointlessly to mean something that is foreign to its concept? This is an objection similar to the one leveled against Gaiser (1968, 9, 336 note 1; 1980, 49), Krämer (1968, 140; 1994, 7), and others by Tigerstedt (1977, 89–90) and Gonzalez (1998, 9; cf. Appendix E note 12). Or am I just squabbling over words? I would rather hope that I am trying to make
will never succeed in actually constructing it, is to renounce a central aspect of
philosophy (although to attempt such a construction obviously is no guarantee of
success), for as Plato has Socrates argue at Republic V.474c–476e, philosophy is love for
the whole of wisdom, not only for some of its parts, and the dialectician—the
philosopher—is the one who possesses the view of the whole. But if this is the case,
that is, if Plato did, qua great philosopher, at least intend to build a system, why can’t the
history of the interpretation of the dialogues be understood also as an attempt at fulfilling
the intention of their author? Why does the aut-aut of a systematic versus an
unsystematic Plato have to be the only available alternative? Why should we be unable
to say that Plato, precisely qua philosopher, aimed at constructing a system, and this even
while conscious, perhaps, that he might not have lived to see the end of his work?

If this line of reasoning is at least not entirely implausible, then the more

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62 Republic VII.537c7: ὁ μὲν γὰρ συνοπτικὸς διαλεκτικός.

63 A radically anti-systematic position is defended by Gonzalez (1998), on which I express my reservations in Appendix E.5.

64 Clearly, this would be illegitimate if by a system we understood a purely abstract construction, thus
dissociating it from the kind of lifestyle that is necessarily connected with or implicated by it. For the
Socrates of the Republic, the grasp of the Idea of the Good is not a matter of abstract knowledge, but the
endpoint of a process of education which is at the same time a lifestyle, an ethos; thus, readings of the
Republic which emphasize the purely cognitive aspect involved in grasping the Good miss the all-
important condition that makes this grasp possible, if not necessary (for an enlightening sample of a
critique of one such reading, that by Heidegger, see Peperzak 1997, 57–111). Beierwaltes (2005, xi)
makes a very similar point about the most explicitly systematic of the Neoplatonists, Proclus: “Sarebbe
un fraintendimento esiziale del filosofare procliano se gli elementi […] della sua comprensiva teoria
dell’Uno venissero racchiusi e irrigiditi in un sistema costruito astrattamente. Bisogna piuttosto
riconoscere che nel pensiero di Proclo pensiero e vita sono intensamente legati l’uno all’altra, che alla
speculazione metafisica di ampio portata corrisponde o necessariamente consegue una forma di vita che
anche al presente—sia pure in modo nuovo e a partire da prospettive mutate—esige un concentrarsi
dell’uomo sulla propria interiorità e sul fondamento e l’originale di essa, senza per questo abbandonare il
mondo e senza ritirarsi dai compiti che gli vengano richiesti.”
important question is not whether Aristotle, Plotinus, Philo, Augustine, or Ficino (to mention but a few) understood Plato, but whether Plato can be understood at all independently of the tradition which he, *volens nolens*, contributed to shape. That is, the question is whether the history of Platonism—the history of philosophy—could itself be understood synoptically as an ongoing conversation which had its (relative) beginning in Plato. To answer this question with a dogmatic “no” may reveal that one has already misunderstood or rejected the dialogical nature of Plato’s philosophy.

One might want to stress that even if Plato himself firmly believed that the dialogue form should be espoused as the *ad hoc* form of philosophical discourse (and even to take this as given is not a matter of recording an open statement made by Plato but an interpretation of Plato’s fairly obvious fondness of Socrates’ method of question and answer), such an exchange is the living conversation of real persons, and not the Platonic written dialogues. In fact, we may say of the dialogues, precisely qua *written* dialogues, what Plato has Socrates say of all written words: “you would think that they were speaking as if they themselves understood something, but if you question something of what they said because you wish to learn, it always signifies only one and the same thing.”

An esoteric reading of the dialogues (see notes 17 and 18 above) takes the

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65 In this context, A. N. Whitehead’s often quoted remark—that “the safest general characterization of the European philosophical tradition is that it consists of a series of footnotes to Plato” (Whitehead 1978, 39)—can perhaps be rephrased to state that the individual philosophers sharing in this tradition are participants in a conversation which, if not started by Plato, certainly gained in speculative depth and liveliness thanks to the great Athenian.

contrast between oral and written discourse quite literally. In this way, the “esoterists” or “esotericists” can argue that since the Platonic dialogues too are written word, if they are to be interpreted correctly, they need to be supplemented by external material, most notably an oral teaching that can be reconstructed on the basis of indirect (as well as direct, according to Szlezák and others) testimonies. Tigerstedt disagrees with this, arguing that the opposition between written and oral word is not to be taken literally (since “to Plato, as to any contemporary Greek, ‘reading’ meant listening, whether to one’s own voice or to that of somebody else”), but between a logos (whether written or spoken) which is mute, unintelligent, and unable to defend itself, and one which is true, “living and animate”, planted by a ‘dialectician’ in the soul of the learner,” and which requires the collaboration of the learner to be brought to fruition.

I am not unsympathetic toward Tigerstedt’s views on this point. But if his

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68 If Tigerstedt is correct to argue that “reading” meant “listening” to ancient Greek ears, it must follow that the question of a literal versus a non-literal sense of these terms holds only for modern readers, although then one may wonder what expressions would have been used by Plato to describe the literal (in the modern sense) opposition between spoken and written word. Would it be possible to take the contrast as being open to both a literal and a non-literal interpretation? What I argue in note 70 below points to a positive answer to this question.

69 Tigerstedt (1977, 70); see also Tigerstedt (1969, 6–13). A longer passage from Tigerstedt (1969, 10–11) is worth quoting verbatim for the clarity with which the author expresses this point: “You cannot learn Platonic Philosophy by reading a book — even a book written by Plato — or by listening to a lecture — even a lecture given by Plato — but only, quite literally, by philosophizing with Plato, i.e., by participating actively in the διάλογος and, under the guidance of the λόγος and the inspiration of the ἔρως, finding in your own soul the truth you seek. This is what must have happened in the Academy. For it is the essence of Socratic-Platonic philosophy that it is ‘philosophizing together’, συμφιλοσοφεῖν [cf. Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics IX.1172a5] — to use a term which Plato never used but which expresses what he intends.”

70 I should qualify my “sympathy” a little (and at the same time offer my answer to the question raised in note 68 above). Fundamentally, I agree with the idea that in order to start to understand the dialogues, the reader must become personally involved in them and must take on an active role in the conversation. I also agree with the view that the contrast between the two kinds of discourse (written and spoken, or
interpretation is correct, then “dialogue” does not necessarily mean the narrow Platonic dialogue form.\(^1\) (That the actual Platonic dialogues may still be—and \textit{de facto} often were—conducive to such \textit{logos} is pedagogically relevant but only incidental to my point.) Other forms of discourse, and rather diverse forms at that,\(^2\) can also be (and still

\[^1\text{As Tigerstedt (1977, 97–98) seems to imply.}\]

\[^2\text{Examples from the history of philosophy are not hard to find. I will limit my list to some well-known}\]
are) considered fully philosophical insofar as they draw the “reader” into the lively activity of learning. What truly matters is that the “listener” becomes actively engaged in philosophy, the pursuit of wisdom.73

If this interpretation is correct, then there is little doubt in my mind that Plotinus’ encounter with Plato’s dialogues was productive of a “living and animate” logos: the *Enneads*, both in their actual written form and in their oral anticipations and/or rehearsals before an audience of eager learners (cf. VP 13; 4.10–11).

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I will briefly introduce some specific features of Plotinus’ approach to Plato later in Section 2.2, but for the time being I thought it was important to anticipate these general observations in order to clarify from the start that, while it is virtually impossible to deny that Plotinus’ reading of Plato often goes beyond what the latter actually said or likely meant, it is nonetheless a philosophically plausible approach insofar as his concerns are philosophical, and to this extent it is profoundly Platonic in spirit (cf. note 39 above).74

samples: Aristotle’s terse lecture notes, Plotinus’ turgid re-elaborations of actual conversations, Nāgārjuna’s relentless fourfold negations, Augustine’s rhetorically elaborate treatises, Proclus’ and Spinoza’s geometrical systems, Aquinas’ at once sober and monumental *summae*, Descartes’ condensed and crisp meditations, Kant’s transcendental inquiries, Hegel’s majestic deductions, Nietzsche’s piercing aphorisms, the quasi-oracular utterances of the second Heidegger, etc.

73 The necessity of personal involvement, coupled with the open list of names and styles mentioned in the previous note, may give the impression that ultimately what matters in reading Plato is simply to “philosophize,” independently of what kind of “philosophy” one espouses: in other words, a kind of subjectivism that has personal involvement and self-expression as its sole standard, regardless of what one is involved in and of what type of self one expresses. I cannot bring myself to agree with this view. Instead, what I take to be genuine Platonic doctrine in this regard are: first, a (naïve?) trust in the power of reason, ever vigilant against the danger of misology (see *Phaedo* 89d1; cf. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* A855/B883, and *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* IV, 395); and second, the conviction that what every individual philosopher, even Socrates (and even Plato), says ought to be confronted with the truth (see *Phaedo* 91a1–b1; *Symposium* 201c6–9, and cf. 198d3, 199a7, 199b3; *Phaedrus* 275b5–c1). Dialogue, I like to think, is the name and locus of this confrontation.

74 To dismiss Plotinus’ interpretation of Plato on the basis of his more or less established philological
As I mentioned in Section 1.1, what follows in this chapter is not part of the systematic reconstruction of the Plotinian “erotics” which is the chief goal of this study; it is rather an attempt at highlighting some of the main features of this reconstruction which will become central in the next three chapters (e.g., Beauty as the end point of eros’ ascent, the division of reality in levels, the Good, etc.). Since highlighting is already interpreting, I would be naïve to think that later interpretations of Plato left my judgment uninfluenced as I read the dialogues (in the present context, particularly sections of the Symposium, the Republic, and the Phaedrus). Whether this influence was for the better (i.e., for a better understanding of Plato) is for the one who knows Plato to determine.

**1.3 Plato’s Choice of the Term ἔρως in the Symposium, and Eros, the God of Love**

Before I turn to our main text, I will briefly consider Plato’s terminology of love and desire, particularly in the Symposium (Subsection 1.3.1), and give a sketch of the background that the speakers in the dialogue were likely to have in common as they were praising Eros, the god of love (Subsection 1.3.2).

**1.3.1 Terminological Remarks: Plato’s Choice of the Term ἔρως**

Some of the most common Greek words for desire are: ἐπιθυμία (and its cognate θυμός), ἔφεσις, ὀρέξις, ὀρμή, πόθος, ἠμερος, βουλησίς (and its cognate βουλή), δίωξις. Plato employs all these words (or at least their verbal and adjectival cognates, as in the case of ὀρέξις), but the crucial term at issue in the Symposium is ἔρως, generally inadequate would amount to a misreading of both his work and partly, I maintain, of Plato’s intentions for writing the dialogues. When this dismissal is granted, an artificial aut-aut, so typical of superficial judgments of Plato’s relation to Plotinus and to Platonism in general, is wrongly established, namely: either Plotinus read the dialogues accurately (where by “accurately” one generally means historical and philological accuracy) or he did not; there is no other choice. This rigid alternative is displaced, I contend, precisely because it fails to consider the possibility of a kind of accuracy that is simply other than strictly historical and philological.
translated with “love” and customarily capitalized\textsuperscript{75} when referring to Eros, the god of love.\textsuperscript{76}

When Agathon and his guests agree to give speeches in praise of Eros, Plato had other words at his disposal to denote love, most notably φιλία, the term of choice of the \textit{Lysis}.\textsuperscript{77} Why did he choose ἔρως, other than for the fact that this was the proper name of the god of love?\textsuperscript{78} A later form of the poetic ἔρος,\textsuperscript{79} the term ἔρως typically denotes sexual passion,\textsuperscript{80} but also, more generally, the love or desire for someone\textsuperscript{81} or

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\textsuperscript{75} With regard to Plato’s text, the issue of capitalization concerns, of course, not its oldest extant papyri, which are written in uncial and survive only in fragments, but its minuscule manuscripts posterior to 895 A.D., the year in which John the Calligrapher completed the oldest surviving copy of the Platonic corpus, containing only the first six tetralogies. See Irwin (2008, 71–74).

\textsuperscript{76} Following is a merely quantitative, alphabetically arranged list of the terms just mentioned as they occur in Plato (cf. Radice and Bombacigno 2003), with the addition of φιλία, ἀφροδίσιος, and ἀγάπη, which I will briefly consider below (numbers in parentheses refer respectively to the occurrences of the term in question and to those of its immediate verbal, adjectival, and substantive cognates): ἀγάπη (0, 88); ἀφροδίσιος (29, 1); βουλή (34, 1113) and βουλή (32); δίωξις (2, 86); ἔπαθμα (226, 232); ἔρως (149), Ἐρως (127), and their adjectival and verbal cognates, ἔρωτικός (49) and ἔφαινο (194); ἔρεξ (2, 30); θέλησις (0, 533); θυμός (79, 52) and its cognate προθυμία (29, 135); ὀρέξ (0, 14); ὀρέξ (19, 77); πόθος (17, 18); φιλία (99, 855). Composite nouns (e.g., φιλοσοφία) are not included in this calculation. Notice that not all occurrences of the cognates of the terms listed here have strictly desiderative meaning (e.g., \textit{Crito} 52a2 in the case of ἀφήμ; \textit{Phaedo} 117b2 in the case of ὀρέξ). The term στοργή (love or affection, typically of parents and children, though rarely it may indicate sexual love: cf. LSJ, s.v.) never appears in Plato (although the verb στέργω does some 15 times) or in Plotinus; it occurs four times in Aristotle (\textit{De Anima} I.404b15 and \textit{Metaphysics} III.1000b6), but always in what appear to be verbatim quotations from Empedocles (DK 31.B109); cf. the analogous cases of θέλησις and ὀρέξ indicated above. See Chapter Two note 42 for a parallel list of these terms in Plotinus.

\textsuperscript{77} Terminological clarifications follow closely entries from LSJ; on Plato in particular see Ast (1908); on the \textit{Symposium} see Dover (1980, 1–3), Kahn (1996, 262–264), Corrigan and Glazov-Corrigan (2004, 44–46).

\textsuperscript{78} E.g., Anacreon 357.1, 358.2 (in D. A. Campbell 1982–1993, II, 54, 56); Theognis 1275, 1277 (in Gerber 1999a, 368); Sophocles, \textit{Antigone} 791; Euripides, \textit{Hippolytus} 525, 538.


\textsuperscript{80} E.g., Aeschylus, \textit{Coephorae} 600; Sophocles, \textit{Antigone} 792; Euripides, \textit{Hippolytus} 32.
something. As the god of love, Eros is often depicted as deceptive, tyrannical, and causing humans to lose their wits, although in the Symposium he does not possess any of these features and is described, by and large, in positive terms.

In contrast with ἔρως, φιλία generally means friendship. It differs from ἔρως in the same way as amicitia differs from amor in Latin. Primarily, it suggests affectionate regard and fondness rather than sexual passion, although rarely it can be used, like ἔρως, to denote sexual love. As such, the term covers a wide range of relations in which affectionate regard is found among different parties: gods and humans, states, family members, superiors and dependents, and more generally among equals. At times

81 E.g., Sophocles, Trachiniae 433; Aristotle, History of Animals IX.631a10.

82 E.g., Aeschylus, Agamemnon 540; Euripides, Ion 67; Plato, Laws VI.782e3; Herodotus, Historiae V.32; Thucydides, History of the Peloponnesian War VI.24.


84 However, Plato is well aware of the more disturbing side of ἔρως, as in Republic IX.573b–c (see Subsection 1.5.3 below, especially notes 232 and 233). The positive account of Eros is also supported in the tradition prior to Plato, particularly in the Presocratics, for instance Parmenides (DK 28.B13), explicitly mentioned in the speeches of Phaedrus and Agathon (Symposium 178b11), and Empedocles (DK 31.B17 = Plutarch, Amatorius 13: Moralia IX.756d; B27 = Plutarch, De facie in orbe lunae 12: Moralia XII.926d–927a).

85 LSJ, s.v.

86 E.g., Xenophon, Symposium 8.15; Plato, Symposium 179c1, Phaedrus 237c8, 255e2.

87 E.g., Proverbs 5:19 (Septuaginta); Xenophon, Symposium 9.6. I have been unable to find a single occurrence in Plato in which φιλία is used to indicate strictly sexual passion, although in the Lysis, as Kahn rightly observes, “the conversation on friendship is set within a narrative frame that depicts erotic infatuation” (Kahn 1996, 259).

88 Aristotle’s Nicomachean Ethics VIII–IX can be considered a summula of this.

89 E.g., Plato, Symposium 188d1.

90 E.g., Thucydides, History of the Peloponnesian War V.5, VI.34.78.

91 E.g., Xenophon, Hiero 3.7; Aristotle, Poetics 1453b19, 31.
φιλία is used to indicate mere kindliness, or amiability, without any particular affection attached to it,\textsuperscript{94} as well as the liking of particular things.\textsuperscript{95} Unlike ἔρως, φιλία does not name any divine or godlike being, although it does identify (rather metaphorically, it would seem) the power which in nature harmonizes contrasting elements.\textsuperscript{96}

As we can see, while ἔρως contains an overt and primary reference to sexual love, this is not the case for φιλία. And yet, sexual passion is not all that ἔρως denotes. If Plato’s purpose was strictly to talk about the nature of love in its sexual component, the semantic scope of ἔρως could have been restricted by easy recourse to an unambiguous term for sexual pleasure, τἀφροδίσια,\textsuperscript{97} which moreover had the advantage of containing an immediate reference to the goddess Aphrodite.\textsuperscript{98} Conversely, one wonders whether Plato might have operated an unambiguous “restriction” in the opposite direction, namely through the excision of all that is merely appetitive in the phenomenon of love by recourse to the term ἀγάπη. This word is not found in the dialogues, but Plato does use its

\textsuperscript{92} E.g., Xenophon, \textit{Anabasis} I.6.3; Isocrates, \textit{The Team of Horses} 28.352b.
\textsuperscript{93} E.g., Theognis 306 (in Gerber 1999a, 216); Xenophon, \textit{Memorabilia} II.6.29.
\textsuperscript{94} E.g., Aristotle, \textit{Nicomachean Ethics} II.1108a28, IV.1126b11–1127a12.
\textsuperscript{95} E.g., Plato, \textit{Republic} IX.581a3; Aristotle, \textit{On the Heavens} III.306a12. In this acceptation, φιλία comes close to one of the meanings of ἔρως (see notes 81 and 82 above) as well as to the main sense of ἐπιθυμία. The three terms are brought together by Plato in \textit{Lysis} 221e4.
\textsuperscript{96} E.g., Empedocles (DK 31.A37 = Aristotle, \textit{Metaphysics} I.985a21–b3; A42 = Aristotle, \textit{On the Heavens} III.301a14–20, \textit{De generatione et corruptione} II.334a5–7; B35 [= several sources]; B53 = Aristotle, \textit{De generatione et corruptione} II.334a1–8, \textit{Physics} II.196a19–23); the terms in question here are two, though clearly related: φιλία and φιλότης).
\textsuperscript{97} Pindar, \textit{Nemean Odes} 7.79; Semonides 7.48, 52 (in Gerber 1999b, 308); Plato, \textit{Philebus} 65c6, \textit{Greater Hippias} 298e1, \textit{Republic} I.329a6 ff., \textit{Laws} I.650a2.
\textsuperscript{98} See Dover (1980, 2).
verbal and adjectival cognates, ἀγαπάω and ἀγαπητός. However, in ancient usage the meaning of this cluster of terms almost coincides with that of φιλία and its cognates; so why not simply choose φιλία?

The reason, I believe, is that in all probability this term too, like τάφροδίσια and ἐπιθυμία but in a different direction, would have unduly restricted the scope of Plato’s project. In other words, φιλία lacks the immediate reference not only to a divine or godlike being, but also to what in Plato is the first step of the so-called ladder of ascent, namely a beautiful body. Here too, as in the case of τάφροδίσια and ἐπιθυμία, ἔρως seems to be the more inclusive of the terms that Plato had at his disposal. As such, he employed it as the most apt to express the affective continuum that permeates all the phenomena denoted by the other terms.

A further possibility for Plato was to focus the discussion on another of the desiderative terms listed earlier, particularly ἐπιθυμία and βούλησις, which with their cognates are by far the ones occurring most frequently in the dialogues (see note 76). As I

99 E.g., Symposium 181c6, 210d2, Phaedrus 233e3, Alcibiades I 104e7, Lysis 215a1, Republic V.472c3.
100 E.g., Cratylus 430a1, Philebus 61e8, Timaeus 67a6.
101 For instance, the meaning of ἀγαπάω in Xenophon’s Memorabilia II.7.9 hardly differs from that of φιλέω. And in the references given in notes 99 and 100 above, none of the occurrences of ἀγαπάω and ἀγαπητός comes close to the meaning of Christian ἀγάπη. In passing, this does not necessarily mean that there is no connection whatsoever between Platonie and Christian love; it rather points to the fact that if such connection exists, it may have to be discovered elsewhere than in mere terminology.

102 For the use of the term ἀγάπη in Plotinus see pages 200–201 below.
103 Symposium 210a5–b6. See page 49 below.
104 Diotima makes clear that this is the case as she compares the ranges of the terms ἔρως and πόθησις, both of which are very wide but have been conventionally restricted to indicate a pars pro toto (Symposium 205a5–d9).
105 See Cobb (1993, 12–13) for a similar view.
shall argue more extensively later (Subsection 1.5.3), while ἔρως in the *Symposium*
includes ἐπιθυμία and βοῦλησις, it cannot be reduced to either of them. Stated differently,
ἐπιθυμία and βοῦλησις are important aspects or moments of ἔρως, but not the whole of
it.  

In short, I think I can safely endorse Corrigan and Glazov-Corrigan’s conclusion
about Plato’s favoring of the term ἔρως, in the *Symposium*, over other available terms:

for Plato’s purposes the choice of Erôs for praise has the advantages that
the word (1) can designate the god or the superhuman force of love itself,
(2) may signify the concrete experience of being in love with or falling in
love with a particular individual while bearing a range of other cognate
meanings, and (3) is distinguished from the common words for sex
derived from the goddess, Aphrodite.  

1.3.2 Eros, the God of Love  

I already mentioned (page 32) that in its capitalized form, the term Ἔρως refers to
the Greek god of love (the Romans’ Amor or Cupido). What most deserves attention for
our purpose is the variety of accounts of Eros’ genealogy and especially his relation to
Aphrodite, a variety which Daremberg and Saglio rightly indicate as a clear sign of the
“travail de réflexion” surrounding this mythological character.  

Absent as a divinity in Homer (but see note 79 above), Eros is found for the first
time in Hesiod, who, as Phaedrus confirms in the *Symposium*, counts him with Earth and

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106 This goes against Bury (1969, xxxvi–xxxvii), who conflates ἔρως and ἐπιθυμία, and partially also
against Friedländer (1958, 50–51), in whom the conflation occurs between ἔρως and φιλία.


108 My main sources for this subsection are: Darenberg and Saglio (1873–1919, I, 1595–1611); Pauly and

109 Daremberg and Saglio (1873–1919, I, 1595).
Tartarus as one of the primordial elements that came into being after Chaos.\textsuperscript{110}

According to the Orphics, Eros is the son of Cronus; for Sappho his parents are Uranus and Gaea, while for Simonides they are Aphrodite and Ares.\textsuperscript{111} Later, in the second century A.D., Pausanias reminds his readers of this plethora of contrasting accounts, but he abstains from telling us anything about a possible way of harmonizing them.\textsuperscript{112}

It is obviously beyond the scope of this work to try to trace a more or less coherent line of development between these contrasting bits of information, but it is important at least to notice that such discrepancy about Eros’ figure is well reflected (and reflected upon) in the *Symposium*. Besides the contrast between Phaedrus’ and Agathon’s accounts concerning the antiquity of Eros (see note 110), one may draw attention to Socrates-Diotima’s myth of Eros’ birth, in which the god is given an altogether new set of parents, Poros and Penia, and, stripped of his divine status, is made into a *daimon*.\textsuperscript{113} Pausanias’ speech presents the idea of two *Erotes*, one common (or vulgar) and one heavenly, an idea that Eryximachus borrows and refashions for his own purposes.\textsuperscript{114}

\begin{footnotes}
\textsuperscript{110} Hesiod, *Theogony* 116–117, 119–120 (= Plato, *Symposium* 178b5–7). See also Aristophanes, *Birds* 693–702. Hesiod’s account is followed in the sixth century B.C. by the lyric poet Ibycus (324, in D. A. Campbell 1982–1993, III, 278) and by the mythographer Acusilaus, also mentioned explicitly in the *Symposium* by Phaedrus as part of his praise of Eros for his antiquity (*Symposium* 178b8–9 = DK 9.B2). Agathon, on the other hand, denies that Eros is most ancient among the gods, but confirms Hesiod’s account insofar as Eros’ beauty is concerned (*Symposium* 195a–196b).


\textsuperscript{112} Pausanias, *Description of Greece* IX.27.2. According to Pausanias, Sappho’s own utterances about Eros are not even in harmony with each other.

\textsuperscript{113} *Symposium* 202b6–203e5. For lack of an adequate translation, I will resort to transliterating the Greek term δαίμων (simplified without the long quantity: *daimon*). For an overview of the use of the terms θεός, τὸ θεῖον, δαίμων, and τὸ δαιμόνιον in Plato see François (1957, 246–304).

\textsuperscript{114} *Symposium* 180c4–e2; 185e6–188e4.
\end{footnotes}
while Aristophanes states that Eros is the god who most loves human beings, and
supports his claim with an ingenious myth of his own.\textsuperscript{115}

The originality of Eros’ connection to Aphrodite, while well supported at least
since the time of Hesiod, has been questioned.\textsuperscript{116} This connection is clearly presupposed
in the \textit{Symposium};\textsuperscript{117} what does remain a matter of dispute in the dialogue is the nature of
the connection. The major discrepancy seems to be that between the accounts of
Pausanias and Socrates. On the one hand, Pausanias affirms the necessity of this
connection, and goes on to distinguish a heavenly (Urania) from a common (Pandemos)
Aphrodite, to which there corresponds a heavenly and a common Eros respectively.\textsuperscript{118} On
the other hand, in Socrates’ speech Eros’ connection to Aphrodite seems weaker, since all
that links them is the fact that the former was conceived on the birthday of the latter. And
yet, Diotima does not fail to remark the unequivocal character of their association: “Eros
was born to be the follower and servant of Aphrodite.”\textsuperscript{119}

It would be easy to gloss over the discrepancies about some major details of Eros’
character in the \textit{Symposium} by arguing that, since each interlocutor is speaking for

\textsuperscript{115} \textit{Symposium} 189c8: \textit{θεῶν φιλανθρωπότατος}.

\textsuperscript{116} Hesiod, \textit{Theogony} 201. See Hammond and Scullard (1970, s.v. “Eros”).

\textsuperscript{117} \textit{Symposium} 177e2, 180d3–e3, 196d1, 203c1–4. See also \textit{Phaedrus} 242d9.

\textsuperscript{118} \textit{Symposium} 180d4: “there is no Aphrodite without Eros” (\textit{οὐκ ἔστιν ἄνευ Ἐρωτὸς Ἀφροδίτη}). In what
follows, we are told that Aphrodite-Urania is an older deity and is the motherless daughter of Uranus,
while Aphrodite-Pandemos is a younger goddess, whose parents are Zeus and Dione (\textit{Symposium} 180d6–
e3). Pausanias is silent about Eros’ genealogy; he simply calls him Aphrodite’s partner or coworker
(\textit{συνεργόν}: 180e2).

\textsuperscript{119} \textit{Symposium} 203c2: \textit{τῆς Ἀφροδίτης ἀκόλουθος καὶ θεράπων γέγονεν ὁ Ἐρως}. 
himself (for even Diotima is Socrates speaking for himself in disguise\textsuperscript{120}), such differences are in no need of being harmonized at all. This is hardly the case, however, if the characters in the dialogue are speaking, not each for himself, but all for Plato, that is, if Plato’s voice, while ideally closer to Socrates’ stance, is fully heard only in the interplay of the various speeches. My goal here is not to shed light on the dynamics of this dramatic contexture,\textsuperscript{121} but simply to point to the fact that, even if this procedure does not fully correspond to Plotinus’ explicit way of reading the Symposium (and, for that matter, the entire Platonic corpus), his interpretive approach to Plato’s text offers relevant examples of how the voices of characters other than Socrates are a precious source of insight. Thus, in the next chapter we will see that in his treatise On Eros (III.5 [50]), Plotinus’ conclusions are formulated and systematized not only on the basis of Socrates’ speech, but also in light of those of the other speakers in the dialogue.\textsuperscript{122}

1.4 A Sketch of the Argument of Symposium 198a1–212c3

Socrates’ discourse is a complex dramatic unity preceded by five speeches of praise (encomia) on the same subject (i.e., Eros)\textsuperscript{123} and a double prologue, or double narrative frame,\textsuperscript{124} and followed by a final discourse by Alcibiades, in which the object of

\textsuperscript{120} For support on this view about Diotima see note 132 below.

\textsuperscript{121} Rosen (1987) and Corrigan and Glazov-Corrigan (2004) are fruitful, if different, examples of how this can be done.

\textsuperscript{122} E.g., he will endorse Pausanias’ distinction between Aphrodite-Urania and Aphrodite-Pandemos, as well as the distinction of Erotes derived from it (Plotinus III.5 [50] 2.14–4.9).

\textsuperscript{123} The speeches are by Phaedrus (178a–180b), Pausanias (180c–185c), Eryximachus (185e–188e), Aristophanes (189c–193e), and Agathon (194e–197e), supplemented by a triple interlude, before and after Eryximachus’ speech (185c–e, 189a–c), and after Agathon’s (193e–194e).

\textsuperscript{124} I.e., Apollodorus (172a–174a) and Aristodemus (174a–178a).
praise is no longer Eros but Socrates himself. My main contention about Socrates’ speech is that the image of ascent is the focal metaphor of the discourse, which in turn constitutes the axis of the entire dialogue, and as such includes (or, in hindsight, is reflected in) the other speeches as failures to complete the ascent due to an inadequate view of eros, or of what it means to love. In this section I will draw a sketch of Socrates’ main argument, limiting myself to highlighting some key transition in the text. Hence, in the next section (1.5) I will move on to offer some critical observations on this part of the Symposium, especially the so-called Ascent Passage, which are particularly relevant for this study.

1.4.1 An Outline of Socrates’ Speech

Broadly, Socrates’ discourse on Eros can be divided as follows:

(1) 198a1–201c9: Critique of the method of the previous speeches
   (a) 198a1–199c2: Methodological critique: praise must be subordinated to truth
   (b) 199c3–201c9: Elenchos and homologia: Eros is the lover, not the beloved

(2) 201d1–212c3: Socrates’ discourse; conversation with Diotima
   (a) 201d1–209e4: The Lesser Mysteries of love
      (i) 201d1–204c6: Eros’ nature: an intermediate/intermediary

125 Alcibiades’ speech (215a–222b) is introduced by his own dramatic entrance (212c–215a) and followed by the epilogue of the dialogue as a whole (222c–223d).

126 My claim is not altogether unlike Corrigan and Glazov-Corrigan’s (2004, 1), but my purpose is to pursue it further, rather than within the Symposium, in Plotinus. See also Reeve (2006, xxiii). For partial illustrations of the claim that the ascent metaphor is central to Socrates’ discourse and to the dialogues as a whole, see Subsection 1.5.4 below.
entity; not a god, but a δαίμων

(ii) 204c7–206a13: Eros’ proper aim: the eternal possession of the good

(iii) 206b1–209e4: Eros’ proper activity: to give birth in beauty for the sake of immortality

(b) 209e5–212a7: The Greater Mysteries of love

(i) 209e5–211b7: The ladder of love, or the Ascent Passage

(ii) 211b7–d1: Synoptic view of the ladder of love

(iii) 211d1–212a7: Beauty itself

(c) 212b1–c3: Conclusion of Socrates’ discourse

1.4.2 Symposium 198a1–201e9: Methodological Critique, Elenchos and Homologia

The beginning of Socrates’ speech is a radical turn of perspective, or rather a shift of the focus of the encomium,127 namely: no longer praise, but truth (τἀληθῆ).128 As in other dialogues,129 Socrates allows himself to use his customary method of brief questions and answers in order to scrutinize the position of his interlocutor (in this case, the results of Agathon’s speech). The purpose of this scrutiny is twofold: to find out whether errors were made in the previous characterizations of Eros (i.e., the elenctic, or refutative, step proper), and to put forth some positive characterizations of it on which the


128 Symposium 198d3, 199a7, 199b3; cf. also 201c8. Socrates will touch again on the issue of the genre of his speech in light of his primary concern for truth at 212b9–c3.

129 E.g., Gorgias 449b4–8, Protagoras 334c7–335a3, Crito 46b1–d7.
interlocutors may agree (ὁμολογία).\(^{130}\)

For Agathon, since Eros was a god incarnating all the qualities one would desire in an object of love (e.g., happiness, beauty, youth, gracefulness), he would have to be identified, not with the love, but with the aim of love, namely the beautiful. Socrates’ procedure completely reverses this position: Eros is not that which love loves, but the lover. This reversal is fleshed out in a manifold characterization of Eros. (i) Love is never simply love, but always love of something (199e–200a); in anachronistic terms: it is intentional (cf. Philebus 35b1–2). (ii) Love implies a lack of the thing desired; or: precisely because it tends to something, it does not possess it (200a–b).\(^{131}\) At this stage, it is clear that Eros means desire, or appetite, of which lack is an essential characteristic. However, Eros and lack do not coincide in their scope, for we do not desire everything that we lack, but we do lack everything that we desire. In other words, lack is part of the essence of desire, not vice versa. A crucial corollary to this: when we say that we love something we already possess (e.g., health or wealth), what we really desire is to have those things in the future as well (200b–e). Finally, (iii) Love is never for ugliness (αἴσχος) but only for beauty (κάλλος), and since all good things (τὰ ἀγαθὰ) are beautiful, Love loves good things (201a–c).

\(^{130}\) The term ὁμολογέω occurs nine times in Symposium 198a1–201c9. Robin well synthesizes the purpose of ὁμολογία: “sans cet accord préalable (homologia), on risqué de se fourvoyer dans une controverse stérile, dont la source est un malentendu” (in Vicaire 1992, lxxiii). Elenchos and homologia are not ends in themselves; what guides them is the discovery of the truth. The elenchos is carried out methodically and directly only toward Agathon’s speech, but more or less overt elenctic remarks aimed at the other speeches occur all throughout Socrates’ discourse (e.g., at Aristophanes’ speech: see Subsection 1.5.4 below).

\(^{131}\) Cf. Lysis 221d7–e3, Philebus 35a3–4.
It is at this point that Diotima, a priestess from Mantinea, is introduced as Socrates’ guide into the so-called mysteries of love.

1.4.3 Symposium 201d1–209e4: The Lesser Mysteries of Love

The first point of the Lesser Mysteries amounts to Diotima stripping Eros of his unqualified immortality, or his divine status (201e–203a). The argument is that if Eros were a god, he would lack nothing; he would have nothing to desire, hence to love, which goes against what Socrates and Agathon just agreed upon. Similarly, since Eros desires beauty, he must be lacking it. This does not mean, however, that he is either mortal or ugly, for just like correct opinion (ὁρθὴ δόξα) comes halfway between (μεταξύ)

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132 If, on the one hand, views about Diotima’s role in the Symposium differ (Cornford 1950, 71; Brès 1968, 229–232; Wender 1973, 216–218; Dover 1980, 137; Halperin 1990, 257–308; R. E. Allen 1991, 46; Reale 1997a, 26–28, 135–147. For an overview and critique of some of these views see Cobb 1993, 71–72; Brisson 1998, 27–31, 63–65; Corrigan and Glazov-Corrigan, 2004, 111–118), on the other, commentators seem to agree that her and Socrates’ doctrines coincide (Bury 1932, xxxix; Friedländer 1958, I.148; Levinson 1953, 32; Rosen 1987, 203, 221, 225; Anton 1974, 178). It seems safe to conjecture that Diotima stands for Socrates (who in turn stands for Plato), and that at least to this extent she is a fictional character (Reale 1997a, 26–28, 135–147; Zuckert 2009, 190 note 21). I am not denying that a historical person named Diotima, broadly matching the character we find in the Symposium, might have actually existed (see Taylor 1960, 224–225), and that Socrates might in fact have known her, although evidence for either claim is quite thin (Dover 1980, 10; Brisson 1998, 28), and as Nails (2002, 138) observes, “all extant later references to Diotima are derived from Plato.” The point is rather that it seems highly unlikely, though not apodictically impossible, that Plato’s report in this dialogue is a faithful replica of (the allegedly historical) Diotima’s actual thought, let alone of her actual words. See Waithe (1987, 83–116) for a helpful overview of the scholarship surrounding the issue and an (ultimately inconclusive) argument in support of both Diotima’s historical existence and the presence of her actual thought (which moreover would be at variance with Socrates’, on which see also Neumann 1965) in the Symposium.

133 On the language of the mysteries and their division in preparatory purification (μύησις), lesser mysteries (τέλεια), and greater mysteries (ἐποπτικά), see Vicaire (1992, 67 note 5), Reale (1997a, 162–164), Brisson (1998, 65–71). The whole of Socrates’ discourse could be interpreted as mirroring this pattern, with the elenchos and homologia (198a1–201c9) standing for the purificatory step, and Diotima’s Lesser (201d1–209e4) and Greater Mysteries (209e5–212a7) standing for their homonymous mystagogic stages. Cf. Clement of Alexandria’s testimony on this in Stromata V.11.373.24–374.4, VII.4.20.12–17; see also note 141 below. Marinus, the fifth century A.D. Platonist and author of a biography of Proclus, applies the same scheme and language of the mysteries to the reading of Plato and Aristotle; he calls Aristotle’s works “preliminary initiations and Lesser Mysteries [προτελειῶν καὶ μικρῶν μυστερίων],” while those of Plato are a “mystagogy [μυσταγογίαν],” and studying them leads to “a vision of truly divine initiations [θείαις δόλως τελετὰς ἐποπτεύειν]” (Marinus, Life of Proclus 13.5–6, 8–9; my translation).
knowledge and ignorance,\textsuperscript{134} so Eros stands halfway between beauty and ugliness, the mortal and the immortal condition.\textsuperscript{135} For this reason, Eros rather than a god is called “a great spirit” (Δαιμόνιον μέγας: 202d13), whose nature, aim, and proper activity Diotima proceeds to illustrate.

His intermediate nature is etiologically accounted for through a story (203a9–204a7). We shall see that Plotinus has much to say about this story (Chapter Two). For now, let us only keep in mind that here Plato provides a brand new parentage for this god newly demoted to \textit{daimon} (i.e., Poros and Penia), one which we do not find in the tradition (see Subsection 1.3.2). His parents explain his opposing qualities of poverty and lack (Penia) and of resourcefulness (Poros), while the fact that he was conceived on Aphrodites’ birthday explains why he is a lover of beauty (φύσει ἔραστὴς ὑπὸ τὸ καλὸν: 203c3–4). An intermediate entity, Eros both does and does not possess what he


\textsuperscript{135} The term \textit{μεταξὺ (“in between”), already introduced in 202a2–b5 and clearly suggesting the intermediary character of Eros, occurs repeatedly in this portion of the text, most notably at 202d11 (μεταξὺ θνητοῦ καὶ ἀθανάτου), 202d13–e1 (πάν τὸ δαιμόνιον μεταξὺ ἐστὶ θεοῦ τε καὶ θνητοῦ), 204b1–2 (μεταξὺ τούτων ἄμφοτέρων), 204b5 (μεταξὺ εἶναι σοφοῦ καὶ ἀμαθοῦς); cf. \textit{Epinomis} 984d8–e3. To say that Eros is μεταξὺ θνητοῦ καὶ ἀθανάτου (202d11) does not imply that Eros is mortal, I take it, but that his immortality is unlike that of the gods, namely, that whatever good he possesses, he does not possess it permanently, as the gods do, but he has to strive continually to either keep it or regain it. Applied to human love, this dynamic is replicated in the process of reproduction as the mortal way of aiming at an immortality \textit{sui generis} (cf. 206e8). R. E. Allen (1991, 94) does not seem to see this as he unqualifiedly states that Eros lacks immortality. If this were the case simply, or without qualification, then on the basis of the text Allen should add that Eros lacks mortality \textit{as well} as immortality, but this does not seem possible—\textit{tertium non datur}—unless one qualifies the terms mortality and immortality. In passing, it is a qualification of this kind that will allow Plotinus to claim that pure \textit{eros} is an \textit{οὐσία} and a \textit{ὑπόστασις} intrinsically connected to the soul (III.5 [50] 2.32–39; see Subsection 2.3.2 below), although not identical with the soul \textit{tout court}, as Allen (1991, 94) infers, mistakenly I believe. Along with μεταξὺ, Plato uses also the expression \textit{ἐν μέσῳ} (202e6, 203e5). What are we to make of Alcibiades complaining that Socrates is in between (ἐν μέσῳ: 227e2) himself and Agathon (the good!) and that he would rather have Agathon in between (ἐν μέσῳ: 227e7) himself and Socrates? If Socrates, qua philosopher, may be seen as representing Eros (204b4), is Alcibiades’ fuss about seating arrangements indicative of a certain confusion about the order of reality?
desires. Specifically, he does not possess it insofar as he desires it, but for the same reason he also possess it; not unqualifiedly, however, but precisely qua desideratum (see Philebus 35b6–7; cf. Chapter Four note 86). Moreover, the situation of those who love is analogous to that of Eros. This also holds for lovers of wisdom (οἱ φιλοσοφοῦντες: 204a8). And since wisdom is one of the most beautiful things and Eros loves beauty, he is accordingly called a lover of wisdom (φιλόσοφος: 204b4).

Agathon and Socrates already agreed that Eros is love of what is beautiful. But what is his goal or proper aim in loving the beautiful? Diotima’s answer is unequivocal (204c7–206a13): what Eros longs for is nothing but to make the beautiful (τὸ καλὸν), which Socrates quickly links to the good (τὸ ἀγαθὸν), his own. Once he obtains it, he reaches happiness (εὐδαιμονία). However, happiness would not be truly such if the final object of desire were not one’s own forever (ἀεὶ), hence Diotima’s threefold conclusion, immediately formalized in its application to Eros: “men love the good,” (206a3–4); “they love for the good to be their own,” (206a6–7); “and not only to be theirs, but also to be theirs forever” (206a9). Ergo: “love is for the good to be one’s own forever” (206a11–12). Thus, immortality (ἄθανασία) is an aspect that belongs to the very essence of love.

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136 Symposium 201c1–5, 204e1–2 (cf. Lysis 216d2, Timaeus 87c4–5). The fusion of the two terms gives rise to the word καλοκἀγαθία (see Xenophon, Memorabilia I.6.14; Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics IV.1124a4; the most likely spurious Definitions 412e8). This noun is never found in Plato, but the two adjectives from which it is fused, καλὸς and ἀγαθός, occur together variously and very frequently (e.g., Laches 192c8–9; Theaetetus 182b7, 185e4–5; Protagoras 315d8–e1; Greater Hippias 297b–c, 304a1; Republic III.402a1, IV.425d7, VI.507b5; Timaeus 88c6). As Dover remarks the aesthetic connotation of the term καλοκἀγαθία “is submerged in the usual moral application of the word” (Dover 1974, 41), and yet the term “differs from ‘good’ in taking account not merely of moral disposition (as manifested in courage and generosity) but also of attributes (e.g., wealth, good physique and skills) which enhance one’s value to the community” (Dover 1980, 143). For a guided tour through some relevant texts where the term appears between Aeschines and Aristotle, see Dover (1974, 41–45). On the relation between beauty and goodness in Plato, see Subsection 1.5.2 below.

137 Symposium 206a11–12: Ἐστιν ἄρα συλλήβδην, ἔφη, ὁ ἐρως τοῦ τὸ ἀγαθὸν αὐτῷ εἶναι ἀεὶ. Robin (1964,
But how do mortal beings go about achieving immortality? Or, what is Eros’ proper activity (ἔργον: 206b3) in mortal beings? The last part of the Lesser Mysteries is dedicated to provide an answer to this question (206b1–209e4), which Diotima offers once again in a nutshell: “it is to give birth in beauty, both in body and in soul” (206b7–8). She then goes on to describe the process of animal reproduction (γέννησις) as precisely the means by which animals try to make themselves eternal. This is true of both body and of soul. That is, Love’s longing for immortality is expressed not only in the physical begetting of children, but also in more strictly spiritual activities (Diotima explicitly mentions the works of poets, creative inventors, and politicians). And while most people turn to others in order to beget children, some are fecund according to the soul and put their effort in trying to give birth to virtues in beautiful and noble souls, with whom they accordingly will fall in love.

16) summarizes this point well: “la fin de l’amour, c’est l’immortalité.” I will return to this later (Subsection 1.5.4).

138 Symposium 206b7–8: ἔστι γὰρ τοῦτο τόκος ἐν καλῷ καὶ κατὰ τὸ σῶμα καὶ κατὰ τὴν ψυχήν.

139 Cf. Laws IV.721c2–8. In the Symposium reproduction is described as “what in the mortal is eternal and immortal” (206e8), or that through which “the mortal participates [μετέχει] in immortality” (208b3); cf. Aristotle, De anima II.415a25–b2. This process of immortalization does not immediately and exclusively take place at the level of the species, through the begetting of an individual of the same species, but starts at the level of what is taken to be a selfsame living unity (τὸ αὐτό, ὁ αὐτὸς: 207d5), or the individual itself, who never consists of the same things (τὰ αὐτὰ: 207d6), both in body and in soul (207d–208b).

140 Symposium 209a3–8. If I am correct to include the χαιροτέχναι of Apology 22c9 among the τῶν δημιουργῶν ὅσοι λέγονται εὑρετικοὶ εἶναι of Symposium 210a5, then these are the same groups of people that Socrates scrutinized in the Apology (21b–22e) as he tried to disprove the Delphic oracle by finding someone wiser than himself. In this light, the Symposium presents a more positive view not only of poetry, as insightfully argued by Corrigan and Glazov-Corrigan (2004, 215–220) in connection with Republic X.595a–608b, but of most human activities. The critique of these groups of people found in the the Apology still stands, however, to the extent that they failed to see that their wisdom is localized, or regional, one kind of wisdom and not the whole of it, and therefore limited. But in the Symposium their works are nonetheless erotic activities, works of love, insofar as they participate in Beauty itself (see the term for participation, μετέχειν, occurring at 208b3, 211a7, and especially at 211b2).
Here the preference accorded to pregnancy of soul over physical pregnancy already points at an ascending movement within the lower mysteries or things of love (τὰ ἐρωτικά). But it is through the final and highest mysteries (τὰ δὲ τέλεα καὶ ἐποπτικά) that Diotima’s attempts to lead Socrates, whether he can follow or not (210a2), to the apex of Eros’ ladder.

1.4.4 Symposium 209e5–212a7: The Greater Mysteries of Love (the Ascent Passage)

Words of ascent, most notably ἐπάνειμι (-εῖμι, ibo), occur repeatedly in the brief synoptic view of the so-called ladder of love (Symposium 211b7–d1). This term is anticipated by Apollodorus at the beginning of the dialogue: “Just the other day I was going up [ἀνιὼν] to town from my city in Phaleron...” This occurrence may be accidental; certainly it does not make for a strict argument when taken by itself; and yet it points at the importance of details in Plato. Specifically, if the ascent metaphor is central for understanding the dialogue as a whole, then the apparently unimportant or less speculative parts of the dialogue should become clear and found to be meaningful.

141 Symposium 210a1. Cf. Plutarch, De Iside et Osiride 77 (Moralia V.382d–e). See note 133 above.

142 Symposium 211b6 (ἐπανιὼν), 211c2 (ἐπανιώνα), 211c3 (ἐπαναβασμοῖς). As Rettig (1876, 309), Hug (1884, 162), and Bury (1932, 130) all point out in their notes to this passage, there are relevant parallels between the language and thought of ascent of Symposium 211b–c and that of Republic VI and VII, in particular VI.510b4–511c2, VII.517b5 (ἄναδον), 521c7 (ἐπάνοδον), 531c3 (ἀνίσσιν), 532b8 (ἐπάνοδος), 532d6 (ἐπανιτέον). See Chapter Four notes 142–147 below for metaphors of ascent in Plotinus.

143 Symposium 172a2: καὶ γὰρ ἐπέγραψεν πρόφητα ἐκ Ἀστυ οἶκοθεν ἀνιὼν Φαληρόθεν. The translation is Cobb’s (1993), which I prefer to those which do not render the ascending movement denoted by ἀνιὼν, most notably Ficino (1590), Jowett (1892), Meunier (1947), R. E. Allen (1991), A. Nehamas and P. Woodruff (in Cooper 1997), and G. Giardini (in Maltese 1997). Translations rendering this movement include Lamb (1925), Apelt (1926), M. Joyce (in Hamilton and Cairns 1961), Martínez Hernández (1986), Vicaire (1992), Rowe (1998), Brisson (1998), Reale (2000), S. Benardete (in Benardete and Bloom 2001). See also ἵνα καλὸν παρὰ καλὸν ἰώ (174a9) and ἀνιώνυ (variant reading of ἄν ἰώνυ at 174b1): here not only the metaphor of ascent, but, if the καλὸν at 174a9 is Agathon (i.e., literally, Good), also a possible foreshadowing of the proximity of Beauty and Goodness (on which see Subsection 1.5.2 below). An upward movement is present also in the closing lines of the dialogues (223d9): “Socrates got up [ἀναστάντα] and left.”
precisely in this light.

Here is Diotima’s summation of the ascent, its trajectory stretching from one single beautiful body to Beauty itself (capitalized to avoid equivocation):  

[b7] This is [the way] to proceed correctly, [c1] or to be led by another, into the matters of love: beginning [2] with these beautiful things here, for the sake of that Beauty, ever to ascend, [3] as if using the rungs of a ladder, from one to two [beautiful bodies], and from two [4] to all beautiful bodies, and from beautiful [5] bodies to beautiful practices, and from practices [6] to beautiful studies, and from the studies [7] one reaches 145 that study, which is nothing other than [8] the study of that Beauty itself, until at last one comes to know [d1] Beauty itself.

In the next section I will draw attention to some features of the Ascent Passage that are of fundamental importance for our main topic.

1.5 Critical Observations on the Ascent Passage

My remarks for this section are grouped under five headings: levels of ascent and levels of reality (Subsection 1.5.1); the relations between the Good, Beauty, and the Ideas (1.5.2); reason and desire in the ascent (1.5.3); illustrations of the connection between the Ascent Passage and other parts of the Symposium (1.5.4); appetitive, donative, and personal love (1.5.5). The goal of this section is to highlight some of the major elements


145 Symposium 211c7, c8: τελευτήσαι, καὶ γνῶ: a major crux (see Bury 1932, Dover 1980). Variant reading: τελευτήσαι, ἵνα γνῶ (or ἴνα τὸ γνῶ; Bury 1932: ἴνα καὶ γνῶ). As from the text printed in the previous note, I read τελευτήσαι (with Hug 1884; Usener, in Burnet 1899–1907; Bury 1932; Dover 1980; Vicaire 1992; Rowe 1998) rather than τελευτήσῃ (against Burnet 1899–1907; A. Nehamas and P. Woodruff, in Cooper 1997). The manuscript tradition is certainly corrupted here (see also the iνo at 211c8), but as Rowe (1998, 200) rightly points out, none of the editorial solutions “makes much difference to the sense”. 
of Plato’s views of love. As I anticipated, these elements will become central in my reconstruction of the significance of eros in Plotinus’ metaphysics carried out primarily in Chapter Three and Chapter Four.

1.5.1 Levels of Ascent, Levels of Reality

A first set of observations concerns the number and rationale of the levels or stages of the ascent. Commentators tend to agree that both in its long version (209e5–211b7) and in the synoptic view I just cited, the upward movement comprises levels in a number between four and six. I propose the following division of levels (or stages, or steps, or rungs):

1. A single body: ἕν σῶμα (210a4–8, 211c3)
2. All bodies: πάντα σώματα (210a8–b6, 211c3–4)
3. Souls: ψυχαί (210b6–c3)
4. Practices and laws: ἐπιτηδεύματα καὶ νόμοι (210c3–6, 211c4–5)
5. Kinds of knowledge, studies: ἐπιστῆμα (210c6–d6), μαθήματα (211c5–6)
6. The single knowledge, study: ἐπιστήμη μία (210d7), ἐκεῖνο τὸ μάθημα (211c6–7)
7. Beauty itself: αὐτὸ τὸ καλὸν (210e1–211b7, 211c7–212a7)

The total number of levels is four. Small-case letters indicate distinct moments within the same level. Items at all levels are qualified as beautiful by Plato.

Symposium 211d3, e1. I take this characterization of the apex of the ascent as the summation of the descriptions given at 210e6–211b7 and 211d1–212a7. Other such incisive summations include: “something wonderfully beautiful in nature” or “something beautiful, by nature wonderful” (τι θαυμαστὸν τὴν φύσιν καλὸν: 210e4–5); “that itself which is beautiful (αὐτὸ [...] ὃ ἐστι καλὸν: 211c8–d1); “divine Beauty itself” (αὐτὸ τὸ θεῖον καλὸν: 211e3); “true Beauty” (τοῦ ἀληθοῦς [καλοῦ]: 212a5).
It will be noticed that in the parallel passages from the synoptic view of the
ascent which I just indicated (i.e., 211c3–212a1), the first moment of the second level,
that is, (2.a) is not stated explicitly. This should not trouble us excessively, however,
since human activities and laws are the outcome of the beauty of soul.

If my observation is correct, one may argue that the whole of (3) also belongs to
the level of soul and should thus be labeled as (2.c). Against such a view, I maintain that
(3) is rightly set apart as an independent level, and thus should not be relabeled. The
reason for this is that the realm of knowledge is not a product of soul comparable to
human activities and laws;\(^{149}\) it is rather that from which the soul draws its resources to

\(^{148}\)This division roughly resembles those by Robin (1964, 17–19; and in Vicaire 1992, xcii–xcviii) and
Reale (1997a, 201–221; 2000, 483), with the difference that they seem to take (2.a) and (2.b) as more
emphatically distinct stages. This is also true of Cornford (1950, 126–128), who counts five levels: (i)
individual beautiful body; (ii) all beautiful bodies; (iii) moral beauty; (iv) intellectual beauty; (v) the
Beautiful itself. Rosen (1987, 263–277) indicates six levels as he thinks of (1.a) and (1.b) as distinct
stages, and considers (2.a) not as itself a level but as a transition (for which Diotima gives no reasons);
however he replaces (2.a) with another level (i.e., the level of beautiful speeches) and seems to take (2.b)
as an independent stage, for a total of six levels. Roochnik (1990, 116–120) also recognizes six levels as
he takes (1.a), (1.b), (2.a), and (2.b) as four distinct stages. Corrigan and Glazov-Corrigan (2004, 148–
151) focus on the transitions rather than the levels as such, but it is safe to say that for them the levels are
also six, since they seem to consider (1.a), (1.b), (3.a), and (3.b) as separate rungs. Moravcsik’s division
is much more complex than any of the ones mentioned in this note, including smaller steps within each
level (except the last), as well as a classification of each of these steps as either erotic, rational, or
creative (respectively labeled as E-steps, R-steps, and C-steps), for a total of fourteen steps (see
Moravcsik 1971, 286 for a detailed division of Symposium 210a7–e1). Nevertheless, he maintains the
distinction of four major levels, roughly corresponding to the ones I outlined above.

\(^{149}\)In fact, it is not a product of soul at all. To be sure, we do manufacture books, newspapers, information
technology, and archives of all sorts, through which knowledge is stored up and made readily available to
the expert user. Knowledge itself, however, is not a product, but a discovery. That is, the truthfulness of
what one comes to know is not merely asserted, but compared to and confirmed (or, in the case of error
and falsity, invalidated) by a standard that was in place prior to the emergence of one’s particular
knowledge. The affinity of soul (the rational element in it) and Ideas that Plato points out elsewhere
(Phaedo 79d3: συγγενῆς; 80a3: διμον τῶ θείω; Republic VI.490b4: συγγενεῖ; see also Phaedrus 246d6–
e3; Letters VII.342d2: συγγενεῖ καὶ ὑμοίοντι; VII.344a) is not due to the fact that the latter are
products of the former; rather, this affinity is inferred from the observation that a soul’s greatest
achievements in, say, geometry are immediately related to a pre-existing principle on whose basis alone
such greatness may be certified. Thus, (i) to say that this principle is produced (and moreover produced
as a matter of convention) is already to confuse production and discovery. And yet, (ii) to say that such a
principle exists does not immediately imply that one already comprehends it fully, but rather that
discovery is the gradual result of several factors, of which effort is not the least important. I take
fashion its beautiful products. At first this comprises a multiplicity of different studies and kinds of knowledge, i.e., (3.a), but ultimately it ought to be unified in a single study, i.e., (3.b), which in the Symposium amounts to the knowledge of that Beauty (ἐκείνου τοῦ καλοῦ μάθημα: 211c8) in accordance with which all other beautiful things are beautiful. This single μάθημα is the overarching grasp of the very principle that we recognize when we call beautiful the lovable things at the lower rungs of the ladder.150

Knowledge of the principle, however, is not itself the principle. Put differently, the principle is not produced or generated as it is known. On the contrary, it is “there” to be known, to be approached; most importantly, in the context of the Symposium, it is there to be loved, for after all it is Eros’ ladder that we are discussing. Therefore, Beauty itself is not to be subsumed under the third step and re-labeled as (3.c), but it is presented as a distinct step. The ascent is an ascent to Beauty itself, not to a production of Beauty (nor is it itself Beauty). Moreover, Beauty itself is final not simply in the sense that it is the end point of the ladder, but, more importantly, because it is that for the sake of which the ascent is undertaken: not merely terminus, but ultimate purpose (or terminus qua ultimate purpose).151 Obviously, the level of Beauty itself is the ultimate level, the last stage, that beyond which one does not ascend, non plus ultra, for if one could ascend

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150 Cf. Republic VI.503e–505a, especially 504a2 (μέγιστον μάθημα). To be sure, misinterpretations of what this knowledge amounts to are very common; more often than not, what we take to be Beauty itself is actually one of the beautiful things that participate in it. When this happens, the possibility of further ascent is compromised. Aristophanes’ discourse, among others, is exemplary in this regard (see Subsection 1.5.4 below).

151 Symposium 210a1: ὃν ἔνεκα; 210e5–6: οὗ δή ἔνεκεν; 211c2: ἐκείνου ἔνεκα τοῦ καλοῦ ἄδι.
further, then it would be neither terminus nor ultimate purpose. Finally, Beauty itself is that which allows us to account for the beauty of all beautiful things; in this sense, it is not a final point at all. It is, on the contrary, the starting point, the very origin or cause of beauty in things. The end of desire is here already its origin, for without it things could not be beautiful, and what lacks all beauty is not lovable or desirable.

A further observation concerns the status of this “epistemic” or “mathematic” relation to Beauty itself. In Diotima’s discourse, the lover who has reached the level of knowledge comes to realize that all that is generated at that level pertains to one single knowledge (ἐπιστήμην μίαν: 210d7), and this knowledge is of the Beauty that she is going to describe. On the basis of the text, therefore, there is little doubt that an epistemic grasp of Beauty itself constitutes one of the highest stages of the ascent. The question, however, is whether this knowledge is itself the end of the ascent, that is, whether it constitutes the ultimate way for the lover to relate to Beauty itself. A close reading of the text does not seem to afford a straightforwardly positive answer to this question.

At Symposium 211b5–7, Socrates states that “when someone, ascending from things here, through loving boys correctly, starts to see that Beauty, he has almost

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152 Plato puts it well in the Lysis at the end of the argument on the “first friend,” or “first loved” (πρῶτον φίλον: Lysis 219d1, 4–5): “When we say that things are our friends for the sake of some other friend [ένεκα φιλον τινὸς ἔπερον], manifestly we are only using the same word, while the real friend appears to be only that in which all these so-called friendships terminate. It appears to be so, he said. Therefore, isn’t the real friend a friend for the sake of nothing else that is a friend? [Οὐκοῦν τὸ γε τῷ ὑπὲρ ψυχ εἶναι φίλον οὐ φίλων τινὸς ἔνεκα ψυχ ἐστίν:] True” (Lysis 220a7–b5).

153 Symposium 211b2–5: “but all other beautiful things participate in it in such a way that, even when those others come to be and pass away, this in no way increases or decreases, nor suffers anything” ([b2] τὰ δὲ ἄλλα πάντα καλὰ ἔκαστον μετέχοντα τρόπον τινὰ [3] τοιοῦτον, οἷον γεγονότων τε τῶν ἄλλων καὶ ἀπολλομένων [4] μηδὲν ἔκαστο μήτε τι πλέον μήτε ἐλαττῶν γέγονα πάσχειν μηδὲ [5] πάσχειν μηδέν).

154 However, Plato seems to view Beauty itself as a manifestation of an even higher reality, the Good (see Subsection 1.5.2 below).
reached the goal.” If “starting to see that Beauty” stands for the epistemic grasp of Beauty, then it is clearly stated that this is “almost” (σχεδὸν) the end, but not quite it. The claim here is not that Beauty itself cannot be the correlate of knowledge; it can: insofar as its beauty is a participation in Beauty, by knowingly gazing upon Beauty, it is not something other than Beauty that one grasps. In fact, one captures glimpses of Beauty also at the lower levels of the ascent, for here too it is Beauty that shines forth in beautiful bodies and practices. However, none of these levels captures Beauty itself by itself, but always presents it as mixed with something else that comes short of it pure and unmixed (καθαρόν, ἄμεικτον: 211e1). Knowledge is no exception to this and as such appears to be only a penultimate step for the one who truly wishes to attain to Beauty. As a consequence, reason’s role in the ascent is called into question as Socrates says that the one “who has come to the end of matters of love will see suddenly something wonderfully beautiful in nature.” As Moravcsik observes, the steps of the ascent are gradual and causally interrelated, and reason plays a crucial role at each level of the ascent. But when accessing Beauty the situation changes: there is no gradual

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157 Moravcsiki takes the triple ἵνα (“in order that”: 210c3–7), the term ἀναγκασθῇ (“that he may be forced to”: 210c3), and ῥωσθεὶς καὶ αὐξηθεὶς (“strengthened and nourished”: 210d6–7) as evidence of this causal connection, and then goes on to explain how causality plays out differently in R-steps, E-steps, and C-steps (Moravcsik 1971, 289–292, 295; see note 148 above).

158 Moravcsik (1971, 287–288) shows that what he calls R-steps are moves that imply two one-many relations: first, a common element is isolated from a plurality of instances in order to grasp a unity; and second, the unities at each level are related as species of the same Beauty.
“dianoetic” motion, but a sudden (ἐξαίφνης: 210e4\(^{159}\)) leap. Thus, while at each level beautiful discourses are generated\(^{160}\) whose beauty refers the lover to Beauty, Beauty itself will appear as neither discourse nor knowledge (οὐδὲ τις λόγος οὐδὲ τις ἐπιστήμη: 211a7).

In order to see how this plays out in Plato’s thought, some explanations are needed on the connection between Beauty and two of the most debated issues in Plato scholarship: the Good and the Ideas or Forms.

1.5.2 The Good, Beauty, and the Ideas

To explain the relations between the Good, Beauty, and the Ideas or Forms\(^{161}\) in Plato is an enormous task. Here I will limit my exposition to the very general outlining of a possible solution. Let us briefly deal with the Ideas first by focusing on what I take to be their explanatory role. In what sense is a beautiful thing beautiful by participating in Beauty? That is, what does it mean to say that the reason of the beauty of a thing is Beauty? One could try to answer this question directly by saying what Beauty is. Socrates-Diotima does that at the end of Eros’ ladder, and the result is a description which, at first, would probably be puzzling to most: “itself by itself with itself, being always one in form,” “pure, unmixed,” “divine Beauty itself,” “one in form.”\(^{162}\) This

\(^{159}\) Cf. Letters VII.341c7. Cf. Chapter Four note 265.

\(^{160}\) See Symposium 210a8 (λόγους καλοίς), c1 (λόγους), d4–5 (πολλοὺς καὶ καλοὺς λόγους).

\(^{161}\) In order to avoid equivocation, the term “good” and other such words as “beauty,” “courage,” “idea,” “form,” etc. are capitalized when their referents are the Good of Republic VI–VII and the Ideas or Forms. Moreover, the terms “Idea(s)” and “Form(s)” are used synonymously.

direct description of Beauty itself may become less puzzling if one takes into account why it seems necessary to Plato to postulate the Idea. This can be done by simply uncovering the insufficiency of other factors to serve as explanations.

Briefly, to account for the beauty of a given thing by pointing at its color, shape, or any other sensible feature which could very well account for another thing’s ugliness ultimately means not to account for its beauty. In a word, the Idea is the necessary factor to account for the way in which a thing manifests itself. Plato offers no such argument directly in the Symposium, but I maintain that the “theory” of Ideas is not “certainly excluded” from the dialogue, as Rosen argues. On the contrary, I believe that if such expressions as “x-itself” (αὐτό), “x-itself by itself” (αὐτὸ καθ’ αὐτό), and “x-here” (τῇδε) versus “true-x” (ἀληθές) indicate anything, this is precisely a connection between the descriptions of Beauty itself in the Symposium and passages from other dialogues—a connection, moreover, that is not merely a matter of linguistic convention, but of content.

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163 As Rosen (2005, 257–258) rightly argues, this holds despite the critical irony with which Ideas are often met. The issue is well synthesized by Spade (1994, vii–viii), if in the different context of the medieval dispute on the universals. For further remarks on the notion of a primarily explanatory necessity, see Appendix B below.

164 Rosen (1987, 272). Here Rosen is trying to show that the instantaneous vision of Beauty as described in the Symposium, taking place in the realm of genesis, is incomplete: “the initiate begins to see the end but cannot entirely grasp it” (Rosen 1987, 273). I sympathize with this view, but I fail to see how it entails a categorical denial of the presence of Ideas in the Symposium. That the “theory” of Ideas is not developed in the dialogue is beyond doubt. But does this necessarily imply that all (more or less implicit) reference to the Ideas is in principle absent?

165 Symposium 210e2–211b7 and 211d1–212a7. Among the other passages where one may infer a connection of the Symposium description of Beauty to Plato’s views on Ideas, see especially Republic VI.507b, Phaedo 96d ff., Phaedrus 247b–250e, Euthyphro 6d9–e1, Parmenides 130b8. Particularly in Phaedo 99c–102a, the so-called “second sailing” (δεύτερος πλοῦς; 99c9–d1), this connection seems hard to deny. This text outlines Socrates’ own theory of causation, the locus classicus of Plato’s formulation of the “theory” of Ideas. I believe that Socrates clearly refers to Ideas in the formulas of “x-itself” (e.g., αὐτό τὸ καλόν: Phaedo 100c4–5) and “x-itself by itself” (e.g., καλὸν αὐτό καθ’ αὐτό: Phaedo 100b6).
The issue goes well beyond the purpose of these pages, but I should at least point out that if the independence, or separation, suggested by the expression καθ’ αὐτό is taken at face value, all kinds of (artificial) problems arise. W. D. Ross clearly shows that Plato’s expressions emphasizing the transcendent aspect of Ideas are consistently counterbalanced by expressions stressing their immanence. The Ideas are levels of being rather than things alongside things (or above them, whatever it means for such a “thing” to be attributed spatial coordinates). Reale puts it well:

the error of many interpreters is to have mistaken this distinction of levels and the differences between them, for an absurd and unwarranted ‘separation,’ taking the Ideas to be, ‘superthings’ separated physically, rather than metaphysically, from things, as if they were simply invisible sensibles to be contrasted with sensibles. [...] With the Ideas Plato discovered the realm of the intelligible as the incorporeal and metaempirical dimension of being. It is true that this world of the incorporeal intelligible transcends the sensible, but not in the absurd sense of ‘separation,’ but as a meta-empirical cause as true cause, and as the true ground of the sensible. 

It should be noticed that beauty cannot be equated to merely physical beauty. That this is undoubtedly the case can be easily seen in the Symposium, where the term “beautiful” (καλός) is used at all levels of the ascent (209e5–211d1: see Subsection 1.4.4

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166 W. D. Ross (1951, 228–230). Symposium 211b1–2 is a perfect example of both. On the basis of Parmenides 132b3–c8, later Platonists such as Iamblichus and Proclus (see for instance Proclus, Commentary on Plato’s Parmenides II.753.8–31, IV.891–901, VI.1054.25–37; cf. also Elements of Theology 161) will be more resolute in emphasizing that Ideas are really separate from sensible things, exist prior to sensibles and are responsible for their existence, although both separation and priority here are to be taken as logical rather than spatial. This is what Wallis (1995, 124–125) refers to as Iamblichus’ principle of Logical Realism.

167 Reale (1997b, 130). Gerson (2003, 176) writes: “There is no problem in viewing immaterial entities as ‘separate’ from the sensible world so long as we understand separation basically as independence.” See also Irwin (1995, 154–162); Rosen (2005, 257–258). To deny that Forms have no existence simply because they cannot be seen would be almost as absurd as to deny that smells amount to nothing simply because they cannot be heard (cf. Plotinus V.5 [32] 12.1 ff.). I think that for Plato to demand of Ideas that they be sensible would amount to missing precisely what they are essentially, namely, intelligible.
and 1.5.1 above). As we saw, Socrates claims that good things are also beautiful. One could be tempted to say that while it may be true that good things are beautiful, it does not necessarily follow that beautiful things are good. But this is unwarranted by the text since Beauty itself is described as the very apex of the ascent, and so, to say that something beautiful is, *qua beautiful* (i.e., as participating in Beauty: 211b2), bad, means to make Beauty itself the cause of badness. In fact, even if we were to restrict the sense of “beautiful” merely to what appears beautiful to the senses, and typically to sight, we would still be unjustified in making the beauty of a bad thing the cause of its badness. That is, we can certainly say that at least some things that are beautiful in this restricted sense happen to be bad, but nothing justifies us in claiming that it is their beauty that makes them bad. If I am not mistaken in my claim, and given the close connection of beauty and goodness drawn by Socrates, the issue is precisely to shed light on the nature of this connection.

Two main factors may account for the difficulty in explaining the relation between Beauty and the Good. The first is well summarized by Brisson as he writes:

“Beauty is probably the Platonic notion whose field of extension is the widest; there are beautiful objects, beautiful bodies, beautiful actions, beautiful souls, as well as an

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168 This can be observed also in Alcibiades’ discourse, in which he misunderstands Socrates’ temperate rejection of his beauty. Perhaps also because he was not present when Socrates gave his speech, Alcibiades remains at the lowest level of beauty (that of bodies) and fancies exchanging his physical beauty for Socrates’ other kind—and, if we are to trust the testimony of some of Socrates’ contemporaries about his physical appearance, the only kind (cf. Xenophon, *Symposium* 4.19, 5.5–7; Plato, *Theaetetus* 143e7–9)—that is, wisdom. But the two kinds of beauty are incommensurable and, as Socrates (ironically) made clear to Agathon earlier on, wisdom itself cannot simply be transferred from one soul to another through touch like water is transferred from a cup into another through a piece of yarn (175c2–e6).

intelligible beauty.” Hence Socrates takes the lover of wisdom (φιλόσοφος) naturally to be coextensive with the lover of beauty (φιλόκαλος: Phaedrus 248d3).

However, καλός and ἀγαθός, while extensively overlapping, do not simply coincide. Two differences in particular are worth noticing: first, καλός denotes, on the one hand, physical beauty and, on the other, something fine, noble, and admirable, which as such deserves praise from others; second, ἀγαθός, besides not denoting physical beauty, can often mean something that is circumstantially good to the individual without this thing necessarily being καλός. The second, and perhaps more important, factor is that the other term of the equation, the Good, is treated all but extensively in the dialogues; Plato offers us a few hints and two brief accounts of it (i.e., Republic VI.504d–509c and Philebus 20b–22e), with doubts remaining, moreover, that these two accounts are of the same thing (cf. Philebus 64a1–3). I speak of a connection, or a relation, rather than of a coincidence because it is hard to establish, on the basis of the Symposium alone, whether Beauty and the Good are strictly equated. They are clearly not equated in the Republic, where Socrates does not merely distinguish them, but also orders them hierarchically, with the superiority of the Good emphatically established not only over Beauty, but also over

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170 Brisson (1998, 72): “Le Beau est probablement la notion platonicienne dont le champ d’extension est le plus vaste; il existe de beaux objets, de beaux corps, de belles actions, de belles âmes et même un beau intelligible.” See also Ast (1908, II, 133); Kahn (1996, 267–269).

171 E.g., the admirable risk (κίνδυνος) of believing in what Socrates said about the soul in Phaedo 114d1–7, despite his admission that things may not be exactly as he described them.

172 E.g., pleasure qua ἀγαθή in the Protagoras and the Philebus. See also note 136 above.
Knowledge or Truth. It is in the *Phaedrus* that the difference between Beauty and all the other Forms is forcefully brought into focus at 250b1–c1:

Now, there is no splendor in the likenesses of Justice and Temperance here, nor in the other things that are honorable for the souls; but only a few, approaching the images, contemplate with difficulty, through their dull organs, the origin of that which is imaged. Beauty, on the other hand, was radiant to see at that time, when with a happy choir we, following Zeus (while others followed other gods), enjoyed a blessed vision and contemplation, and were introduced into the mystery which we may rightly say is the most blessed...

And further on, at *Phaedrus* 250c8–e1, Plato writes:

[c8] As for Beauty, as I said, [d1] it shone radiantely among those things as a being, and now that we have come down here, [2] we have grasped it glittering most vividly through the most vivid of our senses. [3] For vision is the sharpest of the sensations received [4] through the body, but Wisdom is not seen through it—since it would awaken terrible passions, if reaching vision it offered a clear image of itself [6] such as the one offered by Beauty—nor are the other lovely things. But now [7] this is ordained for Beauty alone: to be the most manifest [e1] and the most loved.

In this account, Beauty is described as an Idea, and what distinguishes it from other Ideas is the peculiar way in which it shines forth in the realm of the sensible. In

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173 Republic VI.505d–506a, 507b, 508d–509c, VII.517b–c.


Phaedrus 250c–252c, Socrates goes on to explain that what we call love (ἔρως) is precisely this experience of Beauty in beautiful things, which allows for an ascent to the Intelligible through recollection (ἀνάμνησις: Phaedrus 249c2).

Beauty, however, does not completely coincide with the Good, but, as Robin argues extensively, is one of its two principal aspects, the other being Truth. 176 Two major methods of ascent to the Good are therefore outlined, namely: love (the focus of the Symposium and the Phaedrus), which leads to the Good under the aspect of Beauty, and dialectic (emphasized particularly in the Republic), leading to the same goal but under the aspect of Truth. 177 Robin writes:

every Idea and the totality of Ideas participate in Beauty and in Truth, as well as in the Good. [...] In connection with these texts, 178 I believe, one may infer, that the Good, together with Truth and Beauty, which after all are nothing but the aspects of the Good, forms a sphere of existence higher

176 Robin (1964, 183–187). See Philebus 65a1–5: “[a1] Thus, if we cannot hunt down the good [τὸ ἄγαθὸν] with one idea, [2] grasping it with three, namely beauty, proportion, and truth, [3] we may say that this, as if it were one, can most rightly be held to cause the [4] things that are in the mixture, and since the cause is good, it makes the mixture itself [5] [good]” ([a1] Οὐκοῦν εἰ μὴ μιᾷ δυνάμεθα ἰδέᾳ τὸ ἄγαθὸν θηρεῦσαι, [2] σὺν τρισὶ λαβόντες, κάλλει καὶ συμμετρία καὶ ἀληθεία [3] λέγουμεν ὡς τοῦτο οἶον ἐν ὀρθότατ' ἀν αἰτιασαίμεθ' ἀν τῶν [4] ἐν τῇ συμμετέχει, καὶ διὰ τοῦτο ὡς ἄγαθον ἐν τοιούτῳ αὐτήν [5] γεγονέναι). Doubts remain as to whether the “goods” of Philebus, Republic, and Symposium coincide, although it seems at least fair to say that they overlap to some extent. On the basis of the text just cited, the Good has three, rather than two, principal aspects, that is, not only Truth and Beauty, but also Measure (μετριότης) or Proportion (συμμετρία) (see Robin 1964, 189). Thus, a third ascent may be postulated on the basis of this and other such texts as Timaeus 69b2–5, 87c6–d8 and Philebus 64e5–65a6, although in the Republic the disciplines dealing with the proportionate movements of heavenly bodies (astronomy) and the harmony of sounds (harmonics) are parts of the larger dialectical ascent to the Good (see Republic VII.528e–530c). Plotinus may have this in mind when he envisions three starting points from which one can undertake the ascent (i.e., music, love, and philosophy), but he subordinates music to both love and philosophy (I.3 [20] 1–3); cf. Subsection 4.4.3 below. See also Gadamer (1986, 114–118).

177 The harmony of the two methods is well documented in Plato’s thought and in the oral teaching at the Academy, and it will be the object of reflection for Plotinus as well (see especially I.3 [20]; cf. Subsection 4.4.3 below). See Robin (1964, 186–187).

178 Among other texts, Robin (1964, 184–186) cites Philebus 64d–67a, Gorgias 507e ff., Symposium 202e, Republic VI.508e, 509b, X.597b–d, Phaedrus 246e.
than the very existence of an ideal world.\textsuperscript{179}

Having summarily established the status of Beauty among the Ideas, something remains to be said about the relation of the Good to the Ideas. In order to try to throw some light on this point, I will draw a connection between the ascent in the \textit{Symposium} and the passage on the Divided Line in \textit{Republic} VI.509d–511e.\textsuperscript{180} As given at \textit{Republic} VI.511d8–e2, the four sections of the line are: imaging (εἰκασία), belief (πίστις), thought (διάνοια), and intellection (νόησις), the first two belonging among things of the visible kind, the latter two among the intelligible (τὸ τε ὅρωμένου γένους καὶ τὸ τοῦ νοουμένου\textsuperscript{181}). Now, while both thought and intellection belong to the intelligible, thought is only a penultimate way of aiming at the Ideas; that is, strictly, Ideas can be accessed only through intellection, and thus they remain beyond thought. This does not mean that thought is in no way related to the Ideas, but simply that its relation to them is instrumental: it is the hypothetical (ὑποθέσεις) by means of which one aims at the “unhypothetical” (ἀνυπόθετον).\textsuperscript{182} To conflate the two is to confuse two fundamentally

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\textsuperscript{179} Robin (1964, 185) writes: “toute l’Idée e la totalité des Idées participent du Beau et du Vrai, comme elles participent du Bien. […] Du rapprochement de ces textes, on peut induire, je crois que le Bien forme avec la Vrai et le Beau, qui n’en sont d’ailleurs que les aspects, une sphère d’existence supérieur à l’existence même d’un monde idéal.” Cf. Festugière (1950, 164–185). Another lifelong reader of Plato, H.-G. Gadamer (1995, 481), writes: “what distinguishes the beautiful from the good is that the beautiful of itself presents itself, that its being is such that it makes itself immediately evident [eineleuchtend]. This means that beauty has the most important ontological function: that of mediating between idea and appearance. This is the metaphysical crux of Platonism.”

\textsuperscript{180} The Divided Line Passage should be read jointly with the simile of the sun (\textit{Republic} VI.506e–509c), the image (εἰκόν) of the cave (VII.514a–521a), and the rest of \textit{Republic} VII, especially the description of dialectic (VII.531e–535a). For an enlightening account of the unity and relation of these passages of the \textit{Republic} see Sinaiko (1965, 119–190).

\textsuperscript{181} \textit{Republic} VI.509d8; see also VI.507b9–10.

\textsuperscript{182} \textit{Republic} VI.511a3–d5; cf. \textit{Phaedo} 96a–102a.
different ways of being related to the Intelligible, or, as Socrates puts it, two different “dispositions in the soul” (παθήματα ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ: Republic VI.511d7).

Let us now turn to the Symposium. Broadly, I maintain that the four sections of the Divided Line can be linked to the four levels of Eros’ ascent. For our purposes, the key parallels are those between the sections of thought (διάνοια) and intellection (νόησις) in the Line and the levels of knowledge/study (ἐπιστήμη/μάθημα) and the sudden contact with Beauty itself in the ascent respectively. I believe that the lack of discursiveness (λόγος) in the final rung of the ascent ladder justifies an interpretation of this level in terms that are other than dianoetic.

This parallel may appear problematic in light of Plato’s rather loose usage of the word ἐπιστήμη in the Divided Line and the Ascent Passages. Plato, however, modifies his terminology at Republic VII.533c7–534a5, where he has Socrates affirm that earlier (i.e., in the Divided Line Passage) ἐπιστήμη and διάνοια were hastily conflated, while in fact διάνοια is clearer than opinion (δόξα) but darker than knowledge (ἐπιστήμη). One may infer that in a strict or technical sense ἐπιστήμη coincides with the νόησις of the Divided Line, and δόξα coincides with πίστις. However, νόησις is now used to designate the

\[183\] See Subsection 1.5.1 above; cf. Moravcsik (1971, 295).

\[184\] Rosen (1987, 274) adds an important piece to the puzzle, namely the replacement of ἐπιστήμη with μάθημα at the end of the ascent because μάθημα “refers, not to scientific knowledge, but to an understanding, which is broader than science. The understanding of beauty includes an appreciation of bodies.” This, however, is true only of the synoptic version of the ascent, while in the longer version ἐπιστήμη remains the term of choice. Instead, appreciation of bodies is found in both versions. However, while Rosen is correct in claiming that the understanding of beauty includes “an appreciation of bodies,” we should notice that such an appreciation presupposes, in turn, an appreciation of beauty, for one would not even be in the position of desiring a body if this were not already appreciated as beautiful to some extent. Thus, even the desire of a single beautiful body already includes an appreciative adumbration of beauty; as such, it transcends the urge to merely sexual satisfaction and belongs already to the field of aesthetics (cf. Moravcsik 1951, 291–292). In any event, these two readings are not necessarily at variance with each other.
general disposition of the soul toward the upper part of the line (now called οὐσία),
while δόξα names the general disposition of the soul toward the lower part (now called γένεσις), so that the revised version of the Line is as follows: (1) the sensible realm of becoming (γένεσις) is grasped through opinion (δόξα), which includes (a) imaging (ἐικασία) and (b) belief (πίστις); (2) the intelligible realm of Being (οὐσία) is grasped through intellection (νόησις), which includes (c) thought (διάνοια) and (d) knowledge (ἐπιστήμη). If I am correct, the meaning of ἐπιστήμη in the Ascent Passage (Symposium 210c6–7, d7, 211a7) will have to correspond, not to the strict or technical sense of the same term in Republic VII.533c7–534a5, but to its loose usage in the earlier Divided Line Passage.¹⁸⁵ These results are summarized in the following table.¹⁸⁶

Table 1. Parallels between the Line of the Republic and the Ascent of the Symposium

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Republic VI 511d8–e2</th>
<th>Visible kind (τὸ τοῦ ὁρωμένου γένους)</th>
<th>Intelligible kind (τὸ τοῦ νοουμένου γένους)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Imaging (ἐικασία)</td>
<td>Thought (διάνοια)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Belief (πίστις)</td>
<td>Intellection (νόησις)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Republic VII 533c7–534a5</td>
<td>Sensible realm of becoming (γένεσις) grased through opinion (δόξα)</td>
<td>Intelligible realm of Being (οὐσία) grased through intellection (νόησις)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>= Republic VI</td>
<td>= Republic VI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Symposium 210a4–212a7</td>
<td>[Body (σῶμα)]</td>
<td>Knowledge, study (ἐπιστήμη, μάθημα)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[Soul (ψυχή)]</td>
<td>Sudden contact with Beauty itself</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Now, how does the connection between beauty and goodness, quickly established

¹⁸⁵ Hyland raises a very similar point, but does not mention the Divided Line explicitly. He writes: “Insight into a form is non-discursive, or to put it more positively, it is noetic rather than dianoetic. Such insight is also not daimonstrable knowledge (episteme)” (Hyland, 2008, 58); cf. also Rosen (2005, 265–266).

¹⁸⁶ I did not nor will try to justify the first two parallels from the Symposium (those of body and soul), which are included in the table only tentatively (hence my placing them in square brackets). For an analogous sketch of the parallels within the Republic, cf. Sinaiko (1965, 148).
by Socrates in the *Symposium* (201c1–5, 204e1–2), relate to the parallel between the sections of the Divided Line and the levels of the ascent? Plato refers to the Good as ἐπέκεινα τῆς οὐσίας (*Republic* VI.509b9). 187 If in this context οὐσία can be legitimately taken as naming the intelligible realm, or the Ideas (*Republic* VI.507b5–7), and if the intelligible is the correlate of νόησις (*Republic* VII.534a3), then something other than knowledge or intellection 188 (or at least along with it 189) is required in order draw near to the Good.

The point is controversial because of Plato’s usage of the expression ἥ τοῦ ἁγαθοῦ ἰδέα (the Idea of the Good), 190 from which it would seem fair to infer that the Good should be understood strictly as an Idea, and as such it would be the correlate of knowledge. However, this reasoning is inconclusive, since due to the semantic breadth of ἰδέα and εἶδος, ultimately one cannot offer a univocal qualification, let alone a single rendering, of these terms. It is at least doubtful, therefore, that τοῦ ἁγαθοῦ ἰδέα should be

187 The “beyond” (ἐπέκεινα) indicates a radical difference of status rather than a brute negation. Thus, in Plato to be beyond οὐσία does not mean to be non-existent, as a contemporary of Plotinus (VP 3.29), the pagan Origen, seems to have thought (cf. Proclus, *Platonic Theology* II.4.31.8–21), and as Baltes (1997) shows in an impressively thorough article (see also Whittaker 1969). Similarly, for Plotinus to be beyond οὐσία means, not to be non-existent, but to “be” beyond the realm designated by οὐσία in its technical acceptation, namely Intellect (νοῦς): again, a radical difference of status rather than a brute negation. For references on this point in Plotinus see Chapter Three notes 68, 69, and 70.

188 Whether the νόησις of the first version of the Divided Line or the ἐπιστήμη of the revised version.

189 See Kanh (1987, 94). See Subsection 1.5.3 below.

190 *Republic* VI.505a2, 508e3, VII.517c1, 526e1, 534c1; cf. also *Parmenides* 134c1, *Philebus* 64a2. Εἶδος is never paired with ἁγαθὸν in *Republic* VI, but the association does occur at *Republic* V.476a4–5 and *Parmenides* 130b8, 135c9–d1 (it is also found at *Republic* II.357c5, but in a different acceptation, much like ἰδέα at *Cratylus* 418e7). At *Republic* VII.540a9, the Good is also called παράδειγμα (i.e., pattern or model), a term often found in the context of the discussion of Forms or Ideas (cf. *Euthyphro* 6e4, *Republic* VI.500e3, *Theaetetus* 176e3, *Timaeus* 28a7, 29b4, 39e7, 48e5, 49 a1).
taken technically as a correlate of knowledge and of knowledge alone.\textsuperscript{191} I am not denying that there is—in fact, that there must be—a certain “epistemic” access to the Good. If the Good were not known in any way, could one even hope to access it qua Good? However, it is important to keep in mind that \varepsilon \pi \sigma \tau \iota \mu \varepsilon of the Good is not itself the Good, although for (at least some) human rational beings it may be the best possible way to be somehow in contact with it. This claim needs to be qualified further.

We can divide Plato’s statements on the relation of the Good and knowledge in the \textit{Republic} in two groups: (a) those in which the Good is more or less explicitly said to be beyond knowledge;\textsuperscript{192} and (b) those in which the Good is said to be knowable in some way or another.\textsuperscript{193} The apparent contradiction between (a) and (b) disappears, I believe, if we take (a) to entail that knowledge is not a \pi \alpha \theta \eta \mu \alpha that belongs to the Good itself, and if we understand (b) to mean that \varepsilon \pi \sigma \tau \iota \mu \varepsilon is a possible way of accessing the Good (at least partially).

Two separate questions are at work here. One is whether \varepsilon \pi \sigma \tau \iota \mu \varepsilon actually grants us access to the Good. The other is whether \varepsilon \pi \sigma \tau \iota \mu \varepsilon should be ascribed to the Good (that is, whether the Good itself exercises knowledge). If I am correct in my interpretation of Plato’s statements I just proposed, it seems fair to say that his answer to the second

\textsuperscript{191} As Peperzak (1997, 245 note 91) rightly points out, when this happens, Plato’s usage of \varepsilon \iota \delta \omicron \omicron \zeta and \iota \delta \omicron \alpha “is subjugated to a non-Platonic framework that tells us more about the conceptual or representational frameworks of the researchers than of Plato’s experiences and experiments.”

\textsuperscript{192} See \textit{Republic} VI.508a11–b1, and the emphatic 508e1–509b10.

\textsuperscript{193} Besides the references to \tau \omicron \omicron \acute{o} \gamma \acute{a} \theta \omicron \iota \delta \omicron \alpha and \pi \alpha \rphi \acute{\alpha} \epsilon \gamma \omicron \omicron \alpha given in note 190 above, the following passages from the \textit{Republic} can be cited to support the view that the Good can be known: \textit{Republic} V.476e4–477a5, 479d3–9, VI.504e9–d2, 504e4–505b1, 508b9–c2, 509d1–4, 510a9, VII.517b7–c5, 519c8–d2, 526d7–e4, 532a5–b2, 534b3–d1, 540a8–9.
question is negative.\(^{194}\) As for the answer to the first question, it appears to be positive, but with two very important caveats: (i) “epistemic” access to the Good brings us as close as we can get to it, but the epistemic activity whereby proximity to the Good is achieved is not itself the Good;\(^{195}\) (ii) “epistemic” access to the Good is not independent of a previous overcoming of the dispositions (παθήματα: Republic VI.511d7) proper of the lower sections of the Line, or of the desire for beauties at the lower levels of the ascent.\(^{196}\)

This does not mean that all must start the dialectical ascent from the lowest section of the

\(^{194}\) This will be the standard position of the tradition of Neoplatonism.

\(^{195}\) Thus, much like sight is not the sun but is called “sunlike” (ἡλιοειδής: Republic VI.508b3, 509a1), knowledge and truth are not the Good but are called “goodlike” or “boniform” (ἀγαθοειδής: Republic VI.509a3). Similarly, in Letters VII.342, we are given a distant parallel of the Line in which the knowledge (ἐπιστήμη) of a thing is said to be acquired through three instruments: its name (ὄνομα), its account (λόγος), and its image (εἴδωλον). What matters most is that Plato clearly states that the “thing itself which is known and truly is” (αὐτὸ... ὃ δὴ γνωστὸν τε καὶ ἀληθῶς ἐστίν ὅν: 342a8–b1) is other than the knowledge of it, although reason (νοῦς) is closest to it in kinship and likeness (συγγενεία καὶ ὁμοιότητι: 342d2).

\(^{196}\) I want to stress that here ἐπιστήμη does not mean knowledge that leaves the knower unaffected by what is known. As already pointed out earlier, ἐπιστήμη is a condition or disposition (πάθημα: Republic VI.511d7) of the soul (and so are εἰκασία, πίστις, and διάνοια), that is, an overall attitude of the soul toward the Good qua Truth. As such, it implies a radical turn (στρέφειν πρὸς, περιαγωγή, μεταστραφήσεται, συμπεριαγωγοῖς: Republic VII.518c7, d4, d5, 533d3) of the eyes toward the sun, or of the entire soul toward the Good. The education of the philosopher in the Republic refers precisely to this turning process (see Republic VII.518a–d, 527d–e3, 529a–b3, 533c–d4). And if to this we add that things known (i.e., the Ideas) owe to the Good not only their being known, but also their very being (τοῖς γεγονοσκόμοις τοῖς μὴ μόνον τὸ γεγονόσκεπτα φάναι ὑπὸ τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ παρέῖναι, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὸ εἶναι τε καὶ τὴν οὐσίαν ὡς ἐκείνου αὐτοῖς προσέπευ: Republic VI.509b–8), it seems at least implausible to take the central books of the Republic as just a treatise in epistemology. As I hinted earlier (pages 12–16; note 30 for references), for virtually all ancient philosophers the practice of philosophy, while essentially cognitive, does not coincide with a merely cognitive grasp of true information, but with the transformation of one’s soul in light of what is cognized. Knowledge in the strict sense, ἐπιστήμη, presupposes this transformation. Thus, to claim to know the Good while still confusing an image (εἰκών) with that of which it is an image already betrays the absence of knowledge understood, not as a mere cognitive grasp of things, but as a way of being of the soul (for that matter, it betrays the absence of διάνοια and πίστις as well, and certifies the presence of εἰκασία). Similarly, to claim to know the difference between noble and vulgar love while maintaining, as Pausanias does (Symposium 180e3–181c2), that the same action can be derived interchangeably from either one of these kinds of love, means already to place oneself in an ambiguous position with respect to one’s claim (for a critique of Pausanias’ position, see Corrigan and Glazov-Corrigan 2004, 56–62). Incidentally, the passages cited in this note are among those providing solid textual ground for such notions as purification and return which will be central to Plotinus’ system (see Subsection 4.6.1 below).
Line, but only that if one falls back on, say, εἰκασία, then he has not truly reached the section of πίστις (yet). Similarly, it does not mean that all must start the “erotic” ascent from the lowest rungs of Eros’ ladder, but only that if one still struggles to see beyond, say, the beauty of body, then she has not truly mastered (yet) the ability to see the superiority of spiritual beauty. An important corollary to this in connection with our main topic: ἐπιστήμη is not foreign to Love (cf. Subsection 4.3.2 for an analogous point in Plotinus). That is, insofar as Beauty is an Idea, my goal should be to access it epistemically. However, as we pointed out, unlike other Ideas Beauty has the privilege of shining forth most brilliantly in the sensible. For this reason, at least initially, the ascent of Love toward the Good qua Beauty, rather than that of dialectic toward the Good qua Truth, would seem to be the preferred path of the many, were it only for the greater “visibility” of Beauty comparatively to the other Ideas.198

At this point one may wonder what the systematic role of the Good is, and what a way of relating to it could possibly look like. Concerning its systematic role, Socrates draws on his metaphor of the sun as he claims that the Good is what makes for the knowability and the very being of the Ideas in the same (metaphorical) way as the sun makes for the visibility, existence, and life of sensible things.199 Without the sun (the Good), there would be nothing to see (to grasp epistemically) not merely because light

197 As pointed out in note 2 of the Preface, “erotic” and “erotically” should be taken to mean “pertaining to eros.”

198 But this does not necessarily mean that one never stops at lower desiderata by taking them as the end of the ascent, or rather, by more or less consciously being taken captive by them. The figure of the tyrant in Republic IX could be read as an extreme example of such captivity. See note 233.

199 Republic VI.508b9–509b10, VII.516b9–c2, 517b7–c5. See also my remarks in Chapter Three note 12.
(epistemic light) would be absent, but, more radically, because there would be nothing. 200

As for a possible way of relating to the Good, what I said above about ἐπιστήμη applies here. Only I would like to add that the sun (Good) causes things (Ideas) to be seen (known) without itself being seen (known). Republic VI.508b9–10 seems to warn us against this addition, however: “And thus the sun is not sight, but being its cause, is seen by sight itself, is it not?” 201 I believe that a different, less immediately literal reading of these lines is possible if one allows for a thought experiment. What would it be to see light without there being any visible things around other than light itself? Could we still call “seeing” the kind of seeing in which there is nothing but light to be seen? Would light, pure and unmixed, be truly visible? Even admitting that it would, I must confess that I am having a hard time grasping such a concept of vision. 202 —But as soon as light meets things, light itself is “seen.” That is, as soon as light illuminates things, it is both grasped as the cause of sight itself and is itself visibly perceived in its intercourse with the seen. Thus, the condition in which Plato says that the sun is seen must be one in which other things are already in place. Without the sun, one would plunge into utter

200 The issue requires an extensive treatment which would take us too far afield from our main topic. All I can do here is to hide behind four bibliographical references which I found particularly useful despite their differences: Friedländer (1958, 59–84), Sinaiko (1965, 119–144), Reale (1997b, 109–151), Gerson (1990, second chapter, in particular 57–66).

201 Republic VI.508b9–10: Ἀρ’ οὖν οὐ καὶ ὁ ἥλιος ὡς μὲν οὐκ ἔστιν, αὕτης δ’ ὄν ἀυτῆς ὁρᾶται ὑπ’ αὐτῆς ταύτης;

202 All is seen in the light of the sun, whereby there is sight. But what does it mean to see the sun in its own light? What does vision become when all there is to see is light? What would be of knowledge and eros if the “screens” of Truth and Beauty were lifted from the Good?
darkness; without things, one would face pure light. The visibility of the sun, therefore, is always already a seeing-with. If the “-with” is removed, seeing goes with it, and one is left wondering about a way to envision this most peculiar face-to-face encounter with light.

But while wondering, things are seen in the light of the sun; while wondering, the Good beyond being (*Republic* VI.509b9), yet more prized than knowledge and truth (*Republic* VI.508e6–509a1), is approached from the hither side of things. One can become aware of it through its effects and, once our sight (the soul’s power to learn) has been properly redirected and our eyes (the soul’s eye, to be sure) strengthened, we may begin to study it (*Republic* VII.515e1–c2, 518a1–519b6). And while in the central books of the *Republic* the ascent is accomplished through dialectic and the Good is thus approached under the aspect of Truth, in the *Symposium* the ascent occurs by way of Love, the Good being thus approached under the aspect of Beauty.

Beyond being and more prized than knowledge and truth, the Good is not beyond

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203 If, that is, there could be a plunging or a facing “one.” The realm of vision, much like those of Truth and of Love, is an intermediate realm.

204 Analogously, the understanding of Truth is always already an understanding-with; were we to erase the “-with,” knowledge would be effaced with it, and we would be left other-than-knowingly wondering about this encounter with that which is the ground of knowledge. And so the love of Beauty is always already a loving-with; disposing of the “-with,” what would love become?—Is this the juncture at which knowledge would be replaced by an encounter that, while coinciding with none of the other sections of the Line, nor with utter darkness, one could describe only negatively as otherwise than epistemic? Is this where *eros* is transfigured into something which is neither impassibility nor lack, and becomes an encounter μόνου πρὸς μόνον (Plotinus VI.9 [9] 11.51)? Incidentally, the fact that the Good is beyond knowledge justifies a double trend in Platonic interpretation: “aporetic,” whereby direct knowledge of the principle is deemed impossible; and “mystical,” whereby the impossibility of accessing the principle by means of knowledge does not necessitate the impossibility of accessing it altogether. The two trends are not mutually exclusive.

205 *Republic* VII.519b3; see pages 139–142 below. Elsewhere Socrates remarks that if the art of dialectic is to bear fruit, it must be introduced to the right soul (ψυχὴν προσήκουσαν: *Phaedrus* 276e6). Cf. note 70 above.
all contact. Beauty is precisely one aspect under which such contact is possible, if _eros_ is followed correctly (ὀρθῶς: *Symposium* 210a2, 4, e3, 211b5, 7). For this reason, Beauty has a privileged status among the Ideas; in fact, I believe it can be safely maintained that the Beauty of the *Symposium* is coextensive with the Good of the *Republic* and that its transcendence, much like that of the Good, is superior to the transcendence of the other Ideas, as already observed in a stimulating study by Krüger. To draw again on the metaphor of light, one could envision Beauty as the very shadow of the Good, but given what I have been arguing in this subsection, I prefer to say that Beauty is like the shadow of the thing, and this for two reasons. First, because pure light is itself shadowless; and second, because by detaching Beauty from the beautiful thing, one may end up thinking of it, quite absurdly, as of a thing alongside or above things. Instead, Beauty would never appear without the beautiful thing. To think of it otherwise would be like taking taste, smell, and color as things alongside the tasted, smelled, and seen; what is the pleasant shade of a plane tree independently of that plane tree? Conversely, the beautiful thing would never be perceived as beautiful without Beauty: flavorless flavor, odorless odor, colorless color; could a plane tree along the Ilisus ever be separated from its pleasant shade? And yet, its shade belongs to the tree not like an item possessed: were it not for the light that illumines the tree, not only would the shade never appear; it would never be. As the light of the sun makes the pleasant shade of the tree exist and appear, so the Good

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makes Beauty shine in all things beautiful.\textsuperscript{207}

One final remark: it will be suspected that what I have put forward in the last two subsections already amounts to “neoplatonizing” or “plotinizing” Plato. Partially, it does; not because I am overtly attempting to distort Plato, however, but because I believe that what will come to be known as the hypostatic division of reality can already be detected, \textit{distantly and in outline}, in the Platonic text, of which the Ascent Passage is but a sample.\textsuperscript{208} I am not insisting that Plato worked out this theory in all its details or that,

\textsuperscript{207} This metaphor, like all metaphors, has its shortcomings. What is problematic in this particular case is that in Plato and in the Platonic tradition it is sensible things that are likewise metaphorically referred to as shadows (ὀξύς: \textit{Meno} 100a2–5, \textit{Republic} VI.510a1, e2, VII.515a–517c, 532b4–d1), images or representations (ἰδώλια: \textit{Sophist} 234c6,236a6, 239d4, d7, 240a5, a7, 241e3, 260c8, 264c12, \textit{Statesman} 286a1, 303c2, 306d2, \textit{Symposium} 212a4, \textit{Phaedrus} 250d5, \textit{Republic} VII.520c4, 534e5, X.598b8, 599a7, d3, 600e5, 601b9, \textit{Letters} VII.342b2; εἴκοσι: \textit{Phaedo} 99e1, \textit{Sophist} 236a8, c3, 240b11, b13, 241e3, 260c8, 264c12, \textit{Phaedrus} 250b4, \textit{Republic} VI.509a9, e1, 510b4, b8, e3, 511a6, \textit{Timaeus} 29b2–3, c2), copies or imitations (μίμησις: \textit{Sophist} 241e3, \textit{Republic} X.599b), likenesses (ὁμοίωμα: \textit{Sophist} 266d7, \textit{Parmenides} 132d3, 133d1, \textit{Phaedrus} 250a6, b3; ὁμοιότης: \textit{Phaedo} 74a7, \textit{Letters} VII.342d2), and appearances (φάντασμα: \textit{Sophist} 236b–c, \textit{Republic} VI.510a1, VII.532c1, X.598b3) of the real (that is, intelligible) world, and not vice versa (in the passages just cited the terms are often used in combination, almost synonymously, as in \textit{Sophist} 241e3). In other words, it is Ideas that are thought to be the (formal) causes of sensible things, and not conversely, as my metaphor would have us infer, the sensible things that cause Ideas. See Appendix C (4) for an analogous use of many such terms in Plotinus; cf. also Chapter Four note 62.

\textsuperscript{208} How much of Plotinus or of the tradition of Platonism one is allowed to find in Plato is a matter of debate on which not even some of the best scholars seem to agree (see for instance the brief exchange between Aubenque and de Vogel in Aubenque 1971, 109). Sallis (1996, 3) points out that “it is necessary to insist most stringently that the project of a philosophical interpretation not become an excuse for philological irresponsibility.” And echoing Heidegger, he continues: “If we are to avoid the hopeless confusion involved in interpreting the foundation of the tradition in terms of the tradition that is founded, it is necessary that we seek to get behind this tradition” (Sallis (1996, 4). He is correct; but we should also avoid the opposite confusion, namely the notion that nothing of the tradition is faithful to its foundation (to be sure, Sallis does \textit{not} claim this). In other words, merely to interpret Plato in terms of the tradition of which he is the foundation is unwarranted and confusing; but positively to avoid this tradition on the (confused and likewise unwarranted) premises that it will a priori cloud our comprehension of the foundation is itself positively clouding. One may be forced to suspect, in turn, that such a move is due either to ignorance of the tradition or else to merely ideological reasons. A more inclusive procedure (one that requires time and effort to be carried out, for the tradition is vast and in some cases simply unavailable to the Greekless reader) is to approach the tradition in light of the foundation, and only then to consider whether the foundation may be clarified in light of the tradition. Is this a vicious circle? Likely; but do we have a better approach? It is certainly no more “vicious” than disregarding the tradition on the assumption that it will hinder our understanding of the foundation, as if we had already gained the privileged standpoint from which an understanding of both the foundation and the tradition becomes
even if he did, his descriptions were not to some extent experimental. Rather, I am simply suggesting that at least a certain consistency can be extracted from the dialogues on these points, a consistency which the so-called Neoplatonists, Plotinus in primis, will work hard to defend in order to develop the dialogues into a full-blown system (see Section 2.2). In any event, a most important detail would still be missing in this outline of a reconstructed system, namely Plato’s own assent to such a reconstruction, given also his explicit mistrust of the appropriateness of putting the highest matters (τιμώτατα, τιμώτερα) in writing.209

1.5.3 Reason and Desire in the Ascent

In the previous subsection I tried to connect the Symposium ascent to the issues of Ideas and the Good, and I briefly argued that Love is the path whereby the Good is approached under the aspect of Beauty. But what is the work of eros in this journey of ascent? Is the goal of eros’ ascent a matter of mere spontaneity, with no effort required on the part of the lover? In what sense does Diotima call the highest mysteries τὰ ἐρωτικά (210e2, 211b7, 212b4)? At a very basic level, these words mean that the thing whose possession makes us happy (204e5–205a4)—the Good, Beauty, Truth, the “first friend,” or “first loved,” of the Lysis—is not immediately grasped epistemically, but at first it is desired or loved, and only “divined”210 as that which will grant us happiness. For this possibility. See also my earlier remarks in Section 1.2.

209 On Plato’s attitude toward writing see Letters VII.341a7–342a1, Phaedrus 274b–277a; cf. Statesman 285d8–286b2, Letters II.312d3–e1. See also note 70 above.

210 In Aristophanes’ words at Symposium 192c7–d2: “[c7] But it is clear that the soul of each of the two wants something else, [d1] which it is unable to express, but [the soul] can divine what it wants [2] and say it in riddles” ([c7] ἄλλ’ ἄλλο τι βουλομένη ἔκατέρων ἢ ψυχῇ [d1] δήλη ἔστιν, δ’ οὗ δύναται εἰπεῖν, ἄλλα μαντεύεται δ’ ἀναλύεται, [2] καὶ αἰνίττεται).
reason, Beauty (in the wide semantic scope of καλός) has such a privileged position among the Ideas, for it makes the ultimate desideratum nearer to the sensible condition, the condition we are in. It will be objected that when one has achieved eternal possession of the sumnum desideratum, this is, precisely qua stably possessed, no longer desired (although arguably still loved). I will return to this in Subsection 1.5.5. My concern for the moment is to show, very generally, that eros is a legitimate path for accessing the Good, and, specifically and more radically, that an erotic element is never absent even from cognition.

What does eros do? Very simply, it orients and moves the soul toward the Good under the aspect of Beauty.\textsuperscript{211} If eros were lacking, the soul would be aimless, like the demagnetized needle of a compass, unable to find the North. One will immediately contest that even the magnetized needle of a compass often fails to indicate the North, for instance when someone wearing a belt with a large iron buckle is standing very close to the compass in a direction other than North, say eastward. Far from upsetting or even just weakening the simile, this objection strengthens it, for it is the same force that regulates the direction of the needle, whether toward the North or toward the large iron buckle; in fact, one could say that in this image the buckle plays the role of the North due to its proximity to the compass. Something similar happens to a soul imbued with eros: it is directed toward Beauty, hence the Good. Surely its direction can change due to the

\textsuperscript{211} See the passages from the Phaedrus (250b1–c1) cited in Subsection 1.5.2. For this reason, eros cannot be understood, à la Freud, as some sort of raw energy, generally sexual in nature, aimed at furthering life, for bare life is already a secondary aim, much like the wholeness sought after by Aristophanes’ spherical creatures. As a consequence, there cannot even be a question of sublimation or of counter-sublimation in Platonic eros. Cf. Moravcsik (1971, 291); Roochnick (1990, 120); R. E. Allen (1991, 58–59). For a concise exposition of these concepts in Freud, see Laplanche and Pontalis (1973, 153–154, 431–434).
proximity of something partially or qualifiedly beautiful, but if _eros_ were absent, 
directedness and motion would vanish altogether. To add to the metaphor, one could say 
that we do not need a magnetized needle to be directed toward the North, since this can 
be found by other means (e.g., by reasoning on the position of the sun or other stars in the 
sky). Similarly, the Good can be approached under other aspects and by means other than 
_eros_, for instance under the aspect of Truth by means of dialectic. However, this does not 
make _eros_ superfluous, much like a sunny day or a starry night do not dispose of 
magnetism. On the contrary, when fog and clouds hide the sky from view, a functioning 
compass is a most welcome instrument to find one’s way, much like Eros is said to be the 
best coworker (συνεργόν: 212b3) even when the failure to gaze upon Truth disconcerts us 
and makes us weary of our distance from the Good.  ^212 

But let us leave this metaphor behind and ask rather what it can possibly mean 
that _eros_ points to the Good (under the aspect of Beauty). Plato has Socrates say it 
repeatedly and variously: everyone desires the good and acts for the sake of the good.  ^213 
The claim is outrageous on the face of it, given the not uncommon experience of clearly 
misplaced desires. Does this mean that Plato was unfamiliar with the experience of raw 
 cravings, devoid of all deliberation? A terminological clarification is in place. Plato’s
generic term for desire is ἐπιθυμία. In this he differs from Aristotle, whose generic term is ὄρεξις (never occurring in Plato), while ἐπιθυμία is reserved to denote non-rational desire and is distinct from βούλησις (rational desire, often rendered as “wish”) and θυμός (emotion, or spirit). What is missing in Plato’s terminology according to Aristotle’s scheme is an analogue of Aristotelian ἐπιθυμία; but this does not mean that Plato does not recognize the phenomenon.

Now, what kind of desire is eros? Is it closer to Aristotelian ἐπιθυμία, to βούλησις, or neither? Since the terms ἐρως and ἐρᾶν are often associated to ἐπιθυμία and ἐπιθυμεῖν in Plato, one may be tempted to take his use of ἐρως as a close equivalent of ἐπιθυμία in Plato.

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214 The generic use of ἐπιθυμία in Plato is clear as the term variously indicates, for instance, the desire to leave the city (Crito 52b7–8), desires of the body (Phaedo 66c7, 82c3; Cratylus 404a1–2, Laws VIII.837c4), the innate desire of the cosmos (Statesman 272e6), desire for wholeness (Symposium 192e10), desire of good things (Symposium 205d2), desire of pleasures (Phaedrus 237d8), desire for food and drink (Phaedrus 238a7–b1, Republic IV.437b–439b), good and bad desires (Lysis 221b5–6, Republic VIII.561c1), the origin of φιλία (Lysis 221d3), the desire to know (Greater Hippias 297e3), sexual desire (Republic III.390c1), dronish desires (Republic VIII.554a–555b), lawless desires (Republic IX.572b5), tyrannical desires (Republic IX.587b1), desire for immortality (Laws IV.721d8), incestuous desire (Laws VIII.838b4), desire of spiritual beauty (Laws VIII.841c4–6), desire to enter politics (Letters VII.325b1), desire for philosophy (Letters VII.328a2, 330b6, 338b6, 345d3–4).

215 For Aristotle’s tripartite division of desire see De anima II.414b2, III.432b4–7, Nicomachean Ethics III.1111a27–28, 1111b10–30, Politics VII.1334b22–28, Rhetoric I.1368b37–1369a7. This division is based on Plato’s own tripartite division of the soul in Republic IV.434d2–441c3.

216 One can see that this is the case from Plato’s famous argument for the distinction of the irrational appetitive (ἀλόγιστόν τε καὶ ἐπιθυμητικόν) from the rational (λογιστικόν) “part” of the soul (Republic IV.439d4–8). Glaucos states at Republic IV.437c7–8: “[ε] Thus, each desire is itself only of that particular thing of which it is by nature, while [desires] of this or that kind of thing are additional” ([ε] Οὕτως, ἐφι, αὐτῇ γε ἡ ἐπιθυμία ἐκάστη αὐτοῦ μόνον [ε] ἐκάστου οὗ πέρικεν, τοῦ δὲ τοιοῦ ἢ τοιου τὰ προσγιγνόμενα). As Socrates exemplifies in the same passage, thirst is a desire for drink, while desire for a good drink is supervening on the desire for drink tout-court. This would seem to contradict the statement that everyone desires the good and acts for its sake. What it actually does is simply to tell us that, while we all desire (βούλεσθαι) good things, some desires (ἐπιθυμίαι) are indifferent to the intrinsic goodness of their objects as long as these objects are not perceived as bad. In other words, all βούλησις is for the good, while ἐπιθυμίαι, although not aiming at something openly perceived as bad, is “neutral with regard to judgments concerning what is good” (Kahn 1996, 245; see the whole section in Kahn 1996, 243–247).

217 See Phaedo 66c2; Symposium 197a7, 200a3–201b2 (βούλεσθαι is also included), 207a7; Phaedrus 237d5; Lysis 221b7–e4 (φιλεῖν is also included); Republic IX.573b–c, 578a11; Timaeus 91b3–4, c7–d1;
Aristotle’s use of ἐπιθυμία. However, it has been observed that in Diotima’s discourse, the term chosen to indicate the kind of eros Socrates has in mind (i.e., desire to possess the good forever) is βούλεσθαι, thus leading one to suspect that in the Symposium Plato was trying to work out a more consistent terminology by equating eros to rational desire. An equation of this kind would have the advantage of shedding light on the (henceforth only apparent) paradox of Socratic intellectualism insofar as “no one desires [βούλεσθαι] bad things.” For this reason, the equation is very attractive, were it not for the fact that βούλεσθαι sometimes occurs in association with ἐπιθυμεῖν. Ultimately, it seems fair to conclude that Plato offers only a relatively consistent terminology of desire in and after the Symposium (and before it only in hindsight), a consistency that makes the equation of ἔρως and βούλησις feasible, but not incontrovertible. Thus, we may say that every good we attain (even the apparent goods that turn out to be deleterious in the long run) is attained on the ground of a basic desire for the Good. When the Good is desired

Laws III.688b3, V.734a2–4, VI.782d10–783b1, IX.870a1–6. In the Symposium, Pausanias points out the duplicity of Eros in his speech (180e1–3 ff.).

220 In fairness to Hyland (1968), the association of βούλεσθαι and ἐπιθυμεῖν (and their cognates) does not occur in Socrates’ speech after Diotima has defined ἔρως as the desire for the eternal possession of the good (206a11–12), although ἔρως and ἐπιθυμία are paired again at 207a7, and for the transitive law one might have to take this as an association of βούλησις and ἐπιθυμία. Moreover, a use of ἔρως clearly not coextensive with βούλησις occurs in dialogues likely posterior to the Symposium (e.g., Republic IX.573a2, b6–7, 586c2, X.607e4–7; Timaeus 69d4–5; Laws I.632a1, 649d5, VII.823e6, VIII.831c4, 836b7, XII.941c6), a sign that Plato either abandoned his (alleged) plan for a more consistent terminology, or else that this served only the purposes of the Symposium. Similarly, the distinction of ἔρως and ἐπιθυμία (see note 217 above), and of βούλεσθαι and ἐπιθυμεῖν and their cognates are not sharply drawn even in dialogues likely posterior to the Symposium (e.g., Republic III.390c1–4, VIII.557e2–5; Laws III.687a8–b1, VIII.837c3–d6; Letters VII.331a1–2; see also Symposium 200b9–d6).
221 Those goods that are attained by chance are welcomed with a smile, a sign that we did, in fact, desire them, or would have desired them, had we reflected on the possibility of possessing them.
under the aspect of Beauty, this desire, at least in the *Symposium* and the *Phaedrus*, is called *eros*.\(^{222}\)

On this basis, we may wonder, on the one hand, whether even the raw cravings we mentioned above (see note 211) are altogether deprived of a rational element, namely the ability to distinguish their proper object: being thirsty, I aim at drink, not at, say, food or sexual pleasure. On the other hand, one may also ask whether reason itself is altogether deprived of a desiderative element. Commenting on Plato’s tripartite division of the soul in the fourth book of the *Republic*, Kahn distinguishes three senses in which reason, or the rational part (τὸ λογιστικόν),\(^{223}\) is said to rule the soul: (a) in the weakest sense, instrumentally, or as the means through which certain ends are achieved while the ends themselves lie beyond reason’s jurisdiction; (b) in a stronger sense, as determining also the ends of action; (c) in the strongest sense, as itself “the goal of human life through its own philosophical activity.”\(^{224}\) A desiderative element is present in all the three senses in which reason is said to rule the soul. As Kahn remarks, even in the weakest sense, it is not clear how reason as the power of deliberation and judgment can overcome such cravings as intense thirst unless reason were identical with or included in its essence “a primitive desire for the good, an irreducible, non-derivative urge to pursue what it takes

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\(^{222}\) On this point I am in general agreement with Kahn (1996, 263), who however is more emphatic about the association of ἔρως and βουλήσις.

\(^{223}\) *Republic* IV.441e–6: Οὐκοῦν τῷ μὲν λογιστικῷ ἀρχεῖν προσήκει... 

\(^{224}\) Kahn (1987, 87). Kahn observes that in the weakest sense, reason does not really rule the soul (or it does so only incidentally), while the distinction between the stronger and the strongest sense mirrors the distinction between pre-philosophic and philosophic virtue in *Republic* IV and V–VI respectively.
to be good and advantageous.”

Conversely, this description of reason can be legitimately tailored to fit *eros*, that is: *eros* includes reason in its essence insofar as it is “a primitive desire for the good, an irreducible, non-derivative urge to pursue what it takes to be good and advantageous.” In other words, *eros* includes reason in its essence in the sense that the love for partially or qualifiedly beautiful things is not taken at face value but, while cherished, is questioned with regard to the kind of beauty it is after. In other words, as soon as I reflect on the object of my love, I come to realize its intrinsic limitations, and while maintaining my assent to its relative attractiveness, I direct my erotic aim first to all things of the same kind, then to things which, while of a worthier kind, are nonetheless connected to those things left behind insofar as they are beautiful (καλὰ), and finally to that which is unqualifiedly beautiful: Beauty itself. This process of questioning, “abstracting,” “universalizing,” “ascending,” and so on, is not something other than *eros*; it is itself *eros*

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225 Kahn (1987, 89). On reason as including a desiderative element, or as itself a kind of desire (i.e., the highest desire), see Roochnik (1990, 108–109). This view seems to presuppose the quasi-Spinozistic stance that a desire can be overcome only by a stronger desire (see Spinoza, *Ethics* IV.p7). We need not deny this, as long as (i) we do not take the force of any given desire to be the same under all conditions, (ii) we admit that reason is itself a peculiar kind of desire, or a desire aimed at a rather peculiar kind of object (i.e., the Good), and (iii) we maintain that what is desired is desired because it is (to some extent) good, and not, vice versa, merely judged to be good because it is desired (*contra* Spinoza, *Ethics* III.p9.s; see Chapter Four note 12 for references to the issue in Plotinus.

226 The presence of reason in Eros’ ladder is clearly signaled by the following words: κατανοῆσαι (210a8), ἄνοια (210b2), ἵνα ἀναγκασθῇ αὐτὸς κατανοῆσαι (210c3), ἵδεν (210c4), ἵνα (210c5), ἄγαγεν, ἵνα λοι [...], ἐπιστημον [...], βλέπων (210c7), θεωρῶν (210d4), διανοήματα ἐν φιλοσοφίᾳ (210d5–6) κατίδῃ τινὰ ἐπιστημήν (210d7), λόγους (210a8, c1, d5).

227 *Symposium* 210a8–b1: [a8] ἔπειτα δὲ αὐτὸν κατανοῆσαι ὅτι τὸ κάλλος [b1] τὸ ἐπὶ ὁτῳὸν σώματι τῷ ἐπὶ ἑτέρῳ σώματι ἀδελφόν ἐστι.

Moreover, the very fact that the ascent is a process makes of *eros* not an accomplished feat, but a project, a task. This project indicates an ultimate aim, Beauty itself, as much as the necessity of transforming one’s erotic relations, and therefore oneself, in light of this aim. The aim of love is identified with beautiful things and is initially revealed through the senses, but it is not coextensive with these things (nor, for that matter, with any of the inferior rungs of the ladder). One ought to follow a path in order to reach that to which *eros* points. Hence, love correctly understood in its nature indicates not so much an object to grasp, as a task for the lover: an invitation to approximate the highest *desideratum* by a process of self-transformation (see note 196).

Finally, the possibility of error in the ascent is hardly ever foreclosed. Diotima’s specification that one must proceed “correctly”230 into “erotics” implicitly warns us about the possibility of going astray while attempting the ascent. The same *eros* that points at the Good simultaneously constitutes the risk of misinterpreting the nature of the ultimate *desideratum*231 and may accidentally lead to the lover’s inability to leave behind lower

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229 If only to this extent, I find Moravcsik’s distinction of steps of Eros (E-steps) and steps of Reason (R-steps) in the ascent as slightly off the mark, for the whole process is itself erotic, and therefore R-steps are already also E-steps (see Moravcsik 1971). An alternative to this is to relabel E-steps (say, as affective steps: A-steps) and to consider the erotic ascent as a unitary process, to which R-steps, A-steps, and C-steps (steps of creation) belong as equally important (and equally erotic) moments.

230 Symposium 210a2, 4, e3, 211b5, 7: ὀρθῶς.

231 The difficulty of correctly grasping the nature of the Good is often pointed out in the dialogues. See the whole of the *Philebus*, especially 20b–23b, on the question of trying to determine the nature of the kind of good that would bring happiness to human beings. Compare Socrates’ embarrassment when Glaucon asks him to discuss the Good: he admits that while the “Idea of the Good is the most important thing to study” (ἠ τοῦ ἄγαθον ἱδέα μέγιστον μάθημα: Republic VI.505a2), all he can do is to offer an approximate account of it, and in fact not an actual account of the Good, but only of its offspring (ἐκγόνος), the sun (Republic VI.506d6–e5). All the so-called aporetic dialogues could also be read as expressions of the many difficulties involved in trying to understand the nature of virtue, which plays a very important role
desiderata due to habit, even to the point of turning the lover into the pathological slave of a particular desire. All cases, and the last one in particular, are indicative of the potential danger that constantly accompanies one’s journey into the things of love.

In order to better understand the kind of transformation entailed by an ascent called erotic in the sense outlined above, I will offer three illustrations of how Socrates’ speech, which itself contains a paradigmatic illustration of the truly erotic ascent, relates to other parts of the Symposium as a subtle critique of partial views of eros.

1.5.4 The Ascent Passage in Relation to Other Parts of the Symposium:

Three Illustrations

The first illustration concerns the other speeches found in the Symposium. If

\[\text{in the ascent (this will be true of Plotinus as well, as we shall see in the last chapter, Subsection 4.5.1).}\]

232 In Phaedrus 253c–255e the madness of love is accompanied by the struggle of the charioteer to subdue the unruly horse; there is no guarantee that the charioteer will succeed in taming the horse. Even worse, in Republic VI.489d–495b the best souls, that is, those possessing an eros for the intelligible (Republic VI.485b1, 490b2), if badly nurtured, are those most exposed to the risk of becoming the worst: corruptio optimi pessima. The four constitutions and their corresponding souls described in Republic VIII–IX are at the same time failures to understand the nature of the Good and exemplary illustrations of what a politeia and its people may look like when the Good is replaced by some surrogate (i.e., honor in timocracy, wealth in oligarchy, license in democracy, and a single dronish desire in tyranny).

233 See the description of tyranny as a kind of slavery (Republic IX.577b–580c) and of the tyrannical soul as governed by a kind of Eros which is itself tyrannical (Republic IX.572b–575a). In particular, see the occurrences of ἔρως at Republic IX.572e5, 573a1, 578a11, 579b5, 586c2, and of Ἐρως at Republic IX.573b7, d4, e6, 574d8, e2, 575a1.

234 In this connection, we should not fail to notice Diotima’s reference to the possibility of being led by another in the ascent (Symposium 211c1). If there is any historical truth to her character and to Socrates’ association with her (see note 132), she might have played the significant role of Socrates’ guide into the “erotics” (Symposium 201d5: τὰ ἐρωτικὰ). The helpfulness of a guide, however, does not dispense with the individual soul’s responsibility nor does it guarantee success in the ascent. Alcibiades is a clear example of a failure to follow the guide that was available to him in the person of Socrates. Aristodemus may be read as an example of someone who followed his guide obsessively, an exaggerate admirer of Socrates rather than a true lover of that which Socrates indicates and only partially incarnates. Something similar could be said of Apollodorus, who eagerly seeks confirmation of Aristodemus’ account from the master himself (Symposium 173b4–6); see Corrigan and Glazov-Corrigan (2004, 10–18). The same could be asked of Plato, the author of the dialogue: What kind of lover is he, and what kind of guide was Socrates for him?
Plato’s goal is not merely to praise Eros, but to provide us with a truthful account of it in its different dimensions, particularly in its ascending movement toward Beauty itself as its final destination, what is the point of the other speeches? That is, if it is Socrates’ discourse that conveys the truth about eros, why should Plato give us, not one, but, including Alcibiades’, seven speeches on love? In spite of some differences, commentators generally agree that these speeches pave the way to Socrates’ disclosure about matters of love by providing us with lesser accounts of Eros. Put differently, the speeches give us a range of possible errors (perhaps the most common views about Eros in Plato’s milieu), each of which bespeaks the respective speaker’s partial view of love. But why spending time writing misguided discourses?

In light of my earlier claim that the metaphor of ascent constitutes the focal image of the dialogue (1.3), I maintain that each of the speeches reflects the particular condition of a given speaker in regard to Eros, hence his specific position with respect to the possibility of proceeding or being led correctly in matters of love. It seems to me that

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235 Socrates explicitly alerts us to the fact that his goal in praising Eros is to tell the truth (τἀληθῆ) about him (Symposium 198d3, 199a7, 199b3), as pointed out earlier (note 128).

236 See Corrigan and Glazov-Corrigan (2004, 46–50) for a summary and critical assessment of some of the most prominent views on the issue, followed by the authors’ own stance.

237 But since not all the speeches pronounced at Agathon’s party were reported (Symposium 180c2), the views presented in the seven discourses recounted by Apollodorus-Aristodemus, while exemplary, are not exhaustive of the range of the partial views about Eros.

238 Brisson (1998, 39–49) is a notable exception to this view. He gathers the Symposium speeches into three thematic groups: (i) Phaedrus and Agathon: one Eros, based on traditional theology; (ii) Pausanias and Eryximachus: two Eros and two Aphrodites, Heavenly and Vulgar; (iii) Aristophanes and Socrates: one Eros, who is a god and a daimon respectively, helping humans to realize their aspirations. However, as Corrigan and Glazov-Corrigan (2004, 48) remark, this grouping leaves the order found in the Symposium unexplained; in fact, it may even “obscure” it.

239 In doing so, Socrates meets his interlocutors (and Plato his, readers) where they find themselves with respect to a given issue (in this case, eros). See Rosen (1987, xlviii–li).
Plato spends time reporting these conditions for two main reasons. First, he wants to display awareness, not only of a number of views about *eros*, but especially of the fact that these are views *precisely* about *eros*, that is, views that are not foreign to the wider phenomenon of love that Socrates is going to describe (or, that he just described, in Alcibiades’ case). In other words, these views, while limited, offer a genuine description of at least one aspect of *eros*, and as such display partiality rather than (or only consequently) outright erroneousness. Secondly, Plato intends to show that in order to overcome such partiality, one has to become aware of it as partiality; only then is one in the position to be directed beyond the partiality, toward the whole. To fall short of this awareness and of practical transformation means failing to grasp the erotic phenomenon in its entirety: another unsuccessful love story.

This leads me to my second illustration, focusing on Socrates’ discussion of immortalization through reproduction (*Symposium* 206b1–209e4241). Two problems intersect here: one concerns the possibility that Diotima may be talking not only about “interpersonal” but also about individual immortality; the other touches on the relation of *eros* and Diotima’s view of identity. I will deal with the first problem first. Although Diotima talks about reproduction as the mortal means to immortality, one should not immediately assume that reproduction is only interpersonal.242 In fact, her starting point

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240 E.g., Eryximachus, whose perspective on his own profession (i.e., medicine) rightly recognizes the irenic or harmonizing side of Eros, but fails to account for the more disruptive and disorderly manifestation of it (see Corrigan and Glazov-Corrigan 2004, 62–68; Reale 1997a, 81–96).


242 See Irwin (1995, 306–308), who contrasts “interpersonal” and “intrapersonal” immortality (i.e., immortality of the species and immortality of the individual).
is the process of renewal of the individual, expressed in what appears to be a flux view of identity. According to her description, there is no enduring substratum constituting the alleged sameness of any given living thing; this holds both for the body, whose parts are in a constant process of renewal, and for the soul, whose affections are unstable and whose knowledge even (τὰς ἐπιστήμας: 208a2) must be rejuvenated by exercise, or practice (μελέτη: 208a5). Reproduction mirrors this process of individual renewal at a collective level, thus making for the immortality of the species. Insofar as the aim of the reproductive process is, as Rowe puts it, “(a kind of) immortality,” it constitutes an

243 Symposium 207c8–208b7; cf. Gorgias 493a–494b, Theaetetus 156e7–157c2. Compare Pascal, Pensées 113 (Brunschvicg 123 = Pascal 1964, 1120): “Il n’aime plus cette personne qu’il aimait il y a dix ans. Je crois bien: elle n’est plus la même, ni lui non plus.”

244 This is Aristotle’s view in De anima II.415a22–b7.

245 Rowe (1998, 185). It has been argued that this passage contradicts Plato’s characteristic doctrine of the immortality of the soul (e.g., Hackforth 1950; Grube 1980, 149), or else that here Plato is reporting an opinion held by the historical Diotima (Waite 1987, 86–90, 108–111). Questioning the presupposition behind the first position should suffice to add to the already high improbability of the second (cf. note 132 above). The point of controversy is, primarily, Symposium 208b2–4: “Through this device [i.e., reproduction], Socrates—she said—what is mortal, whether a body or any other thing, shares in immortality, while the immortal does it in another way” (ταύτῃ τῇ μηχανῇ, ὦ Σώκρατες, θνητὸν ἀθανασίας μετέχει, καὶ σῶμα καὶ τάλλα πάντα: ἀθάνατον δὲ ἄλλῃ; Burnet 1899–1907 and Bury 1932 read ἀδύνατον in place of ἀθάνατον). Now, if “the immortal” (ἀθάνατον) means not only gods and daimons (Brisson 1998, 212 note 441), but also what in the soul is immortal (Bury 1932, xlvi; Reale 1997a, 192–193), there is no reason to doubt any discrepancy in Plato’s thought. However, this view is possible only if one takes into account at least those dialogues in which the immortality of the soul is affirmed and whose date of composition is likely proximate to that of the Symposium, namely the Phaedo and the Phaedrus. Grube (1980, 149) argues that “to make the passage at all compatible with the Phaedo we must include the intellect under the ἀθάνατον which is immortal ἄλλῃ.” And he adds that “certainly no one who had not the other dialogues before him would take this to refer to anything but the gods.” While granting that personal immortality is never openly affirmed in the Symposium and that the issue does remain highly debatable, the problem with taking Grube’s position (and in part Hackforth’s, who elaborates on the same point) as definitive does not lie in their pertinent remarks, but in the unspoken presupposition behind what they say, namely that Plato’s contemporaries who were familiar with the Symposium were unaware of his doctrines in the other dialogues, a presupposition which as such is neither proved nor, for that matter, established as probable. On the contrary, it seems to me that the opposite might very well be more probable.

Finally, Cobb’s stance is peculiar: on the basis of Diotima’s view of immortality he argues, not that Plato had doubts about the issue in the Symposium, but that he was ironic when he offered proofs for it in other dialogues (Cobb 1993, 76, 190–191). Independently of one’s conclusions about the issue itself, I
expression of *eros* typical of all mortal beings both at the individual and at the collective level.

As for the second problem, what does it mean to say that *eros* aims at immortality for a being whose identity is the sum of bodily and psychological features which are both relatively random and in constant motion? What gets immortalized? At the individual level: if at seven my hair was brunette and at sixty (if I will still be alive and have some hair left), white, will I have failed to immortalize myself? In fact, have I not already failed to do so, given that I no longer remember so many of the short poems that I was painstakingly made to memorize as a child? At the collective level: Do I fail to immortalize my parents when I favor strawberry ice cream, given that they only like coffee ice cream? Will I have failed to achieve immortality if I will be unable to introduce my students to the pleasures and challenges of reading Plato or any other philosopher I happen to teach on a given semester? The very silliness of these questions unveils the futility of an immortality based on such adventitious features. For this reason, Diotima clarifies from the start that giving birth, or reproduction, is not any kind of reproduction, but “giving birth in beauty” (τόκος ἐν καλῷ: 206b7–8). If beauty (in hindsight, Beauty) is not what regulates giving birth, the result will be a futile proliferation of random individual traits. I will not be concerned about perpetuating such idiosyncrasies (say, my parents liking coffee rather than strawberry flavored ice cream) unless I also find them worth perpetuating; but why exactly I should find them worth perpetuating is precisely what should be explained, if possible.

cannot help wondering whether ascribing irony to Diotima’s account of immortality, rather than to all the others, would have made for a simpler and more plausible explanation (at least statistically).
At this point of the speech, we are still in the Lesser Mysteries of Love, but one thing seems clear already: the individual soul (let alone the individual body) taken as a random collection of empirical preferences does not suffice to explain something like Eros’ ladder, for as we saw, the erotic ascent implies the ability to transcend one’s preferences, the (initial) partiality of one’s eros, and rise at levels of increasing universality. This is already a critique of a merely physiological or scientific view of the human,\(^{246}\) which, while taking note of and cataloguing all these preferences, remains incapable of envisioning the possibility of subsuming them under an ascending erotic movement in which inferior, utterly idiosyncratic desiderata are gradually replaced by higher (i.e., more worth perpetuating) ones. But for this to be possible, the soul has already to be able to recognize the partiality of its immediate desiderata, and be willing to direct itself to Beauty.

Aristophanes’ discourse, my third illustration, is a perfect example of the partiality in which even the best lovers can get caught. Despite its being cast in the form of fiction (a myth), there is much that rings true about love in this wonderfully constructed speech,\(^{247}\) most notably the idea that love amounts to lack, or need, and as

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\(^{246}\) See Rosen (1987, 251). Corrigan and Glazov-Corrigan (2004, 144) observe that this part of Socrates’ discourse “is certainly directed against Pausanias’ and Eryximachus’ self-satisfied and self-sufficient views of the soul, the virtues, and sciences.”

\(^{247}\) The beauty of this speech is the recognition of Aristophanes’ indisputable greatness as a comic poet (Bury 1932, xxix–xxx; Reale 1997a, 98–101; Corrigan and Glazov-Corrigan 2004, 85) and simultaneously a subtle statement of Socrates’ (i.e., Plato’s, or philosophy’s) ability to rise above it by means of Aristophanes’ own art. Corrigan and Glazov-Corrigan (2004, 1, 215–220) may be right in arguing that the Symposium contributes to the famed quarrel between poetry and philosophy of Republic X by providing a positive view of art, namely one in which the artist is aware of his or her fabricated images precisely as images (the Symposium being one of these images, and Plato, one such artist). See also note 137 above.
such to a quest for a (lost and) more encompassing unity.\textsuperscript{248} In loving something, we grasp ourselves as lacking wholeness and at the same time aim at making ourselves whole (again). It would be hard to deny such a basic truth as one becomes aware of it through Aristophanes’ speech. The problem lies not in this, I believe, but in the poet’s understanding of wholeness; for who is whole in his story? Apparently two kinds of beings: the gods and the spherical human creatures prior to Zeus’ surgical procedure. The wholeness of both sorts of beings, however, is a rather sorry kind of wholeness. In the spherical creatures, it manifests itself most peculiarly in physical strength and arrogance (190b5–6), resulting in their titanic desire to attack the gods. The gods, on their part, are unassailable by such creatures, but at the same time seem unable to do without the latter’s honors and sacrifices (190c4–5). The shortcoming of such an understanding of wholeness, therefore, mars from the very start Aristophanes’ view of Eros as the god, restorer of human nature.\textsuperscript{249} As for the other gods, the comic poet does not even show awareness that such a view of their nature is thoroughly questionable.\textsuperscript{250}

\textsuperscript{248} “Thus, \textit{eros} is the name for the desire of and aspiration to wholeness” (τοῦ ὅλου οὖν τῇ ἐπιθυμίᾳ καὶ διώξει ἔρως ὄνομα: \textit{Symposium} 192e10–193a1); see also \textit{Symposium} 191c8–d5.

\textsuperscript{249} Eros is described as “trying to make of two one and to heal human nature” (ἐπιχειρῶν ποιῆσαι ἐν ἕκ δυοῖν καὶ ἱάσασθαι τὴν φύσιν τὴν ἄνθρωπιν: \textit{Symposium} 191d2–3). Corrigan and Glazov-Corrigan’s (2004, 74) remark on the issue is incisive: “If we are pious, we shall be restored to our original nature. But our original nature is violent and impious [...]; the original globular creatures were violent, impious, and unintelligent, or they were content like animals and unintelligent; thus the conditions before and after division render piety meaningless. To restore an ancient nature is not to fulfill human desire but to contradict it.”

\textsuperscript{250} It may be also for this reason that in the \textit{Republic} the poets are deemed inadequate to act as educators. Cf. \textit{Republic} II.379a–385c for what a correct understanding of divine nature may look like according to Plato. In a more benevolent reading of Aristophanes’ story, one could argue (i) that the poet never said that the spherical humans were truly whole before Zeus cut them in half, and (ii) that true unity is one that lacks nothing and cannot be dispersed into multiplicity. We could concede that (i) is true, but then it is not clear that (ii) is what Eros truly brings about in Aristophanes’ story. Alternately, (i) can be easily rebutted if we observe that what the halved human beings desire is not a new condition, but precisely the restoration of the condition they were in prior to Zeus’ resolution. As for (ii), while it may be an accurate
In this light, it is Aristophanes’ very notion of wholeness that becomes questionable and, through it, his understanding of Eros (of *eros*). Plainly put, if the restoration of wholeness is the goal of Eros’ work and if to be whole means simply to regain what was one’s own independently of what it was, then it is clear that *eros* has a merely appetitive aspect. But since this view, as it turns out, does not do justice to the erotic phenomenon in its entirety (see Subsection 1.3.1 above and 1.5.5 below), then either wholeness is not *eros*’ aim, or else it must be understood differently. Socrates makes this explicit as he refutes Aristophanes’ view: “love is neither of the half nor of the whole unless, my friend, this happens to be good.” Thus, there is a standard attached to *eros* which is prior to wholeness; this standard is goodness. And so for Socrates to conceive of *eros* merely as a function of wholeness, while forgetting that it clearly points to something of which wholeness may be a necessary but not a sufficient condition (i.e., what is good), ultimately means already to misunderstand it.

### 1.5.5 Love between Appetite and Donation; Loving Persons

In this last subsection I will touch on two interconnected issues often discussed in Plato scholarship: first, whether Platonic love is merely appetitive or egoistic; second,
whether it is possible, according to Plato’s view of *eros* as I have tentatively outlined it in this chapter, to love a person for that person’s sake.

The first interrogative—Is Platonic love merely appetitive?—has a double target: (1) on the one hand, the lover, that is, the initiate making his way into the mysteries of love; (2) on the other, the beloved, which in the Ascent Passage is ultimately nothing other than Beauty itself, hence the Good.

(1) On the side of the lover, Socrates showed that love does not cease when I, the lover, get what I desire, for I still desire that this possession continue in the future (*Symposium* 200b9–d7). The problem takes the following formulation, which I adapt from an article by R. A. Markus: 252 if all *eros* is merely appetitive, (i) psychologically, once I get what I desire I become afraid to lose it, and so love turns into a kind of fear; (ii) logically, happiness as the fulfillment of all desire is either impossible or else, if possible, desire must cease. Both (i) and (ii) are true, however, only if the premise is in place, namely only if all *eros* is nothing but appetite, sheer need.

(2) On the side of the beloved (i.e., Beauty or the Good), all love must be denied to the Good in principle, for the Good is the Good not only insofar as it is the ultimate desideratum, but, perhaps more importantly, because it does not itself have a desideratum. 253 Again, this holds on the same premise that *eros* is merely appetitive.

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252 Markus (1955, 223).

253 One may object that the Good can itself experience love of an appetitive kind by desiring our ascent to it in the way each of the two halves of Aristophanes’ spherical creatures desires the other half. This is implausible, however, for if I desire the Good and the Good desires my ascent to itself, then neither of us is truly an end, but only a means to the further end which is unification. It follows that unification, not the (alleged) Good, is the Good. Plato puts it well at *Philebus* 60c2–4: “If this [i.e., the good] were always present in living beings entirely and in every way, they would never need anything else again, but they would have perfect self-sufficiency [τὸ δὲ ἱκανὸν τελεώτατον].”
Now, that love ordinarily means more than need or lack may be clear to most.\textsuperscript{254} Here it is a matter of concisely showing that this was clear to Plato as well. There is little doubt, I believe, that love is more than appetitive from the perspective of the Platonic lover. In fact, while Socrates endorses Aristophanes’ view of love as need, he does not reduce \textit{eros} to mere lack. No matter how essential lack is to \textit{eros}, for Socrates lack is only the beginning of the erotic movement.\textsuperscript{255} Once the lover has the goal of his or her affection in view, the result is not mere possession, the simple satisfaction of a need, but a creative activity, that which in the Lesser Mysteries of love is called “giving birth in beauty” (τόκος ἐν καλῷ: \textit{Symposium} 206b7–8), and which in the Greater Mysteries coincides with the generation of beautiful speeches at the different levels of the ascent\textsuperscript{256} (except in the last step, which, as we saw, lies beyond the discursive realm).

The question is why this should be the case, that is, why \textit{eros} as lack or need should turn into \textit{eros} as creative and self-giving activity. At the stage of the Lesser Mysteries, this transition, while manifest, remains somewhat problematic, since as we saw, immortality through procreation appears to be immortality only \textit{sui generis}. And yet, even at this intermediate stage, \textit{eros} is not merely a lack, for a creative activity is

\textsuperscript{254} Although, arguably, some may never experience love beyond need.

\textsuperscript{255} But it is a beginning that should not be underemphasized, for it reappears at every level of the ascent. Once the lover comes to possess the \textit{desideratum} at one level, a new lack appears, signaling the insufficiency of what was just achieved.

already in place, despite the fact that the element of need is not eliminated altogether.\textsuperscript{257} It is only at the very last stage of the ascent\textsuperscript{258} that \textit{eros} as lack is thoroughly transfigured into creative donation. Love of Beauty, not in one of its partial manifestations, but of Beauty itself by itself with itself, is no longer desire to possess, but desire to give and create: as Markus puts it, “a kind of generosity rather than a kind of need. It culminates in togetherness with the object loved and in a creative bringing forth in its presence from the lover’s superabundance.”\textsuperscript{259}

The reason for this dynamic transformation of \textit{eros} is not found in the \textit{Symposium}, but it can be inferred, legitimately I believe, from other dialogues. Incidentally, it also serves us to show that if any \textit{eros} is found at all on the side of the beloved or ultimate \textit{desideratum} (i.e., the Good), it is a kind of \textit{eros} from which the appetitive element of lack or need is completely absent. This position can be formalized in a simple syllogism: (i) the Good, which from the lover’s perspective is the ultimate \textit{desideratum}, is an essentially generous or donative principle; (ii) to ascend to the Good means to some extent to become like it; (iii) ergo, to ascend to the Good means to some extent to become

\textsuperscript{257} Markus (1955, 225–227) remarks that at this stage love is no longer the lack of a needy being, but the giving of something by a being that is already complete. Hence, although divinity and immortality were denied to Eros as need, they are now granted to him in procreation. While I have much sympathy for Markus’ overall thesis, I see two problems in his reading at this particular point: first, it is not clear to what extent pregnant beings are “complete”. More specifically, their very desire for immortality seems to bespeak precisely their incompleteness. Secondly, desire for immortality expressed in pregnancy and procreation seems to be a kind of giving only incidentally. The goal is not to give, but to achieve immortality for oneself. However, we may recall that the stage of pregnancy and reproduction is not final; when this is kept in mind, I believe that Markus is correct.

\textsuperscript{258} Whether this is ever reached by any particular individual will remain an open question.

\textsuperscript{259} Markus (1955, 227). See also Armstrong (1961), Rist (1964, 23–40).
generous or donative.\textsuperscript{260} What is needed is some textual evidence for the two premises of the syllogism.

The texts in support of the major premise, namely that the Good is an essentially generous or donative principle, are the following.\textsuperscript{261} \textit{Phaedrus} 247a7:

jealousy lies outside the divine chorus.

\textit{Republic} II.379b15–c7:

[b15] The good is not the cause of all things, but it is rather the [16] cause of good things, while not being the cause of bad ones. [c1] Certainly, he [i.e., Adeimantus] said. [2] Therefore, I [i.e., Socrates] continued, since the god\textsuperscript{262} is good, it will not [3] be the cause of all things, as many people say, but will be the cause of few things for [4] men, and not the cause of many things, for we have much [5] less good things than bad things, and while the cause of good things is none [6] other than the god, it is necessary to find some other causes for the bad ones, [7] but not the god.

\textit{Timaeus} 29e1–3:

\textsuperscript{260} From this perspective, the purpose of the ascent is to become, not an ultimate object of desire, but generous and donative, of which being an ultimate object of desire may be a probable consequence.


\textsuperscript{262} Plato’s usage of the term θεός and of its adjectival cognate θείος is extremely fluid (see van Camp and Canart 1956; François 1957, 246–304). The noun θεός variously refers to the gods in general (\textit{Euthyphro} 7b2, \textit{Cratylus} 391d6, \textit{Symposium} 180a2, \textit{Republic} II.364b3) and the traditional gods in particular (\textit{Phaedrus} 246e4–247a4, \textit{Timaeus} 39e–41a, \textit{Laws} IV.717a6–b6), the demigurges (\textit{Timaeus} 30a2–c1 ff.), the world (\textit{Timaeus} 34b8, 92c7), the heavenly bodies (\textit{Timaeus} 39e10–40a7 ff.). The adjective θείος variously refers to the Ideas (\textit{Sophist} 254a8–b1; cf. \textit{Republic} VII.517d4–5), intellect or reason (\textit{Philebus} 22c6, \textit{Republic} IX.590d4), the soul, particularly in its best part (\textit{Phaedo} 79e8–80b5, 91c8, \textit{Phaedrus} 246d6–e3, \textit{Timaeus} 41c2–d3, 44d3–6 and 69c3–5, 90a2–b1), good people (\textit{Philebus} 18b7, \textit{Republic} VII.540c2, II.383c4; see also \textit{Laws} IV.716c1–e2), people in contact with the Ideas (\textit{Republic} VI.500c9–d1; see also \textit{Symposium} 212a6: θεοφιλεῖ), and several other things, such as a divine production (\textit{Sophist} 266d6) and the divine madness of love (\textit{Phaedrus} 256b6, 265a10, 266a7–b1).
He [i.e., the Demiurge] was good, and in the good there is never [2] any envy about anything, but being free of it, [3] he wanted all things to become like him as much as possible.

And here are the texts in support of the minor premise, namely that to ascend to or approach the Good means to some extent to become like it.263 Republic X.613a7–b1:

[a7] The gods do not fail to care for [8] the one who eagerly desires to become just and, by practicing [b1] virtue, to resemble a god as much as it is possible for a man.

Theaetetus 176a8–b3, b8–c2:

[a8] For this reason one should [b1] escape as soon as possible from here to get there. [This] escape is to resemble a god as much as [2] possible; and [such] resemblance is to become just and pious with [3] wisdom. [...] [b8] God is nowhere and [c1] in no way unjust, but is most just, and there is nothing [2] more similar to him than the one of us who in turn has become as just as possible.”

Laws IV.716c4–d4:264

[c4] In our view it is God who is preeminently ‘measure of all things,’ [5] much more so than any man, as they [6] say. So, if you want to become dear to such a being, [7] you must do your level best to become like it, [d1] and according to this reasoning the one among us who is temperate [2] is dear to God, being like him, whereas the one who is not temperate and unjust is unlike him and [3] his enemy; and the same reasoning applies [4] to the other vices.


All this should suffice to settle the second issue as well: the charge that the Platonic lover does not love the person for the person’s sake and rather uses people as means to achieve immortality understood as the eternal possession of the good. What I would like to add here is a more explicit reply to this charge. The charge hinges on what one means by person or individual. As we saw in the previous subsection, if the individual person is reduced to a collection of constantly shifting somatic and psychic traits, and if to love these traits means to love the person for the person’s sake, then one would have to admit that there is no room for this kind of love in the Symposium. But one may also ask why exactly there should be room for such love, for how is love of random features different from some kind of fixation? What does it mean to love a person for the color of her hair, his dented chin, or her taste for cheese? Would I love him less if his chin were disfigured (or merely reconfigured) in a motorcycle accident, or if she lived long enough to see her hair turn white? Would her recently developed lactose intolerance end my love for her along with her love for cheese? If loving a person for the person’s sake means to love him no matter who this person will become, I have a hard time seeing how a girl could fall in love with a good-natured boy and continue loving him even when he has turned into a crook. If, on the one hand, what she loves is his crookedness, how has her love not turned into a kind of pathology? If, on the other hand, what she continues

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266. Of course, a crook at heart, if there ever was one, and not necessarily someone who violated some law.
to love is something other than his crookedness, whom does she love? Is it his past
good nature that she continues to love? Or is it the possibility that he might change for
the better? Either way, she loves a model in whose light she saw and/or hopes to see her
beloved.267

It may be objected that this approach to the notion of person is excessively
speculative and amounts to a misunderstanding of what it means to be a person—an
objection from which, incidentally, often I have a hard time distancing myself. Put
interrogatively, will I ever love a person, or will I always already love an ideal of which
the person is nothing but a comparatively inadequate reflection or representation? When
asked in these terms, the question already seems to presuppose something which, if one
grants that my brief interpretative account of Ideas in Subsection 1.5.2 is at least
plausible, Plato would not concede. The presupposition is the view that ideals exist

267 Cf. Phaedrus 253a6–c2. To antagonize Platonic eros and a view of love derived from the Hebraic and
Christian traditions may be helpful as long as one is fair to both. According to Vlastos (1973, 32–33), in
Plato’s view “to make flesh-and-blood men and women objects of our affection would be folly or worse,
 idolatry, diversion to images of what is due only to their divine original. We are a prey to this error, Plato
would say, because of our carnal condition, burned with incompleteness which fellow creatures have
power to complete; were we free of mortal deficiency we would have no reason to love anyone or
anything except the Idea: seen face to face, it would absorb all our love. Here we see the polar opposite
of the ideal which has molded the image of the deity in the Hebraic and Christian traditions: that of a
being whose perfection empowers it to love the imperfect; of a Father who cares for each of his children
as they are, does not proportion affection to merit, gives it no more to the righteous than to the perverse
and deformed.” As it is expressed by Vlastos, this opposition is not very helpful, for even in the Hebraic
and Christian traditions, “to love the imperfect” does not mean to love the imperfect qua imperfect, but
qua capable of being perfected; and for the Father to care for his children “as they are” does not mean to
give in to whatever capricious whim these children may happen to have, but to care that their condition
be improved, for after all, what they truly are according to the tradition Vlastos is referring to is imago
Dei. This already implies that divine love and care are carried out in conformity with an “ideal image”
that transcends the particular imperfection and condition of each person, although the care itself would
have to be provided on the basis of one’s particular situation, or one’s imperfections. Now, Platonic eros
and Judeo-Christian love probably differ on several counts, but on this particular point they seem far
from displaying the polar opposition invoked by Vlastos (cf. R. E. Allen 1991, 95–98; see also pages
200–201 below). As I mentioned earlier (Subsection 1.5.3), we can certainly misrepresent the “ideal image” in accordance with which we love and care for our beloved; when this happens, our love and care
have been disfigured: the ascending eros of the Symposium has turned into something more similar to the
Ἔρως τύραννος of Republic IX.571a–576b.
alongside persons more or less in the same way as trees exist alongside rocks and squirrels on the university campus. But if this is not granted, the objection loses much of its force, for from the point of view of the individual, Ideas (or ideals) are not things alongside things, but possibilities which, by being actualized in the life of a person, cause that person to be more lovable. That is, Ideas are intelligible causes of sensible things, but for the perspective of the individual person this ultimately means that they are the very potentialities nested within the human: possibilities of which at first one has merely a distant inkling, and which only later are illuminated, painstakingly discovered, and found worth pursuing. By thus throwing light on these possibilities and trying to identify with them as much as it is humanly possible, we come to actualize ourselves in accordance with what was discovered and pursued, while this process of approximation to the ideal unveils new possibilities to be activated and realized.

Thus, to charge Plato with a view of love in which the beloved is loved not for his or her sake but as an instrument to achieve immortality for oneself already presupposes that his “erotics” can be isolated from the fuller trajectory sketched by the Ascent Passage, or, as Gerson writes in connection with the Phaedrus, “from his metaphysics.” In the ascent, the beauty of the desired thing (at whatever level) would not even become “visible” were it not for the Beauty in which the thing participates. In other words, whatever is seen worth loving in the beloved is something that, while shining not independently of the particular beautiful features of the beloved, already transcends them by indicating the possibility of a higher beauty. It would be easy to

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268 Gerson (2003, 142).
mistake one’s consideration for this indication as mere scorn for what is inferiorly or partially beautiful, but this ought not to be the case; and that in fact it is not the case becomes clear from Socrates’ rejection of Alcibiades later in the dialogue (Symposium 217a2–219e5). His is not the scornful rejection of someone aware of his superiority over the one who is offering his beautiful body as matter for barter. On the contrary, Socrates rejects Alcibiades’ offer because to accept it would coincide with the obvious derailment of an ascent correctly (again, ὀρθῶς) performed. Moreover, this derailment would involve not only Socrates, but also Alcibiades. Hence, Socrates does not take advantage of his superior dialectic attractiveness (215a4–216c3), but uses it as itself an indication of the path Alcibiades should take if he wants to make his soul more beautiful. Far from using Alcibiades as a means to an end, Socrates tries to show him the end at which both should aim by working together toward it (219a8–b2). In light of this episode, correctly to ascend toward Beauty can hardly be a matter of using others as means to an end, for when this happens it is the end itself that is missed.269

It will be objected that, since I do not possess ideals in their purity, to say that I love another person in light of these ideals always means that what I actually love is neither those ideals nor that person, but the extent to which that person has succeeded to embody my reception of those ideals, and hence, ultimately, the image of myself in the other person. This objection may be answered initially by saying that its basic claim is true also (in fact, that it is true to a greater degree) of love of the other person for the

other person’s sake, for what I love here is in fact a collection of empirical features which I find lovable and which as such point at me as the only arbiter of what is lovable and what is not. More fundamentally, the objection loses much of its power if one keeps in mind that to love another person in light of an ideal (or a set of ideals) does not mean that I immediately grasp, let alone embody, those ideals perfectly and thus I can go on effortlessly to love whomever happens to embody them as best as possible. Rather, to love another person in light of an ideal means at the same time to be willing to take upon oneself the task of understanding and embodying those ideals with and for the beloved person.270

Thus, I conclude that the problem is not so much if and how Platonic love allows for genuinely loving a person “for that person’s sake,” but rather how loving a person for that person’s sake does not already include in its essence some kind of pathology, and therefore if and how one can truly love a person without already being oriented by an ideal in accordance with which his or her love is shaped.272

270 By adding “and for” I may give the impression that the individual person is a kind of “super-ideal” for whose sake one works at understanding and embodying all other ideals. This is fundamentally correct, I believe, to the extent that it is ideals, and not something else (e.g., mere satisfaction of some relatively arbitrary needs or desires), that are understood and concretely embodied, or individualized. In other words, I contend that if to understand and embody ideals and the full blossoming of the individual person stand in a relation of means to end, it is only through these specific means that end can be achieved.

271 This, I maintain, is the sense of Socrates’ and Alcibiades’ reciprocal commitment to self-improvement found toward the end of the Symposium (219a8–b2).

272 I would be tempted to temperate this final statement by noting that what I have argued in this subsection is not an attack on the importance and value of individuality but rather a critique of a certain view of individuality, namely, individuality as a relatively random collection of empirical features (cf. also my brief remarks in note 270 above). However, I am aware that by doing this I would risk to cloud the very difficulty of explaining what exactly it means to love an individual for his or her own sake. I will take refuge in the long passage that concludes a penetrating article by Jean-Louis Chrétien, L’amour du neutre (Chrétien 1990, 329–344), on the impersonality (or neutrality) of love in Plotinus: “Il ne suffit pas de dire qu’on aime quelqu’un pour échapper à l’amour du neutre. Lorsque j’aime quelqu’un pour sa beauté ou sa vertu, c’est, que je le veuille ou non, l’impersonnel que j’aime à travers lui. Prendre le contrepied de cette
1.6 Conclusive Remarks

Before I turn to Plotinus, it may be helpful to offer a summary of the major conclusions reached in this chapter. These conclusions will become the focus of the rest of this study as I investigate the way in which the Platonic view of *eros* was received and transformed by the subsequent tradition.

(1) Plato’s text is read as a starting point for, or as an implicit exhortation to, improving one’s life by practicing philosophy. Both the dramatic setting of the dialogue and the connection of its main topics and arguments to those of other dialogues are crucial for an understanding of the same. Plotinus’ reading of Plato, while obviously not in line with the standards of modern historic-critical methodology, is fair to the extent that it heeds Plato’s exhortation to philosophy.

(2) The term ἔρως is chosen as the name for the phenomenon of love analyzed in the *Symposium* because it is found to be the most apt both to cover the breadth of the phenomenon itself and to convey the connection to Eros, the god of love.

(3) The central metaphor of Socrates’ speech in the *Symposium* and of the dialogue as a whole is that of the ladder of love, or *eros’* ascent to Beauty itself. The metaphor implicitly includes all the other speeches as only partially successful attempts at

possibilité ne résout pas pour autant la difficulté: aimer quelqu’un pour sa manques et ses défauts, pour ce qui il échappe à l’universel, pour l’imperfection singulière qui est sienne, nous fait certes échapper à l’amour du neutre, mais peut-être aussi à l’amour. Le culte de l’accidentel où se complaisent les amants ne garantit pas l’amour pour l’être de quelqu’un. Dire qu’un aime pour rien, mais seulement « parce que c’était lui, parce que c’était moi », nous approche davantage de la vérité de l’amour, mais posons-nous la question: qui, lui? et qui, moi? que la difficulté sous d’autres formes réapparaît, car la réponse nous reconduit à l’alternative de l’amour d’un au-delà impersonnel de la personne ou d’une idolâtrie égocentrique des accidents. L’alternative n’est brisée que si l’au-delà de la personne est lui-même personnel à l’infini, que si la lumière dans laquelle apparaît la personne est celle-là même de l’amour qui la fait être elle-même à jamais, que si l’amour lui-même est une personne” (Chrétien 1990, 344). But to endorse this conclusion already means to have moved beyond Plato’s (and Plotinus’) explicit reflection, I maintain, although not necessarily against it. Cf. also Section 5.2 in the Epilogue.
accomplishing the ascent.

(4) The levels of beauty that constitute the rungs of Eros’ ascending ladder already point at a division of reality in terms of body, soul, intellect, and what lies at the threshold of intellect. This division finds its continuity in the qualified presence of Beauty at all levels.

(5) The terminus of the ascent is Beauty itself, an Idea which is found to be one of the main aspects of the Good, the other aspect being Truth. Beauty’s privilege among the Ideas consists in its being ordered to “shining forth” in the sensible. Eros is the path to the Good under the aspect of Beauty, while dialectic is the path to the Good under the aspect of Truth.

(6) Eros does not immediately put us in contact with the Good under the aspect of Beauty, but, if questioned and followed correctly, it indicates a task for the lover. There is no guarantee of success in this task; in fact one should not even discount the possibility of a total shipwreck. However, if the ascent is ever performed correctly, both in its dialectic and in its erotic version it entails a process of transformation of the entire soul. We could say, simply, that the ascent is this transformation.

(7) Eros is not merely appetitive, that is, it cannot be reduced to lack or need. On the contrary, both in the Lesser and in the Greater Mysteries, Diotima emphasizes an important aspect of creativity and donation. Likewise importantly, brief but poignant passages from other dialogues suggest that the ultimate desideratum itself is found to be an essentially donative principle, and the erotic ascent to the principle, a transformation of Eros from an appetitive to a donative and creative dynamism.
All this, I maintain, can be read in the dialogues legitimately, if tentatively.

And as I observed earlier at the end of both Section 1.2 and Subsection 1.5.2, the extent to which such a reading is already dependent on, or influenced by a trend that one will find only in the subsequent tradition of Platonism remains a matter for debate which only the expert knower of both Plato and the tradition after him may be able to determine.
CHAPTER TWO:

PLOTINUS AS INTERPRETER OF PLATO:

A READING OF ENNEADS III.5 [50] ON EROS

Lui était presque un enfant... Ses delicatesses mystérieuses m’avait séduite. J’ai oublié tout mon devoir humain pour le suivre. Quelle vie! La vraie vie est absente. Nous ne sommes pas au monde. Je vais où il va, il le faut. Et souvent il s’em porte contre moi, moi, la pauvre âme. Le Démon!—C’est un Démon, vous savez, ce n’est pas un homme.

—A. Rimbaud

Δηλοῖ δὲ ὅτι τὸ ἄγαθὸν ἐκεῖ καὶ ὁ ἔρως ὁ τῆς ψυχῆς ὁ σύμφωνος, καθὸ καὶ συνέζευκται Ἐρως ταῖς Ψυχαῖς καὶ ἐν γραφαῖς καὶ ἐν μύθοις.

—Plotinus

2.1 Introduction

This and the next two chapters will provide an account of Plotinus’ understanding of Platonic ἔρως in the context of his metaphysics. In the present chapter, I will first introduce the way Plotinus approaches the Platonic text (Section 2.2), hence I will proceed to offer a reading of what is arguably the most pertinent sample (for our purpose)

1 A. Rimbaud, Une saison en enfer, Délires I, Vierge folle (Rimbaud 2003, 204, 492; translation slightly modified): “He was very nearly a child... His mysterious ways seduced me. I forgot all my earthly duties in order to follow him. O this life! Real life is absent. We are not of this world. I go where he goes, how can’t I? And yet he blows up at me all the time, me—the poor soul. That demon!—He is a demon, you know, he is not a man.” Plotinus VI.9 [9] 9.24–26: “And the soul’s innate love makes clear that the Good is there, and this is why Eros is coupled with the Psyches in pictures and stories.”

2 For directions on how to read the references to editions and/or translations of Plotinus’ text see Section 3 of the Preface. A full list of the orders of the Enneads, their titles, and their dates is found in Appendix A. In the present chapter, treatise III.5 [50] On eros is cited only by chapter and line number; unless otherwise indicated, translations of passages from this treatise are mine, as noted in Preface note 7. I particularly benefited from the translations and commentaries of Wolters and Hadot, respectively in English and French, and from the translations and notes by Igal (in Spanish) and Armstrong (in English).
of Plotinian exegesis of Plato’s thought on *eros* in general and of the *Symposium* myth of Eros’ birth in particular: *Enneads* III.5 [50] *On eros* (Section 2.3 and 2.4). The two chapters that follow are two halves of the same diptych which we may call, echoing the title of a work by Agnès Pigler on the topic, *a metaphysics of love.* Thus, Chapter Three will show how love is operative from the point of view of procession, or the derivation of all reality form one single source, namely the One; conversely, Chapter Four will show how *eros* is operative in the process of return, or the soul’s purificatory movement toward its source taken as the highest *desideratum,* that is, the One qua Good.

### 2.2 Plotinus as Interpreter of Plato

Plotinus’ reading of Plato is filtered through a variety of sources, all very likely from within the Greek philosophical tradition, chronologically both prior and posterior

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3 Pigler.

4 The question of a non-Hellenic, most notably Indian, influence on Plotinus is a matter of debate. The issue was stirred particularly, if not originally, by Bréhier in his 1928 book, *La philosophie de Plotin.* Bréhier answered the question positively by tracing parallels between Plotinus and the Indian tradition on the issues of the identity of the source of all reality and the individual’s deepest self (i.e., the coincidence of Brahman and Ātman captured in the “That art thou!”—*Tat tvam asi*—of the *Upaniṣads*: see *Chandogya Upaniṣad* VI.8.7, 9.4, 10.4, 12.3, 13.3, 14.3, 15.3, 16.3), and the overcoming of a sharp dichotomy between subject and object (Bréhier 1961, 107–133). Though not considered implausible in principle, Bréhier’s position was criticized from early on, specifically by Armstrong (1936), who pointed out the lack of both external and internal evidence in support of the thesis: externally the historical data offered by Bréhier are either very thin or of secondary importance; and internally Plotinus’ speculative innovations can be easily explained on the basis of the Greek tradition within which he worked. More fundamentally, Rist (1967, 224–229) argues that Indian derivation is made even more implausible by the fact that the kind of mysticism espoused by Plotinus differs radically from that of the *Upaniṣads* in that Plotinian union with the One does not imply complete identification with it, as it would seem to be the case in the coincidence of Ātman and Brahman, at least in the ordinary interpretation of the *Tat tvam asi* (for a view arguing against the possibility of reading *Tat tvam asi* as an identity statement, see: Brereton 1986; Olivelle 1996, 349). Following Zaehner (1957, especially chapters 8 and 9), Rist calls the former kind of mysticism “theistic,” and the latter, “monistic” (cf. Chapter Four note 234 below). For a brief assessment of the topic in fundamental agreement with these conclusions see Wallis (1995, 13–15); for a detailed survey of views on the issue see Wolters (1982), who ultimately argues for the inconclusiveness of the available evidence.
to Plato. At times he positively employs these sources to throw light on what he takes to be Plato’s doctrine; other times he interprets them to be unfortunate departures from Plato’s original teaching; other times still he sees them as plainly aberrant readings of the Platonic text. Very generally, it seems fair to say, with Charrue, that Plato is Plotinus’ main source, and that Plotinus’ appreciation of other thinkers is directly proportional to their philosophical proximity to what he takes to be Plato’s true teaching.

In relation to the Platonic corpus, Plotinus refers to himself as a mere interpreter

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6 Aristotle is a good example of both cases. If on the one hand Plotinus is critical of Aristotle’s identification of the first principle with thought thinking itself (Metaphysics XII.1074b34–35), on the other he makes ample use of this and other Aristotelian doctrines to develop his own views of the hypostasis Νοῦς and to make sense of several puzzles (e.g., about soul and the sensible world). Often Aristotelian strategies are combined with Platonic views in order to clarify a given point; for instance, the possibility, beyond pure univocity and mere equivocity, of applying the same term to the One and to what derives from it, is supported through a combination of the Aristotelian notion of focal meaning (i.e., all beings are so named in reference to what is “being” primarily, that is, substance) with the Platonic notion of participation (see Bussanich 1999, 60–61). See Rist (1967, 178–180), Wallis (1995, 23–24), Gatti (1999, 11), and, above all, the extensive treatment given to the topic by Szlezák (1979).

7 This, for instance, is the case of Gnosticism, which comes under attack in the so-called Großschrift (III.8 [30], V.8 [31], V.5 [32], II.9 [33]), on which see Roloff (1970), Cilento (1971), and Elsas (1975); cf. also pages 399–400 below. Plotinus states explicitly at II.9 [33] 6.24–28: “[24] And in general they [i.e., the Gnostics] [25] falsify [καταψεύδοντα] Plato’s account of the manner of the making [viz. the fashioning of the sensible universe at the hands of the Demiurge in Plato’s Timaeus], and a [26] great deal else, and degrade [ἔλκουσι] the great man’s teachings as if they [27] had understood the intelligible nature, but he and the other [28] blessed philosophers had not” (cf. also VP 16.9–12).

8 Charrue (1978, 17–23); see also Lacrosse (1994, 17–19). This statement should not lead us to underestimate the positive influence that other authors, especially Aristotle, had in shaping Plotinus’ understanding of Plato (see note 5 above). If we are to trust the testimony of the V century Neoplatonist Hierocles of Alexandria as reported by the Constantinopolitan Patriarch Photius (Bibliotheca 251.461a26–39), Plotinus aimed at bringing together Plato and Aristotle under the same encompassing understanding (διον), a feature which the Alexandrine apparently inherited from his master, Ammonius. Gatti (1999, 21) rightly draws a parallel between this report of Hierocles and Porphyry’s remark that Plotinus “brought the mind [νοῦν] of Ammonius to bear on the investigations in hand” (VP 14.14–16).
of Plato. As an interpreter, however, he chooses carefully the passages to be interpreted. In fact, his interests (and, in fact, the interests of Platonism in general) in Plato’s writings have rightly been called “anthological.” Accordingly, throughout the *Enneads* Plotinus focuses on a few selected dialogues and, perhaps more importantly, on some key passages within them, often paying little attention to the context of these passages in their respective works. This should not surprise us, however, since for Plotinus, what Plato says in his writings is important to the extent that it expresses a truth that is universal and permanent. Such an approach obviously results in a departure from

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9 V.1 [10] 8.10–14: “And [it follows] that these statements of ours are not new; they do not belong to the present time, but were made long ago, not explicitly, and what we have said in this discussion has been an interpretation [ἐξηγητὰς] of them, relying on Plato’s writings for evidence that these views are ancient.” This hardly means that Plotinus merely repeats what Plato wrote. His reading of Plato may remain questionable from the standpoint of modern philology, as I indicate below (note 11). As Dodds (1960, 2) rightly argues in a seminal article, “Plotinus built his structure very largely out of used pieces, the materials that Greek philosophical tradition presented to him. But the essence of the Plotinian system lies in the new meaning which the whole imposed on the parts; its true originality is not in the materials but in the design (as, indeed, I suspect is the case with every great philosophical system).”


11 Schwyzer (1970) has showed how this is the case, for instance, with Plotinus’ interpretation of the *Philebus*. Does this imply that Plotinus is completely unconcerned with what Plato actually meant? If anything, he constantly refers his readers, more or less explicitly, to the dialogues in order to find textual support for his own theories (e.g., I.2 [19] 3.5, II.1 [40] 7.1, III.5 [50] 1.5, III.6 [26] 11.1, III.7 [45] 1.13–16, IV.3 [27] 1.23 ad fin., V.8 [31] 4.51–55, VI.2 [43] 22.1–3, VI.4 [22] 16.4–7). However, he is also aware that Plato is not always transparent but speaks in riddles (αἰνίσσομαι: e.g., III.4 [15] 5.3, IV.2 [4] 2.49, VI.2 [43] 22.1, 13), and consequently needs to be explained and clarified (e.g., IV.8 [6] 1.27; IV.4 [28] 22.10). As I just pointed out, Plotinus sees his own philosophic endeavor as an interpretation of, or commentary on Plato, of whom he is very seldom critical, for instance on pleasure as restoration or replenishment, which, perhaps following Aristotle (*Nicomachean Ethics* X.1173b9–15), he seems to consider a genuine view of Plato (I.4 [46] 12.5–6, VI.7 [38] 25.1–3; cf. McGroarty 2006, 168–169; but see also Chapter Four note 25 below). His reading of the dialogues, however, is seldom accurate when considered from a philological standpoint. And yet, admittedly, this is not the standpoint from which he chooses to operate, as his sharp remark on Longinus’ way of reading Plato confirms: “Longinus is a scholar [φιλόσοφος], but certainly not a philosopher [φιλόσοφος]” (VP 14.19–20), a lover of words, rather than of wisdom. For a commentary on this remark by Plotinus see Pépin (1992). Cf. Seneca (*Letters to Lucilius* 108.23, 30), who highlights a similar contrast between *philosophia* and *philologia* (see also Cicero, *De republica* 1.2).

12 Incidentally, this is also something that Plotinus might have learned from Plato (*Symposium* 201c6–9). In this light, perhaps, we can explain his lack of interest in the so-called aporetic dialogues, as well as in
what Plato actually said—if, that is, anyone could establish apodictically what this is.

And yet, Augustine’s well-known remark that in Plotinus Plato lived again13 is not as far-fetched as it would seem at first if one is willing to concede, with Rist, that “there are certain elements in the thought of Plato himself which, if isolated, will turn him into a proto-Plotinus, if any notion of a rigid Platonic system be maintained.”14

This possibility of mapping the main structure of the Plotinian system from some isolated Platonic elements is possible if at least three interconnected conditions are taken into account. The first condition is that some specific texts from the Platonic corpus are selected in which Plato is ambiguous or else appears to contradict statements he makes elsewhere.15 Secondly, one must allow for the possibility that some philosophical problems that are treated explicitly only in the subsequent tradition of Platonism may in fact be present in Plato at least implicitly.16 It is a good reader’s task to point out such problems and, qua philosopher, seek answers to (and textual support for) them, which is just what Plotinus tries to do in his writings. Thirdly, Plotinus reads Plato with an eminently practical interest in mind, that is, the improvement of one’s soul through the

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13 Augustine, *Contra Academicos* III.41.

14 Rist (1967, 58); see also Reale (2004, VIII, 57). I tried to highlight some of these elements in my reading of Plato’s view of *eros* throughout Chapter One, especially Subsection 1.5.2.

15 “Elsewhere” here may include not only his writings but also the unwritten doctrines (ἄγραφα δόγματα) mentioned by Aristotle in *Physics* IV.209b15 (see Chapter One note 17).

16 It goes without saying that the same claim could be made about Plotinus (cf. Rist 1971, 77–78), and indeed about every philosopher.
practice of philosophy: thus, what we may call a lack of emphasis on a philological or scholarly approach to the Platonic text has its positive counterpart in Plotinus’ faithfulness to and focus on what he took to be the core of Plato’s teaching, namely its usefulness in view of improving one’s life in the face of particular questions raised by a particular audience. It follows that Plotinus’ reading of Plato is primarily not a historico-critical affair with each individual dialogue, but an active engagement of the text on the background of questions and objections raised by other schools of his time.

17 None of these three conditions is exclusive to Plotinus’ reading of Plato. However, one will recognize that the first is generally avoided, at least ideally, by contemporary readers of Plato, whose philosophical interests are (should be?) hardly ever divorced from philological concerns. By contrast, the second condition is still very much part of the way we read Plato, to the point that his greatness is attested in part also by the best readers’ ability to show how philosophical questions that received extensive treatment only later in the history of philosophy can already be found, albeit in embryone, in the dialogues. As for the third condition, in my experience within the academia thus far I have found very few readers of Plato who explicitly recognize that the object of their study may have a direct impact on their efforts to improve their lives.

18 If we are to trust Porphyry, this applies also to Plotinus’ composition of his own writings (VP 8). According to Rist (1967, 170–173), this privilege accorded to philosophy over philology may correspond to the method Plotinus inherited from his master, Ammonius. See also O’Meara (1993, 6–7).

19 May we argue, then, that Plotinus’ philosophical production is also dialogical, but in a way different than Plato’s? In the latter the dialogue, though sometimes possibly rooted in actual conversations surrounding the historical figure of Socrates, may be the literary form he chooses for the discourse of philosophy as such (see my discussion at pages 27–30). The treatises of the Enneads, by contrast, are elaborations of replies to questions asked by an actual audience (see VP 13; 4.10–11), sometimes put in writing only because of the insistence of close persons, Porphyry in primis (VP 5.5–7).

L. Brisson and A.-Ph. Segonds (in Brisson et al. 1992, 223) remark that, while for authors like Origen and Jerome the claim to have put their thoughts in writing under the insistence of some friends might have been merely false modesty, for Plotinus this is unlikely to be the case, since the claim is made not by Plotinus himself, but by Porphyry. They fail to consider that this fact may be lack of modesty on the part of Porphyry, who, by pointing at his own influence on Plotinus, would lead posterity to direct some of the praise given to the Enneads to the insistence that occasioned their production. But if Porphyry overestimates the influence of his insistence on his master (e.g., perhaps, when he undervalues the quality of the treatises that Plotinus wrote late in his life, when Porphyry was in Sicily and Plotinus was ill; cf. Igal 1972, 104–106), it may very well be that Plotinus’ case is not unlike that of Origen and Jerome, whatever this may be. For all I can tell, the difference between Plotinus and these authors on the issue is that while the latter did not shun from including an autobiographical reference in their writings, Plotinus’ own silence about what led him to put his thoughts in writing may simply be part of his broader reluctance to speak and leave behind something of himself (cf. VP 1).

20 Hence Gerson’s judgment on Plotinus’ general approach to the dialogues: “I believe the best way to
Now, among Plotinus’ favorite dialogues is the Symposium and, in it, Socrates’ speech, in particular the story of Eros’ birth (203a9–e5) and the so-called Greater Mysteries of love (209e5–212a7), as well as Pausanias’ distinction of a double Aphrodite and a double Eros (180c3–e3 ff.). The first and last of these three passages constitute the focus of a large portion of Enneads III.5 [50], with which I will deal in the next section (2.2). Before I turn to it, however, we should ask: Granted that Plotinus’ exegesis of Plato is philologically far from impeccable, how does he manage to make it philosophically plausible? The three conditions briefly outlined in the previous paragraph are already a partial answer to this question. Further help is provided by Lacrosse, who offers three methodological viewpoints which characterize Plotinus’ overall reading of Plato. The first viewpoint is what Lacrosse calls a “sublimated Platonism,” the second, an “objectifying (or ontologizing) and syncretistic exegesis,” and the third is Plotinus’

distinguish Plotinus’ Platonism both from Plato’s and from the versions of Neoplatonism that came after Plotinus is to focus on Plotinus’ response to the most serious objections raised against Platonism. These objections, principally Aristotelian and Stoic, naturally presume specific interpretations of Plato’s claims. Plotinus’ Platonism is, roughly, the reformulation of these claims in response to these objections. These reformulations rarely correspond with exactness to anything to be found in the dialogues” (Gerson 1999, 6). Regrettably much of the material that would help us to reconstruct the objections and alternative philosophical positions of Plotinus’ interlocutors is available to us only in fragmentary form.

21 The Symposium is only one of three dialogues explicitly mentioned in the Enneads (III.5 [50] 2.7, 5.2; see also VP 15.7, 23.9), the others being the Philebus (III.5 [50] 8.9, IV.3 [27] 7.1, VI.7 [38] 25.2–3; see also VP 20.42) and the Phaedrus (III.5 [50] 8.7, IV.3 [27] 7.12–13, IV.8 [6] 1.36–37). Gatti (1999, 11) includes the Theaetetus and the Republic in this list, but if to cite a dialogue “explicitly” means to name its title, I must admit that I have been unable to find explicit mention of these two dialogues, whether in the Enneads or in SP (the Republic is mentioned at VP 20.43, the Gorgias at VP 20.42, probably the Laws at VP 12.6, and presumably the Critias at VP 7.14). However, citations and allusions (the difference between the two seems to be rather thin: see Szlezák 1979, 19 note 39) to other dialogues abound, especially to Phaedo, Parmenides, Sophist, Republic, Theaetetus, and Timaeus (see the Index fontium of any modern edition of the Enneads).

22 We will find these viewpoints operative in the brief exposition of Enneads III.5 [50] in the next section.
way of reading mythical narratives. In the remainder of this section I will briefly touch on these three viewpoints.

According to Lacrosse, what constitutes the sublimating aspect of the Plotinian reading of Plato is the fact that Plotinus takes a doctrine of his master “in order to raise its points of application and thus purify its extension.” With respect to our topic, the doctrine in question is Plato’s view of love as presented in Socrates’ second discourse in the *Phaedrus*. The sphere of interest of this discourse within the dialogue is human love. Now, the language of love, through which Socrates in the *Phaedrus* introduces the possibility of a dialectical ascent to the world of Ideas, is extended beyond the sphere of interpersonal human love and is employed to describe a mystical experience. Further, while the language of dialectic leads to the realm of Intellect but also stops there, the language of love is still operative to describe the further ascent to the One beyond

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23 The three viewpoints can be found in Lacrosse (1994, respectively at pages 21–30, 30–35, and 35–41).

24 Lacrosse (1994, 30 note 59): “pour élever ses points d’application et purifier ainsi son extension.” To avoid confusion with a remark I made in Chapter One note 211, it should be kept in mind that this kind of sublimation is not Freudian sublimation. In the context of Plotinian exegesis, it is a matter of seeing how the dynamic that takes place in a certain sphere has an analogue in (or, more in keeping with Plotinus’ view of reality, is an analogue of) a different, ontologically superior, sphere. For Freud, on the other hand, sublimation is the channeling of sexual energy toward objects or activities that are seemingly unrelated to sexuality.

25 As Hadot (1993, 54) writes, “when Plotinus uses the language of the *Phaedrus* it is not, as it was for Plato, in order to describe human love, but rather immediately to express a mystical experience. For Plotinus, human love is no longer the starting point or first stage in a gradual ascent, but has become a mere term of comparison. It is only a reflection of that genuine love which is infused into the soul by the Good.” See also Hadot (1988, 291–293), PIGLER (17). However, I think it would be wrong, in light of this statement, to claim that human love, of which sexuality is a fundamental expression, has no place in the ascent. While it is true that the ascent does not have to start with sexual love, it certainly can move its first steps form there, as Plotinus himself attests (I.3 [20] 2). Thus, strictly, human love does not “immediately [...] express a mystical experience,” but rather might direct to such an experience the one who is willing to understand the nature of eros at work in sexuality (see also note 51 below). To this extent, one can argue that Plotinus does not differ from Plato as strikingly as Hadot (and perhaps more so PIGLER) seems to maintain, since for both thinkers the love of the beauty of bodies is both a genuine expression of Beauty and an opportunity to rise (though not to rise necessarily) to qualitatively superior expressions of Beauty.
Intellect as well as the process of derivation of all reality from a single source. I will make these claims more explicit and support them in the next two chapters.

In addition to this, Lacrosse describes Plotinus’ exegesis of Plato as objectifying (or ontologizing) and syncretistic. The chief Plotinian example of the objectifying aspect of this description is the hierarchical classification of the threefold One of the Platonic Parmenides in the three Plotinian hypostases: the One as the principal One (i.e., One in the proper sense, the single source of all reality, itself beyond all form and determination); Intellect as the one-many (i.e., the one-which-is-one: multiple unity, or Nous as the ever actual unification of thinking and the multiplicity of the intelligibles qua object of thought), and Soul as the one-and-many (i.e., both unity and multiplicity, ever borrowing from Nous its object of contemplation, which it always approximates dianoetically without ever possessing it in noetic actuality). By syncretically relating

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26 Hence Trouillard’s (occasionally misquoted: e.g., by Lacrosse 1994, 27; PiGler 17) remark: “quand la dialectique a achevé sa tâche, l’amour n’a pas fini la sienne” (Trouillard 1995b, 157).

27 I will consistently capitalize the terms “one” and “intellect” when these refer to the first two so-called hypostases of the Plotinian system: the One and Intellect (or Nous). The term “intellect” will not be capitalized when it refers to the particular intellects connected to individual rational souls. As for the term “soul,” I will capitalize it only when it indicates the Soul-Hypostasis and the World-Soul, while I will leave it in small case when its referent is either soul in an undetermined sense or individual embodied souls. On these distinctions see Section 2.3 and Subsection 3.4.2 below; on the term “individual” as applied to souls, see note 83; on the term ὑπόστασις see Section 2.4.

28 V.1 [10] 8.25–26: [25] ...τὸ πρῶτον ἕν, ὁ κυριώτερον ἕν, καὶ δεύτερον [26] ἕν πολλά λέγων, καὶ τρίτον ἕν καὶ πολλὰ. The first One (i.e., the One) is also called “the absolute One” (τὸ πάντως ἕν and παντελῶς ἕν: VI.2 [43] 9.6 and 30), while the the second One (i.e., Nous) is also called “the One that is” (τὸ ἕν ὃν: VI.2 [43] 9.8, 10.11, VI.4 [22] 11.20); cf. Proclus, Platonic Theology I.11.47.10–12: ...τὸ μὲν πρῶτον ἕν τιθεμένος, τὸν δὲ νοῦν ἕν πολλά, τὴν δὲ ψυχὴν ἕν καὶ πολλά, τὰ δὲ σώματα πολλὰ καὶ ἕν. The references to Plato’s Parmenides correspond to what traditionally are referred to as the first three hypotheses of the notoriously difficult second part of the dialogue: the absolutely simple One (137c4–142a8), the one which is one with Being, hence a one-many (142b1–155e3; 144e5: ἕν πολλά; cf. Chapter Three note 200), and the one which is both one and many (155e4–157b5; 155e5: ἐν τε ὁν καὶ πολλά; cf. Chapter Three note 260). For an extensive treatment of Plotinus’ three hypostases in light of his reading of the Parmenides see especially Dodds (1928), who first worked out extensively the identification of the One of the first hypothesis of the Parmenides and the Good of the Republic that is at the basis of Plotinus’
these three “ones” to different and seemingly incongruent utterances in the Platonic
corpus, Plotinus manages to overcome the ambiguities found in Plato. Thus, the Good
beyond being of Republic VI.509b9 is equated to the One of the first hypothesis of the
Parmenides, which is superior and transcends the realm of Intellect and corresponds to
Plotinus’ One. In contrast, Plato’s referring to the Good as still an idea (although the
supreme one) in Republic VI–VII,\(^\text{29}\) is taken as an indication that in these passages he is
talking, not about the absolutely simple One, but about the One-Many, which coincides
with Being and corresponds to Plotinus’ Intellect.

This way of reading the Platonic text reaches beyond the Parmenides. Thus,
where Plato speaks of the soul at times as simple (e.g., in the Phaedo) and at times as
composite (e.g., in the Timaeus, but also in the Republic), Plotinus sees these claims as
the expression of two different and yet connected realities, respectively the Soul-
Hypostasis and individual souls mixed with body.\(^\text{30}\) And as Lacrosse remarks, this
practice is not limited to concepts, but extends to mythical figures as well: for instance
the figure of Eros, which Plato alternately conceives as a god (Phaedrus 242d9), as a
daimon\(^\text{31}\) (Symposium 202d13), and as an affection (πάθος) of the soul (Phaedrus 252b2).
As we shall see in the next section, for Plotinus these seemingly contrasting descriptions

\(^{29}\) Plato, Republic VI.505a2, 507b5–7, 508e3, VII.517c1, 526e1, 534c1.

\(^{30}\) IV.2 [4] 2; see also VI.4 [22] 4. Souls mixed with body include both individual souls and the World-
Soul. On the appropriateness of this denomination see note 83.

\(^{31}\) As with Plato, I will simply transliterate the terms δαίμων and ἔρως (cf. Preface note 3, Chapter One note
113) though I will occasionally refer to the latter as “love” and capitalize it when it is obvious that it is
the proper name of the mythical character Eros.
of Eros become compatible as he refers them to three different kinds of love.

This brings me to the third viewpoint mentioned by Lacrosse, which constitutes a general key to Plotinus’ way of reading mythical narratives such as that of Eros’ birth found in the Symposium. It is Plotinus himself who gives us this key explicitly at III.5 [50] 9.24–29:

[24] Now myths, if they are really going to be myths, must both divide temporally the things of which they speak, and separate from each other many [facets] of the [26] beings which, though existing in unity, are nevertheless distinguished in rank or powers (seeing that [27] even reasoned discourses both introduce generations of things ungenerated and [28] they too separate things that exist in unity); and once [the myths] have fulfilled their didactic function as best as they can, [29] they allow the one who understood [them] to re-compose [what was divided].

This passage chiefly clarifies three things. First, myths are not descriptions of factual events, but narrative elaborations of realities whose separation is, rather than spatiotemporal, one of “rank or power.” Secondly, the division operated by myths is not

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32 III.5 [50] 9.24–29: [24] Δεί δὲ τοὺς μύθους, εἴπερ τοῦτο ἔσονται, καὶ μερίζειν [25] χρόνοις ἢ λέγουσιν, καὶ διαφέρειν αὐτῷ ἀλλήλων πολλά τῶν [26] ὄντων ὁμοίοι μὲν ὄντα, τἀξεῖ δὲ ἢ δυνάμεις διαφέροντα, ὡς που [27] καὶ οἱ λόγοι καὶ γενέσεις τῶν ἄγεννητων ποιοῦσι, καὶ τὰ [28] ὁμοίοι ὄντα καὶ αὐτοὶ διαιροῦσι, καὶ διαδέχοντας ὡς διανύονται [29] τῷ νοσήματι ἄμα συγχωροῦσαν συναριθμόν. For a similar view, cf. Sallustius, On the Gods and the World IV.9; the last two lines of this text are particularly significant: “Now, these things never occurred in any particular moment, but always are; and Intellect sees all things at once, while discursive reason expresses some first and others later” (Ταῦτα δὲ ἐγένετο μὲν οὐδέποτε, ἐστὶ δὲ ἀεὶ καὶ ὃ μὲν νοῦς ἀμα πάντα ὁρᾷ, ὅ δὲ λόγος τὰ μὲν πρῶτα τὰ δὲ δεύτερα λέγει; my translation).


34 Cf. VI.7 [38] 35.27–30.

35 WOLTERS (249) rightly notes that the double καὶ at lines 24–25 of this passage is correlative; its purpose is to “separate and coordinate two related but distinct features of myths: the presentation of 1) the eternal as temporal, and 2) the integral as separated.” The same goes for the second and third καὶ at line 27. The extent to which Plotinus’ reading of myths is allegorical in the way Philo’s works, Porphyry’s Cave of the Nymphs, or Plutarch’s De Iside et Osiride (Moralia V) are, is debated. Pépin (1955, 5; 1976, 190) criticizes de Gandillac’s (1952, vii, note 1) claim that Plotinus is “rarement allégoriste.” Pépin may be right, given also his treatment of several myths found in the Enneads (Pépin 1955; 1976, 190–209, 378–384), and yet de Gandillac’s remark does not sound so hasty when one compares Plotinus’ rather moderate allegorism with the doubtlessly more explicit one of the authors I just mentioned.
ultimate but propaedeutic: in fact, those who have understood their purpose are enabled to see the unity of that which the mythical account separated. And thirdly, while we should emphasize the proximity of *mythos* and *logos* insofar as they appear to have in common the procedure of division (διαίρεσις), we should not conflate them, since *οἱ λόγοι* at line 27 does not seem to be equated but rather contrasted with *τοὺς μύθους* at line 24. Therefore, in this passage *mythos* and *logos* must be distinguished clearly, if minimally, although in the present context we are not given to know what the difference

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36 For this reason, the ὁμοῦ at lines 26 and 28 does not indicate mere proximity, but interpenetration of what is together, hence my translation of it as “in unity”; cf. III.5 [50] 7.51, 9.14 (see WOLTERS 211 and 250).

37 Thus, I think that Lacrosse (1994, 37–38) overstates his case when he claims that Hadot’s translation of λόγοι at III.5 [50] 9.27 as “discours rationnels” (HADOT, ad loc.) introduces an erroneous opposition between *mythos* and *logos*. He goes on to argue that, on the contrary, in this text λόγοι should be taken as meaning “récits mythiques,” which are indeed rational, but that should not be differentiated from the μύθους with which the passage began. I rather think that the text makes better sense if read as expressing a qualified contrast between *mythos* and *logos* (see also Harrington 1975, 119). Virtually all the translators cited in the first subsection of the section of the Bibliography titled “Plotinus,” with the exception of Guthrie and, curiously, all of the four older French translators (Bouillet, Alta, Meunier, and Bréhier), render λόγοι with terms implying that Plotinus is talking about something other than *mythos*. Some examples: “rationes” (Ficino 1492); “begriffliche Darstellungen” (H. F. Müller); “wissenschaftliche Darlegungen” (Harder); “esposizioni scientifiche” (Cilento); “ragionamenti” (Faggin); “philosophy” (MacKenna and Page); “rational discourses” (ARMSTRONG); “reasoned discourses” (WOLTERS); “exposiciones razonadas” (IGAL); more safely, the Japanese translators (Mizuchi, Tanogashira and Tanaka) write 论説 (*ronsetsu*: “discourses,” the first kanji conveying the meaning of “argument,” “discussion”) and provide the phonetic, *katakana* rendering of λόγοι (ロゴイ) in *furigana* next to their translation, as they also did with μύθους on line 24 (物語, *monogatari*; ミューテス). If what is at stake for Lacrosse is to avoid setting up too stark a contrast between *mythos* and *logos* (hence his speaking of *mythos* as “logos mythique”: Lacrosse 1994, 38), it seems to me that it would be easier to defend the proximity of these terms by simply observing that for Plotinus they share a common procedure, that of division (διαίρεσις). This procedure, to be sure, is common to all discourse. Thus, the contrast between *logos* and *mythos* is only a secondary one: the real contrast is that between the diachronic unfolding of elements common to all discourse and their synchronic coexistence in noetic intuition (cf. HADOT 23, 246; see also my remarks in Appendix D). Therefore, even to speak of a “logos mythique” does not guarantee the rationality of mythical discourse unless *mythos*, like *logos*, is understood as a species, so to speak, of the diachronic unfolding of the contents of Intellect at a lower hypostatic level. Cf. IV.3 [27] 30.7–9; see also the following note. (Thanks to Kenji Aoki for kindly reviewing my transliterations of the Japanese translation of the *Enneads*, Mizuchi, Tanogashira and Tanaka 1986–1988, whenever I cite it verbatim.)
between the two kinds of discourse is.\footnote{To my knowledge, Plotinus never deals explicitly with the distinction between \textit{mythos} and \textit{logos} (hence the partial justification for Lacrosse’s critique mentioned in the previous note). May it be that \textit{logos} in the more technical sense of rational discourse includes also the procedure contrary to division (διαίρεσις), namely re-composition (9.29: συναρέειν, συναίρεσις), while \textit{mythos} differs from \textit{logos} not only for the fantastic and often poetic character of its narratives, but also because it implies only \textit{a diairetic} procedure? Or are we to say that both \textit{mythos} and \textit{logos} are only \textit{diairetic} in nature? If the latter is the case, it is hard to imagine what kind of “discourse,” other than “mythical” and “rational,” would characterize the reassembling procedure; that for Plotinus the act of reassembling does not coincide with the intuitive grasp of the elements in unity but is a kind of discourse, and as such also diachronic (see previous note), seems beyond doubt, as he himself shows in the discursive re-composition of his own exegesis of Eros in III.5 [50] 9.29–57. Cf. IV.3 [27] 9.14–20, 10.1–2 ff. for what one might refer to as a non-mythical sample—should we call it “logic or dianoetic” (τῷ λόγῳ καὶ τῇ διανοίᾳ: 9.19–20)?—of the practice of division (here called “analysis,” ἀναλοίαν: 9.19) and re-composition in the \textit{Enneads} which should enable one to “grasp in unity” (ὁμοῦ λαβεῖν: 10.2) what was divided only through \textit{logos} (τῷ λόγῳ: 9.19); see also IV.6 [8] 4.35–42, VI.7 [38] 3.4, 35.28. On a terminological note, διαίρεσις is one of the names of the dialectical procedure in the \textit{Theaetetus}, and especially throughout the \textit{Sophist} and \textit{Statesman}; in \textit{Phaedrus} 266b3–7, Plato couples division with another operation, collection (συναγωγή), in the context of dialectic (cf. also \textit{Phaedrus} 249b5–c4). If, despite its having been placed at the end of the treatise, we take the passage on myth as programmatic of \textit{Enneads} III.5 [50], then we can safely suppose that what Plotinus does in his inquiry \textit{On Eros} is also an experiment in Platonic dialectic minimally understood as the science of correct division and collection. What is being divided in order to be better understood is, first, love or desire, and, second, the soul itself as that in which love inheres.}

To sum up, Plato is Plotinus’ primary source, but Plotinian exegesis cannot be reduced to a literal or philological exegesis of Plato. Thus, while Plato remains Plotinus’ starting point, he admits that the Platonic text is not always transparent, so that on the one hand he has to explain it (sometimes by critically employing material from other thinkers, especially Aristotle), and on the other, in so doing, he develops a philosophy of his own that neither coincides with nor is independent of Plato.\footnote{As PIGLER (11) remarks, this is the very ideal of exegesis: creativity on the basis of a well-established tradition.}

\section*{2.3 An Overview of \textit{Enneads} III.5 [50] \textit{On Eros}}

As Wolters shows, this treatise is neither a lecture nor a mere commentary, but a philosophical inquiry,\footnote{WOLTERS (xi–xii).} which takes the mythical figure of Eros as presented in the
Symposium (particularly in Diotima’s account of his birth at 203a9–204a7), as its guiding element for addressing the question: “What is eros?” The purpose of the treatise is readily stated in its opening lines: to investigate whether eros “is a god, or a daimon, or an affection of the soul, or if one is a god or a daimon and another an affection, and what kind of thing each is” (1.1–3). Unsurprisingly, the main reference is Plato, whose seemingly contrasting utterances on eros’ nature are here interpreted in a syncretistic way, as I pointed out in Section 2.2. Therefore, the problem, from here to the end of the treatise, will be to put aside the first, exclusive alternative of the indirect question about eros (i.e., whether he is a god, a daimon or an affection of the soul) by showing in what sense the second, more inclusive alternative (i.e., that eros is all these things) is to be pursued. After the introductory lines (1.1–10), the remaining material in the treatise comprises three major divisions: 1.10–65 (eros as an affection of the soul;

\[\text{\footnote{As with Plato’s, Plotinus’ jargon of desire is varied. Here is the same list of terms given in Chapter One note 76 as they occur in the Enneads (cf. Radice and Bombacigno 2004) with numbers in parentheses again referring respectively to the occurrences of the term in question, and to those of its immediate verbal, adjectival, and substantive cognates: ἀγάπη (0, 31); ἀφροδίσιος (5, 0); βουλή (2); δίσις (1, 28); ἔπιθυμη (70, 53); ἔρως (65); Ἐρως (27), and their adjectival and verbal cognates ἔρωτικός (10) and ἔρωι (39); ἔρεις (54, 90); ἔθλες (10, 178); ἔθμος (34, 18) and its cognate προθυμία (10, 3); ἔφεσις (0, 1); ὀρεξις (50, 26); ὄρη (31, 25); πόθος (7, 18); φιλία (6, 51); cf. also σπουδή (7, 77) and ὠδίς (10, 6). Composite nouns (e.g., φιλομάθης) are not included in this calculation. Plotinus’ use of these terms is rather loose. I already pointed out (Chapter One note 76) that the term στοργή (love or affection, in particular of parents and children, though rarely it may indicate sexual love: cf. LSJ, s.v.) never appears in Plotinus. As remarked by Arnou (1967, 63), “entre tous ces termes ἔρως, ἔφεσις, πόθος, ὀρεξις, ὄρη, il ne reste chez Plotin que des nuances, qui souvent s’effacent” (see also Gerson 1994, 151, who endorses this conclusion; cf. Chapter Four note 5). As a general warning to the reader of the Enneads, Rist (1967, 43) writes that “Plotinus’ use of terminology is not always a guide to his thought.”}}

\[\text{\footnote{III.5 [50] 1.1–3. As indicated in Section 3 of the Preface, for the sake of brevity from this point through the end of Chapter Two in my references to Enneads III.5 [50] I will report only chapter and line numbers. References to other treatises are given in full.}}\]

\[\text{\footnote{Other sources of Plotinus’ dissertation are the θεολόγοι (2.2, 8.21), that is, “ancient mythologizing poets” (WOLTERS, 47), probably including Hesiod (Theogony 120–121), the Orphics (fragments 1, 2, 28, 37), and Acusilaus (DK 9.B1–3 = Damascius, De principiis 124, III.163.19–164.8; Plato, Symposium 178b8–9; Scholia to Theocritus XIII.1/2). Cf. also Proclus, Commentary on Plato’s Republic I, 132–140.}}\]
classification of eros}; 2.1–4.25 (Eros as a god and as a daimon); 5.1–9.57 (Eros as daimon: exegesis of the Symposium myth of Eros’ birth). A more detailed outline of the treatise can be found in Table 2 on the next page.

I will deal with the classification of eros as an affection of the soul in Subsection 2.3.1, and reserve another subsection to clarify Plotinus’ reading of the elements found in the Symposium myths (2.3.2). In the following section (2.4) I will comment on what I take to be the central tenet of Enneads III.5 [50], namely Plotinus’ view of eros as something belonging to the soul not accidentally but essentially.

2.3.1 Enneads III.5 [50] 1.10–65: Eros as an Affection of the Soul:

Classification of Eros

The Platonic text at the basis of the claim that eros can be an affection of the soul is Phaedrus 252b2, where the experience of love is explicitly called a πάθος.44 The fundamental thesis of this division (and, in fact, of the whole treatise) is not only that eros “arises in souls that long to be joined to something beautiful” (1.11–12),45 but more

44 In Plotinus the term πάθος is used synonymously with πάθημα (e.g., 1.65; Wolters 8). On occasion, I simply transliterate the word πάθος (pathos), but in general I follow Armstrong in rendering both πάθος and πάθημα with “affection.” It should be observed, however, that since the description of eros in its pure form can be applied not only to individual embodied souls, but also to the World-Soul and to the Soul-Hypostasis, and since pure eros is called πάθος, one might be tempted to infer that the World-Soul and the Soul-Hypostasis are subject to something accidental, an emotion or a passion (the first two senses in LSJ, s.v.; see this and the next subsection on these classifications of Soul). This does not seem to be the case in Plotinus. The best solution would be to opt for a more neutral translation of the term πάθος; regrettably, no such translation is available among those afforded by LSJ (s.v.; “condition” as found under πάθος LSJ A.III and under πάθημα LSJ A.II still seems to retain the sense of something happening to the soul only accidentally) nor, for that matter, in E. A. Sophocles (1900, s.v.) or Kittel and Friedrich (1964–1976, V, s.v. πάσχω). Thus, I will continue to translate the two terms with “affection” while maintaining that when I refer to the eros of the World-Soul and of the Soul-Hypostasis as pure, I am not implying that eros is a pathos or accidental affection. See also note 87 below.

45 The text at the basis of this affirmation is Symposium 204c–209e.
Table 2. An Outline of Enneads III.5 [50] On Eros*

<table>
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<th>I. Introduction</th>
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<td>Subject and method of the treatise (1.1–10)</td>
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**II. Eros as an affection of the soul (1.10–65)**

1. Two kinds of love: temperate and shameful (1.10–16).
2. The genesis of love: desire for Beauty itself (1.16–38).
3. Fourfold subdivision of the two kinds of love (1.38–65).
   a. Pure love with recollection (1.38–39).
   b. Mixed love: in accordance with nature (1.40–46).
   • Statement of the difference between pure and mixed love (1.46–50).
   c. Deviant love: at variance with nature (1.50–55).
   • Restatement of the difference between pure and mixed love (1.55–65).

**III. Eros as a god and as a daimon (2.1–4.25)**

1. The problem of Eros’ relation to Aphrodite (2.1–19).
   a. Main theme and sources, especially Plato (2.1–9).
   b. Puzzle: Was Eros born of Aphrodite, with her, or both? (2.10–14).
3. Heavenly Eros: pure love (2.32–3.27).
   a. The nature of pure love (2.32–39).
   b. Metaphorically: Eros is like an eye (2.39–46).
   c. Generated from the Soul’s contemplation of Intellect (3.6–13).
   d. The “etymology” of Eros: ὅρασις (3.14–19).
   e. Summation: pure Eros and pure Soul (3.19–27).
4. Eros as daimon (3.27–4.9).
   a. The Eros of the World-Soul (3.27–38).
   b. Eros of individual souls as the substantial daimon of each soul (4.1–9).
5. The Hierarchy of erotes and their corresponding souls (4.9–25).
   a. Relations between erotes and souls (9–15).
   b. Eros’ varied manifestations in the world (15–23).
   c. Summation and transition (23–25).

**IV. Exegesis of the Symposium myth: Eros as daimon (5.1–9.57)**

1. Problem: the Symposium on the nature of daimons (5.1–4 ⇒ 6.1 ff.).
2. Objections to the identification of Eros with the sensible world (5.5–21).
4. Six questions and five answers on daimons (6.7–45).
   a. Q&A 1: How daimons differ from gods: they are subject to passion; gods are not (6.7–13).
   d. Q&A 4: Daimons as traces of soul in the cosmos (6.24–27).
   f. A 5.a: only Eros sprouts from the Soul’s desire of the good, other daimons for the sake of administering the world (6.28–35).
      i. Daimons share in intelligible matter (6.25–35).

[ Exegesis of the myth proper (7.1–9.57) ]

ii. Penia as the mythical representation of intelligible matter (7.1–9).
iii. Poros as the mythical representation of Logos (7.9–12).
iv. Eros as a mixture of his parents (7.12–25).
   h. A 5.b: Daimons and the three kinds of love (7.26–58).
      i. Other daimons are like Eros, but desire particular goods (7.26–30).
      ii. Universal Eros; desires for particulars; evil desires (7.30–39).
      iii. Only natural erotes are good in ousia (7.39–46).
      v. Analogy of erotes and thoughts (7.49–58).
5. Other elements of the myth of Eros’ birth in the Symposium (8.1–23).
   a. Zeus as Intellect and his relation to Aphrodite (8.1–23).
      i. Zeus as Intellect and Aphrodite as Soul (8.1–17).
      ii. Godesses as the souls of gods; Aphrodite as Hera, Zeus’ spouse (8.17–23).
   b. Poros, Zeus’ garden, and nectar are all symbols of logos (9.1–23).
      i. Poros’ relation to Intellect and Soul; nectar and garden (9.1–16).
      ii. Nectar is logos as the drink of inferior divinity (9.16–19).
      iii. Garden is logos as the place outside of Zeus-Intellect (9.19–23).
   b. Division and recomposition of the elements of myth in Eros’ story (9.29–39).

radically that its origin (ἀρχή) is a desire for Beauty itself present in soul (1.16–19).  

Hadot rightly points out that in the first chapter of III.5 [50] desire for Beauty itself is not distinguished from the desire for the Good (cf. 1.17, 23–24, and 64), so that here Plotinus’ claim is not unlike the countless instances in which he states, “the absolute anteriority” of the desire for the Good to all desiring.  

What reasons does Plotinus offer for the claim that the presence of this desire for the Good under the aspect of Beauty is something present “formerly” (πρότερον: 1.17) in the soul, that is, it is innate or connatural (σύμφυτος) to it? He writes that the presence of Beauty itself to the soul is, or rather grounds, a kind of “recognition, an affinity, and an

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46 Beauty itself (αὐτὸ τὸ κάλλος) or, simply, Beauty (here capitalized to avoid equivocation with the plurality of beautiful things participating in it) is obviously a Platonic expression (see Plato, *Parmenides* 134c6–8, *Phaedrus* 250e2, *Greater Hippias* 292d2, *Republic* V.476c2–3, 479a2).  

47 See Hadot (151): “c’est le désir du bien qui a cette antériorité absolue”; cf. also de Gandillac (1952, 63–64). See I.6 [1] 7.1, I.7 [54] 1.22, V.5 [32] 12.7–8, VI.5 [23] 1.12, VI.7 [38] 33.29, 42.12; cf. Plato, *Philebus* 20d8; Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* I.1094a3. Elsewhere, at V.5 [32] 12, Plotinus does distinguish more precisely between desire of the Good and desire of Beauty and emphatically subordinates the latter to the former. He argues that while Beauty is grasped only by those who already know it and have already been painfully awoken to it by eros (see Plato, *Phaedrus* 249c–252c; cf. Plotinus I.6 [1] 4.12–22), the desire for the Good is naturally and gracefully present even to those who are asleep and unaware of it and is beyond recollection (cf. VI.7 [38] 22). This distinction between Beauty and the Good, however, does not seem to be operative in the first chapter of III.5 [50] (but see also 6.29: τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ καὶ καλοῦ). Thus it must also follow, for the text to be free of contradiction, that the connatural eros mentioned in this treatise does not coincide with the one presented in V.5 [32] 12. Tentatively, I take the difference between the erotes in the two treatises to be one of extension. More specifically, the eros in V.5 [32] 12 is the desire of Beauty understood technically as an Idea (or, elsewhere, as representative of the entire realm of Intellect: V.1 [10] 7.27–30, V.8 [31] 1.1–6, VI.7 [38] 18.1–2); instead, the eros of III.5 [50] is of a more comprehensive kind, since its referent is not Beauty taken strictly as noetic Beauty, but first Beauty as an analogue of the Good, true ἀρχή of all eros (1.17, 23–24, 64), further as the archetypal (noetic) Beauty of which there can be recollection (1.33, 40), and finally as the several images, “here below,” of the archetypal Beauty (1.26, 35). More explicit parallels on which I base this interpretation are I.6 [1] 6.23–26, 7.14–18, 28–29, 9.37–43, VI.7 [38] 32.24–39, 33.21–22, VI.8 [39] 15.1–2. Helpful remarks on the subject can be found in IGAL. (I, 38–39), O’Meara (1993, 97–99), Gerson (1994, 212), Corrigan (2005, 216–217). See also note 49 and pages 328–330 below.  

awareness of kinship [with it] independent of reason." But how does this recognition take place? Patently, as we experience beautiful things, which are taken to be "images" (εἰκών: 1.26, 35) of Beauty itself. The reasoning behind these affirmations seems to be the following: if we feel a loving transport toward beautiful things, it must be because we recognize something in them that makes them beautiful, and hence desirable; this "factor" is Beauty itself, and things called beautiful are desired as images of it; the possibility of this recognition is not a product of our encounter with beautiful things, but is itself a prior predisposition connatural to the soul which is activated or heightened, as it were, by the presence of images of Beauty. All experiences that we might refer to as

49 1.17–18: [17] ἐπίγνωσιν [18] καὶ συγγένειαν καὶ οἰκειότητος ἄλογον σύνεσιν. HADOT (100 note 20, 152) argues that the topic of recognition has its textual antecedent in the notion of ἄνάμνησις found in the Phaedrus (249b6–c4). However, if it is true that, as I argued in note 47 and as Hadot himself points out, here Beauty is not sharply distinguished from the Good and that for Plotinus there is no recollection of the Good (V.5 [32] 12.13), one might be inclined to disregard the plausibility of this reference to the Phaedrus. Of the editions and translations of the Enneads cited in the section of the Bibliography titled "Plotinus," only Hadot mentions this reference, although Guthrie (1918) and IGAL quote I.6 [1] 2.3, 7–11 as parallels, where the Beauty Plotinus is talking about is indeed that of Intellect (see also II.9 [33] 16.45, V.3 [49] 2.11). A possible solution to the puzzle is that to maintain that here Plotinus does not distinguish sharply between desire of Beauty and desire of the Good does not mean to say that these desires themselves are not sharply distinguished, but rather that in the text the different aims of these desires are sometimes expressed by the same term (i.e., Beauty itself). Thus, Beauty itself refers alternately to the Good and to Intellect, and it is up to the reader to figure out what the case in each instance is. One must admit that a solution of this kind requires a great deal of work on the part of the reader, but this is not an unusual requirement for someone familiar with the Enneads, whose terseness "often verges on unintelligibility" (WOLTERS 238; cf. also Bouillet 1957–1961, I, xiii; Arnou 1967, 7) and has rightly been called "désespérante" (HADOT 9), making a commentary virtually indispensable. To be sure, in Plotinus the terms καλός and κάλλος have a very wide spectrum, ranging from material things through Intellect and the One, much like in Plato they spanned from a single beautiful body to Beauty itself through all the rungs of Eros’ ladder (see page 49 above; cf. Corrigan 2005, 205–207). And as in Plato beautiful things on inferior rungs of the ladder were such by participating in Beauty itself, so in Plotinus beauties at any given level are considered to be images of the Beauty at the level right above it (see for instance I.6 [1] 2, V.8 [31] 1, as well as the passages quoted at the end of note 47), so that the term “beautiful” lends itself to be used analogously of rather different, though not altogether disconnected, things. As for the other elements in these two lines (1.17–18), the affinity of soul and Beauty also echoes a favorite Platonic theme (e.g., Republic X.611e2; see also Chapter One note 149); finally, ἄλογον does not mean irrational but independent of, or prior to reason (see HADOT 152; cf. VI.7 [38] 20).

50 On the basis of what I argued in notes 47 and 49, “Beauty itself” here refers to the noetic realm.

51 Cf. VI.7 [38] 21–22. Speaking of Eros as the son of Aphrodite (cf. Plato, Phaedrus 242d9), Plotinus
erotic have this recognition of Beauty as their common denominator. Thus, Plotinus, quickly commenting on Symposium 206b1–e6, points out that to generate, both in nature as a whole (1.19–24) and in the context of the sexual intercourse of individuals (1.26–30), means to generate with Beauty in view.\(^53\)

The thesis that all eros issues from an originary desire for Beauty itself is important insofar as it already alerts us to the fact that, whatever its further specifications may be, eros’ origin is one and the same. Two such specifications were quickly introduced at 1.10–16 between the eros as the desire of “temperate people who are akin to Beauty itself” (1.13), and eros as a desire that “wants to issue in some shameful action [εἰς αἰσχροῦ τινος πρᾶξιν]” (1.13–14). Another distinction is breached at 1.30–36 between the eros of those who are moved to generate without the recollection (άνάμνησιν: 1.34) of the archetypal Beauty (ἄρχέτυπον: 1.33) that is at the basis of all

writes that, besides being the guardian of beautiful boys (Plato, Phaedrus 265c2–3), he also works as the “mover of souls toward the beauty [up] there [ἐκεῖ κάλλος], or else to increase the already existing impulse toward it [τὴν ἤδη γεγομένην πρὸς τὸ ἐκεῖ ὁρμήν]” (2.4–6). The predisposition of which I am speaking here is this “already existing impulse.” See also my remarks in Subsection 4.4.3.

See especially Symposium 206c8–d2 (“But these things [i.e., pregnancy and birth] cannot occur in what is disharmonious. And ugliness is disharmonious with everything divine, while beauty is harmonious.”) and 206e5 (“[Eros is love] of procreation and of birth in beauty”), clearly alluded to at 1.28–29.

WOLTERS (xvi–xxii) speaks of this view as a vindication of sexual love in Plotinus. He argues, with Trouillard (1955b, 162) and against such authors as Friedländer (1958, 55–58), Hadot (1993, 56; see note 25 above), and Ferwerda (1965, 90), that sexual love, being rooted in the soul’s connatural desire for Beauty, can in fact be the starting point of the soul’s ascent to the Good, as Plotinus himself remarks (I.2 [19] 5, I.3 [20] 2, VI.7 [38] 31). HADOT (29) later recognizes that Wolters is right in insisting on the fundamental goodness of sexual love.

1.13: σωφρόνων αὐτῷ τῷ κάλλει οἰκείοις. Cf. Proclus, Commentary on Plato’s Alcibiades I 48.8–9. The terms οἰκείωσις (1.13, 25), οἰκείωσις (1.38), and οἰκείωσις (1.25) indicate the natural affinity of two given terms (cf. Chapter Four note 85). WOLTERS (10) rightly remarks that in Plotinus these terms are soul and the intelligible realm (2.24; cf. III.8 [30] 6.18, 21, 8.7), or else the sensible and the intelligible (III.6 [26] 1.21, 3.1, IV.4 [28] 44.16, 23). However, given that, as I pointed out above, no sharp distinction is made initially between desire for Beauty and desire for the Good in this chapter of treatise III.5 [50], one wonders whether a deeper sort of affinity might be intended.
beautiful images, and the *eros* of those who do recollect the archetype. These distinctions are then taken over and made sharper at 1.38–65. The following threefold classification of *eros*, which I borrow from Hadot,\(^55\) can be derived from the text:

(1) Pure *eros* (1.38–39, 46–47, 55–57, 58–59)
   - (a) With recollection (1.39–40, 60–62)
   - (b) Without recollection (1.40, 59–60)

(2) Mixed *eros* (1.30–36, 40–46, 47–50, 57–58)
   - (a) With recollection (1.34–35, 60–62)
   - (b) Without recollection (1.32–33, 35–36, 59–60)

(3) Deviant *eros* (1.38, 50–55, 63–65).\(^56\)

We are here called to present Plotinus’ justification for three main distinctions: the one between pure (καθαρὸς: 1.38) and mixed (μέμικται, μικτὸν: 1.40, 57) *eros*; the one between *eros* according to nature (κατὰ φύσιν: 1.42) and deviant or unlawful *eros* at variance with nature (ἐν παρανόμῳ καὶ παρὰ τὴν φύσιν: 1.50); and the one between *eros* with recollection and *eros* without recollection. We should not lose sight of the fact that

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\(^{55}\) See HADOT (163); cf. WOLTERS (liii) for a similar division. IGAL (II.116–117, 123 note 12) offers a different classification: (1) Pure *eros*: (a) with recollection, and (b) without recollection; (2) Mixed *eros*: (a) according to nature, and (b) against nature. Igal’s subsumption of *eros* against nature under mixed *eros* is not unjustified insofar as Plotinus states that unlawful lovers started out from the course in accordance with nature but strayed from it (1.51–52). However, as I show in the next few pages, the chief characteristic of mixed *eros* is a desire of procreation; but since this characteristic is absent in *eros* against nature, this is better distinguished as an altogether different type of *eros*, hence my preference for Hadot’s classification.

\(^{56}\) A similar classification appears at 7.30–39. There, however, it is the Good, rather than Beauty, that explicitly constitutes the goal of *eros*. Moreover, what in the first chapter of the treatise I called deviant *eros*, in chapter 7 is barely even referred to as *eros*, but is called “evil desire” (7.37: κακαῖς [...] ἐπιθυμίαις; but see 7.42: Οἱ [viz., ἔρωτες]), and as a consequence it cannot be considered as belonging essentially to the soul (7.42). See HADOT (226–230). On *eros* as belonging essentially to the soul see Section 2.4 below.
the context of these distinctions is *eros* as an affection of the soul, that is, something that the soul comes to experience incidentally as it comes in contact with images of Beauty at the sensible level.

Let us begin with the last distinction. The discriminating factor between the two kinds of lovers is that those who love without recollection of the archetypal Beauty take images of Beauty for true Beauty, while recollecting lovers appreciate images of Beauty precisely qua images. Plotinus further remarks that the mere fact of not recollecting the archetype and even the fact of being attracted to inferior beauties is free of fault (ἀναμάρτητος: 1.37). This is consistent with his guiding principle that the ultimate aim or origin of all *eros* is Beauty itself, so that attraction to its images, even if one is unaware of the archetype, is a tribute to it rather than an immediate error of judgment. More importantly, not only does lack of recollection not mar the purity of one’s *eros*, but if *eros* is called pure even in the absence of recollection, recollection itself is not, strictly, an essential aspect of pure *eros* (nor, for that matter, of mixed *eros*).

What, then, makes *eros* pure and distinguishes it from mixed *eros*? Plotinus offers


58 What does constitute fault (ἁμαρτία: 1.38) is abandonment to, or fall into, sexual intercourse (ἡ δὲ πρὸς μίξιν ἔκπτωσις: 1.38), resulting in a misguided consideration of sensible pleasure as the primary desideratum.

59 One may be tempted to identify pure *eros* without recollection with the originary desire for Beauty itself mentioned at 1.16–17. The reason for this is that, as we saw earlier (see pages 116–118, especially notes 47 and 49), at 1.16–17 the originary desire for Beauty itself, ἀρχή of all *eros*, is not sharply distinguished from the soul’s connatural desire for the Good, and the latter, being beyond all form (that is, beyond the realm of Ἄρχος), is also beyond all possible recollection (V.5 [32] 12.13), and so beyond knowledge, since from the perspective of soul, to come to know an Idea implies a recollection of it (see IV.7 [2] 12.8–11, IV.8 [6] 4.30; see also I.2 [19] 4.21, II.9 [33] 12.7, 16.47). However, the identification of pure *eros* without recollection with the originary desire mentioned at 1.16–17 would be inconsistent, since in this context recollection, while absent, remains at least possible. This is also true, *a fortiori*, of mixed *eros* without recollection.
his explanation at 1.38–50 and elaborates further on it at 1.55–65. He argues that *eros* is pure when one is “content with beauty alone [ἀγαπητὸν τὸ κάλλος μόνον]” (1.39), while it is mixed when it is accompanied by “another desire, [viz., the desire] to be immortal *as far as it is possible for a mortal.*” This added desire results in a productive activity in which, like in *Symposium* 206b1–209e4, the lovers aim at perpetuating themselves through sexual union. One could say that the purity of *eros*, whether with or without recollection, consists in its being simply theoretical or contemplative.

Accordingly, its mixed character results from an additional element, which for Plotinus is the desire to procreate.

But why is mixed *eros* introduced as an inferior kind of *eros*? That is, why is contemplation alone superior to contemplation plus procreation? One tends to shrink from the notion of a purely contemplative *eros*, taking its purity as a polite euphemism for impotence: contemplative love as sterile love. This is clearly *not* what Plotinus has in mind. The superiority of pure contemplation over productive contemplation, or of pure

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60 1.40–41: [40] ἄλλη τοῦ [41] ἀθάνατον εἶναι ὡς ἐν θνητῷ ἐπιθυμία. The italic in my translation indicates the allusion to Plato, *Symposium* 206e8.

61 Thus, Armstrong, in a note to this passage, is correct when he says that “[i]n Plato all love up to the highest is essentially productive (cf. *Symposium* 212a). In Plotinus it is not” (ARMSTRONG III.170–171, note 1). We might add that in Plato, like in Plotinus, the productive activity that takes place at the lower levels of Eros’ ladder is an inferior kind of activity when compared to the contemplation of Beauty itself at the highest level. The difference between Plotinus and Diotima seems to be, not that for the latter *eros* is productive while for the former it is merely contemplative, but rather that for Plotinus genuine contemplation devoid of desire for self-perpetuation, and hence for procreation, is possible even when the object of contemplation is less than Beauty itself. It is primarily a matter of attitude of the soul rather than, strictly, of level of ascent. I therefore disagree with Friedländer when, contrasting Plato and Plotinus’ views of love, he claims that Plotinian *eros* is “meaningless within the world of phenomena” and the Plotinian soul is “alienated from this world” (Friedländer 1958, 57, 56). The point is not that the material is meaningless and the soul is estranged from it, but rather that the material can be correctly appreciated only when the soul erotically relates to it with an eye to what is ontologically superior not only to the sensible, but also to itself.
over mixed *eros*, is due to the greater self-sufficiency of the former. In Plotinus’ own words at 1.46–50:62

[46] Therefore, that which does not want to generate [47] is more self-sufficient in regard to beauty, while that which desires [48] to produce something beautiful wants to do so out of lack and is not [49] self-sufficient; and it thinks it will produce something of that sort, if at all, if it will [50] generate in beauty.

The comparative, αὐταρκέστερον, highlights the fact that pure *eros* is not self-sufficient tout-court; after all, no *eros*, insofar as it is intentional, will ever be thoroughly self-sufficient.63 Rather it is “more self-sufficient” than other kinds of *eros*, which depend on additional factors besides Beauty. By contrast, all that pure *eros* needs in order to be pure, is Beauty.64

We finally come to the distinction between mixed *eros* and unlawful *eros* (here used synonymously with “*eros* against, or at variance with, nature,” or, more concisely, 62 1.46–50: [46] Τὸ μὲν οὖν μὴ γεννᾶν [47] ἐθέλον μᾶλλον αὐταρκέστερον τῷ καλῷ, τὸ δὲ ἐφιέμενον [48] ποιῆσαι καλὸν τε ἐθέλει ποιεῖν ὑπ’ ἐνδείας καὶ οὐ [49] αὐταρκες· καί, ἐπεὶ τοιοῦτον ποιήσει, οἴεται, εἰ ἐν καλῷ [50] γεννήσεται. The μᾶλλον at 1.47 is pleonastic (WOLTERS 29).

63 See Plato, Symposium 199e–200a; cf. Subsection 1.4.2.

64 Conversely, mixed *eros* is not altogether deprived of contemplation. But while pure *eros* is contemplative in an unqualified way (that is, purely, or by simply gazing on, or being content with, Beauty itself: the last level of Eros’ ascent in the Symposium), mixed *eros* is so qualifiedly (that is, mixedly, or as productive of images of Beauty with Beauty in view: the Lesser Mysteries as well as all the lower rungs of Eros’ ladder in the Symposium). When neither of these is the case, then *eros* becomes deviant, as we shall see presently. And as HADOT (159–160) points out, the hierarchy between *erotes* rehearses one of the great Plotinian principles, that “making and action are either a weakening or a consequence of contemplation. [...] For who, if he is able to contemplate what is truly real will deliberately go after its image?” (III.8 [30] 4.39–40, 43–44; [39] τὴν ποίησιν [40] καὶ τὴν πράξειν ἢ ἀσθένειαν θεωρίας ἢ παρακολούθημα). [...] [43] Τίς γὰρ θεωρεῖν τὸ ἀληθινὸν δυνάμενον [44] προηγουμένους ἔρχεται ἐπὶ τὸ εἴδολον τοῦ ἀληθινοῦ;). This is not a manifesto of idleness or, worse, a well-pondered contempt of the sensible realm; if anything, it is an appreciation of the sensible insofar as it is the result of contemplation and as such cannot be evil (as for the Gnostics). I will return briefly to this point in Chapter Four (pages 399–400). For a stimulating study on the topic of contemplation in Plotinus see Gatti (1996).
“deviant”\textsuperscript{65}). We saw that the presence of the additional desire for procreation is what introduces a difference in pure \textit{eros}, thus making it mixed. Now, this desire is also what makes of mixed \textit{eros} an \textit{eros} in accordance with nature, distinguishing it not only from pure \textit{eros} but also from \textit{eros} at variance with nature. Thus, just as the presence of desire for self-perpetuation in \textit{eros} introduces a double difference (i.e., mixed \textit{eros} as distinguished from both pure and deviant \textit{eros}), so its absence introduces an ambiguity, namely the fact that based on the mere lack of the desire for self-perpetuation, the positive identity of \textit{eros} remains hidden.\textsuperscript{66} It follows that a further factor is needed if one is to distinguish deviant \textit{eros} not only from mixed \textit{eros} but, perhaps more importantly, also from pure \textit{eros}. This factor is the soul’s attitude toward sensible beauty understood as an image of the archetypal Beauty of Intellect. In the case of pure \textit{eros} the attitude is contemplative, while deviant \textit{eros} is an immoderate abandonment to pleasure (1.38) resulting in the soul’s inability both to recognize the desire to procreate and to use images of Beauty to recollect Beauty itself (1.53–55).

However, it is important to realize that for Plotinus all \textit{eros} is essentially good, that is, it primarily indicates a connection to Beauty insofar as the soul, even when \textit{eros} has become deviant, is stirred and attracted by images of Beauty. As Hadot rightly

\textsuperscript{65} Line 1.52 refers to lovers who have strayed from the course in accordance with nature (παράφοροι ἐκ ταύτης [i.e., πορείας]), hence the appellative “deviant” used to describe their \textit{eros}.

\textsuperscript{66} This is a recurrent theme in Plotinian metaphysics: the extreme terms of a hierarchy share the absence of the features proper to the intermediate terms. So, for instance, the One and matter, which constitutes the antipodes of Plotinus’ universe, share the character of formlessness in opposition to the pure form of Intellect and the partial form of soul and ensouled bodies (see VI.7 [38] 33.13, 21, 37, VI.9 [9] 3.4, 43, I.8 [51] 3.14, 31, 8.21, II.5 [25] 4.12). Cf. Chater 3 note 329, and Chapter Four note 75.
observes, “there is no love which is substantially evil.” Plotinus’ remark that “the desire for good often involves the fall into evil” (1.63–64) does not invalidate, but confirms this observation, since it points to the fact that even deviant eros is ultimately rooted in the primary desire of Beauty itself connatural to soul, a topic to which I will return in Chapter Four. In conclusion, for Plotinus eros as an affection (πάθος) of the soul is a single phenomenon that can manifest itself in the three types of eros presented above, hence the use of the plural (παθήματα) in the closing line of the chapter.

2.3.2 Enneads III.5 [50] 2.1–9.57: Identification of the Mythical Entities

In chapters 2–9 of treatise III.5 [50] Plotinus continues his explanation of Plato’s (seemingly) conflicting affirmations about eros, now focusing on the descriptions of Eros as a god and son of Aphrodite (Plato, Phaedrus 242d9, Symposium 180d1–e2) and as a daimon with a different set of parents (Plato, Symposium 202d13, 203a9–204a7).  


68 1.64–65: [64] ἡ ἀγαθοῦ ἔφεσις ἔχει εἰς κακὸν τὴν ἔκπτωσιν [65] πολλάκις. ARMSTRONG’s translation. Wolters (45) claims that “Plotinus is not here speaking of the desire of the Good,” but he offers no reasons for such a claim. I believe Wolters is correct to the extent that desire for any good and desire for the Good are different. However, if one keeps in mind that desire for any good ultimately points to the Good and is possible because of the Good, I see no reason for categorically dismissing the possibility that Plotinus here may in fact be talking also about the Good.

69 It may be convenient to report the Platonic passages from the Symposium where these mythical entities are mentioned.

Here is the story of Eros’ birth as told at Symposium 203b2–e5: “[b2] Well, when Aphrodite was born, the gods had a banquet, both the others [b3] and Poros [i.e., Passage, Resourcefulness] son of Metis [i.e., Counsel, Wisdom]. After they dined, [b4] Penia [i.e., Poverty, Want] came begging, just as [it happens] when there is a feast, and [b5] she was near the door. Now, Poros, entering Zeus’ garden drunk with nectar—[b6] for wine did not exist yet—[b7] and since he was weighed down [with drink], lied down to sleep. So Penia, planning [b8] to have a child from Poros due to her own resourcelessness ἀπορίαν, lied down by [c1] him and conceived Eros. Just for this reason [c2] Eros has been a follower and a servant ἀκόλουθος καὶ θεράπων of Aphrodite, [c3] because he was begotten during her birthday celebrations γενεθλίοις, and at the same time he is by nature [c4] a lover of beauty φύσει ἐραστὴς ὀν περὶ τὸ καλὸν, and since Aphrodite is beautiful. [c5] So, insofar as he is son of Poros and Penia, Eros has such a fate. [c6] First, he is always poor πένης, and far from ἁπαλός τε καὶ καλός, as most people think, but [is rather] hard σκληρὸς, [d1] and rough αὐχμηρὸς, and barefoot...
Before dealing with the speculative relevance of Plotinus’ exegesis of the mythical characters and elements found in the Platonic text, it may be better to offer a brief account of what he takes these characters to represent. It is at this juncture that his reading of myths (of which, as we saw, he will not give us a theoretical statement until the last chapter of the treatise) comes into focus together with the other exegetical strategies of sublimation, ontologization and syncretism mentioned in Section 2.2.

The classification of the results of Plotinus’ exegesis of the mythical data he inherited from Plato and the poets mentioned in notes 43 and 72 was first suggested by Ficino in his 1475 commentary on Plato’s Symposium and has been retrieved and elaborated further by Wolters, Lacrosse, and, more systematically, by Hadot, whose main conclusions I follow.70 The material in this subsection can be read more easily with Table 2 and Table 3 in hand.

70 See Ficino, Commentary on Plato’s Symposium VI.7; WOLTERS (xxv–xxvi); HADOT (40–65); Lacrosse (1994, 41–64).
### Table 3. Mythical Entities and Their Metaphysical Equivalents in *Enneads* III.5 [50]

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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1) Love of the World-Soul</td>
<td>3.27–38, 4.9–10, 14–15, 7.12–25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(a) of the superior part: divine, pure</td>
<td>3.27–30, 4.2–3, 6.28–30, 8.1–16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(b) of the inferior part: daimonic, mixed</td>
<td>3.32–33, 6.30–35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pandemos:</td>
<td>(2) Love of individual (rational) souls</td>
<td>4.1–14, 6.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• son of Aphrodite</td>
<td>(a) of the superior part: divine, pure</td>
<td>4.10–13, 38–40, 46–47, 55–59, 2.8–9, 3.33–36, 4.23–26, 6.28–30, 7.30–31, 39–42, 55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pandemos;</td>
<td>(b) of the inferior part: daimonic, mixed</td>
<td>1.40–46, 47–50, 55–59, 3.36–37, 4.25, 7.39–42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• daimon, son of Poros and Penia</td>
<td>(c) deviant: possible only for the inferior part</td>
<td>1.13–14, 38, 50–55, 63–65, 7.36–39, 42–46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ZEUS</strong></td>
<td>The Good</td>
<td>2.15, 19–20, 33–34; (Symposium 180d7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>DIONE</strong></td>
<td>Intellect</td>
<td>2.19–20, 33–34; (Cratylus 396b3–c)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ENNEADS</strong></td>
<td>Intellect of the World-Soul (II Demiurge)</td>
<td>2.16, 8.1–16, 9.30; (Philebus 30d1–2, Phaedrus 246e4, Letters II.312e5); note 77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>HERA</strong></td>
<td>The logoi coming to Soul from Intellect</td>
<td>7.9–12, 8.3–4, 9.1–16, 34–37; (Symposium 203b2–7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>DAIMONS</strong></td>
<td>Traces of Soul in the cosmos</td>
<td>6.24–27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Different from Eros</td>
<td>6.27–35, 7.26–36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>PENIA</strong> (Poverty)</td>
<td>Intelligible (psychic) matter, receptacle of logos</td>
<td>6.44, 7.1–9, 9.45–53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>METIS</strong> (Counsel)</td>
<td></td>
<td>5.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>POROS</strong> (Resourcefulness)</td>
<td>The logoi coming to Soul from Intellect</td>
<td>8.4, 9.8–19, 34–37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>GARDEN of ZEUS</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>(Symposium 203b2–7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>NECTAR, DRUNKENNESS</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>9.5–8, 19–23, 34–37</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Some parallels in the rest of the *Enneads*

- On Penia and the notion of matter as indetermination: III.6 [26] 14.5–10; cf. also note 89 above, pages 251–256, 279.
The leading principle of Plotinus’ exegesis is that “every soul is Aphrodite.”\textsuperscript{71}

The problem can be summarized in terms of the double parenthood of both Eros and Aphrodite in the \textit{Symposium}. On the one hand, we have the duplicity of the figure of Aphrodite, who is divided by Pausanias in heavenly (\textit{Urania}) and earthly (or vulgar in the etymological sense of “popular”: \textit{Pandemos}) based on her parenthood: Uranus in the first case, Zeus and Dione in the second (2.14–32).\textsuperscript{72} On the other hand, we have the duplicity of Eros, who is at once son of Aphrodite, hence either heavenly (2.33–3.26) or earthly (3.27–4.25) depending on the nature of his mother,\textsuperscript{73} and of Poros and Penia (5.1–7.58), who conceived him on the day of Aphrodite’s birth in Zeus’ garden as Poros was drunk with nectar (8.1–9.23).\textsuperscript{74}

Plotinus reshapes the seemingly conflicting identities of these mythical characters and elements to fit his system. Thus, Aphrodite \textit{Urania} corresponds to what is generally referred to as the Soul-Hypostasis, that is, Soul unmixed with body, also called divine Soul, Soul simply (\textit{μόνον ψυχῆ, ἁπλῶς ψυχή}: 3.31), or Unparticipated Soul;\textsuperscript{75} her Eros is

\textsuperscript{71} VI.9 [9] 9.31: \textit{ἔστι πᾶσα ψυχὴ Ἀφροδίτη}. See also V.8 [31] 2.10–14.

\textsuperscript{72} Plato, \textit{Symposium} 180c3–e3. As I mentioned at the end of Subsection 1.3.2, Plotinus finds useful elements for his exegesis of Plato not only in Socrates’ statements, but also in those of other characters in the dialogue. This is a clear sign of the syncretistic aspect of his exegesis. Extra-Platonic sources on the duplicity of Aphrodite may include: Hesiod, \textit{Theogony} 190; Homer, \textit{Iliad} V.311–372; Xenophon, \textit{Symposium} 8.9–10; Pausanias, \textit{Description of Greece} IX.16.2–3.

\textsuperscript{73} Plato, \textit{Symposium} 180c3–e3. It must be observed that for Plotinus the duality of Aphrodite and her corresponding Eros is not one of moral opposition (as it seemed to be in Pausanias’ discourse in the \textit{Symposium}), but rather of ontological subordination. Therefore, the appellative \textit{Pandemos} should not be taken in the pejorative sense that it has in Pausanias. See HADOT (46–48 and 116 note 137).

\textsuperscript{74} Plato, \textit{Symposium} 203b2–c4.

\textsuperscript{75} For a more systematic classification of the hypostasis soul see the opening paragraphs of Subsection 3.4.2, ending with Table 5 at below.
the god Eros, divine insofar as he is always directed to the superior hypostasis of
Nous (here represented by Cronus), in turn directed to and derived from the Good or the
One (here represented by Uranus). Aphrodite Pandemos, on the other hand, corresponds
to the World-Soul, in turn divided in a superior (divine) and in an inferior (daimonic)
part. The superior part is actually the particular intellect of the World-Soul (here
represented by Zeus) ever contemplating Nous (i.e., again, Cronus). More precisely, the
World-Soul is the individual soul that belongs to the particular intellect of Zeus, in
accordance with the principle that every particular intellect (represented by a male god)
expresses itself, or is connected to, an individual soul (represented by a goddess: 8.19–
20). This connection is expressed both by a father-daughter relation (hence Aphrodite as
the daughter of Zeus: 8.11–17) and by a husband-wife relation (hence the identification

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76 The text which is very likely at the basis of the identification of Cronus with Intellect and of Aphrodite
Urania’s contemplation of it (and, arguably, of Zeus and Uranus as well) is Plato’s Cratylus 396b3–c3,
which reads: “[b3] And that he [viz., Zeus] is the son of Cronus [b4] may seem outrageous [ὑβριστικὸν]
to one who hears it for the first time, [b5] but it is reasonable that Zeus be the offspring of a great
intelligence [δινοίας]; [b6] for kōros [κόρον] means, not a child [παῖδα], but his purity [τὸ καθαρὸν] and
[b7] unmixedness of Intellect [ἀκήρατον τοῦ νοῦ]—and he [viz., Cronus] is son of Uranus, as the story
[λόγο] goes; [b8] and again, it is right [καλῶς] that the vision toward the above [ἐς τὸ ἄνω ὄψις] is
called with the name [c1] ‘urania’ [οὐρανία], for it looks at the things above [ὁρῶσα τὰ ἄνω], and just
from there, Hermogenes, the astronomers say that [c2] comes the purity of intellect [τὸν καθαρὸν νοῦν],
[c3] and that the sky [τῷ οὐρανῷ] was rightly [ὀρθῶς given its name.”

77 Plotinus’ avowed sources for the identification of Zeus are Plato’s Phaedrus 246e4, Philebus 30d1–2,
and Letters II.312e3. Elsewhere (IV.4 [28] 10.1–4), Plotinus explicitly associates Zeus with the figure
of the Demiurge or Divine Craftsman found in Plato’s Timaeus (see especially 29d–30c; relevant passages
of the Timaeus referred or alluded to by Plotinus in relation to this issue include 37c7, 39e7–9, 41a7–8,
69c3–4). Other important passages on the Demiurge in Plotinus are II.1 [40] 5.1–9, II.3 [52] 18.15 (νοῦς
part to a certain lack of clarity in the Timaeus story itself, which led to subsequent interpretations of this
figure (see Zandee 1961, 24–26; Wallis 1995, 34). In any event, the matter is not central to our concerns.
I think that from the references to the Enneads I just listed in this note it may be safe to conclude that an
identification of the Demiurge with the Intellect of the World-Soul (and hence with the figure of Zeus as
presented in III.5 [50]) is highly plausible (cf. Gerson 1994, 56–58).
of Aphrodite with Hera, Zeus’ spouse, also attested in the myths: 8.22–23). Thus, strictly, what is generally referred to as the World-Soul, much like every individual rational soul, is actually a complex entity made up of two parts, or rather, aspects: a superior one permanently connected to the realm of Intellect via the Soul-Hypostasis, and an inferior one, the psychic part proper, directed to the care of the material cosmos. Given that in treatise III.5 [50] the character of Zeus is used consistently to represent the superior part, and Hera is mentioned only once clearly in reference to the inferior part, it would have been convenient to have Aphrodite Pandemos constantly representing the World-Soul as a whole, but Plotinus’ usage does not seem to be wholly transparent on this point.

Since the two parts of the World-Soul are divine and *daimonic*, the quality of their *Erotes* will also be divine and *daimonic*, or *Uranius* and *Pandemos*, respectively. The other *daimons* we find in the myths are interpreted as traces of Soul into the cosmos (6.24–27) and are thus associated to the inferior part of the World-Soul. However, they differ from Eros insofar as they spring from Soul for the sake of the administration of the cosmos (6.30–35; 7.26–36), while the major feature of Eros as a *daimon*, even when he is involved in the promotion of marriages, is to direct the souls in love toward the

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78 Pausanias, *Description of Greece* III.13.9; Timaeus of Locris, *On the Nature of the World and the Soul* 96e. See HADOT (236–240) for a detailed account of this identification.


80 An alternative interpretation of Plotinus’ exegesis takes the double Aphrodite (Urania and Pandemos) as two levels of the World-Soul, the superior or separate one, and the inferior one linked to the body of the cosmos on the model of the embodied human soul (see IGAL II.128 note 36; cf. II.3 [52] 9.31–47). For an assessment and dismissal of this interpretation, see HADOT (51–55).

recollection of higher realities (3.30–38, 6.28–30; 7.30–36).82

This division of the World-Soul in two parts (i.e., Zeus as its intellect and Aphrodite-Hera as its corresponding soul) is mirrored in the structure of individual83 rational souls.84 It must be observed that these souls are not derived from the World-Soul as its parts. On the contrary, since both individual rational souls and the World-Soul are mixed with a material element and are derived from the Soul-Hypostasis, they are called soul-sisters.85

One will object that this reading does not account for the fact that eros as an affection (or better, as three different types of affections) of the soul treated in the first chapter of this treatise has no mythological equivalent. I assume that this is because its third type (i.e., deviant eros) can never be ascribed to the World-Soul, whose great power for Plotinus prevents it from ever losing sight of higher realities.86 However, I find nothing to prevent us from ascribing the first two types of eros as an affection of the soul (i.e., pure and mixed eros) to both the Soul-Hypostasis and the World-Soul. More specifically, the eros of the Soul-Hypostasis (i.e., Aphrodite Urania) and of the particular

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83 WOLTERS (124) complains that the use of the word “individual” to refer to, say, a rational (human) soul is imprecise, since strictly also the World-Soul is an individual soul. So, he suggests calling the World-Soul “macrocasmic soul,” and what are generally referred to as individual souls, “microcasmic souls.” While Wolters’ observation is correct, I will pragmatically disregard his suggestion simply because, given the word usage that has imposed itself in Plotinian scholarship, his designations would be likely to generate further confusion in an area where the labeling of entities is already quite fluid.

84 Further material on the individual soul, especially on the Plotinian doctrine of an undescended part of the soul, is found in Chapter Three (pages 238–240) and Chapter Four (Subsection 4.3.2 and 4.4.1).


intellect of the World-Soul, or of its superior part (i.e., Zeus), will be pure and divine, while that of its inferior part, or of the soul belonging to this intellect (i.e., Aphrodite-Hera), will be mixed and *daimonic.*

As for Poros and Penia, they represent two aspects of Aphrodite, the soul. On the one hand, Poros is *logos,* the very presence of *Nous* in the soul, or soul insofar as it is formed by *Nous.*

Penia, on the other hand, is matter, receptacle of *logos* and symbol of privation and indigence, or, more specifically, of a yet undetermined desire for the Good.

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87 Cf. HADOT (53–60). To ascribe pure *eros* to the Soul-Hypostasis and to the World-Soul is legitimate provided that we keep in mind that the status of *eros* in this context is not, strictly, that of an affection (*πάθος, πάθημα*), as it appears to be the case, by contrast, in the first chapter of the treatise. The reason for calling *eros* an affection in the first chapter seems to be not only the need to make sense of Plato’s claim about *eros* in this regard (*Phaedrus* 252b2), but above all the fact that in the context of the first chapter *eros* reaches the soul’s awareness mainly as a result of an accidental encounter with images of Beauty at the sensible level. Sees notes 46 above and 106 below.


89 Plotinus normally associates poverty (*πενία*) with lower or sensible matter: see I.8 [51] 3.16, 5.21–24, II.4 [12] 16.19–23, III.6 [26] 14.5–17 (in this passage the association is explicitly to the Platonic character, Penia; see page 279 below), VI.7 [38] 12.22 (see the opening pages of Subsection 3.4.3 for a classification of matter in Plotinus). By contrast, the matter at issue in III.5 [50] is not sensible but intelligible (*Ὕλε... νοητὴν: 6.44). However, doubts remain as to whether the intelligible matter mentioned in this treatise corresponds to the one treated technically in II.4 [12] 5.2–5, 15, VI.3 [44] 9.36. Armstrong remarks that intelligible matter here is to be understood as “an intermediate stage between complete incorporeality and material embodiment,” of which we find antecedents in Plato (*Epinomis* 984d8–e5) and Aristotle (*On the Generation of Animals* III.761b8–23; *Metaphysics* VII.1036a9–11, VIII.1045a34), but which is found nowhere else in Plotinus (ARMSTRONG III, 189 note 2; echoed by Radice 2002, 622 note 34; cf. also O’Brien 1991, 83 note 25). In reply, WOLTERS (168) aptly cites I.2 [19] 2.19–22, where corporeal and intelligible matter differ “only in degree.” Strictly, therefore, what matter indicates here is not corporeality, but indetermination (*ἀοριστία: 7.6, 18). Similarly, intelligible matter indicates, not soul tout-court as Bréhier (1924–1938, III, 182 note 1) briefly states, but intelligible indetermination, as we shall see in the next chapter (Subsection 3.4.1). Consequently, and again strictly, the opposite of “material” is not “intelligible,” but “thoroughly determined.” It follows that the intelligible realm, to which soul has access, is opposed to the sensible insofar as it is incorporeal, not insofar as it is immaterial, for immateriality here means indetermination, and Plotinus speaks both of an intelligible and of a corporeal or sensible indetermination: intelligible and sensible matter respectively. Following ARMSTRONG (and contrary to Dillon 1969, 35–36), IGAL (II, 134 note 64) claims that the intelligible matter mentioned in III.5 [50] is not the one treated technically at II.4 [12] 2–5, but rather a kind of “psychic matter” which, represented by Penia (7.1–9, 9.48–53), stands for the indetermination of the lower soul. Igal is certainly correct insofar as the focus of the discussion is Penia as an aspect of soul connected to Eros qua *daimon.* Moreover, his observation does not invalidate the equation between matter and indetermination. See also the closing pages of Subsection 3.4.2 for Pigler’s interpretation of the character of Penia (PIGLER 180–186).
“an indeterminate and indefinite representation [ἀόριστον καὶ ἄπειρον φάντασμα]”

(7.8). The daimon Eros, springing from the intercourse of these two aspects, reflects the diversity of his parents (7.12–25). The relation of Penia to Poros, whereby Eros is engendered, is that of matter to form, a hylomorphic intercourse that represents “the fundamental law of the genesis of all reality, a scheme of universal explanation.”

Finally, the garden and nectar are further representatives of logos, the presence of Nous in soul.

As I mentioned earlier, the results of this section are schematically summarized in Table 3 above.

2.4 The Substantiality of Eros:

Observations on Some Passages of Enneads III.5 [50]

The goal of the present section is to clarify the content of some of the passages which I take to be the philosophical core of Plotinus’ treatise on eros. These passages are speculatively very closely interrelated and can be gathered under three headings: eros as ὑπόστασις and οὐσία generated from another ὑπόστασις and οὐσία (2.32–39 and 3.1–6); the illustration of Eros as the eye of Aphrodite, the soul (2.39–46 and 3.6–19); and the parallel between eros and thoughts (7.49–46).

I will begin with a summary clarification of the two key terms, ὑπόστασις

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90 Hadot (73): “la loi fondamentale de la genèse de toute réalité, un schéma d’explication universel.” Hadot explains that the drunkenness of Poros is typical of love at all levels, a fact indicating that even when desire seems satisfied, an insurmountable distance remains between desire and its object, a separation that is bridged only within the Good itself. Following this remark, Hadot explains how this scheme functions not only at the level of soul, but also within Intellect. See also note 109 below and Chapter Three note 269.

91 Hadot (77–81). See also Chapter Three note 281.
(hypostasis) and οὐσία (ousia), which are at the center of the discussion. Given the difficulty in providing a single rendering for each term, here I will simply transliterate them. Plotinus writes at 2.32–39.92

[32] Now, following upon [33] Cronus, or, if you wish, upon Cronus’ father, [34] Uranus, [Aphrodite] directed [her] activity toward him and was made akin [to him], and being in love with [him], [35] she engendered Eros and with Eros she looks toward him, and [36] her activity produced a hypostasis and an ousia, and [37] the two look upward,93 both she who gave birth [i.e., Aphrodite/Soul] and the beautiful Eros who [38] was born as a hypostasis ever ordained toward another Beautiful [i.e., Cronos/Intellect] [39] and having its being in it...

These few lines provide us with the backbone of Plotinian procession and return (which I will treat in the next two chapters) in terms of hypostasis and ousia.

The first point in need of clarification concerns the word hypostasis. Since in the jargon of Plotinian scholarship this term is generally reserved for the three hierarchically ordered principles of all reality (i.e., the One, Intellect, and Soul),94 and since Plotinus is emphatic about the fact that there are neither more nor less than three of such principles,95 one would be justified in asking whether when he calls eros a hypostasis he is contradicting himself. That the answer to this question must be negative can be easily ascertained, first, by verifying whether Plotinus himself refers to these three principles as


93 See note 76 above.


95 See II.9 [33] 1.12–16, 2.1.
hypostases, and second, by a quick look at how the term hypostasis is used in the Enneads. Now, Plotinus’ term of choice to identify the One, Intellect, and Soul is, rather than hypostasis, ἀρχή.96 Even when the three principles are in fact referred to as hypostases, the noun hypostasis is usually modified in some way or another97—an indication that, even when used technically, the term has a much broader field of application than the so-called three hypostases.98 The point, therefore, is not to deny that Soul, Intellect, and the One are hypostases, but that the term hypostasis is not restricted to these three. Ultimately, hypostasis in Plotinus means the existence that any given thing has independently of what, added to it accidentally (whether actually or in thought), is not part of its essence, whose account is as accurate as it is proximate to what he takes to be Plato’s understanding of it.99


97 See, for instance, III.4 [15] 1.1–3, VI.2 [43] 4.17 (νοητὴν ύπόστασιν); see also II.9 [33] 1.41: πλειόνων ύποστάσεων (a plurality of hypostases). Similarly Porphyry, in the titles of what he numbered as treatises V.1 [10] and V.3 [49], does not speak of hypostases tout-court, but of primary (ἀρχικῶν) and knowing (γνωριστικῶν) hypostases respectively (VP 25.36, 4.41, Pinax 5.2; VP 6.11, 25.40, Pinax 5.4). Plotinus did not himself give titles to his treatises, but Porphyry tells us that the titles which he reports in VP are the ones that came to prevail among those who owned copies of Plotinus’ treatises (VP 4.14–19). As Dörrie (1955, 73) shows, the term ύπόστασις acquired a technical sense only with Porphyry.

98 Many different things are called hypostasis or are said to have hypostasis in the Enneads: the One (V.4 [7] 1.12, VI.8 [39] 15.28, 13.43–44); Nous (V.1 [10] 7.42); Soul (III.5 [50] 2.24, V.1 [10] 3.9, 15); logos (III.5 [50] 9.19–20); wisdom (I.4 [46] 9.19); knowledge (VI.1 [42] 6.13–15); numbers (VI.6 [34] 5.17); time (III.7 [45] 13.49, IV.4 [28] 15.3); relations (VI.1 [42] 7.26–27), among which eros (III.5 [50] 3.1, 4.3: ὑποστάτων); motion (VI.6 [34] 16.41); plants (V.2 [11] 1.25); matter (I.8 [51] 15.2; but see III.6 [26] 7.9–20); sensible things as having apparent hypostasis (V.5 [32] 1.14–15: τὴν δοκοῦσαν ὑπόστασιν); and so on.

99 This, I believe, is part of what Gerson (1994, 3) has in mind when he claims that “the term means simply ‘extra-mental existence’ or ‘existents’ in the plural” (see VI.2 [43] 13.27–28). He adds: “When Plotinus
Secondly, in this passage, the terms *hypostasis* and *OUSIA* are used synonymously both with “being” (τὸ ἔΙναι: 2.39) and with each other.\(^\text{100}\)

Thirdly, as Hadot suggests, lines 38–39 contain an allusion to Aristotle’s definition of the category of relation (πρός τι).\(^\text{101}\) To have one’s being in something (τὸ ἔΙναι ἐν τούτῳ ἔχουσα: 1.39) means to depend ontologically on it.\(^\text{102}\) If Hadot is correct in identifying Aristotle as the background of this passage\(^\text{103}\) and the reference to the Stagirite is not a mere coincidence, two different, though related, issues are at work here: one is the identification of that on which *eros* depends as a relative; the other is how something relative can be an *OUSIA*. The neuter dative, τούτῳ, at line 39 leaves little doubt that the relative on which *eros* depends for its existence is not the feminine Aphrodite-Soul, but the other Beautiful (ἄλλο καλὸν: 1.38), which in this context is the noetic realm. However, qua relative, a relative owes its being to that of which it is a relative; in other words, as a non-substantial category, a relative owes its being to the *OUSIA* of which it is, raises a question about the ὑπόστασις of X, he is generally not in doubt that X exists in some way, but he is intent on arguing that some opponent’s account of that existence is false and that a better (i.e., Platonic) one is needed.”

\(^{100}\) See Wolters (81); cf. the combined expression ὑποστάσεις οὐσιώδεις at 7.43.

\(^{101}\) Hadot (112 note 104, 178). Aristotle, *Categories* 6a36–37: [36] Πρός τι δὲ τὰ τοιάτα λέγεται, ὅσα αὐτὰ ἄπερ ἐστίν [37] ἐπέρνον εἶναι λέγεται ἢ ὀποιοιών ἄλλος πρός ἐπέρνον (“We call relatives all such things as are said to be just what they are, of or than other things, or in some way in relation to something else”). Aristotle, *Categories* 8a31–32: [31] ἔστι τὰ πρός [32] τὸι ὁπωσοῦν ἄλλως ἐπέρνον (“those things are relatives for which being is the same as being somehow related to something”). Translations are by J. L. Ackrill (in Barnes 1995).

\(^{102}\) See Atkinsons (1983, 110–111, 147), who provides ample evidence of the Plotinian doctrine that each *hypostasis* acquires existence as a distinct *hypostasis* by depending on and being defined on the basis of the *hypostasis* prior to it. I will deal with the details of this doctrine from the perspective of *eros* in the next chapter.

\(^{103}\) Hadot is the only translator/commentator I am aware of who quotes Aristotle as a background source for this passage.
In traditional terms, an accident (συμβεβηκός). In the case of *eros*, this *ousia* is soul, in which *eros* would inhere as an accident. But to my knowledge, no accident is ever called *ousia* in Aristotle. The reference to Aristotle, therefore, should be taken as an allusion whose purpose is not systematically to criticize Aristotle, but simply to point at *eros*’ dependence, for its being, on that of which it is a relative, namely the Beauty of Intellect. Patently (and negatively), then, to be an *ousia* does not automatically mean to be substantial in an absolute sense, that is, to be *causa sui*, which, as we shall see (cf. Chapter Three note 53), within the Plotinian system is prerogative of the One.

Finally, and more positively, the term *ousia* (and, in this context, *hypostasis*) means something which, while having only a relative degree of ontological independence, only needs what is ontologically superior to it in order to exist qua *ousia*. Less obscurely, *eros* in its pure form owes its existence and the fact of being what it is, directly, to that in which it inheres (i.e., Soul) and to that of which it is a relative (i.e., the Beauty of Intellect); indirectly, to that on which everything, including Soul and Intellect, depends for its existence (i.e., the One).

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104 The perfect participle of συμβαίνω (i.e., συμβεβηκός, the term traditionally translated with “accident”) occurs only five times in the *Categories* (5a39, b10; 7a27, 33, 36) and is never used technically to indicate the nine non-substantial and non-composite predications (*Categories* 1b25), as it seems to be the case in other works of Aristotle (e.g., *Posterior Analytics* I.75a20, 83b12, *Physics* VIII.256b10, *Metaphysics* III.995b20).

105 It would be profitable to investigate whether the allusion to the text of the *Categories* is also meant (i) as a critique of Aristotle’s concession that the soul is *ousia*, but only “in the sense of the form [ἐνδόοι] of a natural body which has life potentially” (*De Anima* II.412a20–21, my translation; see also II.412a27–28 and 412b5–6, where the soul qua *ousia* is called ἐντελέχεια ἡ πρώτη, and 412b10–13; cf. *Metaphysics* XII.1072b26–27), which Plotinus expressly rejects (IV.7 [2] 83); and (ii) as part of Plotinus’ revision of Aristotle’s theory of predication and ontology undertaken in the first three treatises of the sixth *Ennead* (42–44 in Porphyry’s chronological order, on which see Strange 1981).

106 For this reason, I surmise, it may be that when *eros* is treated as an affection of the soul in the first chapter of III.5 [50], it is never called *ousia* or *hypostasis*, since in that specific context, qua affection of
means that it does not occur to the soul, from which it springs, as something external or accidental, but that it is engendered as the chief act of the soul’s nature, and that the soul’s essential activity is the desire for Beauty and the Good to which *eros* is ultimately directed.\(^{107}\) To be soul, therefore, means to be erotic in this qualified sense, although not every individual rational soul succeeds in recollecting *eros*’ true aim, and some souls even deviate from *eros*’ natural direction. Thus, Arnou’s remark I quoted earlier in note 42—that in Plotinus the terms ἐρως, ἔφεσις, πόθος, ὀρεξὶς, ὀρμή cannot be taken as consistently signifying qualitatively different ways of desiring—is generally correct but also needs to be partially revised in light of Plotinus’ use of the term *eros* in III.5 [50]; for what Arnou claims may be true of all the terms he mentions (with the addition of ἐπιθυμία\(^{108}\)), except *eros*. In fact, the former terms indicate desire in its aspect of mere

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\(^{107}\) In this basic meaning it has in III.5 [50], the tendency expressed by the term *eros* coincides with the kind of desire expressed by the term βούλησις, namely rational desire unequivocally directed toward the Good (VI.8 [39] 6.37–38; I.4 [46] 6.19–24), in opposition to other desires (see Gollwitzer 1900–1902, I, 9–10; Arnou 1967, 64; Gerson 1994, 151–155). The use of the term βούλησις in this acceptation is well attested both in Plato (see pages 74–77 above) and in Aristotle (e.g., *Metaphysics* XII.1072a27–28; *Nicomachean Ethics* III.1111b26, 1113a5, b6; *Rhetoric* I.1369a3, b2–3).

\(^{108}\) The expression τῆς τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ ἐπιθυμίας at 9.50–51 is an exception, probably due to the fact that Plotinus is following Plato’s use of the term in the text on which he is commenting (see Gerson 1994, 273 note 73).
lack or poverty (represented by Penia in the myth); by contrast, *eros* in the treatise dedicated to it is also an inventive tendency (7.25, 27: ποριστικόν, a feature which he derives from his father, Poros) insofar as it is imbued hylomorphically with the *logos* of a superior principle.109

Now, in treatise III.5 [50] Plotinus gives us two illustrations of the hypostatic character of *eros*, here understood as a relative: that of the eye (ὁφθαλμός) at 2.39–46 (continued at 3.6–19) and that of thoughts (νοήματα) at 7.46–58. Let us begin with the key passage where Eros is compared to an eye, at 2.39–46:110

[39] [Eros is,] as it were, between desiring [40] and desired, [it is] the eye111 of the desiring that through its medium provides [41] the lover with the sight of the desired, while [the eye] itself runs ahead [42] and, before it gives the lover the power of seeing through the organ, [43] is itself filled with what is seen: seeing earlier [than the lover], to be sure, [44] yet not in the same way by fixing112 in the lover that which is seen, [45] but [by]

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109 As Lacrosse (1994, 130–131) puts it, “de manière générale, on peut dire que ce qui les différencie fondamentalement, c’est que le désir est toujours matière, tandis que l’érôs se présente d’emblée comme structure hylémorphique, logos dérivé et hypostase intermédiaire…” (130–131). See also Hadot’s reference in note 90 above. I will return to this point in the next chapter.


111 Terms of vision used between 2.40 and 3.19: ὀφθαλμός, ὄμμα (eye); ὄρασις (seeing, the act of sight: on the side of the subject); ὁράμα, ὅραμα (that which is seen, vision: on the side of the object); θέαμα, ὑράμενον, θέαν (seeing, view, sight, spectacle: it can be both on the side of the subject and on that of the object); εἴδωλον (image, likeness), to which ἄγαλμα (9.12) and εἰκών (9.33) are closely related (see Appendix C (4). Cf. WOLTERS (98–99) and HADOT (268–277, under the relevant entries in the index). References to Plato may include: *Theaetetus* 156d3–e7, *Phaedrus* 251a7–b2, *Meno* 76d–5, *Timaeus* 45b2–46a4 and 67c8–d1. Cf. also Chapter Four note 257.

112 The term I translated with “fixing,” ἐνστηρίζειν (2.44), is likely opposed to παραθέουσαν, which was translated with “as it runs by [it]” (2.45–46). WOLTERS (87) claims that the verb ἐνστηρίζειν is always transitive, and hence its object is the eye (WOLTERS’ translation: “the eye does impress”). A good number of translators, however, render the verb as intransitive, thus making vision (τὸ ὅραμα: 2.44) the subject. Exceptions to this among the editors and/or translators cited in the section of the Bibliography titled “Plotinus” are: Ficino (1492: “sitisit”; however, the Greek text on which his translation is very likely based, the manuscript marked as *Parisinus Graecus* 1816, in turn based on the *Lauretianus* 87.3:
enjoying the sight of beauty as it runs [46] by [it].

By the time Plotinus wrote this, the metaphor of the eye of the soul was something of a common place in the history of philosophy, at least within the tradition of Platonism. Plotinus reinterprets this metaphor in an original way. The main correspondences are three: the Soul as lover, eros as the eye of the lover, and the Beauty of Intellect as the beloved. What Plotinus seems to be saying is that eros allows the Soul to see the Beauty of Intellect (or Intellect as Beauty). This is not the case, however, for it is not eros that produces the Soul’s vision of Beauty, but rather the Soul’s vision of Beauty that produces eros as a hypostasis and ousia. Thus Plotinus writes at 3.6–10:

HG1, xiii–xiv, reads τῷ ἐν τῷ στηρίζειν: see Henry 1948, 45–62; cf. Saffrey 1996, 491–492 for further references), Bouillet, H. F. Müller, Guthrie, and MacKenna (including the revised MacKenna and Page), Mizuchi, Tanogashira and Tanaka, and IGAL. HADOT (112 note 106) argues that it is hard to think of the eye as that which fixes what is seen in the soul because the eye is only the “lieu de passage de l’image,” hence his translation: “le spectacle se fixe.” I wonder if what Hadot argues only shifts the focus of the problem, for the point seems to be, not whether the eye is the place in which the image is fixed, but whether it is the medium through which the fixing is accomplished. As far as I can tell, there does not seem to be anything wrong with saying that the “locus” proper of the fixed or impressed image remains the soul, while the eye is instrumental in accomplishing the fixing. In any event, the issue remains debatable if the term ἐνστηρίζειν could in fact be taken as intransitive. LSJ (s.v.) does not testify to such usage, nor do Bonitz (1870, s.v.), E. A. Sophocles (1900, s.v.), Ast (1908, s.v.), and SP (s.v.). Rocci (1961, s.v.) cites Philo Alexandrinus 1.15 as an instance of the intransitive use of ἐνστηρίζειν, but none of the indexes to Philo I consulted (i.e., J. Leisegang, in Cohen, Wendland et al. 1887–1926, VII.1, s.v.; Borgen, Fuglseth and Skartsen 2000, s.v.) confirm this information nor, for that matter, the use of this verb in Philo. Perhaps Rocci’s reference is not to ἐνστηρίζειν but to στηρίζειν, which Philo does use multiple times and can indeed occur in the active form with the intransitive meaning of “standing fast” or “being firmly set” (cf. LSJ B.II, s.v.).


[6] And this [viz., Intellect] was its [viz., the Soul’s] first vision, and it would look [at it] as toward [7] its good, and rejoiced in its seeing, and the vision was of such a kind [8] that the seer [could] not make its sight something secondary, so that by [9] a sort of delight, [and] a tension toward it, and an intensity of the [10] sight, [the Soul] generated from itself something worthy of itself and of its vision [viz., Eros].

Therefore, *eros* as an eye is not that which made the first vision possible, but the essential result of that vision which indicates the Soul’s fundamental connection to Intellect, or the almost necessary effect of the Soul’s radical stupor in the face of Beauty, here used as the short name for the realm of Intellect. This radical experience brings about a *hypostasis* and an *ousia: eros* as the indelible mark of *Nous* on Soul,\(^\text{115}\) or *eros* as the truly real reminder of an unforgettable vision. One need not interpret all this in chronological terms; the priority voiced by the word “first” (πρῶτον: 3.6) is logical rather than strictly chronological, as confirmed by the passage on myths quoted earlier on page 111. That is, the vision of Beauty could very well be interpreted as the connatural openness of the (rational) soul to contemplate the noetic realm, a possibility which, if taken seriously, cannot but be paired with an essential love for this great Beauty: *eros*.\(^\text{116}\)

Plotinus continues at 3.11–13:\(^\text{117}\)

\(^{115}\) This vision, to be sure, is itself derived from a still higher vision, to wit, the contemplation of the One by Intellect. As we shall see in Chapter 3 and Chapter 4, psychic *eros*, or the *eros* engendered by the Soul’s contemplation of Intellect, is only one type of *eros*, the other two being noetic *eros*, that is, Intellect’s love for the One, and henologic *eros*, or the One’s self-love, making of the One the end and origin of all *eros*.

\(^{116}\) Notice that Plotinus here is talking about *eros* in its pure form. As we saw in the first chapter of treatise III.5 [50], *eros* can also deviate from its course. When this happens, *eros* occurs to the soul as something external, or accidental. This means that *eros* may become deviant, but in its essence, qua *eros*, is originally pure.

Therefore, from that which is strenuously active about what is seen, \(^{118}\) and from that which outflows, \(^{118}\) as it were, from what is seen, \(^{13}\) Eros came into being [as] a filled eye, \(^{119}\) like a vision along with [its] image \(^{120}\) ...

Wolters rightly points out that in this passage we find the two “constituents” of Eros that correspond to his parents in the *Symposium* myth: Penia and Poros. \(^{121}\) The former corresponds to the soul’s indeterminateness as the receiving pole of vision (3.11: τοῦ ἐνεργοῦντος), while the latter (along with nectar and the garden of Zeus) corresponds to the images (3.13: εἰδώλου) or *logoi* flowing from Intellect as the determining pole of vision. \(^{122}\)

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\(^{118}\) Notice the assonances and associations with Poros: ἀπορρέοντος (3.12), ποριστικὸν (7.25), ῥυέντης (9.8), ῥυέντος (9.35).


\(^{120}\) Line 3.13: οἷον μετ’ εἰδώλου ὄρασις (cf. 2.42–43: τὴν τοῦ ὁρᾶν δι’ ὀργάνου δύναμιν). I follow WOLTERS in translating this with “like image-mediated vision.” WOLTERS (99) also argues that the expression tacitly contrasts mediated sensible vision with immediate intellectual vision. This is true only if one keeps in mind that “sensible vision” here is used metaphorically (much like “vision” tout-court), as confirmed by οἷον at 3.13.

\(^{121}\) WOLTERS (97).

\(^{122}\) The (perhaps unavoidable) complaint that to call *eros* an eye is “just a metaphor” seems to underestimate (i) the fundamental difficulty of explaining the nature of love, and (ii) the explanatory power of (good) metaphors. One may be inclined to bypass all metaphors and argue that love should be understood objectively and literally, say as a complex of chemical reactions. Unfortunately, this allegedly non-metaphorical explanation tells us even less about the nature of love than its straightforwardly metaphorical equivalent. What is more, such an explanation is also very likely misleading insofar as it reduces an experience to what may very well be only one of its (albeit necessary) epiphenomena (i.e., the chemical reactions accompanying the experience of love). An indication of this is the fact that the supposedly non-metaphorical explanation of love, that is, the chemical formula of love, remains utterly unintelligible without the experience of love; it also leaves the very connection between phenomenon and epiphenomenon unexplained, that is, it does not seem to shed any light on the reason(s) why an experience such as love *should* manifest itself as a given complex of chemical reactions and, conversely, why the same complex of chemical reactions taking place in a test-tube in a lab do not amount to love.
As I anticipated, Plotinus indirectly clarifies the substantiality of *eros* through another illustration, that of thoughts (*νοηματα*) at 7.46–58: [123]

[46] For in general it is likely that the true goods [47] are *ousia*, as long as [the] soul acts according to nature within limits, [124] [48] while the other [goods] do not have their activity from soul, but are nothing other than affections; [125] [49] [they are] like false thoughts which have no *ousia* under them [50] the way the really true, eternal, and definite [thoughts] [51] possess in a unity [the act of] thinking, what is thought, and being, [126] not only [52] in the [Intellect that is] simply, but also in each particular intellect [when it is directed] to a true intelligible, [53] if [it is true that] also the intellect in each of us [127] must be regarded, [54] in its pure status, [128] as [a unity of] the act of thinking and what is thought, although we [are] not this [pure status] in unity [55] and simply. Whence [130] also

Thus, when the goal is to try to understand what love is, in the end a supposedly literal and objective statement about love may turn out to be more (unwittingly) misleading than its metaphorical—and knowing—metaphorical—counterpart.

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[124] Cf. 1.21, 7.50.

[125] Cf. 7.44.


[127] Line 7.53 presents a textual crux. Three solutions have been proposed. (1) HS1: καὶ νοητὸν τὸν ἐν ἐκάστῳ εἶδει, καὶ ἐν ἐκάστῳ ἦμων; (2) HS2: καὶ νοητὸν τὸν ἐν ἐκάστῳ, εἰ δεὶ καὶ ἐν ἐκάστῳ ἦμων; (3) IGAL, followed by HS2 in their Addenda, and by HADOT: [καὶ νοητὸν τὸν ἐν ἐκάστῳ], εἰ δεὶ καὶ < νοητὸν τὸν ἐν ἐκάστῳ ἦμων>. In my translation I follow (3).


[130] Another textual crux is found at 7.54–55, with three solutions offered: (1) HS2: νοητὸν—καὶ μὴ ὁμοίοι καὶ ἡμῶν τούτῳ καὶ ἀπλῶς—ἐδέναι; (2) Addenda to HS2: νοητὸν καὶ μὴ ὁμοίοι· καὶ ἡμῶν τούτῳ καὶ ἀπλῶς·
our eros is [directed to] things [that are] simply; for [so are] also our [56] acts of thought: even if [our acts of thought are directed to] something particular, [this is] accidental, [57] just like when one observes that this triangle here [equals] two right [angles], [he does so] in so far as [58] [it is] triangle simply.\footnote{Cf. Plato, \emph{Republic} VI.510d5–511a1; Aristotle, \emph{Metaphysics} VII.1035b1–3, V.1025a32.}

This passage is meant to be part of the answer to the fifth of a series of six questions asked between 6.7 and 6.28, namely: “Why are not all daimons erotes?” (6.27).\footnote{The remaining five questions (and answers) are: (1) How do daimons differ from gods? Answer: gods are free of affections (ἀπαθὲς: 6.10), daimons are not (6.7–14); (2) Why did daimons not stay impassive? Unanswered (6.13–14); (3) Are there daimons in the intelligible realm, and are there gods in the sensible cosmos? Answer: there are no daimons in the intelligible, and the gods that we see in the sensible (i.e., the heavenly bodies down to the moon) are secondary gods (6.14–24); (4) What are daimons in the sensible cosmos? Answer: they are traces left by the Soul in the cosmos (6.24–27); (6) In what sense are daimons not free of matter? (6.28). Answer: They participate not in sensible but in intelligible matter (6.25–7.25). See the outline of the treatise in Table 2 above.}

Plotinus’ main response to this question, outlined at 6.28–35, is that Eros springs from the pure Soul’s desire for the Good and the Beautiful (ψυχῆς ἐφιεμένης τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ καὶ καλοῦ: 6:29), while other daimons spring from the inferior part of the World-Soul (and of individual rational souls) for the sake of the administration of the sensible cosmos.

What justifies the fact that Eros and other daimons are both called daimons (although Eros in its pure condition is called a god) is the fact that both essentially share in the double aspect of indigence and resourcefulness; or, in mythical language: their parents are Poros and Penia.\footnote{See 6.1–6, 7.26–30.} By contrast, their different aims are what differentiate them. Thus Plotinus implicitly recalls the distinction between pure, mixed, and deviant

\[\text{δῆν; (3) IGAL (n.84 ad loc.), followed by HADOT): νοητὸν, καὶ μὴ ὁμοῦ καὶ ἡμῶν τοῦτο καὶ ἁπλῶς. δῆν. In my translation I follow (3).}\]
eros introduced in the first chapter of the treatise. Just like there the discriminating factor was the primary aim of any given soul, so here it is the particular daimon with which each (rational) soul identifies itself. What is central to these identifications is the fact that, no matter what daimon a (rational) soul happens to identify with, this soul still retains the eros with which it is naturally endowed; it does so, however, by leaving it inactive (ἀργὸν: 7.34), and to this extent it is inferior to those souls which actively identify with their eros by primarily engaging, not in the pursuit of particular goods, but of the Good true and simple (τοῦ ἄπλοῦς ἀγαθοῦ καὶ τοῦ ὀντος: 7.31). Yet as Plotinus emphatically points out, even these inferior daimons are called ousia insofar as they are “according to nature and noble” (κατὰ φύσιν καλοί: 7.40). The only desires that are explicitly called evil (κακαῖς... ἐπιθυμίαις: 7.37) and in no way ousia or hypostases (οὐδαμῇ οὐσίᾳ οὐδὲ ὑποστάσεις οὐσιώδεις: 7.43) are those which have deviated altogether from the eros connatural to the soul. These deviant desires are what Plotinus takes to be truly “pathological” for the soul, in the sense that they do not belong to it originarily or essentially, but are the result of the soul’s vicious attitudes and dispositions (ἐν διαθέσεσι καὶ ἔξεσιν: 7.45).

134 Historically, the personification, or rather, daimonification (and deification), of the desiderative forces present in the soul in its various manifestations had the advantage of giving a plausible philosophical interpretation to gods and daimons as central figures in the religious sensibility of the Hellenistic world (see Kittell and Friedrich 1964–1976, II, 1–10, s.v. δαίμων). People were thus identified with their daimons, or the primary desire which, qua souls, they had embraced (see 7.30–39; cf. Plato, Phaedrus 252c3–253c6).

135 To be sure, Plotinus refers both to Eros and to these other daimons with the collective appellative of erotes (7.40). However, he does maintain the difference between the two on the basis of their primary aim.

136 See 7.40–42; cf. 4.4–7 on individual souls.

Now, Plotinus compares the pathological status of deviant desires to false thoughts, and the substantial status of pure (and, to a lesser extent, mixed) *eros* to true thoughts. To say that true thoughts have the status of *ousia* means that qua thoughts they coincide with what they think. Put differently, in true thinking, the thinking subject and its object are identical. This doctrine occurs often in the *Enneads* and has its more explicit avatars in Aristotle and Parmenides (see note 126). To this extent, knowledge or the act of knowing, much like *eros*, is to be understood as a relative term whose substantiality depends on the substantiality of what is known.\(^{138}\) However, there is a major difference between true thoughts and pure *eros*: the former take place at the noetic level, whereas the latter occurs at the level of Soul. Thus, as Hadot points out, the identity of thought and being, which in *Nous* is continuous, can be achieved by particular intellects only occasionally. Within this framework, *eros* qua *ousia* signifies precisely this tendency of each particular intellect toward that which such an intellect can be only partially and discontinuously (see 7.54–55).\(^{139}\) And even when the thoughts of a particular intellect are directed toward sensible particulars (e.g., the triangle mentioned at 7.57), they can nonetheless be true to the extent that they grasp these particulars in light of what is absolute (e.g., the absolute triangle, or triangle simply at 7.58: ἁπλῶς τρίγωνον).

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\(^{138}\) On knowledge (ἐπιστήμη) as *hypostasis* relative to the known (ἐπιστητὸν), see VI.1 [42] 6.13–15, where the same claim is made also about sense-perception (αἴσθησις) in relation to what is perceived (αἰσθητὸν).

\(^{139}\) Hadot (234–235). He writes: “L’Amour est justement le désir de ce dont on est privé, donc le désir de cette unité, de cette coïncidence avec ce qui est universellement et absolument (7, 55). S’il est substantiel, ce sera seulement dans la mesure où il se rapporte à ce qui est absolument (cf. 2, 39; 7, 30–32): il sera ainsi relation subsistante” (Hadot 235).
2.5 Conclusive Remarks and Transition

Let us briefly summarize the main points of the present chapter.

(1) In Section 2.2 I sketched the way in which Plotinus interprets Plato, whose writings he takes as the basic point of departure of his inquiries. Plotinus’ reading of Plato focuses on selected passages and isolated elements in the dialogues which are: often ambiguous and in need of explanation; foreshadowing problems explicitly treated only in the later tradition; useful for an active engagement in philosophical activity. Other authors (in particular Aristotle) are interpreted to shed light on Plato, but always with a critical eye. Following Lacrosse, I argued that Plotinus’ exegesis of the dialogues is sublimating, objectifying or ontologizing, and syncretistic.

(2) In Section 2.3 I moved on to offer a reading of a text particularly relevant for our inquiry in which Plotinus carries out his exegesis most explicitly, Enneads III.5 [50] On eros. I explained his threefold classification of eros in pure, mixed and deviant, and outlined the metaphysical equivalents of the mythical entities found in the Platonic passages that constitute the focus of his exegesis.

(3) Next, in Section 2.4, I argued that the philosophical core of the treatise is the definition of eros as a hypostasis and ousia which is connatural to rational souls in virtue of their contemplative connection to Intellect. Eros was called the Soul’s eye, and in its purity it was compared to true thoughts.

* * *

We may now take a step back and ponder once again the metaphor of eros as the eye of the Soul as a transition or an entry point into an interpretation of the role of eros in
Plotinus’ system. We saw that at the level of the soul’s contemplation of Intellect there are two visions: the originary one that generates eros, and the derivative one made possible by eros once this has been generated. Concerning the first vision, since traditionally the metaphor of sight would seem to be epistemic in nature,\textsuperscript{140} one cannot help wondering what eros has to do with the soul’s vision of Intellect. More explicitly, why does such vision generate love? Why not knowledge? Or, perhaps more appropriately, why not confusion (given the soul’s awareness, through vision, of its weaker degree of unity in comparison to Intellect)? Why not frustration (given the soul’s failure to live up to the standards of the superior unity of Intellect, at least immediately)? Why not envy, desperation, rebellion even? Why love?

The question “Why love?” seems to be different and yet not altogether disconnected from that of (metaphorical) vision. On the one hand, I first ought to see in order to love; only successfully will this love enable me to recognize and pursue what was found lovable in the first place. On the other hand, if vision did not give birth to love, one might wonder what this would tell us about the nature of both the one who sees and of what is seen. A sight that does not awake some affective reaction in the one who sees: is it even possible? And if possible, would it even be desirable? If the soul were not awakened in the presence of Beauty, if it did not grow an erotic eye as something naturally sprouting out of such an encounter, what kind of soul would it be? And if the connatural connection of soul to the realm of Intellect did not leave its genuine mark on the soul in the form eros, how would the soul ever become capable of rising to the noetic

\textsuperscript{140} Cf. Chapter Four note 264.
level. Instead, it is because vision generates love that the soul is awakened to Beauty and the possibility of an ascent is granted. As I shall argue in Chapter Four, the place of *eros* in the ascent is essential.

Vision *without* love would amount to the detached codification of optical data (if possible at all for a living being). Vision *with* love, by contrast, means that the soul can be touched and reawakened to its true nature: to its connatural connection to the intelligible and, eventually, to the One beyond *Nous*.¹⁴¹ The possibility of a vision of this sort is in principle open to all individual rational souls, and yet even when *eros* arises, the soul is not automatically transported into the noetic. Though connatural to the soul, the connection to *Nous* requires a certain attunement or disposition of the soul not merely to fall in love with Beauty, but also to be open to be transformed so as to become more and more akin to it. As already in Plato (see page 79), *eros* indicates, not an accomplished feat, but a task. Thus, love is what allows the lover to see and desire Beauty as that which is to be loved; and yet merely to desire Beauty does not make us immediately and

¹⁴¹ Thus, Chrétien (1990, 330) remarks: “C’est pourquoi dans le pensée grecque, et singulièrement dans la pensée platonicienne, toute noétique est une érotique, la théorie de l’esprit est aussi la théorie de l’amour.” Doesn’t something similar happen when, say, a man falls in love with a beautiful (καλοκἀγαθός) woman? After her vision has given birth to love in him, doesn’t the lover see her face everywhere? Doesn’t everything remind him of her hair, her features, her approaching steps, her smile? Didn’t this “first” encounter with the beloved, this first vision, bring about something which, no matter how accidental and imaginary it may seem to an outsider, for the beloved is the most substantial and real thing there is? Doesn’t this love for the beloved now identify the lover more than anything else? Parents, siblings, relatives, friends, native land, personal interests: isn’t the lover willing to leave all this behind for his beloved, this ineffaceable mark, this unforgettable vision? Doesn’t love make the lover truly see things which previously he never even imagined could be there? Does this first vision not allow him to enjoy sounds, smells, sights, touches, tastes which he never thought he could enjoy? Isn’t this love somehow like a novel organ of vision, a brand new eye that the lover received by which the whole world is viewed differently?—Widening the field: Is the case of the scientist’s passion for her discipline somewhat similar to that of the lover? Doesn’t the artist pursue his art with a similar erotic attitude? What of the sportsperson, the politician, the religious person, the lover of wisdom? Doesn’t something similar happen in all these cases, an experience whereby not only a vision is given, but also a new eye, which for the viewer is the indication of the task of approximating this vision as best as possible?
actually beautiful.

The question remains: Why do we love anything? Or: Why do we find something lovable? In reply to Aristophanes, who restricted the answer to these questions to a primordial desire to be whole again by rejoining our lost half, Plato had Socrates suggest that this explanation is insufficient, since we would cut off our own limbs if those proved to be detrimental to our overall health; thus, *eros* must be of something beyond what is superficially our own, and even beyond wholeness. This factor is the good and only the good.¹⁴² But what is good? And how is *the* Good recognized amidst partial and often misleading goods? That is, why is it often so difficult to recognize it? Isn’t the very notion of a universal Good a mere illusion? Plato’s answer to these questions in book VII of the *Republic* pointed at the necessity of purification of the eye of the soul. That is, given the involvement of the soul’s (metaphorical) eye with (likewise metaphorical) darkness, its sight needs to be habituated, and painstakingly so, to the vision of things in light and to the nature of light itself (see pages 68–71). As we shall see in Subsection 4.3.1, Plotinus follows Plato on this last point. However, he seems to go beyond Plato, or at least to be much more explicit than him, about the central question: Why love?

On the basis of Plotinus’ analogy of *eros* and thoughts given at 7.46–58, one may get the impression that *eros*, no matter how pure, is only an adventitious condition of the soul qua soul due to the latter’s distance from Intellect; and that if the particular intellect of an individual soul ever succeeded in identifying with *Nous*, not partially and momentarily, but fully and continuously, its *eros* would cease to exist. For Plotinus this is

¹⁴² Plato, *Symposium* 205d10–206a1 (see my third illustration is Subsection 1.5.4).
only partially the case, however; for if it may be true that upon such a hypothetical success a particular intellect would be integrated in \textit{Nous}, its \textit{eros} would be refashioned as noetic \textit{eros} rather than cease to exist altogether. As we shall see, the aim of this specifically noetic \textit{eros} is not \textit{Nous} itself, but the One beyond \textit{Nous}.

Our next task is to show that the claim that the One is the origin and end of all reality means to say that the One is the root and terminus of all \textit{eros}. The question “Why love?” can be addressed through three sub-questions, which will be implicitly addressed in the next two chapters. This is where my systematic reconstruction of Plotinus’ thought on \textit{eros} takes place more explicitly. \textit{First}, does \textit{eros} ever stop? That is, does it have a truly ultimate aim? This question will be answered positively and \textit{eros}’ ultimate aim will be identified with the One. However, to have an ultimate aim does not mean that \textit{eros} will cease, but rather that it will be sustained permanently and unswervingly, qua \textit{eros}, in the presence of the beloved. The \textit{second} question is: Why is Intellect not the ultimate aim of desire? As we shall see, the answer will be that it is because within \textit{Nous} there is still a minimal distance, that is to say, a lack of unity, between thinking and what is thought (as well as a multiplicity of intelligibles) that \textit{Nous} cannot serve as the Good. The distance is bridged only in the One, and the bridging of this distance is that which \textit{Nous} desires by being a (necessarily imperfect) image of it. Finally, the \textit{third} question: How can we speak about the absolutely simple, and how can the individual soul come in contact with it in union? While it seems reasonable to admit that the unity of Intellect, being a \textit{noetic} simultaneousness of reciprocally interpenetrating parts, lends itself to being unfolded
successively at the level of soul in a discursive or *dianoetic* manner, the very act of speaking of that which, qua truly one, has no parts whatsoever seems already to violate and hopelessly misrepresent its unity. If we are to speak of the One at all, we must be aware of the intrinsically metaphorical character of our utterances. Plotinus’ favorite term to describe the One, other than the phrase “the One” (τὸ ἕν), is the Good, whereby the One is named, strictly, not for what it is in itself, but in relation to everything else, namely as the end point of the aspirations (or, simply, of the *eros*) of the whole of reality. This appellative, “the Good,” will be the focus of Chapter Four, where the One qua Good will be approached as the ultimate *desideratum* of the soul’s erotic ascent. As for a metaphor to describe the One itself, prior or independently of what derives from it, Plotinus reverts once again to the notion of *eros* as he writes that the One is simultaneously “beloved and love and love of itself” (VI.8 [39] 15.1).

In the next chapter I shall investigate the meaning of this statement by Plotinus and see that the *eros* that has been the focus of the present chapter (in fact, that *all eros*) has not only its ultimate aim in the One qua Good (the focus of Chapter Four), but also its unoriginated origin in the One metaphorically understood as self-love. Thus, the proper seat of *eros* is not the soul (as it would seem to be in Plato), nor is it Intellect (as with Aristotle’s First Mover, which moves by being loved), but rather the One as that which,

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143 Plotinus’ statement about myths discussed earlier at the end of Section 2.2 can be understood precisely as a one form of such a discursive unfolding, the other form being that of rational discourse.

144 VI.8 [39] 15.1: Καὶ ἐράσμιον καὶ ἔρως ὁ αὐτὸς καὶ αὐτοῦ ἔρως (the translation of this line is mine throughout; ARMSTRONG’s translation can be found in Chapter Three note 1). I will comment on this text in Subsection 3.3.1. Works like Lacrosse (1994), PIGLER, and, I hope, the next two chapters of this study should suffice to demonstrate that this Plotinian reference to *eros* is not “an occasional lapsus,” as suggested by Thesleff (1980, 109 note 28). To these works we should add a chapter in Rist (1964, 56–112), to whom Thesleff’s remark was directed.
existing as spontaneous love of itself, in its superabundance gives to what
immediately proceeds from it, Intellect, a love for the One itself. This love is replicated,
with lesser intensity, at the level of Soul, of which the treatment of eros as the eye of the
soul is an illustration. As such, and as diversely argued by Lacrosse and Pigler in their
monographs on eros in Plotinus (see Preface note 7), eros constitutes the fundamental
link between the different levels of reality in Plotinian metaphysics, both in the process of
derivation of all reality from the One and in the process of return to it.
CHAPTER THREE:

PLOTINUS’ METAPHYSICS OF LOVE:

THE DERIVATION OF ALL REALITY FROM THE ONE AS EROTIC PROCESSION

...amorem unius inextinguibilem...

3.1 Introduction

One of the most obvious difficulties in dealing with any aspect of Plotinus’ thought is to find a point of entry in his philosophical universe which would not presuppose knowledge of the rest of this universe. Part of the problem is owing to the fact that Plotinus’ writings, unlike Proclus’ Elements of Theology for example, do not attempt to reproduce a system, but rather discuss particular problems whose solutions are

1 Plotinus V.1 [10] 6.2–8: “For the soul now knows that these things must be, but longs to answer the question repeatedly discussed also by the ancient philosophers, how from the One, if it is such as we say it is, anything else, whether a multiplicity or a dyad or a number, came into existence, and why it did not on the contrary remain by itself, but such a great multiplicity flowed from it as that which is seen to exist in beings, but which we think it right to refer back to the One.” Plotinus VI.8 [39] 15.1–2: “And he, that same self, is lovable and love and love of himself, in that he is beautiful only from himself and in himself.” Proclus, Commentary on Plato’s Parmenides VII.509.33: “…the inextinguishable love of the One...”
intelligible on the basis of a system which, though never made explicit more geometrico by Plotinus himself, constitutes the indispensable background of those discussions. Thus, in trying to make this background as explicit as possible, Plotinus scholars provide us with relatively systematic accounts of his thought which one will hardly ever encounter in the Enneads themselves. Some of these accounts revolve around the ideas of derivation or procession of all reality from the One, and ascent, return or conversion to it.²

The contents of the present and of the next chapter follow in the wake of this expository and systematizing method or tradition, but from the point of view of eros.³

What this means, as I anticipated in the closing section of the previous chapter, is that the interpretive systematization of the Plotinian universe will have eros as its guiding concept, or that the whole of Plotinus’ philosophical output can be clarified in terms of eros. More specifically, in these chapters eros will be presented as the key factor through

² See for instance the relatively short accounts by Armstrong (1953, 27–41; ARMSTRONG I, xi–xxviii; 1967, 236–268), Wallis (1995, 47–93), and IGAL (I, 23–35, 93–101), and above all the two classic monographs by Trouillard (1955b and 1955a); in part see also O’Meara (1993, especially chapters 6, 7, and 10), Gerson (1994, in particular chapters 1, 3, 9, and 10), A. Smith (2004, 1–74), in part Arnou (1967), as well as Reale (2004, VIII, 51–52, 171–186), who admittedly focuses on the notion of procession and deals with that of return only marginally (cf. also Labecki 2006 and 2007). In different ways, works like Alcinous’ Didaskalikos before Plotinus, and, after him, Iamblichus’ Protrepticus, Porphyry’s Sententiae, Damascius’ De principiis, and, in rigorous geometrical format, Proclus’ Elements of Theology and Elements of Physics are obvious attempts at systematizing (and thereby interpreting in their own terms) the set of notions and problems (including those of procession and return) that had become the common heritage of of the Platonic tradition, in whose development Plotinus played a fundamental role. For an account of the notions of procession and conversion in the broader context of Neoplatonism, see Lloyd (1990, chapters 4 and 5).

³ A clear advantage of this method is its pedagogical force. One of its most obvious shortcomings is the fact that in it the explicitly close reading of the text of the Enneads is often replaced by a more synoptic approach in which primacy is given to the view of the whole, while the real questions and problems and the likely interlocutors of Plotinus’ treatises may at times fall in the background or appear tangential due to the focus on the systematic framework within which they are addressed. I hope that the reading of Enneads III.5 [50] that I undertook in Chapter Two may represent a sufficient sample of an attempt partially to overcome this deficiency in the present study.
which Plotinus accounts both for the derivation or procession of all reality from one
single principle, the One (Chapter Three), and for its return to the same principle as the
Good, the ultimate goal or highest desideratum of all reality (Chapter Four). Were it not
for the chronological element introduced by internal references, the content of Chapter
Three and Chapter Four could be read in reverse order, since the realities they treat are
the same, only approached from the opposite poles of Plotinian metaphysics.4

The main bulk of this chapter is divided in three sections, the first of which
introduces the complex problematic of the derivation of all reality from the One (Section
3.2), while the remaining two analyze the erotic status of each “level” of the Plotinian
universe from the viewpoint of derivation, namely, the One above5 or beyond Nous (3.3)
and everything else that is derived from it (3.4), to wit, Intellect or Nous (Subsection
3.4.1), soul (3.4.2), and, beneath these “divine realities” (V.1 [10] 7.49), the sensible or
material world, including pre-cosmic matter (3.4.3). In my exposition I draw freely from
the sources cited in the section of the Bibliography titled “Plotinus,” with some important
additions,6 above all Pigler’s monograph, Plotin, une métaphysique de l’amour,7 whose

4 As Trouillard (1955b, 28) remarks, the two processes “n’apparaissent antithétiques que dans l’image
spatiale qui les représente comme des événements extraposés.” What this means in the ensuing
exposition is not only that everything comes from the One as an act of love or generosity on the part of
the One, but, perhaps more radically, that in this act of love each of the derived hypostases (i.e., Intellect
or Nous and soul) constitutes itself or comes about as this particular hypostasis by erotically turning itself
or “reverting” first upon itself and toward its generator (i.e., the hypostasis immediately “above” it), and
ultimately toward the One (which for Nous is also its immediate generator). See pages 133–139 for the
meaning of the term ὑπόστασις, and pages 204–207 and 364–367 for the notion of reversion.

5 Let it be noticed that all such terms as “level,” “above,” “beyond,” “beneath,” and so forth, do not have, in
this specific context, spatial connotations, much like “before” and “after” are not to be understood in
strictly temporal terms.

6 These additions include: Trouillard (1955b), O’Meara (1993), and Gerson (1994).

7 Pigler organizes her exposition around conceptual triptychs, which she successively applies to the four
precise analyses have made my work in this chapter considerably lighter.

Table 4 on the next page may be used as a helpful reference, especially in matters of terminology, through the reading of this chapter.

3.2 Derivation of the Many from the One: The Problem and Its Plotinian Solution

The focus of the present section is Plotinus’ answer to the following interrogative:

How does multiplicity derive\(^8\) from utter simplicity (cf. V.9 [5] 14.13: \(\pi \omega \zeta \dot{\varepsilon} \dot{\epsilon} \zeta \dot{\varepsilon} \dot{\nu} \omega \zeta \dot{\pi} \lambda \eta \theta \omicron \omicron \zeta\))? This question and its Plotinian answer, concisely put forth chiefly in *Enneads* V.4 [7] (*How that which is after the First comes from the First and on the One*), include a

\(^8\) Two terminological observations on the use of the word “derivation” and its cognates are in place here.

1. I follow O’Meara (1993, 60–61) in referring to the process of constitution of all things *ultimately* from the One with the more neutral term “derivation” (occasionally I also call it “procession”), in contrast with other such expressions as “emanation,” “production,” “making,” “creation,” and so on. The reason for this is to distinguish the process that I take Plotinus was likely to have in mind from the ideas often associated with the other terms I mentioned, which may suggest that the process entails (a) deliberation and/or (b) fabrication and ought to be material in character (as in the case of making and production); (c) that what “springs” from a given source diminishes or otherwise affects the source and/or (d) is wholly homogeneous with it (as might be the case with emanation and the idea of overflowing); (e) connections to ideas, Christian or otherwise, that are not central or explicit in the Plotinian problematic (as might be the case with creation *ex nihilo*).

2. The Greek term I translate with “derivation” in this context is πρόοδος (occasionally διέξοδος, for instance at III.8 [30] 9.38, where Plotinus calls the One ἄρχη διεξόδου), which in the *Enneads* is not reserved to name the process of derivation or procession of all reality directly from the One, but is used also to indicate the several intermediate stages of this process, that is, in approximately “descending” order: of *Nous* (or rather, of intelligible matter, as I will argue in Subsection 3.4.1) from the One (e.g., in V.5 [32] 3.9); of Soul (or, perhaps less imprecisely, of psychic matter, as we shall see in Subsection 3.3.2) from Intellect (e.g., IV.8 [6] 6.5–6); of the World-Soul and of individual souls from the indivisible Soul-Hypostasis (e.g., IV.3 [27] 8.2–3; IV.2 [4] 1.44, on which see Chappuis 2006, 52–54); of the soul’s powers from the soul (e.g., IV.8 [6] 5.33); of soul into plants (e.g., V.2 [11] 1.27); of images from form (e.g., III.6 [26] 17.7; see Fleet 1995, 266). Less technically, the term πρόοδος is used also to indicate the progress of such quantitative entities as the unit and the point toward multiplicity (e.g., VI.3 [44] 12.14; cf. also VI.6 [34] 11.26) and the progress of any given potentiality toward its proper actualization (e.g., VI.3 [44] 22.7, 47).
### Table 4. Prospect of the Derivation of All Reality in Plotinian Metaphysics: Stages, Kinds of Unity, Kinds of Love

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage of Derivation</th>
<th>Kind of Unity</th>
<th>Kind of Love</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Stage of Derivation</strong></td>
<td><strong>Kind of Unity</strong></td>
<td><strong>Kind of Love</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ONE (The Good, Principle, First, Source, Root, Father, Beyond, etc.)</td>
<td>Unqualified simplicity</td>
<td>Self-love</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NOU Loving Intellect (intelligible matter, indefinite dyad, pre-hypostatic noetic matter, primary otherness)</td>
<td>Indeterminate erotic energy wholly directed toward the One</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NOU Thinking Intellect (the fully formed hypostasis of Nous)</td>
<td>Noesis (intuition)</td>
<td>Noetic (intuitive) possession of the One; friendship among intelligibles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S Undescended (part of) individual souls</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S Pre-hypostatic (intelligible) psychic matter (psychic analogue of Loving Intellect)</td>
<td>Indeterminate erotic energy wholly directed toward Nous</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S Soul-Hypostasis (higher soul)</td>
<td>Eternal primary dianoia or discursiveness</td>
<td>Dianoetic (discursive) possession of Nous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S Remainder of intelligible (psychic) matter (Penia in III.5 [50] 7 and III.8 [30] 5)</td>
<td>Indeterminate erotic energy wholly directed toward the Soul-Hypostasis</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O World-Soul (lower soul, Nature)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U Rational individual souls in their embodied operations</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L Immanent Nature Intellect of the World-Soul</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Eternal derivative dianoia (discursiveness)</td>
<td>Constant connection to the Soul-Hypostasis’ contemplation of Nous; care for the sensible cosmos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Temporal dianoia (discursiveness)</td>
<td>Intermittent connection to the Soul-Hypostasis’ contemplation of Nous; care for the individual body</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M Lower Matter, as opposed to Intelligible Matter</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MAT Cosmic matter (sensible matter, the sensible, body)</td>
<td>Unity of discrete parts, temporal (form, life)</td>
<td>Sympathy (organic); friendship implying enmity</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T Pre-cosmic matter (Penia in I.8 [51] 14, III.6 [26] 14)</td>
<td>Formless continuity</td>
<td>Aspiration to existence</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Notice**

- The double line between the level of soul and the level of matter indicates the fundamental difference which Plotinus posits between the hypostases or higher realities (i.e., the divine things of V.1 [10] 7.49; cf. page 259 above) and the material universe.
- The gap between the levels of pre-cosmic and cosmic matter indicates the tentativeness with which I take pre-cosmic matter to be part of Plotinian metaphysics understood as a system of integral emanation (see note 17).
- From the top, the decreasing shades of the highlighted rows indicate the decreasing erotic intensity of levels or stages of intelligible matter.
- The various connections (i) of the undescended (part of) individual souls to individual souls in their embodied operations, (ii) of the latter to the sensible, and (iii) of the intellect of the World-Soul to the Soul-Hypostasis’ contemplation of Nous, are indicated by semi-open links between these levels.
- The reasons for placing undescended individual souls in Nous should become clearer after reading the next chapter, particularly Subsection 4.3.2, 4.4.1, and 4.6.2.
cluster of related problems, which I here summarize in the order in which they will appear in the ensuing subsections. First, why should the many derive from one principle and why should there be only one such principle, the Principle (Subsection 3.2.1)?

Secondly, since the Principle will turn out to be of an unqualifiedly simple nature, how can we speak of it (3.2.2)? Thirdly, how or in what manner do the many derive from the One? It is in reply to this last question that I will introduce Plotinus’ Principle of Double Activity (3.2.3). And lastly, are the Plotinian hypostases real things with a relatively independent existence or aspects-modes of one single, all-encompassing reality (3.2.4)?

A summary treatment of these questions constitutes the necessary framework to

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10 The expression “Principle of Double Activity” does not occur in the Enneads (but see note 100 below). If I employ it (and capitalize it), it is simply because it serves me as a useful label for an idea that occurs very often in Plotinus. The same applies to other expressions that appear and are discussed later in this and the following chapter, namely: “Principle of Prior Simplicity,” “Principle of Prior Simplicity,” “Principle of Prior Simplicity,” “Principle of Prior Actuality,” “Principle of Reversion,” “Principle of Superabundance,” “Principle of Henologic Giving,” “Principle of Superiority of Cause to Effect,” “Principle of Likeness of Cause and Effect,” “Principle of Assimilation,” “Principle of Affinity,” and “Principle of Participation.” A summary table (Table 6) of all these principles is provided at the end of Chapter Four for the reader’s convenience. As previously pointed out (Chapter Two note 27), I also capitalize the following: “One,” “Intelect” or “Nous” (as well as “Form,” “Being,” and “Beauty” when these are used as shorthand descriptions of the noetic realm), “Soul-Hypostasis” (not to be confused with the expression “the hypostasis soul” as indicating the whole of psychic manifestations, and with “soul,” often used anarthrously to indicate soul in general without reference to any of its specific manifestations), and “World-Soul.”
understand the workings of *eros* in Plotinian metaphysics, both for this and for the next chapter.

### 3.2.1 Necessity of Deriving the Many from the One, and the Uniqueness of the Principle

The notion of a single source of all reality is part of the Greek philosophical tradition even prior to Plotinus.\(^{11}\) However, when one considers that, despite their talk of an Idea of the Good as the cause of both the knowledge and the existence of Ideas\(^ {12}\) and of a First Mover as the final cause of all things,\(^ {13}\) both Plato and Aristotle seem to have taken the cosmos to be without beginning in time,\(^ {14}\) it might be asked whether there ever

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\(^{11}\) Gerson (1994, 3 and 227–228 note 5) points out that this single Principle is uncontentiously called “god” (θεός) within this tradition. On the Plotinian One as θεός see Rist (1962b), Ham (2000, 279–281). For references in Plotinus see SP, s.v. θεός (c).

\(^{12}\) Notice that in the *Republic* just as the sun is called responsible for sight and cause of things seen (*Republic* VI.508b9, VII.516c2: αἴτιος), so the Good is called the cause (aitia) of knowledge and of all that is correct and beautiful (*Republic* VI.508e3, VII.517c2). *If the metaphor of the sun (which stands for the Good) is read in light of the story of the cave in book VII, in this context “things” does not mean sensibles but Ideas. To my knowledge, nowhere does Plato attribute to the Good direct causality for the existence of sensible things (nor, for that matter, of the soul), although at *Republic* VI.509b2–4 he does state that the sun does not only provide visible things (τοῖς ὁρωμένοις) with the power to be seen (ὁρᾶσθαι δύναμιν), but also with generation, growth, and nourishment (τὴν γένεσιν καὶ αὔξην καὶ τροφήν), which obviously are features incompatible with Platonic Ideas. By contrast, Proclus (*Elements of Theology* 12) seems to have in mind precisely this passage from the *Republic* when he identifies the Good with the ἀρχή of all, or the final cause with the efficient cause (see Dodds 1963, 198; cf. note 167 below, and Section 4.2). Whatever the case may be, if it is still Ideas that Plato has in mind in *Republic* VI.509b, then the only way I see in which the Good could be said to cause the existence of things is indirectly, namely if, agreeing that the Good causes the existence of Ideas, the latter in turn cause the existence of sensible things, so that the Good becomes the ultimate cause of the existence of everything, although one might then wonder (i) whether the existence caused by the Good and that caused by the Ideas would have to be taken equivocally, or else (ii) why Ideas are necessary at all as causes of existence. Against the latter conjecture, (ii), Gerson (1990, chapter 2, in particular pages 57–65) argues that Ideas cause things, not to be, but merely to be what they are; in other words, they act as formal causes. Admittedly this problem, though legitimately raised in reference to Plato, is borrowed from the later tradition and never seems to surface explicitly in Plato.

\(^{13}\) See especially *Republic* VI–VII for Plato, and *Physics* VIII and *Metaphysics* XII for Aristotle.

\(^{14}\) Here I have in mind Plato’s notion of the so-called “receptacle” (ὑποδοχή) of becoming as logically prior to both the cosmos and the four elements of water, air, earth and fire (*Timaeus* 49a6, 51a8–b1, 52d2–e5, 69b2–c5), along with Aristotle’s notion of prime matter (πρωτή ὑλή, a rare expression but a key element
was a Greek or Hellenized thinker who explicitly upheld the single origin thesis for what it truly means, namely that all reality derives from one single source, and not from the combination of two or more independent elements of which one may be more important than the other. If we except some possible anticipations of the thesis in the so-called Neopythagoreans, it seems that the one who first formulated it explicitly and precisely in Greek philosophy was Plotinus. To put it more sharply, what the thesis means for our author is: (i) that everything, including lower matter (as distinguished from intelligible matter), derives from the One and depends on it for its existence; (ii) that the many, whether taken individually, partially, or as a totality, can in no way be resolved in the Aristotelian system: e.g., *Metaphysics* V.1015a7, IX.1049a25–26; cf. also VII.1035b30: τὰ ἅπα ἐκ τῆς ἐνδείκτης ὕλης (ultimate matter), which has no separate existence and so is never experienced as separate from form (see for instance *De generatione et corruptione* II.329a24–26, 34–b1; cf. *Metaphysics* VII.1029a20–28). Schweyzer (1973, 266–272; cf. also Fleet 1995, 200–201) points out that Plotinus identifies Plato’s receptacle with Aristotelian prime matter (see II.4 [12] 1.1–4, III.6 [26] 11–12, 13.12–18, 19.14–18; cf. also II.4 [12] 6), probably following Aristotle’s own lead (e.g., *Physics* IV.209b11–16, where the Stagirite identifies matter and space, or χώρα, the latter being closely associated with the receptacle in *Timaeus* 52a8–b5), although evidence in Plato might suggest otherwise (see W. D. Ross 1936, 565–567; Gerson 1994, 108–109; Corrigan 1996, 26 note 8; for a helpful discussion on the interpretation of the receptacle see O’Brien 1981, 118; 1991, 11; 1993, 112; 1995, 22; followed by O’Meara 1999b, 25; Corrigan 1996, 262), an expression which I will not use often in these pages but which well describes Plotinus’ system of derivation of all reality from one single source, as long as one maintains that emanation does not imply any diminution in the Source (cf. H. F. Müller 1913, 416–422; Gerson 1994, 28–29; note 8 above). However, I adopt this position not without some reservations, for even conceding that lower matter is unambiguously and consistently said to be generated in the *Enneads*, I have not been completely persuaded that it coherently fits Plotinus’ metaphysical architectonics (see Subsection 3.4.3).
in the One, and so the One must be understood as utterly transcending what derives from the One (not only in the sense of being other than it, but also as not being directly involved in it),\(^{18}\) (iii) that derivation does not detract from the simplicity of the One;\(^{19}\) (iv) that the One must be incorporeal;\(^{20}\) and (v) that the process of derivation is a-temporal.\(^{21}\) These five points sum up Plotinus’ basic views on derivation.\(^{22}\)

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\(^{20}\) Cf. for instance V.4 [7] 1.17–19; the entirety of VI.5 [23] On the presence of being, one and the same, everywhere as a whole II. When understood as fulfilling the first four conditions, (i) through (iv) in the main text, the One is taken to be the universal cause in the sense that it is the origin of all reality (see note 17 above). But the One is cause also in another sense, namely as the final object of desire of all reality, which will be the focus of the next chapter (see particularly Section 4.2).

\(^{21}\) Cf. II.9 [33] 3.11–15, III.2 [47] 1.20–26, VI.7 [38] 23.22–24. This is the thesis of the so-called eternity of the cosmos, common to the entire Greek tradition. For a concise treatment of the problem in connection with Plotinus, see Moreau 1970, 17–26, especially 22–26). Plotinus is generally in agreement with this tradition, but with an important specification, namely his understanding of eternity and its relation to time (on which see Appendix D). For this reason, I prefer to refer to the process of derivation as “a-temporal” rather than as “eternal.”

\(^{22}\) Leaving aside the fifth condition, (v) (a-temporality; see previous note), the originality of Plotinus may become apparent through a quick overview of the thought of the major philosophers of the Greek tradition before him on the issue.

It may be that the concept of ἀρχή in the Physiologists fulfills (i), radical dependence for existence, and perhaps even (ii), radical transcendence (cf. Gerson 1990, 5–14, 15), although what is predicated of the ἀρχή is more like a heightened difference that does not seem to preclude involvement in its effects; however, it tells us little about (iii), simplicity, and it is not clear that it fulfills (iv), immateriality: see Thales (DK 11.A12 = Aristotle, Metaphysics I.983b6–33), Anaximander (DK 12.B1 = Simplicius, Commentary on Aristotle’s Physics 24.13–21), Anaximenes (DK 13.A5 = Simplicius, Commentary on Aristotle’s Physics 22.9–13; DK13.A7 = Hippolytus, Philosophoumena I.7.1–12).

Conditions (i), (iii), and (iv) may be true of Xenophanes (DK 21.A30 = Aristotle, Metaphysics I.986b18–27; DK 21.B23 = Clement of Alexandria, Stromata V.14.399.14–17) and the Eleatics (Parmenides: DK 28.B8.1–49 = Simplicius, Commentary on Aristotle’s Physics 145.1–146.22; Zeno: DK 29.A21 = Aristotle, Metaphysics III.100b7–13; Melissus: DK 30.B8 = Simplicius, Commentary on Aristotle’s On the Heavens 558.9–559.12; DK 30.B9 = Simplicius, Commentary on Aristotle’s Physics 109.34–110.2, 87.6–7), but it is not clear that the same can be said of (ii). In fact, the transcendence of Being with respect to beings voiced by these authors (i.e., the fact that Being, or the one, is none of the beings, or the many, depending on it) actually does not amount to the totality of these beings, thus implying some sort of pantheism or immanentism. Something along the same lines may be argued about
The main question is: Why must all reality be understood as deriving from a single principle? The most concise answer to this interrogative is the longstanding principle that whatever is composite, or made up of parts, ultimately derives from something that is simple, a statement which, with O’Meara, I will refer to as the Principle of Prior Simplicity.23 The version of it given at24 V.4 [7] 1.5–15 is a classic Plotinian

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[5] For there must be something simple before all things, and this must be something other than all the things that come after it, existing by itself, not mixed with the things that derive from it, and all the same able to be present in a different way to these other things, being really one, and not a different being and then one; it is false even to say that it is one, and there is “no concept or knowledge” of it; it is indeed also said to be beyond being. For if it is not to be simple, outside of all coincidence and composition, and truly one, it could not be a first principle; and it is the most self-sufficient, because it is simple and the first of all: for that which is not the first needs that which is before it, and what is not simple is in need of its simple components so that it can come into existence from them.

O’Meara observes that there are three different points at issue here. The first is that in this context the parts making up the whole are not of the kind whose existence depends on the existence of the whole; instead, they have a double existence: both within

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25 Some parallels for the Principle of Prior Simplicity include III.8 [30] 9.1–6, 10.20–23, V.3 [49] 12.9–20, 16.12–16; cf. also VI.5 [23] 1.1 (IGAL, ad loc.). Within the Platonic tradition, one can encounter other versions of this principle in Alcinous’ Didaskalikos X.165.34–166.14, and more notably in Proclus’ Elements of Theology 1–6. For a possible antecedent of this principle see Alexander of Aphrodisias, Commentaries on Aristotle’s Metaphysics 55.20–56.6 (cf. O’Meara 1999a, 69). Other reformulations of the principle, heavily recontextualized and accompanied by sustained arguments, are found throughout the history of philosophy, typically in the Middle Ages (e.g., Bonaventure, Commentaria in quatuor libros Sententiarum Ld.8.p.2.q1; Thomas Aquinas, Summa theologiae Lq.3.a7; Duns Scotus, De primo principio IV.3–6).

26 Cf. Plato, Letters II.312e3–4. Notice that for Plotinus the Principle of Prior Simplicity is already at work at intermediate levels of unity: “the principle of each group of things is simpler than they are themselves” (V.3 [49] 16.7–8: ἡ ἀρχὴ ἑκάστων ἁπλουστέρα ἡ αὐτά).

27 Cf. Plato, Parmenides 141e10–11.


the composite and independently of it. The second point is that when wholes are analyzed into their parts, this analysis will lead to one single ultimate element which is unqualifiedly simple, is “presupposed, directly or indirectly, by all composite things,” and is “independent of all that derives from it.” And thirdly, since the elements of any given compound are not random aggregates, but unified structures with an inner organization, which therefore require a principle of unity, the priority of the unifying principle with respect to the composite is better understood as superiority “in power and being.”

This principle must be one and one only, that is, one of a kind: unique in its absolute simplicity. The sole reason Plotinus offers for this last claim in treatise V.4 [7] is that if there were two such things, both would be one. Now, since the Principle is unqualifiedly simple, it cannot be a body, for body is understood to be infinitely divisible

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30 Cf. V.6 [24] 3.10–15. O’Meara (1993, 46) observes: “This dual status is common in Plotinus’ universe: soul is both part of (in) the world and separate from it; intellect is both part of (in) soul and above it; and the nature of intellect is such that it derives from something which both composes it and is prior to it, the One. This is no universe where immanence excludes transcendence.”

31 O’Meara (1993 46, 45); see also O’Meara (1999a, particularly 67–73); cf. Dodds (1960, 3).


33 O’Meara (1993, 49). O’Meara continues: “It is superior in power because it produces the compound. And it is superior in being because it exists at a higher level of perfection: it possesses unity, self-integrity, independence to a greater degree.” See also O’Meara (1999a).

34 This is not unlike Spinoza’s affirmation that God is the only existing and conceivable substance (Ethics I.p14), with the essential difference that by affirming that God is the immanent but not transitive cause of all things (Ethics I.p18), Spinoza obliterates God’s transcendence, which Plotinus, by contrast, strenuously maintains. Plotinus argues that the One, like Spinoza’s single substance, is none of the things derived from it, nor their totality (see note 18 above), but he would never say that things derived from the One are its modes, as it is the case of particular things in Spinoza (Ethics I.p25.cor.).


and so it lacks simplicity by definition.\(^{37}\) One may grant, therefore, that the First will have to be something incorporeal (μὴ σωματικὴ: V.4 [7] 1.19), but what does it mean to say that if there were two such things, both would be one? Put more technically, what does it mean to say that the simplicity of the Principle implies its uniqueness?

Gerson, from whose account I borrow freely in the remainder of this subsection,\(^{38}\) remarks that the possibility of there being two or more such principles differing solo numero, as in Leibniz’s indiscernibles,\(^{39}\) should be discarded because the uniqueness of the Principle “is supposed to follow from its being the sort of thing it is (τὸ τοιοῦτον [cf. VI.9 [9] 6.23]), namely, one or simple.”\(^{40}\) One might argue that although the two are indiscernible to the inquirer, at least one factor still ought to be postulated in order to differentiate them. If we do so, this factor must be either essential to the nature of the Principle or inessential. If it is essential, then the one possessing it in addition to all that the two have in common will be the Principle; if it is inessential, the one possessing it is diminished, qua (alleged) Principle, by the very fact of possessing it, thereby not being the Principle.

The fact is that one cannot argue for the uniqueness of the Principle without already taking its nature into consideration; conversely, one can argue against its uniqueness only by failing to take its nature into consideration. At VI.8 [39] 7.39–41, Plotinus explicitly argues about the One that “[39] it possesses uniqueness [τὸ μοναχὸν]

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\(^{40}\) Gerson (1994, 5).
not because it is obstructed by something else but because [40] it is this very thing 
[τὸ τὸτο ὁτὲ ἐἶναι] and is, we may say [ὁῖν], satisfied with itself [ἀρέσκειν ἑαυτῷ] and has nothing [41] better than itself” (cf. also VI.8 [39] 9.13). As Gerson observes, “[e]vidently, unqualified simplicity is thought to be incapable of duplication,”41 and duplication is impossible because the absolutely simple is identical with the First (τὸ πρῶτον: see V.4 [7] 1.1–3), whose essential and absolute priority is incompatible with the very notion of duplication.42

Plotinus is not quite as explicit on this point, but I believe that what he has in mind is a necessary connection between that nature of the Principle and its uniqueness, or the fact that uniqueness is necessarily part of its nature—“part,” that is, from the perspective of the inquirer. Its nature is infinity of power, which as such resists the notion of multiplication. There is nothing in principle limiting the number of individuals that can

41 Gerson (1994, 5). Incapability of duplication here should not be understood as a lack, but as a necessity grounded in the very nature of the Principle. As I will argue in Subsection 3.3.2, the simplicity of the One is the simplicity of an infinite self-sufficient power (see V.5 [32] 10.20–23, VI.5 [23] 12.3–7, VI.9 [9] 6), which as such, of necessity, does not engender, nor is it engendered by, an infinite equal to itself.

42 Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* XII.1074a31–38 would appear to be an antecedent of this line of thinking: “[31] It is evident that there is only one heaven [ἐἷς οὐρανός]. For if [32] there were a number of heavens, as there are a number of men, then the principle [ἀρχή]—one for each heaven—would be specifically [ξείδα] one [33] but numerically [ἀριθμῷ] many. Now, things that are numerically [34] many all have matter [ὕλην]; for many < particulars > have one and the same account [λόγος]—[35] that of man, for instance—but Socrates is one < particular >. But the primary essence [τὸ δὲ τί ἦν εἶναι... τὸ πρῶτον] has [36] no matter, since it is actuality [ἐντελέχεια]. Hence the primary [37] unmoved mover [τὸ πρῶτον κινοῦν ἀκίνητον] is one in number and in account; so also then what is always [38] and continuously moved; and so there is only one heaven” (translation by Irwin and Fine; cf. *Metaphysics* VIII.1045a36–b1). However, this text fails to provide a background for the Plotinian notion of the uniqueness of the Principle, for as we shall see (Subsection 3.4.1 and Section 4.2), Plotinus will criticize Aristotle, saying that the Aristotelian First Principle, being intellective in nature (Metaphysics XII.1074b34–35: ἡ νόησις νοήσεως νοῆσων νόησεως), is not truly simple, hence, in accordance with the Principle of Prior Simplicity, not truly First (see for instance V.1 [10] 9.7–27; V.3 [49] 5; VI.9 [9] 2). More in keeping with our point, the reason given by Aristotle for the uniqueness of the First Principle (namely that the latter is pure actuality and therefore wholly deprived of matter, which is the element that makes for multiplication within the same kind in the passage I cited) simply does not seem to be what Plotinus has in mind; in fact, Plotinus admits the existence of incorporeal intellects that are one in kind (see Gerson 1994, 6), hence, I surmise, the absence of any reference to Aristotle for the text of V.4 [7] 1.5–15 in HS1 and HS2.
belong to a given species, even in the case of incorporeal intellects (see note 40). This cannot be the case with the Principle if it is to be truly the First. Thus, Plotinus’ remark that if there were two such things both would be one means, not that these two things are both first although we have no way to establish how they differ, but rather that either none of the two is the First, and so a new First must be postulated, or else that their very nature excludes the possibility of their being, as it were, multiple individuals within the same genus, and so they are not two but one.

But what does it mean for Plotinus to say that something is simple (ἀπλοῦν)? Very broadly, it means that nothing can be predicated (κατηγορεῖσθαι) of it.\(^\text{43}\) For this reason he states that the One, as that which is unqualifiedly simple, has no essence (οὐσία);\(^\text{44}\) that is, it cannot be circumscribed by a limit or assigned any specific content. Strictly, even to call it “One” perhaps is inappropriate and a mere negation of multiplicity; when we do so, we do it in an ordinary fashion (κοινῶς; VI.9 [9] 5.32) and certainly we are not to imply that what is called “One” is first something else, and One only successively.\(^\text{45}\) On the contrary, for the One to be and to be one are identical. This is not the case for everything that is derived from the One; that is, in everything but the One, unity is provided from without (to wit, by the One itself) as something distinct from

\(^{43}\) See III.8 [30] 10.28–31. Plotinus writes that to add something to the mere expression “the Good” is, rather than a proper addition to it, the addition of deficiency, as if a diminution of its reputation (III.8 [30] 11.12–13, V.5 [32] 13.7–16). On the issue of predication concerning the One and its ineffability see the next subsection.


each thing’s essence.\textsuperscript{46}

Now, Gerson suggests that a thing’s unity amounts to its existence as not only conceptually but also really distinct from that thing’s essence, so that what the One gives to everything derived from it is that thing’s existence.\textsuperscript{47,48} My contention, which I adapt from Pigler,\textsuperscript{49} and which rather than being at variance with Gerson’s position tentatively supplements it from the vantage point of our main topic, is that the language of essence and existence can be legitimately transposed in terms of \textit{eros}. More explicitly, this means chiefly two things. First, what distinguishes the \textit{eros} that belongs to the One (to which I will refer as \textit{henologic \textit{eros}}) from the \textit{eros} of everything else is that \textit{henologic \textit{eros}}, unlike any other manifestation of \textit{eros}, is not directed to something other than itself and so does not entail any lack whatsoever.\textsuperscript{50} Thus, just like in the language of being the One

\textsuperscript{46} VI.9 [9] 1. See the next note for further references.

\textsuperscript{47} This line of reasoning was hinted by Rist (1973, 83–85) and ably, if differently, developed by Corrigan (1984; 1999) and Gerson (1990, 185–226, especially 201–212; 1994, 5–14). In short, as I just indicated in the main text, according to the last two authors something is unqualifiedly simple when its essence coincides with its existence (here synonymous with its unity). These authors claim that this identity applies to the Plotinian One and quote a number of texts from the \textit{Enneads} to support their point (e.g., VI.9 [9] 2; VI.6 [34] 13.50, VI.7 [38] 2, 21.12–14, 42.11, VI.8 [39] 13.56–57, 20.15–16, 21.32–33), although they do not always agree about the argumentative persuasiveness of each passage. Thus, they make of Plotinus the precursor of a famed argument in the history of philosophy (on which see Gilson 1952, 74–107; MacIntyre 1967). Gerson in particular thinks that the identity of essence and existence in the One constitutes the crucial argument in support of what I referred to as the Principle of Prior Simplicity. He even believes that the distinction between essence and existence, or, as he puts it in this context, “the individually existing Form and the nature its name names such that the latter serves the universalizing function while the former remains separate” (Gerson 1990, 44), is already present, though not explicitly emphasized, in Plato, most notably in the first part of the \textit{Parmenides}, in \textit{Philebus} 15a1–b8, and \textit{Timaeus} 51e6–52a4, 53b1–5 (see Gerson 1990, 33–81, in particular 40–52). Gerson (1990, 44) goes on to argue that “Plato clearly intends participation in a Form to mean having the attributes that the Form’s name names, but not having the Form’s properties, that is, immutability, eternity, etc.”

\textsuperscript{48} For a critique of this position as put forth by Gerson (1994), see D. L. Ross (1996). I already touched on this point earlier in Chapter One (pages 19–22).

\textsuperscript{49} \textsc{Pigler}.

\textsuperscript{50} We shall see (Subsection 3.4.1) that noetic \textit{eros}, or the \textit{eros} proper to Intellect, is an eternally fulfilled
is the ground of its own existence, so in the language of eros the One is at the same
time beloved, love, and love of itself (VI.8 [39] 15.1). Second, what the One gives to
everything ultimately derived from it (though apparently not to matter\(^51\)) is a fundamental
directedness toward the One itself, which as the target of this aim is conceived of as the
Good. Thus, just like in the language of being everything receives existence from the
One,\(^52\) which alone is \textit{causa sui},\(^53\) so in the language of eros no thing, whether taken

\(\textit{eros},\) ever in possession of its \textit{desideratum} (i.e., the One) and \textit{to this extent} it entails no lack. However, an
element of lack must still be maintained in it by the very fact that its \textit{desideratum} is something other than
itself, for \textit{Nous}, while never deprived of its beloved, is not itself the beloved, or the Good, except
equivocally, as when Intellect is called the proper good of soul, or that through which soul tends to the
Good (cf. I.7 [54] 2.9–11, VI.7 [38] 30.7–8, VI.8 [39] 7.1–2).

\(^{51}\) See Subsection 3.4.3 below.

\(^{52}\) See notes 46 and 47 above for references. In addition to this, Plotinus seems to maintain that the One is
not only the cause, but also the sustainer of the existence of things (VI.7 [38] 23.20–24, 42.11, VI.8 [39]
\textit{(Meditations} III.49 = Descartes 1897–1910, VII, 49) will echo this idea as he wro
ted that “conservation
differs from creation only by a distinction of reason.”

\(^{53}\) See VI.8 [39] 14.41, where the One is explicitly referred to as cause of itself (αἴτιον ἑαυτοῦ): cf.VI.8 [39]
7.53, 13.55, 15.8, 16.21, 20.2 and 21. If conceived of temporally, the notion of self-causation is
obviously contradictory, for before the One were to bring itself into existence, it would either exist or not
exist. If it existed, causation would not occur simply because the One \textit{already} existed; if it did not exist,
causation would still not occur because, in accordance with the Parmenidean adage, \textit{ex nihil nil fit}
(Parmenides, DK28.B8.5–10 = Simplicius, \textit{Commentary on Aristotle’s Physics} 78.14–19; cf. also
pseudo-Aristotle, \textit{On Melissus, Xenophanes, and Gorgias} 974b12 = DK 30.A5), and so the One will
\textit{never} exist. Ousager (2004, 129–137) makes the interesting point that we would be able to bypass all
these problems if, instead of translating αἴτιον ἑαυτοῦ as \textit{causa sui}, we rendered it with \textit{ratio sui}, its own
reason. Whatever the case may be, it is certainly not in temporal terms that one should understand the
expression αἴτιον ἑαυτοῦ, or \textit{causa sui}, when referred to the One. Instead, the One’s self-causation may
be clarified from the perspective of its double causality, efficient and final (I offer more explicit remarks
on the issue of the One’s double causality in what follows: see pages 181, 188–191, and 217–218, and
more extensively in the next chapter, Section 4.2). From the perspective of efficient causation, to say that
the One is \textit{causa sui} means that it neither receives existence nor is maintained in existence by anything
other than itself (cf. VI.5 [23] 12.34–35); similarly, from the perspective of final causation, for the One to
be \textit{causa sui} means that it seeks nothing beyond itself. As for the specific context of treatise VI.8 [30],
\textit{On free will and the will of the One}, Plotinus’ main goal in speaking of the One as cause of itself is to
exclude from it all contingency: since the One does not receive existence from without and seeks nothing
outside itself, it cannot be other than it is and for it freedom is identical with necessity (see Hadot 1999,
33–36). Important contributions on the concept of αἴτιον ἑαυτοῦ as applied to the One are Beierwaltes
(1999) and Narbonne (2001a, 98–110), and the already quoted Ousager (2004, 129–137); here one can
find further references to primary and secondary sources.
individually or collectively, will ever be the universal object of love, or the Good, but everything is erotically predisposed toward the One,\(^{54}\) which alone is simultaneously the Good of all and *amor sui*.

I will deal with this last point more extensively in Subsection 3.3.1. But before I come to it, we must briefly turn our attention to the remaining preliminary questions, beginning with the one I implicitly anticipated in the preceding paragraphs: the question of the ineffability of the One.

### 3.2.2 The Ineffability of the One

The issue of the simplicity of the One goes hand in hand with those of its transcendence and ineffability, for if to be unqualifiedly simple means, minimally, to be impervious to all predication (see note 43), one must ask how and if we can even speak of it. How can one attribute simplicity to the One if this precludes all distinction and therefore, *a fortiori*, all dienoctic or discursive distinction? Accordingly, Plotinus calls the One “truly ineffable” (ἀρρητὸν τῇ ἀληθείᾳ: V.3 [49] 13.1), and the contact with it, “without speech and without thought” (ἀρρητος καὶ ἀνόητος: V.3 [49] 10.43). And yet, he does not think that speech *about* the One is altogether impossible. On the contrary, he indicates two paths out of silence, one negative and another positive.\(^{55}\)

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\(^{55}\) Cf. Armstrong (1940, 1–28); Rist (1964, 69–87). A loose parallel of this can be found in Alcinous, who speaks of three ways of conceiving (νόησις) God: negation or abstraction (ἀπόφασις; negative utterances in my exposition in the main text), analogy (ἀναλογία; the *via positiva* in the main text) and eminence (ὑπεροχή; superlatives and expressions of transcendence in my account). See Alcinous, *Didaskalikos* X.165.16–34 (see Rist 1964, 87–88 note 129); cf. Numenius, fragments 2 and 9.
Let us begin with the so-called via negativa. The language of negation, whose constant use in Plotinus makes of him one of the most illustrious forerunners of negative theology, is often found in the Enneads in passages where the One is said not to be a number of things; for instance: neither being, nor substance, nor life,\(^{56}\) ungenerated,\(^{57}\) incorporeal,\(^{58}\) without form,\(^{59}\) without activity,\(^{60}\) needing nothing,\(^{61}\) and so on. Plotinus explains the dynamic of negation in the following passage, V.3 [49] 14.5–8:\(^{62}\)

[5] But we have it [i.e., the One] in such a way that we speak about it [6] but we do not speak it. For we say what it is not, [7] but we do not say what it is: so that we speak about it from what comes after it. [8] But we are not prevented from having it, even if we do not speak it.

Thus, our language about the One, rather than expressing the Principle straightforwardly, indicates it in a roundabout way by our making signs to ourselves (ἡμῖν αὐτοῖς σημαίνειν: V.3 [49] 13.5), as it were. However, in the context of negation, apophasic utterances about the One should not be understood as indications of a mere lack,\(^{63}\) but, in Wallis’ terms, as “denials of everything inconsistent with the One’s


\(^{59}\) V.5 [32] 6.4: ἀνείδεον; cf. VI.7 [38] 17.36, 28.28, 32.9, 33.37, VI.9 [9] 3.4, 43. The formlessness of the One should not be confused with the formlessness of matter, on which see note 329.


\(^{63}\) That apophasic utterances are not indication of a mere lack is a misconception about Plotinus and Neoplatonism that we might fall into if we were uncritically to espouse Heidegger’s interpretation of Western metaphysics as onto-theology and forgetfulness of being. Heidegger’s main thesis is that the
excellence, in particular of all plurality and all limitation.” Thus, for instance, the
One does not possess faculties that are found at lower levels of unity, including
intelllection (φαντασία), not because it lacks them but because it does not need them. Most

history of Western metaphysics can be read as a momentous and variously formulated forgetfulness of Being (Seinsverlassenheit), which ultimately means forgetfulness of the difference between Being (Sein, Seyn) and beings (Seiendes): the ontological difference. This forgetfulness results in the reduction of Being either to the most general concept of being (which is the focus of ontology) or to the highest of beings (i.e., God, the focus of theology), whence the designation of metaphysics as onto-theo-logical (onto-theo-logisch). As the history of such forgetfulness, metaphysics according to Heidegger ought to undergo an epochal overcoming (Überwindung) so as to enable human beings to recall Being itself (“Andenken an das Sein selbst”) (Heidegger, 1998, 278–279 = Gesamtausgabe 9, 367–368). This thesis appears often in the Heideggerian corpus; it is the object of focused attention in the following essays: the 1929 What is Metaphysics?, including its 1943 Postscript and, above all, its 1949 Introduction (where the term “ontotheological” appears), all collected in Wegmarken (Heidegger 1998, 82–96, 231–238, 277–290 = Gesamtausgabe 9, 103–122, 303–312, 365–383); The Onto-onto-logical Constitution of Metaphysics (1957) in Identität und Differenz (Heidegger 1969, 42–74, 107–143). If Heidegger’s thesis is taken to apply to Plotinus, the One will be reduced to one among the beings derived from it, which Plotinus strenuously denies. The alternative is that the thesis does not apply to Plotinus, but then either the One is reduced to nothing (the point against which I am presently arguing) or else Heidegger’s thesis, by failing to take into account the tradition of Neoplatonism, is itself at least historically inaccurate, though undeniably thought provoking. Regrettably, Heidegger’s references to Plotinus are brief, scattered, and general (e.g., Heidegger 1988, 81 = Gesamtausgabe 24, 13; Heidegger 1995, 38 = Gesamtausgabe 33, 47; see Beierwaltes 1989, 368 n. 12 for further references), thus making it very hard to establish the extent to which he thinks that the forgetfulness of which he speaks can be applied, if at all, to this major stream of the Western metaphysical tradition. Thus Narbonne (2001a, 149–150) is correct to lament that “la thèse de l’oubli de l’être, donnée comme le trait fondamental de la tradition métaphysique occidental, et qui ne fait donc pas de quartier pour Plotin ou ses successeurs, s’est justement dispensée d’une véritable confrontation avec la pensée néo-platonicienne.” On this issue one can profit from the reading of Hadot (1959), Aubenque (1971), Beierwaltes (1989, 365–378; 1995b), Schürmann (1982), Kremer (1989), Narbonne (2001a, 149–167; 2001b, 187–271); see also Caputo (1986), who by showing the influence of Meister Eckhart on Heidegger already points at the debt that the latter indirectly owes to the tradition of Platonism.


66 Cf. IV.4 [28] 24.1–12, V.6 [24] 5.1–5, VI.7 [38] 9.38–46, 41. Faculties such as the senses, the ability to deliberate, and even intelllection, are certainly powers, but they are also indications of a lack. The case of deliberation illustrates the point well (cf. pages 188–191, 202–204): we are capable of deliberation
importantly, when the One is said to be “beyond being,” the point is not that the One is non-existent. The Plotinian “beyond being” is neither absolute nothingness nor an “otherwise than being,” but rather an excess of being, or “being otherwise” (i.e., otherwise than the Being taken in its technical acceptation, namely Nous). Therefore, a certain continuity can be maintained between the One and beings, since negative descriptions of the One indicate utter superiority, or excellence, rather than mere privation.

because we possess reason, but we do so also because the best course of action is not immediately available to us, and so we need to deliberate about it. The One, by contrast, has no need for this, for it is always in the best possible condition.

See references in the Index Fontium of HS₁ and HS₂ under Plato, Republic 509b9; cf. note 70 below.

At I.7 [54] 1.8 the One is even said to be the best of beings (ἀριστον ὄν τῶν ὄντων); and at III.8 [30] 10.26–35 Plotinus clearly argues that the One, although it is none of the things of which it is the origin and although nothing can be strictly predicated of it, is not nothing.


It may be asked how it is possible to refer to the One as both “beyond being” (insofar as the One is like nothing that is found in Nous or at lower ontological levels) and “being otherwise” (insofar as the One is not altogether non-existent). I think the answer to this question depends on what facet of the problem one wishes to emphasize. If what is at stake is the affirmation of the One’s transcendence, then the Platonic formula of the “beyond” (ἐπέκεινα, ὑπέρ: see note 72 and 73) is employed. If, by contrast, what is at stake is the affirmation of the One’s existence, then Narbonne’s expression “being otherwise” may safely be applied to it. However, it should be kept in mind that what each expression amounts to is an emphasis on a different facet of the same problem, and that one expression does not immediately efface the other. I maintain that for Plotinus it would be equally mistaken to claim, on the one hand, that the One is non-existent on the ground that it is said to be “beyond being” and, on the other, that the One is a part of or in the totality of beings because it is occasionally said to be. It may seem that what is at stake in this problematic is also the validity of the principle of the excluded middle as applied to the seemingly all-encompassing couple of being and nothingness. A thing either is A or is not A, that is, in terms of being and nothingness, a thing either is or is not: tertium non datur. This principle is far from being invalidated, however, since “to be” for Plotinus would be equally mistaken to claim, on the one hand, that the One is non-existent on the ground that it is said to be “beyond being” and, on the other, that the One is a part of or in the totality of beings because it is occasionally said to be. It may seem that what is at stake in this problematic is also the validity of the principle of the excluded middle as applied to the seemingly all-encompassing couple of being and nothingness. A thing either is A or is not A, that is, in terms of being and nothingness, a thing either is or is not: tertium non datur. This principle is far from being invalidated, however, since “to be” for Plotinus is identical with Nous (cf. Chapter One note 187); therefore, in saying that the One is other than being, he simply places it beyond the noetic sphere without committing himself to say that it does not exist absolutely. I surmise that a partial solution to this problem would lie in developing a language that is not so dependent on the notion of being (or on the close connection of being and essence)—an immense task, to be sure—but I do not know of any passage in which Plotinus consciously attempts that, although this does not necessarily mean that he is unaware of the problem. To my knowledge, the only philosopher who explicitly attempted anything like this within the Western tradition is Emmanuel Levinas in his later publications, particularly Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence (Levinas 1981). The focus of Levinas’ analyses, however, is not the One, but the human person...
In this sense, the language of negation already points to the language of eminence (or of the highest degree of perfection), testified by Plotinus’ abundant use of superlatives and of expressions indicating transcendence, such as ὑπέρ (“above”) and ἐπέκεινα (“beyond”). While appreciating why expressions of transcendence should belong under the path of negation, we might be tempted to conceive of superlatives as closer to affirmation. I believe instead that it is safer to keep both under the heading of negation insofar as the degree of perfection they express in this context is one which, while occurring in the form of affirmative linguistic descriptions, points beyond the field of description altogether, toward an experience that lies not only beyond the dianoetic, but also beyond the noetic. Let us consider the positive path.

The *via positiva* is the language of analogy, whereby Plotinus attempts to give

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positive, albeit metaphorical, descriptions of the One. His favorite metaphors are those of the spring and of the root of a tree, of fire, snow, and of an odorous substance, of the center of a circle (or of a series of circles), of light (or the sun), and of love. It is hard to overemphasize that these descriptions are metaphorical, hence the sustained use of such qualifiers as οἷον and ὥσπερ ("as if," "so to speak," "like").

The kind of analogy Plotinus is likely to have in mind is not one of proper proportionality but, as Gerson (1990, 213) writes, one "of proportion where the cause is denominated from its effects." Thus, the One is variously called or said to have βούλησις (VI.8 [39] 13.56), ἐνεργεία (VI.8 [39] 7.47, 51, 16.15, 35, 20.9), ζωή (VI.8 [39] 7.51), νοῦς (V.4 [7] 2.18), οὐσία (VI.7 [38] 17.6, VI.8 [39] 7.52, 20.10), ὑπόστασις (VI.8 [39] 7.47, 20.11), and so on, not in the sense that it is identical with any of these things spoken of ordinarily, but in the sense that its nature has (or rather, is) the power to bring about all such things as effects while itself remaining that very power (see Section 3.3). The One possesses eminently what it does not have actually (see Pigler 58). Or, to cite Gerson (1990, 214) again, "the One is virtually what everything else is actually" (cf. V.3 [49] 15.27–32, V.5 [32] 9.1–10). This principle is attributed to Speusippus and criticized, perhaps not wholly fairly, by Aristotle at Metaphysics XII.1072b30–1073a3. The images reported in the ensuing lines of the present paragraph in the main text, I maintain, are attempts to indicate metaphorically the causal nature of the One.

On the One as source (πηγή) see particularly III.8 [30] 10; cf. VI.9 [9] 11.31. The One is called source of a number of things: beauty (I.6 [1] 6.15–16, 9.41–42), acts according to nature (I.7 [54] 1.15–16), Nous (II.5 [25] 3.40, VI.9 [9] 9.2), true soul (II.5 [25] 3.40), cause and being (VI.8 [39] 14.29–32), the best things (VI.9 [9] 5.36), life (VI.9 [9] 5.36), and on so, not in the sense that it is identical with any of these things spoken of ordinarily, but in the sense that its nature has (or rather, is) the power to bring about all such things as effects while itself remaining that very power (see Section 3.3). The One possesses eminently what it does not have actually (see Pigler 58). Or, to cite Gerson (1990, 214) again, "the One is virtually what everything else is actually" (cf. V.3 [49] 15.27–32, V.5 [32] 9.1–10). This principle is attributed to Speusippus and criticized, perhaps not wholly fairly, by Aristotle at Metaphysics XII.1072b30–1073a3. The images reported in the ensuing lines of the present paragraph in the main text, I maintain, are attempts to indicate metaphorically the causal nature of the One.

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77 On the One as love (eros) see VI.8 [39] 15.1, 16.12–14; see Subsection 3.3.1 below.

78 On the image of the circle see I.7 [54] 1.23–24, IV.1 [21] 1.16–17, IV.4 [28] 16.23–30, V.1 [10] 11.10–12 (cf. page 316 below), VI.5 [23] 5, VI.8 [39] 18.7–32. As Armstrong (V, 50–51 note 1) rightly remarks, the metaphor of the circle “can be used at any level of the hierarchy to describe the combination of immanent presence and transcendent separateness which Plotinus sees when he is trying to describe the relationship of a relatively complex and multiple derived reality to its simpler and more unified source” (cf. e.g. IV.2 [4] 1.24–29). A similar point can be made about the images of light/sun (on which see I.7 [54] 1.24–28, III.5 [50] 2.31–32, IV.3 [27] 11.14–17, IV.5 [29] 7; cf. note 160 below) and of love (on which see my previous chapter).


80 On the One as love (eros) see VI.8 [39] 15.1, 16.12–14; see Subsection 3.3.1 below.

81 To limit our references to the passages just cited in this paragraph and their immediate context: III.8 [30]
Thus, at VI.8 [39] 13.47–50 Plotinus tells us that “[47] one must go along with the words, if one [48] in speaking of that [Good] uses of necessity to indicate it expressions [49] which we do not strictly speaking allow to be used; but one should understand [50] ‘as if’ with each of them.” In fact, even such a common appellative as “the Good” does not really name the One, but only a perspective on it (to wit, the perspective of the whole of reality desiring it), so that strictly not even goodness is predicated of the One.

This array of positive analogies offered by Plotinus does not only constitute a path out silence as he attempts to indicate the unqualifiedly simple nature of the One by means

10.4, 9, 11, 29; IV.3 [27] 17.12; IV.4 [28] 16.21; V.1 [10] 6.12–13, 29, 33, 45; VI.8 [39] 13.50, 15.5–6, 16.12–13, 19–21, 24, 31, 18.4 (and several other times in the remainder of chater 18). Gelino (1963, 99) refers to the term οἷον with the felicitous expression “coefficiente di approssimazione,” but on the same page he does not seem to realize that the function of this term is only secondarily to soften the features of the images that Plotinus uses to speak about the One. By contrast, the primary function of οἷον is to introduce us to those images and, through them, both to the possibility of thinking about that of which they are images (i.e., the One) and to the realization that this exceeds all thinking. Thus, the meaning of οἷον is closer to “nearly” rather than to “so to speak.” (this is similar to one of the meanings of the Latin quasi: see Lewis and Short 1879, s.v., II.A; cf. Beierwaltes 1999, 223–225). Thus, οἷον is an index of neither pure negation nor pure affirmation, but, as Beierwaltes (1999, 225) puts it, “[e]s hat eine für das Denken und seinen Selbstüberstieg anagogische Funktion.”


See II.9 [33] 1.5–8, V.3 [49] 11.22–23, VI.7 [38] 24.13–16, 41.28–31, VI.9 [9] 6.39–42, 55–57. It follows that attributes normally associated with the Good, like self-sufficiency for example, are also not strictly predicated of the One (see V.3 [49] 17.12–14). What is said about the One is not categorically predicated of it but, as I pointed earlier, is inferred from what comes after it (V.3 [49] 14.7–8, V.5 [32] 6.17–21, VI.9 [9] 3.49–54). In fact, all strict categorial predication, including the appellative “Principle,” fails in the discourse about the Principle. As Meijer (1992, 184) puts it, “‘[t]o speak about it (περὶ αὐτοῦ)’ is not to speak categorically about the nature of the One but rather about its relations with what follows to reversely leading to conclusions about the One.” We might recall that among these relations, that of priority and posteriority of nature between the One and the many is one of non-reciprocal dependence, that is, one in which the posterior depends on the prior for its existence but not vice versa (cf. pages 164–165 above; see also my discussion of the Principle of Participation in Section 4.5 below).
of words, but also throws light on a question closely connected with the idea that
everything derives from a single source which is unqualifiedly simple, namely: How can
the many (or, to use the language of Plato’s Parmenides, “the others”) spring from the
One? How can something unqualifiedly simply give rise to multiplicity? Plotinus’ answer
to this question is his original Principle of Double Activity, as I already anticipated (see
note 10).

3.2.3 Modality of the Derivation of the Many from the One:

The Principle of Double Activity

Very generally, the Principle of Double Activity states that everything operates in
accordance with a twofold activity which is proper to it: internal and external.85 The
principle is found most frequently in Plotinus’ account of the emergence of a hypostasis
from another. I will begin by citing two passages in which the Principle of Double
Activity is put forth explicitly.86 The first passage is V.4 [7] 2.26–37:

[26] But how, when that [viz., the One] abides unchanged, does [Intellect]
[27] come into being? For each and every thing there is an activity which

85 The only exception to the Principle of Double Activity in Plotinus’ system would seem to be lower
matter, which has no external activity and therefore generates nothing beyond itself (see Subsection
3.4.3).

86 V.4 [7] 2.26–37 and V.1 [10] 6.25–39; other important references, more or less explicit, to the Principle
22.26–33, VI.8 [39] 18.46–52. Rutten (1956) calls this principle “doctrine des deux actes”; I follow IGAL
(I, 28–29), who calls it “principio de la doble actividad.”

87 V.4 [7] 2.26–37: [26] Ἀλλὰ πῶς μένοντος ἐκείνου [27] γίνεται; Ἐνέργεια ἡ μὲν ἐστι τῆς οὐσίας, ἡ δ’ ἐκ
tῆς οὐσίας [28] ἐκάστου· καὶ ἡ μὲν τῆς οὐσίας αὐτὸ ἐστὶν ἐνέργεια [29] ἐκάστου, ἡ δὲ ἀπ’ ἐκείνης, ἣν δεῖ
παντὶ ἐπισημαίνει ἢ ἄνάγκης [30] ἐπεράν οὐδὲν αὐτὸν· ὁμοῦ καὶ ἐπὶ τοῦ πυρὸς ἢ μὲν τὶς ἐστὶν
συμπληρωθεῖσα [31] τὴν οὐσίαν θερμότης, ἢ ἀπ’ ἐκείνης ἢ δὲ ἐκ τῆς ἐν τῷ οἰκείῳ ἐνεργοῦσα ἐν ἐνέργαιαν
ὑπόστασιν λαμβάνον, ἅτε ἐκ μεγάλης δυνάμεως, μεγίστη μὲν [37] οὖν ἡ παρατήρησις. I take the καὶ at line 35 to be
epexegetical. The translation is ARMSTRONG’s, slightly modified.
belongs to the essence and one which goes out from the essence; [28] and that which belongs to the essence is the actuality which [29] each thing is, while the other activity derives from the first one, which must in everything follow it of necessity, [30] being different from the thing itself: as in fire there is a heat which is the fullness of [31] its essence, and another which comes into being from that [primary heat] when [fire] [32] exercises the [activity] which is connatural to its substance in [33] abiding unchanged as fire. So it is also in the higher world; and much more so there, while the Principle abides [34] in its own proper way of life, the activity generated from the perfection in it, [35] that is, from its coexistent activity acquires substantial existence, [36] since it comes from a great power, the greatest [37] indeed of all...


[25] So, if there is a second after the One [26] it must have come to be without the One moving at all, without any inclination or act of will [27] or any sort of activity on its part. How did this happen then, and [28] what are we to think of as surrounding the One in its repose? [It must be] a radiation from it [29] while it remains unchanged, like the bright light of the sun which, so to speak, [30] runs round it, springing from it continually while it remains unchanged. And all [31] beings, as long as they remain in being, necessarily give out from their own essences, [32] in dependence on their present power, a surrounding reality directed to what is outside them, [33] a kind of image [34] of the archetypes from which it was produced: fire [produces] the heat which comes from it; [35] snow too does not merely keep its cold inside itself; and [36] perfumed things show this particularly clearly: as long as they exist, something is diffused from themselves [37] around them which is enjoyed by what is near them. And [38] all things, when they come to perfection, produce: what is always perfect produces always and [39] everlastingly; and it produces something less than itself.

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Four observations on these passages should suffice to outline the essentials of the theory. The first concerns the probable lexical and conceptual sources of the Principle of Double Activity, the two activities being the activity of the essence (ἐνέργεια τῆς οὐσίας) and the activity from the essence (ἐνέργεια ἐκ τῆς οὐσίας).\(^9\) From a lexical standpoint, its most likely background is constituted by Aristotle’s twin notions of ἐνέργεια and ἐντελέχεια.\(^\text{90}\) The basic Aristotelian meaning of ἐνέργεια is that of being engaged in a given work or activity (ἐργον)\(^9\) as opposed to merely having the potentiality, or potency (δύναμις), for it.\(^9\) In this sense the meaning of ἐνέργεια extensively overlaps with that of ἐντελέχεια.\(^9\) But Aristotle also distinguishes between first and second actuality, as when someone knows Greek but is not speaking it at the moment (first actuality), in contrast with someone who knows it and is presently speaking it (second actuality).\(^9\) Now, first actuality (in our example, the ability to speak Greek whenever one wishes if nothing

\(^9\) The two expressions, ἐνέργεια τῆς οὐσίας and ἐνέργεια ἐκ τῆς οὐσίας, literally, if clumsily, translated as “activity of the essence” and “activity from the essence,” have also been variously rendered as “internal and external activity (or act)” (e.g., in the first chapter of Emilsson 2007), “inmanente” and “liberada” (IGAL I, 28), or, more neutrally, “primary and secondary activity” (e.g., Gerson 1994, 22–35), or “first and second activity.” This is acceptable as long as we remain aware that “secondary” does not mean accidental or unnecessary (much like Igal’s “actividad liberada” does not mean that this activity was previously “forced” in some way or another), and as long as we stay clear of spatial connotations (as one might wrongly infer from Emilsson’s “internal and external activity”).

\(^\text{90}\) Neither word occurs in Plato, hence their highly probable Aristotelian derivation. Both terms are often translated with “actuality” (see note 102 on translating some Aristotelian terms).

\(^9\) The spectrum of activity is rather wide, ranging from, say, a person’s ordinary walking (De interpretatione 23a4–11, Physics V.228a12–17, On the Generation of Animals II.736b22–25) to the eternal unhindered thinking of the Prime Mover (Metaphysics XII.1071b19–20, 1072b726–27).

\(^\text{92}\) See for example De interpretatione 19a9, 23a4–11, Physics III.201a9–15, Metaphysics IX.1048a25–b5.


external prevents it) is in fact also a kind of potentiality, traditionally referred to as “active potentiality,” a “heightened state”\(^{95}\) to be distinguished from the more basic potentiality of someone who, being of the appropriate sort of genus and matter (τὸ γένος τοιοῦτον καὶ ἡ ὑλή\(^{96}\)), is in the position of being able to learn to perform a given activity (in our example, to speak Greek) but has not learned it (yet).

Admittedly, the actuality of the Aristotelian Prime Mover, that is, the activity of self-thinking, ought to be of the second (Aristotelian) kind, and permanently so.\(^{97}\) If one concedes Aristotle’s reasoning in *Metaphysics* XII, this is not too difficult to maintain, since the way in which his God moves the heavens is by its being their final cause, or the highest object of love.\(^{98}\) In our next chapter we will see that, in spite of certain differences, this is also the case of the Plotinian One, which in the *Enneads* is called the “most loved” (ἐρασμιώτατον).\(^{99}\) But unlike Aristotle’s Prime Mover, whose activity is wholly self-contained and whose causality is strictly final, the One appears to have both a double activity and a double causality. The double causality in question is on the one hand final and, on the other, efficient (see my last observation in this subsection). As for

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95 I borrow the expression from Brentano (1975, 37), who uses it in a slightly different context. Thomas Aquinas, commenting on Aristotle’s treatment of the potential and the actual in *De anima*, already hinted at the idea that the relation of first to second actuality is one of potency to act (Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on Aristotle’s De anima* II.1.18).

96 Aristotle, *De anima* II.417a27; cf. 412b18–b3, where in the example of vision, the faculty of sight (ὄψις) is distinguished from actual seeing (ὁράσις) not only conceptually but also terminologically.

97 See *Metaphysics* XII.1071b19–22, 1072a23–26; cf. the difficult passage on active or agent intellect in *De anima* III.430a10–25.


99 VI.7 [38] 32.25, 33.14.
its double activity,\footnote{100} the One (and in fact, every being whatsoever\footnote{101}) is said to possess an ἐνέργεια which, much like that of the Aristotelian God, is self-contained, and another which, proceeding of necessity from the One, generates something other than the One.\footnote{102}

It appears then that while from a lexical point of view the Aristotelian derivation of the Principle of Double Activity may seem probable, from a conceptual standpoint no strict parallel can be drawn between Aristotle’s two entelechies and Plotinus’ two activities. This is so because Aristotle’s first actuality is a kind of potentiality, whereas there is nothing potential in the Aristotelian sense in either activity of the One. It may be objected, first, that Plotinus himself refers to the One with the term δύναμις, as when he

\footnote{100} The expression “double activity” is explicitly found at II.9 [33] 8.22 (ἐνέργειαν... διττήν) and at VI.2 [43] 22.29 (ἐνέργειαι διτταί).

\footnote{101} See the opening paragraphs of Section 3.3 below.

\footnote{102} Gerson (1994, 23) writes about the Aristotelian God: “To have activity outside itself would be to allow a wedge between what the principle is in itself and what it does outside itself. Such a wedge would require that the former be in potency to the latter.” He goes on to state that “Plotinus combines the Aristotelian distinction of act and potency with the distinction of first and second actuality in a most remarkable way.” This could be misleading if we took it to imply that Plotinus introduces potentiality in the One (something which Gerson does not do, to be sure) and if we failed to consider that, as I already pointed out, the Aristotelian distinction between first and second actuality already contains an explicit reference to potency in Aristotle himself. Thus, as ARMSTRONG (V, 212 note 2) remarks, the distinction between two actualities applies only to human minds, which exercise the activity of thinking only intermittently; it does not apply to the divine Nous, which is eternally active and actual. Therefore, for Aristotle the human soul is itself a first actuality distinct from the particular activities it is engaged in at the level of the composite (activities which amount to the second actuality), but since the soul does not exist separately from the composite, it must always be engaged in some one of these activities (see Gerson 1990, 308 note 70). For this reason the distinction of first and second actuality as outlined in De anima II.412a11–413a3 cannot apply to the One strictly (see Plotinus V.6 [24] 6.5–12). The One’s second activity, therefore, is not something that takes place within the One, or something added to it, but an activity which, while springing of necessity from the One, gives rise to something that is not identical with it, and for this reason the One can be said to possess not only final but also efficient causality. The First Mover, by contrast, cannot be an efficient cause because its causality is never directed outwards (cf. Lloyd 1976, 147–148; Gerson 1994, 24; Bussanich 1999, 48); that is, the Aristotelian God lacks the activity from the essence, whence it take it that for Aristotle it is not the case that everything perfect is productive of something other than itself (cf. notes 180 and 181 below).
calls it the “power of all things” (V.4 [7] 2.38: δύναμις πάντων\textsuperscript{103}), or a power that is “unspeakable” (IV.8 [6] 6.12: ἀφάτου), “infinitely great” (V.3 [49] 16.2: ἀμήχανος\textsuperscript{104}), “endless in depth” (VI.5 [23] 12.5: βυσσόθεν ἄπειρον\textsuperscript{105}), and “standing on its own” (VI.6 [34] 8.10–11: ἐφ’ ἑαυτῆς βεβῶσαν). Secondly, in Aristotle the first ἐντελέχεια is sometimes equated with “habit” (ἐξεις\textsuperscript{106}), a notion that would seem less fraught with the danger of introducing potentiality in the Principle and so, after all, adequate to serve as the background of the Principle of Double Activity.

Neither objection stands however, since, in the first place, the notion of δύναμις at work in the expressions from the Enneads I just quoted is not the Aristotelian one of


\textsuperscript{105} On the power of the One as ἀπειρον (boundless or infinite) see V.5 [32] 10.22–23, 11.1–5; VI.5 [23] 4.13–14. The power of the One is ἀπειρον, however, not in the pejorative sense of an imperfect scatteredness, as in the case of lower matter (see note 329 below), but in the sense that the One is that which imparts form and determination while itself remaining beyond all form and determination.

\textsuperscript{106} Aristotle, De anima II.412a21–28 (where the word used is ἐξεις, the verbal cognate of ἐξεις, 417b9–16; cf. also Nicomachean Ethics I.1098b33–1099a3 and Eudemon Ethics II.1218b35–36, 1219a6. I am not dogmatically committed to the traditional rendering of ἐξεις with “habit,” an obvious heir to the less obscure (in Latin; cf. Sachs 2001, 183) habitus. However, I am mildly reluctant to embrace (or at least to give unqualified preference to) such creative translations of it as “active condition,” found in Sachs’ versions of Aristotle’s De anima (Sachs 2001) and Nicomachean Ethics (Sachs 2002). My reluctance springs from the fact that, without a good explanation (which Sachs does provide, to be sure, in his introductory essay to the Ethics: Sachs 2002, xi–xvii), to my (non-native English speaker’s) ears translations of this sort remain at least as impenetrable as (though arguably less misleading than) the old “habit” and the more recent “state” and “condition.” Moreover, while it is true that by itself the English “habit” is in all likeness misleading as a rendering of ἐξεις, it is also true that for Aristotle “habituation” remains central to the constitution of ἐξεις in the Nicomachean Ethics. A similar reluctance on my part applies to other terms, such as δύναμις (Sachs 2001, 184: “potency (not potentiality)” and, less mildly, ἐνέργεια (Sachs 2002: “being-at-work”) and ἐντελέχεια (Sachs 2001: “being-at-work-staying-itself”); in the cases of ἐνέργεια and ἐντελέχεια, Sachs’ renderings may even give the (misguided) impression that the two words share the same root in Greek.
potentiality and (temporary) lack of actualization.\footnote{Needless to say, Plotinus’ refashioning of the meaning of δύναμις does not mean that he is unaware of the ways in which Aristotle uses the term to mean a (yet) unfulfilled ἐνέργεια, as is clear from several passages in the \textit{Enneads} (e.g., III.8 [30] 11.2, V.3 [49] 7.17–18, and especially II.5 [25], the treatise on the potential and the actual). On δύναμις in Plato and on a comparison between the Platonic and the Aristotelian usage of the term, see Souilhé (1919, respectively 71–168 with the appended \textit{Tableau Récapitulatif}, and 169–190); see also note 115 below.} In fact, not only is δύναμις banned altogether from the One (as it is from the Aristotelian Prime Mover), but it is thoroughly refashioned to mean infinity of power.\footnote{See particularly VI.9 [9] 6 and VI.5 [23] 11; cf. V.5 [32] 6.14–15 (ἀπλετον φύσιν). Lloyd (1955, 145) rightly points out that “power” was the primary meaning of δύναμις not only before Plotinus, but well before Aristotle (cf. Souilhé 1919, 1–70). What Aristotle did is to distinguish between two main senses of the term: that of active power and that of possibility (potentiality), with the latter being dependent on the former (see \textit{Metaphysics} V.1019a15–1019b15). Aristotle probably turned to the notion of ἐνέργεια as more apt to express the nature of the Unmoved Mover, from which all potentiality is excluded. When Plotinus employs the notion of δύναμις in reference the One, he does not reverse the Aristotelian order nor does he merely rename Aristotelie’s divine ἐνέργεια. As Lloyd (1955, 146) writes, “Aristotle’s ἐνέργεια was complete in itself: Plotinus’ δύναμις is always accompanied by a δύναμις or ἐνέργεια ποιητική.” This ἐνέργεια ποιητική is neither Aristotelian potentiality, which would imply lack, nor Aristotelian pure ἐνέργεια, which is not ποιητική at all. For a different use of δύναμις in the context of the discussion on lower matter see note 334 below.} And secondly, as Hadot remarks in connection with some texts of Marius Victorinus and of Porphyry,\footnote{Hadot (1968, I, 228–230; see also 335 note 6). Victorinus’ text in question is \textit{Against Arius} III.5.1 (= PL 8, 1102b); the texts of Porphyry are \textit{Ad Gaurum} 33.14, 52.6, 12–15.} although it is true that in Aristotle there is a definite tie between first ἐντελέχεια and ἔξες, “the Aristotelian \textit{habitus} is but an analogue of the [Plotinian] first activity. Even if this first activity is known as an active power, it is not itself a \textit{habitus}.”\footnote{Hadot (1968, I, 228 note 4): “L’\textit{habitus} aristotélicien n’est qu’analogique à l’acte premier. Même si cet acte premier est conçu comme une puissance active, il n’est pas lui-même un \textit{habitus}.”} If a conceptual analogue of Plotinian δύναμις, which here appears to coincide with first activity,\footnote{Sometimes Plotinus equates the δύναμις of a thing to what elsewhere he calls its ἐνέργεια, as when he applies the Principle of Double Activity to soul, but the language he uses is that of δύναμις rather than of ἐνέργεια (IV.3 [27] 10.29 \textit{ad fin.}; cf. II.9 [33] 8.22–26, V.1 [10] 6.45). See the opening paragraphs of Section 3.3 below.} is to be found, it
would lie less in the Aristotelian than in the Stoic notion of ἔξις.112 Chrysippus, for example, speaks of ἔξις as a principle of both cohesion113 and specification114 of any given thing: ἔξις is a thing’s substantial character from which result certain specific effects external to the thing. Plotinus’ Principle of Double Activity seems to presuppose a distinction like the Stoic one between a thing’s ἔξις and the effects deriving from it.

Unlike Aristotelian δύναμις (and unlike Aristotelian ἔξις, which for the most part can be understood as a form of actualization presupposing potentiality115), Stoic ἔξις is not


114 SVF II, 449.147.38–43 (= Plutarch, De Stoicorum repugnantibus: Moralia XIII.1053f); SVF II, 612.187.3 (= Philo, De aeternitate mundi 17, VI.99.16). In these passages ἔξις as a specifying principle is equated to the substantive quality of each thing and is mentioned in connection with such realities as the hardness of iron, the thickness of stone, the whiteness of silver, and the inner fire of charcoal.

115 I take it that this is how Hadot (1968 II, 228 note 4) understands Aristotelian ἔξις. If so, he is certainly right in the case of virtue (ἀρετή) as presented in the Nicomachean Ethics (e.g., I.1103a9–10, II.1106a10–12, b36, III.1114b26–27, VI.1143b24–25). However, it would seem that the usage of ἔξις in Aristotle cannot be reduced to this meaning. For instance, in his analysis of vision Aristotle calls light (φῶς) “the activity of the transparent qua transparent [ἐνέργεια τοῦ διαφανοῦς ᾧ διαφανές]” (De anima II.418b9–10), which is made such or is actualized as transparent by fire (De anima II.418b14–15, 419a24–25); and he adds: “light appears to be the contrary of darkness [ἐναντίον... τῷ σκότει]; but darkness is a privation of that state from the transparent [στέρησις τῆς τοιαύτης ἕξεως ἐκ διαφανοῦς], so that evidently light is its presence [παρουσία]” (De anima II.418b18–20, my translation). Rutten (1956, 103) quotes these passages in connection with Plotinus’ Principle of Double Activity (as expressed at IV.5 [29] 7.13–17) and understands the interior activity of the Aristotelian fire as the Plotinian activity of the essence, and the action by which fire actualizes the transparent as the activity from the essence. The obvious difference between the two sets of activities in Aristotle and in Plotinus is the fact that in Aristotle the transparent pre-exists fire, albeit unactualized, while in Plotinus the very existence of the derived reality constitutes the activity from the essence. (One might wonder what an unactualized transparent would be, but certainly it is not nothing and it still would not be nothing if there were no fire to actualize it qua transparent.) Perhaps the Aristotelian derivation of the Principle of Double Activity could have been supported through a reference to the passage on passive and active intellect in De anima III.5, where Aristotle compares the active intellect (πνευτικόν) to “a kind of state, such as light [ὁς ἔξις τις, οἶνον τὸ φῶς]” (De anima III.430a15). In this text there is no question of unactualized potency: ἔξις appears to be identified with pure ἐνέργεια. This passage and the history of its interpretation, however, are so complex that this reference alone would hardly suffice to support an Aristotelian meaning of ἔξις as the plausible source of Plotinian δύναμις (here equated to ἐνέργεια τῆς οὐσίας). Moreover, as I
possibility or (yet) unachieved actuality, but active power irradiating externally
according to the nature of the thing, a power through which the nature of the thing may
also become known.

There is little doubt that a detour through the Stoic concept of ἔξις is useful to
clarify Plotinus’ understanding of δύναμις. But a plausible antecedent of the notion of
an active power irradiating externally as the nature of the thing can be found even before
the Stoics, more specifically in Plotinus’ main source of inspiration: Plato. In fact, this
notion is not only already present in Plato, but the term used to indicate it is also our main
suspect: δύναμις. As Souilhé has showed, the Platonic δύναμις belonging to a thing is
both active and passive, for on the one hand it reveals the nature of a given thing by
irradiating that thing’s peculiar trait outwardly, while on the other it shows that that thing
can be acted upon by some things and resist some others. In a word, as Souilhé puts it,
δύναμις is for each thing “at the same time principle of knowledge and principle of

remarked above (note 108), Aristotle’s pure ἐνέργεια is wholly self-contained, whereas Plotinian δύναμις
is always productive of something other than itself. Hence the plausibility of considering Stoic along
Aristotelian influence on Plotinus concerning this point, and, I surmise, the correctness of Hadot’s
critique of Rutten (1956, 101) for failing to recognize this. In any event, even if Hadot is right in taking
Stoic ἔξις as a plausible source of the Plotinian Principle of Double Activity, one should not forget (i) the
analogical character of Plotinus’ discourse and (ii) the materialism that distinguishes the Stoic from the
Plotinian outlook (cf. note 146).

116 For a more detailed account of the Plotinian appropriation of the Stoic notion of ἔξις see Narbonne
(2001a, 58–87, especially 72–79).

117 Plato uses the noun δύναμις (and the related verb δύνασθαι) in this acceptation in relation to a number
of things, for instance the four elements (Philebus 29b8, Timaeus 32c8), intelligence (Philebus 31a2), the
moist (Philebus 32a1), drugs and Socrates’ famed charm to make the soul healthy (Charmides 156b2–3),
soda and other similarly pungent substances (Timaeus 66a1), acidity and salinity of blood in rotting
vessels (Timaeus 82e6), the congealing power of fibers (Timaeus 85d6). In particular, at Republic
VI.509b9–10 the Good is said to be beyond οὐσία by transcending it “in dignity and power [πρεσβείᾳ καὶ
δυνάμει].” Here too, as in the other passages I just cited, the meaning of δύναμις is clearly not that of
Aristotelian potentiality. Cf. Souilhé (1919, 150–152) for further references.
Taken in this sense, δύναμις can apply to everything in the Plotinian universe, except the One, whose power is a pure outflow that excludes all affection (παθεῖν). If a Platonic antecedent of properly henologic δύναμις must be found, perhaps one may quote Republic VI.507c6–508c2, where the maker of the senses fashioned eyes and colors (i.e., the proper object of sight) with “the power to see and to be seen”; and yet in order to actually have sight a third thing is needed, namely light, without which the eyes remain blind and the colors unseen. But light, an illustration of the Good (the One in Plotinus), causes sight and visibility while itself remaining unseen, or seen only in a most peculiar way (see my reading of Republic VI.508b9–10 at pages 68–71). In other words, light gives to the eye the power to see, and to colors, the power to be seen. Light itself, however, neither sees nor is seen, for it is the more fundamental δύναμις which is not seen directly but divined, as it were, through that which it makes possible while itself never being identical with anything which it makes possible. If this interpretation is not too far-fetched, perhaps the meaning of the Plotinian δύναμις πάντων might also be clarified with reference to Plato.

Further, one will notice—my second observation—that in the texts from the Enneads I quoted at the outset of this subsection Plotinus says that the One’s activity τῆς

118 Souilhé (1919, 149): “En un mot, elle est à la fois principe de connaissance et principe de diversité.” See Sophist 247d8–e4 (a text absent from the Index fontium of both HS1 and HS2), where Plato has the stranger suggest to the materialists “that things that are are nothing but power” ([e3] τὰ ὄντα [4] ως ἔστιν οὐκ ᾱλλο τι πλὴν δύναμις), and that δύναμις is to be understood as ability to act (ποιεῖν) on something or to be acted upon (παθεῖν), even if minimally, by something (cf. also Phaedrus 270b4–9, Theaetetus 156a5–7). For a useful discussion of these passages and those cited in the previous note see Cornford (1957, 234–239).

119 Plato, Republic VI.507c7–8: τὴν τοῦ ὄριν τε καὶ ὀρᾶσθαι δύναμιν.

οὐσίας is prior to its activity ἐκ τῆς οὐσίας. This priority should not be understood as chronological but rather as one of being and power (see note 33 above). Thus, while it would be true to say that for Plotinus there never was nor will there ever be a time in which the One’s (nor, for that matter, Intellect’s and Soul’s) activity from the essence did not exist, it is likewise true to say that this activity depends, for its being, on a more fundamental activity, the activity of the essence, as its necessary condition.121 This dependence is non-reciprocal, for the activity of the essence is the very being of the thing in question,122 that which abides123 unchanged even while generating something other than itself.

My third observation regards the necessity of the activity from the essence.124 This would seem to contradict the priority I just claimed for the activity of the essence over the activity from the essence; for if the latter is connected to the former of necessity, in what sense is the activity of the essence independent of that from the essence? Let us remind ourselves that the immediate subject of our questioning is the One, although analogous questions could be asked of Intellect, Soul, and even sensible things. How could the One be the One if Nous (or rather, intelligible matter, as we shall see in Subsection 3.3.1) were not to spring from it as its second activity? Qua One, the One


must generate intelligible matter. Are we then to presuppose a necessitating force prior to the One? If so, would the One truly be the Principle? Or are we to say that the distinction between first and second activity is merely conceptual?125

The key to these questions, the answers to which are all negative in the *Enneads*, lies in the appropriate grasp of the Plotinian meaning of necessity. When we say that the whole of reality springs of necessity from a single source, what necessity means in this statement is not external determination,126 but a superior kind of freedom, one in which the burden of deliberation and choice is absent and in which activity takes place as a matter of pure spontaneity.127 The One, therefore, cannot be other than what it is, not

125 According to Rutten (1956, 104–105) this is Aristotle’s position in *Physics* III.202b6–8 and *De generatione et corruptione* I.324a9–11, where the distinction between the action of the mover and that of the moved is only conceptual. For Plotinus, by contrast, the activity from the essence is really distinct from the activity of the essence.

126 External determination for Plotinus can be of three kinds (VI.8 [39] 9.6–13): violence (βία), such as forced action and motion of which Aristotle speaks (*Physics* VIII.254b13, *Metaphysics* V.1015a26–b3, *Nicomachean Ethics* III.1110a1–4); chance (τύχη), such as happening to be courageous in times of war (VI.8 [39] 5.8–10; cf. VI.8 [39] 7.11–15); and necessity (ἀνάγκη), which counters the activity of reason, such as an artisan’s dependence on the nature of the material with which he is working (cf. Plato, *Timaeus* 46d1–e6, 47e3–48a5; see Plotinus VI.8 [39] 10; see also note 131 below). But since the One, in its activity, depends on nothing external to it, none of these three types of determination can possibly apply to it (see Gerson 1990, 219–220 for a more elaborate exposition of this point).

127 Combès (1969, 322) puts it sharply: “La nécessité est le détour que la liberté s'impose pour se poser soi-même radicalement.” Cf. Rist (1967, 137–138). Plotinus, consistently with his principle that the ἀρχή of something differs from that of which it is ἀρχή (see note 134 below for references) calls the One, not free, but the maker of freedom (ἐλευθεροποιὸν: VI.8 [39] 12.19). Narbonne (2001a, 37–38) calls the freedom of the Plotinian One a freedom of necessity, as opposed to a freedom of contingency. He links the freedom of necessity to the Scholastic notion of libertas spontaneitatis (e.g., in the XVI century Spanish Jesuit Luis de Molina: Molina 1876), in which only one course of action is open but at the same time the agent’s assent and desire are required to pursue it. The libertas spontaneitatis is fruitfully contrasted with the notion of libertas indifferentiae, in which the agent is indifferently open to two or more courses of action (I was unable to find the precise expressions “libertas spontaneitatis” and “libertas indifferentiae” in Molina 1876, although the corresponding concepts are there). One could also compare the freedom of the One in Plotinus with the “happy necessity [nécessité hereuse]” which Leibniz attributes to divine nature (*Théodicée* 374 = Leibniz 1875–1890, VI, 338). Leibniz, however, denies that a genuine indifference is freedom at all (*Théodicée* 302–303 = Leibniz 1875–1890, VI, 296–297); in fact, he states that it is impossible (*De libertate* = Leibniz 1840, II, 669). See also the useful discussion by Ousager (2004, 165–170).
because it is constrained, but because, prior to all deliberation and choice in the ordinary sense of these terms, it is in possession, as it were, of a stable grasp of the best course of action and of an unwavering will and power to bring it about; indeed, on Plotinus’ view, it is bringing it about ab aeterno.\textsuperscript{128} We may refer to this condition, beyond both ordinary freedom and ordinary necessity, as either henologic freedom or henologic necessity.\textsuperscript{129} The illustrations given by Plotinus (fire, snow, and smell) may help to clarify the point. Fire, for example: in its double activity, since fire is heat, it heats of necessity what is within its reach, based on its intensity. If fire did not make things hot, it would cease to be fire.\textsuperscript{130} This fact implies no external determination but flows as a matter of course from the nature of fire. Nor does this fact imply that the nature of fire depends on the observation that we perceive some things as hot; quite the contrary, from

\textsuperscript{128} In this sense, therefore, although all deliberation is denied to the One (III.2 [47] 1, V.8 [31] 7), the One is said to have will (βούλησις: see VI.8 [39] 13.1–9, 51) and even choice (αἵρεσις: VI.8 [39] 13.51). Granted, this is not the ordinary experience of willing and choice, and yet one will admit that it is neither coercion, nor chance, nor ordinary necessity. Analogously, Plotinus explicitly says that the One does not think, and yet he is unwilling to call it unthinking (ἀνόητον: III.8 [30] 9.15); instead, he tentatively attributes to it introspection (κατανόησις: V.4 [7] 2.17), forethought (προνοεῖν: V.3 [49] 10.43), and super-thought (ὑπερνόησις: VI.8 [39] 16.32). See also note 165 below.

\textsuperscript{129} It is true that, as Gerson (1990, 309 note 83) notes, Plotinus uses such terms as ἐχρῆν and ἔδει to indicate the necessity proper to the One in contrast with ordinary necessity, labeled ἀνάγκη (VI.8 [39] 9.13–15). This distinction, if intended to be technical, is not in use in the passages on the Principle of Double Activity which I cited earlier (V.4 [7] 2.26–37 and V.1 [10] 6.25–39). Cf. again Appendix B note 1.

\textsuperscript{130} The term “fire” (πῦρ) indicates the ordinary phenomenon of fire with which we are familiar only derivatively. Thus, the fire I experienced, say, in my youth at summer-camp is not itself the activity of fire’s essence, but one image of that heat itself—the fire beyond, Fire itself (VI.7 [38] 11.47, 48: ἐπέκεινα πῦρ, ἀντὸ τὸ πῦρ), or universal fire (IV.8 [6] 3.19: τὸ παντὸς πυρός)—of which all such fires are manifestations. We should again remind ourselves of the metaphorical character of the element of fire as used in this context. Fire is carefully chosen among sensible phenomena as an illustration for what Plotinus takes to be its closeness to the incorporeal (I.6 [1] 3.21–22; cf. Plotinus’ remarks on the incorporeal activity of the luminous body at IV.5 [29] 6–7, on which see Armstrong 1940, 54–58). For an account of how fire fits in Plotinus’ cosmology see II.1 [40] 7 and the commentaries by Dufour (2003, 145–156) and Wilberding (2006, 208–224); a helpful diagram on this can be found in IGA\textit{L} (I, 356–357 note 45).
the fact that we observe that some things are hot which under different circumstances can be cold, we may infer that there exists a source of heat which, in terms of heating power, is prior to and independent of the things being heated.\textsuperscript{131}

This leads me to my fourth and last observation on the texts taken as evidence of the Principle of Double Activity, a point which here I will only introduce while leaving its positive development to the next section. Prior to Plotinus, the likeness between cause (\(\alpha \iota \tau \iota \alpha \), \(\alpha \iota \tau \iota \nu \omicron \)) and effect was conceived of primarily as likeness in kind\textsuperscript{132} (as the likeness between an oak tree and an acorn, for example). But the One is not itself a kind\textsuperscript{133} and, qua Principle (\(\dot{\alpha} \rho \chi \dot{i} \iota \)), it must be different from what derives from it.\textsuperscript{134} Therefore, it may be asked what it is exactly that the One causes in its “products.” Gerson argues that what

\textsuperscript{131}Once again, it can hardly be overemphasized that the images Plotinus uses to exemplify the double activity of the One should not be taken literally. As illustrations, they evocatively indicate, rather than plainly express, the double activity of the One. More importantly, the type of necessity at work in the phenomena that are the focus of these illustrations obviously differ from the kind of will, choice and freedom that Plotinus attributes to the One (see note 126 above). The limitations of these metaphors, however, are not merely negative, for in their failure to express precisely the dynamism at work in the Principle, they positively point at the discontinuity between the One and everything else derived from it. In fact, although there is no distinction of first and second \(\dot{\epsilon} \nu \dot{\epsilon} \gamma \rho \gamma \dot{\epsilon} \alpha \) within the One, what derives from the One exists as really distinct from it (hence Plotinus’ insistence on the transcendence of the One and the impossibility of a pantheistic interpretation of his metaphysics; see Gerson 1990, 214–215). Conversely, these illustrations, however imperfect, also point at the continuity between the One and everything else because, despite the differences between the double activity of the Principle and the activities of everything else, the One’s first \(\dot{\epsilon} \nu \dot{\epsilon} \gamma \rho \gamma \dot{\epsilon} \alpha \) (i.e., its very being) is said to be known through its second \(\dot{\epsilon} \nu \dot{\epsilon} \gamma \rho \gamma \dot{\epsilon} \alpha \) (V.1 [10] 7.42–48, V.3 [49] 14.7). This means that the nature of the cause can be glimpsed through observation of its effects (cf. note 74 above).

\textsuperscript{132}See for instance Aristotle, Posterior Analytics I.72a29–30, Metaphysics II.993b23–31. In these passages Aristotle’s emphasis is on the idea that the true cause of a feature (e.g., heat) shared by a number of things (e.g., hot bodies) is what possesses that particular feature in the highest degree (e.g., fire). Cf. Alexander of Aphrodisias, De anima Mantissa 111.19–22.

\textsuperscript{133}See VI.2 [43] 9.5–10.

the One causes is the very being or existence of the thing. In this sense, the One is understood as (a very peculiar kind of) efficient cause, while essential or formal causality is reserved to the second hypostasis: Intellect. As already anticipated, I will follow Pigler’s suggestion that what the One causes in its “products” is love for the One, which in the Principle is the One’s love of itself and the One as itself love (see Section 3.3 below).

3.2.4 The Status of the Hypostases

Before I turn to analyze how the Principle of Double Activity operates in terms of eros in each hypostasis, a few remarks are in place about the status of the hypostases themselves, which in the technical sense for Plotinus are neither more nor less than three. The question can be asked briefly in terms of the alternative outlined by Wallis: Are the hypostases separate independent entities (the static view), or are they levels or degrees of reality present in us as states of consciousness (the dynamic view)?

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136 Gerson (1994, 34–35, 58). I hinted that the efficient causality of the One is of a peculiar kind because what the One causes, in this perspective, is not the initiation of change in some pre-existing material (at least not directly), as might be the case for an Aristotelian efficient cause or principle of motion (ἡ αρχὴ τῆς κινήσεως, or ἡ αρχὴ τῆς μεταβολῆς, or τὸ τῆς μεταβολῆς αἴτιον: see Physics II.194b29–32, De generatione et corruptione II.335b9–336a12, Parts of Animals I.639b12–13, Metaphysics I.983a30, 984a26; cf. also Plato, Philebus 26e1–27b3), but existence itself.

137 II.9 [33] 1.12–16, 2.1. On the meaning and use of the term υπόστασις see pages 133–139 above. On what Plotinus takes to be the antecedents of his doctrine of the hypostases, see V.1 [10] 8–9. On Nature or the World-Soul as, not a fourth hypostasis, but as part of the hypostasis soul see note 294. On matter as a “desire of existence [ὑποστάσεως ἔφεσις]” (III.6 [26] 7.9) rather than itself a hypostasis, see pages 276–278 below.

138 Wallis (1995, 5). Wallis traces the problem back to the German scholarship of the first half of the twentieth century, most notably O. P. Kristeller and H.-R. Schwyzer, in which the two sides of the alternative (i.e., hypostases as objectively existing realities versus hypostases as states of consciousness) are respectively named gegenständlich (the static view) and aktuell (the dynamic view).
Problem is similar to the one faced by Plato in his postulation of Forms as explanatory entities (on which see the opening pages of Subsection 1.5.2), and is central not only to Plotinus but also to the Platonists after him.

Interestingly, Plotinus seems to endorse both sides of the alternative. The clearest statement of his position is probably V.1 [10] 10.5–10:

[5] And just as in nature there are these three of which we have spoken [viz., the One, Nous, and Soul], [6] so we ought to think that they are present also in ourselves. I do not mean [7] in [ourselves as] beings of the sense world—for these three are separate [from the things of sense]—but in [ourselves as] [8] beings outside of the realm of sense perception; “outside” here is used in the same sense as [9] those realities are also said to be “outside” the whole universe: so the corresponding realities in man [are said to be outside], [10] as Plato speaks of the “inner man.”

As Atkinson points out, the distinction between “in nature” and “in ourselves” can be traced back to Plato, and the view that the human soul is a microcosm reflecting the structure of the whole of reality is already found in Democritus. But unlike Democritus, for whom the analogy seems to be one of proportionality between the functions of the beings in the world and those of the parts of the soul, Plotinus thinks


142 I.e., just as in the world there are beings whose function is to rule, so there is a part that has the same ruling function within the soul.
that the two higher hypostases are in us, or in soul, actually. At the same time, he claims that all things are in the One, or rather that the One possesses all things beforehand. Is Plotinus contradicting himself here? Or is he simply refashioning, without solving it, the dilemma concerning the status of the hypostases?

Unless the hypothesis of self-contradiction is taken seriously, evidently the modalities of containment in Plotinus’ two statements (i.e., the containment of Soul, Nous, and the One in the human soul, and that of all things in the One) must differ. In the former case, to say that the human soul contains the three hypostases obviously does not mean that it encompasses them spatially, but rather that it has the power to turn toward them and grow in likeness to them. This process of assimilation corresponds to the erotic movement of ascent or return of the soul to the Principle with which I will deal in the next chapter. What is important to notice at this stage of our discussion is that the soul’s capability of rising to the level of higher hypostases does not imply any lack or potentiality (in the main Aristotelian sense of the term) in those hypostases. On the

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143 See III.4 [15] 3.22 (ἐσμὲν ἕκαστος κόσμος νοητός), 6.22; cf. I.1 [53] 13.7–8. Whatever the reasons, the view of the hypostases as states of consciousness seems to be more agreeable to modern sensibility than a view of them as separate independent entities. The work of recent commentators appears to confirm this observation: so, for instance, Wallis (1995, 5–6, 72–73, 82) stresses what he calls an illusionist or telescopic view of the hypostases, while Hadot (1993, chapter 2; 2002, 163–168) refers to them as levels of self or of consciousness, and Lloyd (1990, 126) calls them “experiences” and “types of consciousness.” Gerson (1994, 227 note 3) rightly warns us that such (relatively anachronistic) qualifications of the hypostases should not be taken to imply that for Plotinus the hypostases exist in thought alone or depend on thought for their existence. I will have the occasion to return to this point in the next chapter (see Subsection 4.3.2).

144 V.3 [49] 15.24–33; see especially lines 29–30, where the One is said to have all things by possessing them beforehand (τῷ πρότερον ἔχειν αὐτά). Similarly, Plotinus says that the One is everywhere (πανταχοῦ) and nowhere (οὐδαμοῦ) (VI.8 [39] 16.1–2, V.5 [32] 8.23–24; cf. also III.9 [13] 4), a principle to which Bussanich (1999, 47, 50) refers to as the principle of immanence.

contrary, if a potentiality can be observed in any given thing, the priority of its corresponding actuality must be maintained (e.g., in the case of the human soul, the actuality of that to which this soul has the ability to become assimilated, namely the Soul-Hypostasis, Intellect and, ultimately, the One), a principle to which we might refer as the Principle of Prior Actuality. This principle is not prerogative of Plotinus, but common

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146 I modify the expression from Lloyd (1976, 147), who speaks of a “prior actuality principle.” Under the heading of “prior actuality principle,” Bussanich (1999, 46–48) includes several elements which I distributed differently in my exposition in this and the next chapter (e.g., the Principle of Superiority of Cause to Effect and the Principle of Affinity). This should not worry us excessively, since all these “principles” or elements are mutually implicating in Plotinian metaphysics. In the Principle of Prior Actuality, the priority of actuality over potentiality (in the Aristotelian sense) refers not, say, to my actual knowledge of Pythagoras’ theorem at twelve years of age as opposed to my potential knowledge of it at four, in which instance potentiality is obviously prior to actuality, at least chronologically (Aristotelian examples of this kind of priority of potentiality over actuality are found in On Sense and Sensibilia 438b21–23 and On the Generation of Animals II.736b15, 741b7–15). The priority I have in mind refers rather to the priority that actuality has over potentiality when the latter is generally understood as a principle of change. In this sense, it is standard Aristotelian doctrine, found chiefly in Metaphysics IX.1049b4–1051a3 (cf. also De interpretatone 23a21–6, Metaphysics VII.1032a22–25). Aristotle’s main reasons to uphold this position can be reduced to the three senses in which he understands the priority of the actual over the potential in this passage from the Metaphysics, namely: (i) priority of formula or of expression in speech (λόγος), so that that of which the potential is potential is conceptually prior to the potentiality for it (e.g., capability of building is understood on the basis of a previous knowledge of actual building; cf. De anima II.415a19–20); (ii) priority of time (γρόνος), as in the priority of the actual individual of a given species over a potential individual of the same species (although the individual itself is potential before being actual, e.g. as a seed before being a tree; cf. On the Heavens III.302a7–9); (iii.1) most importantly, priority of being (ὑπόστασις), since things that are posterior in the process of becoming (γίνομενος) must already possess the form (εἶδος) of what they are becoming (e.g., a boy must already possess the form of man), toward which they move as toward an end (τέλος); (iii.2) priority of being can be understood also in a stronger sense (κυριωτέρως), namely as the priority of eternal (αἰωνιός) over perishable (φθαρτά) beings, for the former exist only actually and of necessity (hence excluding all potentiality) in their perpetual activity. We find Plotinus formally subscribing to this doctrine chiefly in the sense of (iii.1) and (iii.2), though disagreeing with Aristotle on assigning the place of ἀρχή of all to Intellect, for example at IV.7 [2] 87.13–20, where he also makes clear that the act of a given potency is in a way the desideratum (ὀρκόντα) of that potency (cf. also V.9 [5] 4.4–10). Plotinus uses the Principle of Prior Actuality in different contexts, for instance in his critique of Stoic materialism at VI.1 [42] 26.1–17. He contends that when the Stoics argue that matter is a principle (ἀρχή), they make the potential prior to the actual (οὐκ ἐστιν ὡς ἀρχὴ in Stoicism see: Zeno, in Diogenes Laertius, Lives of Eminent Philosophers VII.134, and in Philo, De providentia I.22 = SVF I, 85; Cleanthes, in Hermias, Irrisio Gentilium Philosophorum 14 = SVF I, 495; Crysippus, respectively in Sextus Empiricus, Against the Mathematicians IX.11 and X.312 = SVF II, 301 and 309, and in Alexander of Aphrodisia, On Mixture 224.32 = SVF II, 310). But this cannot be, argues Plotinus, for the potential, qua potential, is posterior to the actual because it is unable to initiate change; in order for change to occur, the potential needs something actual prior to it. Thus, in the case of matter something actual is required to turn matter into a body by initiating motion. Plotinus applies the Principle of Prior Actuality to the hypostases, or real beings, as he states that a higher hypostasis (e.g., the One) is actual prior to a lower one (e.g., Nous), and
possession of the whole (Neo-) Platonic tradition.147

In the second statement, by contrast, to say that the One possesses all things beforehand does not mean that it itself is or can become all things, a view that would amount to pantheism and would also introduce potentiality and multiplicity in the Principle. As we saw earlier (Subsection 3.2.1), the One abides unchanging in its being, which is identical with the activity of the essence. All things are in the One or belong to it in the radical sense that it is by the One’s infinite power that they exist and are sustained in their being. And as Plotinus explains, this modality of containment of things in the One prevents them from being in it as already actually distinct (ὡς μὴ διακεκριμένα: V.3 [49] 15.31); if this were not the case, multiplicity would again creep into the Principle. How, then, does the differentiation of everything derived from the One take place? It occurs first at the second level (i.e., at the level of Nous as the ever actually unified multiplicity of the intelligibles, and the duality of thinker and object of thought), and then by recourse to the second level, in the sense that by lovingly contemplating Nous, soul diachronically makes explicit, unfolds, or temporalizes, the perfectly unified multiplicity of the second

147 See Lloyd (1976). Plotinus warns us that the One is called cause (αἴτιον) only from the perspective of the causatum, and that we should not predicate causality of the One taken by itself (VI.9 [9] 3.49–54). And yet, it is on the basis of the Principle of Prior Actuality that a certain continuity between the One as cause and the whole of reality as its effect can be maintained. However, this continuity should not be understood as continuity of genus and species, but as one of decreasing levels of unity or, in terms of love, of increasing distance between one’s relatively unified identity and the aim of one’s eros (i.e., the perfect erotic identity which is the One; see Subsection 3.3.1). Thus, when the Principle of Prior Actuality is applied to the individual soul’s eros for the One, we might have to say that the soul’s desire for the One and its capability to ascend to it presupposes necessarily that there exist a One to begin with, or that the One be prior in being to the soul’s desire for it. On the objection that desire for the One is fictional and can be reduced to some other (allegedly more basic) form of desire, see the second part of note 50 in Chapter Four.
hypostasis (see Appendix D below).¹⁴⁸

In light of what I just said, it should be clear that the hypostases cannot be understood as monads, completely sealed off from each other. If this were the case, neither procession nor return could ever take place. On the contrary, the Plotinian metaphysics of the hypostases is one that entails both discontinuity and continuity or, if one prefers, both transcendence and immanence of the Principle in the fabric of reality. It entails discontinuity insofar as the hypostases are really distinct, independent, or separate from one another. But it also entails continuity to the extent that this separation is not to be understood spatially, but as a priority of being, or the ability of higher hypostases to subsist independently of the lower ones while leaving a “trace” (ἲχνος; see Appendix C) of themselves in their products.

Now the fil rouge of both discontinuity and continuity, or this trace of the Principle in all that is derived from it, is eros. The self-love of the One, which is identical with its primary activity or activity of the essence, is at the source of all procession: it is the infinite power by which the One engenders all things. This eros, which in the One is perfect self-identity, is found in derivative form (that is, not as perfect self-identity, but as a love of the Principle with different degrees of intensity depending on the level of unity of the thing possessing it) in everything else. Thus, while the One as self-love abides in its perfect self-identity independently of all that is derived from it (what amounts to

¹⁴⁸ The perfectly unified multiplicity of the second hypostasis is itself the result of its even higher form of contemplation of the Principle, a contemplation whereby Nous constitutes itself as a hypostasis by attempting to replicate the unqualifiedly perfect unity of the One. The source of the differentiation of things is, again, the universal eros for the One, now played out either as noetic contemplation of the One or as psychic contemplation of Nous as each subordinate hypostasis attempts to replicate the unity of the hypostasis immediately above it. See Subsection 3.4.1 and 3.4.2 below.
discontinuity or transcendence), its infinite power is naturally propagated in the derived hypostases in the form of love for the One (what amounts to continuity or immanence). *Eros*, therefore, is both the source of all procession and the desire for the Principle whereby each lower hypostasis constitutes itself as a really distinct entity by lovingly contemplating the hypostases immediately above it. The rest of the present chapter is an attempt to analyze this dynamic.

3.3 Henologic *Eros*:

**The One, Perfect Erotic Self-identity and Source of all Love**

The importance of the topic of the One’s *eros* may be better appreciated on the backdrop of the Principle of Double Activity introduced earlier in Subsection 3.2.3. Commenting on V.1 [10] 6.31, Atkinson writes that “[t]he application of the double-activity theory to πάντα τὰ ὄντα is something of an exaggeration.” He grounds his judgment in the carefulness with which Plotinus chooses the illustrations of his principle (i.e., fire, snow, and smell, whose peculiar properties, according to Atkinson, are steeped in the Greek philosophical tradition and are particularly apt to clarify what Plotinus had

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149 PIGLER (20) puts it well as she states the central thesis of her work: “Les « trois hypostases », l’Un, l’Intelligence, l’Âme, ne sont pas trois réalité distinctes et séparées, trois ‘monades’. Certes, si l’Un est bien le Principe absolu dont tout dérive, il y a cependant continuité, et non discontinuité, dans la procession des hypostases. Cette continuité est assurée, telle est notre thèse, par le processus dynamique de l’Érôs de l’Un comme puissance originelle se transmettant dans ses dérivés.”

150 Atkinson (1983, 145). Atkinson does admit that Plotinus treats the theory “like a natural law” and rightly adds that if this is the case, “then there is no need to worry about whether the producer produces intentionally, since what happens is governed by natural necessity.” However, as I pointed out earlier (pages 188–191 and 202–204), the contrast between intentionality and necessity can hardly be applied to the generation of a hypostasis from a higher hypostasis, in particular the generation *Nous* from the One, since the lack of intentionality in the One does not preclude freedom absolutely, while henologic necessity, though analogous to the necessity of a natural law, is identical with henologic freedom.
While Atkinson’s observations about the properties of fire, snow, and smell are correct, I think that the universal application of the theory is crucial to understand Plotinus’ metaphysics. For this reason, I consider it to be genuine Plotinian doctrine. As we read at IV.3 [27] 10.32–35, the Principle of Double Activity extends even to inanimate things:

[32] In soulless things the one [power], [33] so to speak, lies asleep in them, while the [power] from them [which goes out] to something else [34] consists in making like themselves that which is capable of being affected: and this is of course common [35] to all that exists, to bring things to likeness with themselves.

The same point is made in the lines that follow this passage (35–42) with respect to soul, whose proper activity is life and is understood as the attempt to bring inanimate bodies to likeness with itself by giving them life. Moreover, by Plotinus’ own admission, the axiom of the One’s self-diffusiveness introduced in the closing lines of V.1 [10] 1 (and which I will discuss in Subsection 3.3.2) seems to make sense on the premise that what is true of everything else (i.e., that each thing has an activity from the essence) is

151 Thus, for Atkinson (1983, 57–58) it would be Aristotle’s use of fire to illustrate causal processes (Metaphysics II.993b25–26) and such descriptions of it as an “excess of heat [ὑπερβολὴ θερμότητος]” (De generatione et corruptione II.330b26) and as a “boiling over [ζέσις]” (Meteorologica 340b23) that influenced Plotinus’ description of the genesis of Intellect from the One at V.2 [11] 1.8–9. Similarly, it would be the (pseudo-)Aristotelian description of smell as an incorporeal “effluvium [ἀπόρροια]” (Problems XII.906a24, 907b6–7, 24) that suited Plotinus’ theory (Atkinson 1983, 146).

152 Notice, however, that to claim that the principle is universal does not mean that Plotinus’ illustrations of the Principle of Double Activity are not metaphorical. In fact, the principle, while universal, applies differently to different things, in particular eternal and temporal beings. See Gerson (1994, 23–24).


154 The emphasis in the translation is mine. See also IV.5 [29] 7.17: ἐκαστὸν τῶν ὄντων.
true *a fortiori* of the One. Thus, if what Plotinus has in mind at IV.3 [27] 10.32–42 is his own Principle of Double Activity, as I think is the case, there seems to be little doubt that he considers this doctrine a universal fact. This fact is important because as I noticed earlier (Subsection 3.1.4) it allows for a certain continuity in Plotinian metaphysics.

The questions I will address in relation to IV.3 [27] 10.32–35, the passage suggesting the universality of the Principle of Double Activity, are the following. First (Subsection 3.3.1), what kind of love is henologic *eros*? Second (3.3.2), what does the One give? And third, what does it mean to be brought to likeness with the One? The treatment of the third question will be postponed until the next chapter (see particularly Subsection 4.3.1 and Section 4.6).

### 3.3.1 The One: Beloved, Love, and Love of Itself

The central contention of this subsection is that the activity of the essence, that is, the very being of the One or its unqualified unity, can be explained in terms of *eros*. My main goal is to show that *eros* is what regulates the dynamic of procession of all reality from the Principle. The key texts are VI.8 [39] 15.1–2 and 16.12–14:

[1] And it [i.e., the One], that same self, is beloved and love and love of itself, [2] in that it is beautiful only from itself and in itself.156

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155 The only explicit support I was able to find for this is Pigler (77 note 1).

156 VI.8 [39] 15.1–2: [1] Καὶ ἐράσμιον καὶ ἔρως ὁ αὐτὸς καὶ αὐτοῦ ἔρως, [2] ἰατρὶς οὖκ οὖν ἄλλως καλὸς ἔναντι ζευλός ἐν παρ᾿ αὐτῶν καὶ ἐν αὐτῷ (ARMSTRONG’s translation, slightly modified). In this context the expression “self-love” has no moral connotations. On Beauty as lovable, cf. I.6 [1] 5.20–21, VI.7 [38] 22, 32.30, V.8 [31] 9.41. Other than VI.8 [39] 15.1–2 and 16.12–14, I am not aware of any other place in the *Enneads* in which Plotinus refers to the One as love of itself, or self-love. Leroux (1990, 344) gives III.5 [50] 5.6 as a parallel, but this line reads Πλάτων τὸν Ἐρωταν, ἄλλα μὴ τοῦ κόσμου τὸν ἐν αὐτῷ: either I fail to detect the connection he is suggesting or else the reference contains a typographical error which I am unable to emend.
But it [i.e., the One] turns, so to speak, toward its own interior, as if filled with love for itself, pure radiance, itself being identical with that which it loved.  

In this section I will be concerned only with the descriptions of the One as love and love of itself. I will deal with the description of the One as beloved in the next chapter (see particularly Section 4.2).

One will notice that in 15.1 the term for love is ἔρως, whereas in 16.13–14 it is ἀγαπάω, the verbal cognate of ἀγάπη. Nygren’s celebrated distinction (and alleged radical incommensurability) between eros and agape immediately comes to mind, with eros standing for merely appetitive desire, and agape indicating a purely donative kind of love. If we take this distinction at face value, we may be led to think that in these passages Plotinus is talking about two different types of love. However, as Rist rightly points out, Nygren is only statistically correct but ultimately too reductive in his judgment, since both Plato and Plotinus “have refined their concept of love in the direction of Ἀγάπη to a degree far greater than Nygren has admitted.”

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158 Nygren (1953). The uncompromising tone of Nygren’s position deserves to be cited verbatim: “There cannot actually be any doubt that Eros and Agape belong originally to two entirely separate spiritual worlds, between which no direct communication is possible” (Nygren 1953, 31). “Agape stands alongside, not above, the heavenly Eros; the difference between them is not one of degree but of kind. There is no way, not even that of sublimation, that leads over from Eros to Agape” (Nygren 1953, 52).

159 Rist (1964, 85); see also Rist (1964, 79–87, 98–99; 1970b). Leroux (1990, 356) and PIGLER (28 note 1) agree with Rist, who points at two possible reasons for Plotinus’ lack of consideration for Ἀγάπη as a
may, what I think can be safely inferred from the texts cited above is that the referent of both ἔρως and ἀγαπάω is the same love of the One. Moreover, in 15.1 the absence of οἷον, Plotinus’ quasi-technical term for analogical predication (see note 81 above), indicates that this passage is the locus where the author of the Enneads comes closest to speaking about the One positively without recourse to analogy.  

The broader context of both passages is treatise VI.8 [39] On Free Will and the Will of the One. As the title given to this treatise by Porphyry suggests, the goal of the work is to clarify in what sense the One can be attributed a will or freedom. We saw earlier (Subsection 3.1.3) that within the One freedom is identical with necessity.

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Technical term for henologic love: (i) in order to stay clear of Christian echoes, and (ii) because in the context of the soul’s ascent to the One the two kinds of love, eros and agape, “are not entirely separated” (Rist 1964, 99). My goal is not to consider Nygren’s thesis explicitly and in detail, nor is it to deny that, understood in Nygren’s terms, eros and agape may be useful labels to discriminate between two distinct phenomena or two radically different types of experience. All I want to emphasize here, very generally, is that the distinction between eros and agape, while in itself meaningful, is likely to be an exaggeration when applied to Plotinus, as well as to Plato, as it is persuasively argued by Markus (1955) and Armstrong (1961); see also Osborne (1994, 222–226), who criticizes Vlastos (1973) along with Nygren (1953), and R. E. Allen (1991, 95–98), whose criticism is directed more specifically to Karl Barth’s echo of Nygren’s distinction in his Kirchliche Dogmatik (Barth 1962, 173–193). Finally, Burnaby (1938, especially 15–21, 92–100, 121–126, 162–168) shows how the clear-cut distinction between eros and agape fails to apply to the theology of Augustine, who is influenced by Platonism and rejects the radical discontinuity between the two forms of love postulated by Nygren (cf. previous note).

160 It will be objected that at VI.8 [39] 16.12–13 Plotinus uses the terms οἷον twice in close succession (and once more on line 15). I think the reason for this is that in the context of these lines Plotinus is trying to say something positive about the One, but by a detour through Nous (VI.8 [39] 16.15–16: οἷον νοῦς), hence the need of the analogical qualifier (cf. PIGLER 28). Following Leroux (1992; see also 1990, 347), PIGLER (40–41 and in particular 72–73) identifies the description of the One as light with the description of it as love and argues that light is more than just a metaphor (see notes 79 and 157 above for references to images of light in the Enneads). I am not fully persuaded by this, since these descriptions, though identified, remain different. Thus, one cannot help asking which description is primary and why (or why not, if neither is primary). Is one description more literal than the other? If so, how, and why? Are these descriptions ultimately still metaphors? (On an aside, at I.7 [54] 1.24–28, as well as at V.1 [10] 6.28–30 but unlike V.6 [24] 4.16–18, on which see note 278 below, the One is compared not to light, but to the sun, while light is said to be what comes from it and depends on it. At least in this instance, it seems impossible even to argue that light is said metaphorically of the One, for it is not said of the One at all; cf. pages 317–318 below.) For a concise treatment of the metaphor of light in Plotinus see Schroeder (1992, 24–39).
Empirical freedom, or the freedom that has deliberation and choice as its conditions and belongs properly to embodied rational souls, is a secondary type of freedom in the sense that it is not truly independent of the relative struggle that these conditions imply; it is a freedom that must always confront itself with the limitations within which it is set. The absence of these conditions and limitations does not entail the absence of freedom tout-court, but only the absence of that kind of freedom for which they are conditions and limitations. This means that a different type of freedom is at least conceivable, one that is independent of all conditions and limitations and which we could call primary or absolute freedom. This other freedom is identical with necessity in the sense that the being which is free primarily or absolutely cannot be other than it is and owes its very being to nothing but itself: this is freedom as pure, spontaneous self-positing or self-determination. If freedom is to be attributed to the One at all, this is the kind of freedom that belongs to it, a freedom to which I accordingly refer to as henologic (cf. page 190 above).  

Now at the level of empirical freedom, such phenomena as deliberation and choice as its conditions and belongs properly to embodied rational souls, is a secondary type of freedom in the sense that it is not truly independent of the relative struggle that these conditions imply; it is a freedom that must always confront itself with the limitations within which it is set. The absence of these conditions and limitations does not entail the absence of freedom tout-court, but only the absence of that kind of freedom for which they are conditions and limitations. This means that a different type of freedom is at least conceivable, one that is independent of all conditions and limitations and which we could call primary or absolute freedom. This other freedom is identical with necessity in the sense that the being which is free primarily or absolutely cannot be other than it is and owes its very being to nothing but itself: this is freedom as pure, spontaneous self-positing or self-determination. If freedom is to be attributed to the One at all, this is the kind of freedom that belongs to it, a freedom to which I accordingly refer to as henologic (cf. page 190 above).  

Now at the level of empirical freedom, such phenomena as deliberation and

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161 For excellent analyses of the topic see Leroux (1990, 23–123; 1999). The kind of freedom Plotinus attributes to the One (henologic freedom or necessity) does not seem to differ considerably from the kind of autonomy which Kant attributes to rational beings that are not subject to sensible inclinations (Neigungen). Similarly, in Plotinus what I referred to as empirical freedom, that is, the freedom of embodied rational souls, has a plausible Kantian counterpart in the condition of rational beings heteronomously determined by sensible inclinations (see Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* IV:432–448; *Critique of Practical Reason* V:33, 42–44). By contrast, henologic freedom differs both from the kind of paradoxical self-assertion one finds in some of Dostoevsky’s characters, for instance the fictitious author of the diary of *Notes from Underground* (Doestoevsky 2003, 229–351), and from the possibility of negative divine self-determination, actually rejected by God but still latent in God and reawakened by the first man, considered by Pareyson (1995, 235–292). It differs from the self-assertion of the main character of Dostoevsky’s *Notes* because there the path of self-debasement this character choses is for him a way (perhaps the only way left) to assert himself as an individual, but this self-assertion remains a choice made as a reaction to a given situation, which as such is absent in the Plotinian One. Henologic freedom also differs from Pareyson’s idea of a rejected but latent negative divine self-determination in God simply because no such latency is ever to be found in the One.
choice, which necessarily accompany this kind of freedom,\footnote{162} already point to the fact that as an empirically free being, I am not identical with the aim of my desire,\footnote{163} indeed that deliberation and choice are some of the means by which I try to fill the gap that opens between me and my desideratum. Qua desirer, I am always set apart from that which I desire, always intentionally directed toward something that I am not, ever divided in what I merely conventionally call myself, never truly one. For the One the situation is different. Since no gap exists between that which it is and that which it desires, the Principle is identical with its desideratum: at once beloved, love, and love of itself. This is what makes the One different from everything that is derived from it: its absolute erotic self-identity.\footnote{164}

What is obviously problematic in this way of speaking about the One is that its unqualified simplicity appears to be forfeited by reflexive expressions implying duality,\footnote{165} although one might wonder, as already in the case of being and nothingness

\footnote{162} To be sure, I can defer the choice of my course of action to the tossing of a coin or some such device. This fact, however, would not invalidate my claim that deliberation and choice accompany empirical freedom necessarily, for although as the coin is tossed my action will be a matter of chance, the action is not ultimately the result of chance because it was still deliberation and choice that led me to the decision of deferring my course of action to the tossing of a coin.

\footnote{163} The insight is a somewhat intensified version of Plato’s observation that one does not desire what one already has (Symposium 200a1–6); an intensified version, that is: one does not desire what one is not.


\footnote{165} VI.8 [39] 15.1 (αὐτὸν ἥρως), 16.13 (ἐξακολουθείς ἄγαπησάς). For other reflexive expressions referring to the One see II.5 [25] 3.6 (ἐξακολουθείς ἄγαπησάς: self-thinking), II.5 [23] 3.1–2 (οὐκ ἐξήλεξεν αὐτὸν ἐξειλέξεν αὐτὸν: does not self become separated from itself), VI.7 [38] 27.18 (οἴκειος ἀυτοῦ: affinity with themselves; on oíckēdoi see Hadot 1968, 290–291), VI.8 [39] 13.21 (ἐξακολουθεῖ τὸ θέλεια: wants itself), 15.3 (τὸ συνελεύσει ἐπάθεια: "self-presence," as translated by MacKenna 1917–1930, also in MacKenna and Page 1969), and most conspicuously 16.16 ad fin. A reflexive way of speaking about the Principle can already be found in Aristotle’s description of the being of the First
(see note 70), whether our grammar permits another mode of expression. A related, though perhaps less obvious, problem is the fact that in Plotinus the genesis of each hypostasis is described as a folding or reversion (ἐπιστροφή) upon itself and toward the hypostasis that generated it, an idea to which we might conveniently refer to as the Principle of Reversion. In terms that will become clearer in the next three subsections,
the principle states that in constitutes itself as that particular hypostasis by erotically reverting upon itself and toward its generator, every hypostasis except the One (cf. note 166) replicates the unity of its generator at its own level of existence.\textsuperscript{167}

We can tentatively settle the question of self-reversion by simply noticing that the self-turning of the lower hypostases and the self-turning of the One are the same only coincidentally. In fact, the turning upon itself of Nous and of Soul is simultaneously a movement toward the hypostasis immediately above each of them (i.e., the One and Intellect respectively).\textsuperscript{168} The same holds for the One, but with the important difference

\textsuperscript{167} Lloyd (1990, 127, 128), to whom I owe some of the references in this note, puts it well: “The theoretical function of reversion is to complete the reality of what has proceeded and so to give it an identity. [...] So the process is a process of self-determination; and it is supposed to be repeated analogously in every case of the production of a novel entity.” The general idea conveyed by the Principle of Reversion is stated at III.4 [15] 1.8–12, where Plotinus writes about the genesis of the inanimate or lifeless (ἄζων): “[8] Just as everything was produced before this [viz., the lifeless] was produced shapeless [ἀμόρφωτον], [9] but was formed by turning toward its producer [ἐπιστρεφεῖται δὲ τῷ ἐπιστρέφεσθαι πρὸς τὸ γεννῆσαν] [10] and being, so to speak, reared to maturity by it, so here, too, that which is produced [11] is not any more a form of soul—for it is not alive—but absolute [12] indefiniteness [ἀοριστίαν... παντελῆ].” (This is one of the central, if controversial, texts about the generation of lower matter, on which see Subsection 3.4.3; cf. also IV.4 [28] 2.3–8). The same idea is clearly expressed also at V.2 [11] 1.10–11 in the context of the derivation of Nous from the One. In fact, the whole first chapter of V.2 [11] may be read as an anticipation of the cyclical process of constitution of reality which will receive a more scholastic formulation in later Neoplatonism in the triad of “abiding” or “rest” (μονή), “procession” (πρόοδος), and “reversion” (ἐπιστροφή) (see for instance Anonymous Commentary on Plato’s Parmenides XIV.21–26; Iamblichus, Commentary on Plato’s Timaeus, fragment 53.20 = Proclus, Commentary on Plato’s Timaeus II, 215.523–24; Proclus, Elements of Theology 25–39, especially propositions 26, 30 and 31, Platonic Theology II.6.41–21–28, Commentary on Plato’s Timaeus I, 371.20–25; Damascius, De principiis 72–84, especially 75–78, II.123–137; Dionysius Areopagite, On Divine Names IV.9 = PG 3, 705a; in the Latin milieu, cf. Marius Victorinus, Hymn to the Trinity III = PL 8, 1144a: “Status, progressio, regressus: o beata Trinitas”). What I have called the Principle of Reversion roughly coincides with the third stage of this triadic movement, ἐπιστροφή. For what I take to be a different meaning of ἐπιστροφή and related terms in the context of the soul’s ascent to the One, see Subsection 4.4.2.

\textsuperscript{168} As Plotinus himself points out with regard to Nous, “in turning to itself it turns to its principle” (VI.9 [9]
that the Principle has nothing above itself and therefore its turning upon itself does not imply a reference to a higher source as in the case of Intellect and Soul. As for the issue of reflexive expressions, what they are meant to accomplish, evidently, is not to point at an originary split in the Principle but rather to emphasize the self-contained character of henologic *eros*. Unlike anything else, the One aims at nothing outside of itself.\footnote{The same point is made by recourse to the language of vision at VI.8 [39] 16.18–21 (cf. also VI.7 [38] 35, III.5 [50] 3.11–17).} In fact, within the One there is a strict coincidence between its being, its volition,\footnote{See the concluding lines of the argument at VI.8 [39] 13.55–59: “[55] For if [56] its [viz., the One’s] will [βούλησις] comes from himself and is something like his own work [οἷον ἔργον], and this will [57] is the same as its existence [ὑποστάσις], then in this way it will have brought [58] itself into existence; so that it is not what it happened to be [ἐτύχεν], but what [59] it itself willed.” It is in this sense that the One is *causa sui* (see note 53 above).} and its life.\footnote{In a seminal article Hadot (1960) argued that life (ζωή) constitutes, together with being and thought, one of the three characteristic determinations of the structure and genesis of the second hypostasis (see for instance VI.2 [43] 8.23–25, VI.7 [38] 13, 21.4–6, 17.14–25; cf. Plato, *Sophist* 248e6–249a3, *Timaeus* 39e3–9; Aristotle, *Metaphysics* XII.1072b26), although as Cilento rightly remarked in the discussion following Hadot’s presentation (in Hadot 1960, 152–153), in a more ordinary sense life is a peculiarity of soul (so, for example, at VI.7 [38] 11.35, 43 the term ζωή appears to be used synonymously with ψυχή). But can life be attributed to the One at all? Plotinus would seem to deter us from doing so (see III.8 [30] 10, VI.7 [38] 17). And yet, perhaps echoing Aristotle’s famous dictum about being (*Metaphysics* VII.1028a10: Τὸ δὲ λέγεται πολλάκις ἔργον), Plotinus writes that “[18] [t]he term ‘life’ is used in many different senses [Πολλάκις], [19] distinguished according to the rank of the things to which it is applied, first, second and [20] so on...” (I.4 [46] 3.18–20). Thus, when he does attribute life to the One (VI.8 [39] 7.51), we must understand that henologic life is of a different kind than that of Intellect and Soul: it must be a boundless, infinite and unoriginated life. Here again we find the principle according to which the cause must contain the effect eminently (see note 74), and so the One is life in the sense that it is the principle of life (III.8 [30] 9.38–39: ἕργον ζωῆς), much like it is called eternal by reason of its being the principle of eternity (cf. Appendix D). PtGILER (37–44) calls the life of the One “archi-Vie” (arch-Life) and argues that it is identical with the One’s power and self-love. “C’est pourquoi, si en l’Un il n’y a aucune distinction possible, puisqu’il est l’absolument simple, si en lui tout est strictement équivalent, la lumière, le regard, la Vie, et si surtout tout culmine dans l’Amour que le Principe se porte à lui-même,
This self-identity does not amount to inertia, however. If it did, there would be no procession or derivation, and the Plotinian universe would be identical with the immobility of a single monad. The One’s simplicity is not sterile but is rather the simplicity of an infinite erotic power whose self-identity is productive of alterity or otherness. For this reason, I maintain, Plotinus found the term “love” and the reflexive expression “love of itself” apt to describe his conception of the Principle: because in the simplicity of its erotic δύναμις the possibility of otherness, which constitutes the main trait of the rest of reality, is already surmised (I will return to the notion of otherness in Subsection 3.4.1).

But why and how is it that the One’s self-love is the source of all procession so that Plotinus calls the One “the power of all things” (III.8 [30] 10.1–2)? Why is self-love productive of otherness? And if, as I mentioned earlier in Subsection 3.2.3, the activity of the essence, which in this context amounts to the One’s love of itself, is really separated from, or other than, the activity from the essence, what does this otherness consist of? To put it somewhat differently, since the One is ineffable (cf. Subsection 3.2.2), how will we be able to affirm that it gives anything to what is derived from it if, qua ineffable, it cannot itself be attributed, or be said to possess, whatever it gives? And if the One is also the First, the absolutely prior, what will it have to give other than itself? But what does it mean for the Principle to give (of) itself? And what is the modality of this henologic giving?

alors la « conversion » du Premier vers lui-même exprime, plutôt qu’un mouvement, son indicible unité puisqu’elle se fait sans mouvement, l’Un étant absolument immobile, et sans que rien ne soit à voir puisque l’Un n’est pas à lui-même un objet” (PIGLER 41 note 2).
3.3.2 Superabundance and Its Modality: The One Gives What It Does not Have\textsuperscript{172}

The issue of henologic giving or donation is implicit in the understanding of the Principle in terms of an unqualifiedly simple (erotic) power which is identical with none of the things that are derived from it. In other words, the simplicity and the transcendence of the Principle would seem to preclude either the differentiation of reality, for qua simple the One contains none of the things derived from it—and if they are not in the Principle, where are they to be found?—or else the very possibility to conceive it as the Principle of all, for how can it be called the source of all things by utterly transcending them?

A partial answer to these questions was hinted earlier when it was claimed that the nature of the One is such that by abiding in its own power the Principle virtually contains all things as effects while never actually becoming any of them (note 74) nor ever depending on, or being related to them in any way (note 18). Such claims remain unintelligible, however, unless the nature of the One is determined more precisely. I will argue that this determination can be accomplished in terms of eros, a word which, as we saw in the previous subsection, Plotinus uses to describe the very being of the Principle. More specifically, there are two different problems that a description of the nature of the One in erotic terms will help us to clarify. The first is the very productivity of the One, or why something whose nature is perfectly identical self-love should be generative of otherness. The second problem is the identity of the content of what, for lack of better terms, I will refer to as the One’s donation in the process of derivation of all reality from

\textsuperscript{172} I borrow this formulation from a thought-provoking article by Jean-Louis Chrétien (1990, 259–274), \textit{Le Bien donne ce qu’il n’a pas}. 


it, namely: What does the One give?

The question concerning the first production of otherness is central to Plotinus and to all Neoplatonic metaphysics. In the previous subsection, the nature or being of the One was described as love of itself, or self-love. But why should something whose nature is perfect erotic self-identity be productive of otherness? If the One is, or exists, and is unqualifiedly simple erotic self-identity, the fundamental question is not “Whence otherness or multiplicity?” but “Why otherness or multiplicity?”

For the sake of brevity, the Plotinian answer to this interrogative will be concisely referred to as the Principle of Superabundance. Plotinus variously states it in several passages, of which the following three may be considered exemplary. The first passage is V.2 [11] 1.7–9 (full Greek text at note 202 below):

[7] the One, perfect because it seeks [8] nothing, has nothing, and needs nothing, overflows [ὑπερερρύη], as it were [οἷον], and [9] its superabundance [τὸ ὑπερπλῆρες] makes something other than itself.

And at V.3 [49] 16.1–5 Plotinus writes:

It has been said elsewhere that there must be something after the First, and in a general way that it is power, and overwhelming power; and the point has also been made that this is to be believed on the evidence of all other things, because there is nothing, even among the things on the lower level, which does not have power to produce.


[34] How then could the most perfect, the first Good, remain in itself as if it grudged to give of itself or were impotent, when it is the productive power of all things? How would it then still be the Principle?

[37] Something must certainly come into being from it, if anything is to exist also of the others which derive their being from it; for that it is from [39] it that they come is necessary.”

The chief source of the Principle of Superabundance is Timaeus 29e1–3177 (see also the rest of the passages from Plato cited at the end of Subsection 1.5.5), and as in the Timaeus, the justification of the principle seems to be that the nature of goodness is

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177 Plotinus insists that the temporal origin of the world in the Timaeus myth should not be understood literally (see for instance III.2 [47] 1.20–26, IV.3 [27] 9.12–20, VI.7 [38] 6.1–9). In this, he is the heir of a tradition that goes back at least to the the early Academy (e.g., Speusippus, Xenocrates, and others: cf. Aristotle, On the Heavens I.279a32–280a2; Scholia in Aristotelis de Caelo 489a9–12 = C. A. Brandis, in Bekker 1831–1870, IV; Simplicius, Commentary on Aristotle’s On the Heavens 304.3–6).

178 Lovejoy (1936, 50–55) called what I referred to as the Principle of Superabundance, Principle of Plenitude (cf. also Narbonne 2001a, 55–56). Whatever the name assigned to it might be, in later centuries this principle will develop into the tradition of the bonum diffusivum sui (see for instance Dionysius Areopagite, On Divine Names IV.31 = PG 3, 731b–c; Thomas Aquinas, Summa theologicae I.q27.a5.arg2; Bonaventure, Commentaria in quatuor libros Sententiarum Ld45.a2.q1. Cf. Trouillard 1955b, 78–79; Chrétien 1990, 259–260; Gerson 1994, 25; Corrigan 2005, 121–122). The reference to the Timaeus and the rest of the passages cited at the end of Subsection 1.5.5 (as well as Diotima’s claim about the work of eros as “giving birth in beauty” at Symposium 206b7–8; see Subsection 1.4.3) confirms that the Principle is older than Plotinus. The “self-” in “self-diffusiveness” (and the “sui” in “diffusivum sui”) should be understood in light of the remarks on reflexive expressions put forth in the previous subsection.
evidently diffusive of itself.\textsuperscript{179} Consistent with his idea that a glimpse into the cause can be caught through observation of its effects (see note 74), Plotinus argues his point by reference to “things on the lower level.” Any thing that has reached its perfection, maturity or completion (τέλεια) naturally generates something other than itself.\textsuperscript{180} To be or actually to exist implies productivity.\textsuperscript{181} \textit{A fortiori}, that which exists as the most perfect

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\textsuperscript{179} Pace Cornford (1937, 34), who claims that all that Plato means when he calls the Demiurge ungrudging is that “the imperfection of the world is due to Necessity, not to the deliberate withholding of any excellence that it might possess,” and hence that one should not read in the passage unwarranted “importations of later theology.” The latter warning is admirable, but to claim, as Cornford (1937, 35) does, that the notion of an overflowing love would constitute one such importation not only in the \textit{Timaeus}, but in Greek thought as a whole, seems at least excessive. Plotinus, for one, disproves this claim, even independently of the fact that Plotinian henologic \textit{eros} and Christian love are not identical. Moreover, evidence of the kind of love Cornford claims to be absent in Greek thought can be found even in Plato, if implicitly and sporadically, for instance at \textit{Phaedrus} 246d8–e1, 247a7, \textit{Republic} II.378b–c, 380c8–9, X.617e4–5, \textit{Laws} IV.713d5–6, V.731d6–732a4, \textit{Timaeus} 28c–29a, 37c6–8, and most of all 29e1–3; see also Aristotle, \textit{Nicomachean Ethics} VIII.1159a23–25. On this topic see Rist (1964, 30–34), to whom I owe most of the references to Plato in this note.

\textsuperscript{180} V.1 [10] 6.37–39; V.4 [7] 1.25–30; cf. Plato, \textit{Sophist} 248a12. IGAL (I, 29–30) considers this idea the core of what I labeled Principle of Superabundance and thus call this principle “principio de la productividad de lo perfecto.” If, as I argued, the Principle of Superabundance is true of both animate and inanimate things, the notion of perfection is to be taken as indicating something more than merely sexual maturity, the focus of Diotima’s discourse on reproduction and immortality in the Lesser Mysteries of love (\textit{Symposium} 206b1–209e4).

\textsuperscript{181} Heidegger (1988, 99–121, especially 106–109 = \textit{Gesamtausgabe} 24, 140–171, especially 149–153) saw this when he explained that in antiquity and in the Middle Ages being or existing (Sein; esse and existere; \textit{vivere}) was understood primarily as production (\textit{Herstellen}) and presence-at-hand (\textit{Vorhandenheit}), actuality (\textit{Wirklichkeit}) as actualization (\textit{Verwirklichung}). I think that this thesis, however insightful, calls for at least two critical observations. First, I find its application to Aristotle (and perhaps even to Plato: cf. n. 12 above) at least questionable insofar as that which in Aristotle’s system is most truly actual (i.e., most truly being), namely the First Mover, is not itself truly productive (or if it is, it is so only by being the universal final cause, not by itself being the universal efficient cause; cf. pages 181, 188–191, and 217–218 above, and Section 4.2). Heidegger’s thesis at first seems to fit better the Neoplatonic and Christian traditions than it does Aristotle. However (my second observation), although in Plotinus production, which in this context is synonymous with derivation, remains essential to the nature of being and actuality, it is already dependent on something which is not itself produced. Heidegger agrees with this, but he seems to read Greek ontology as saying \textit{without exception} that this “something” which is already there prior to production is \textit{ός} or matter (Heidegger 1998, 115–116 = \textit{Gesamtausgabe} 24, 163–164). This generalization, I believe, cannot be applied at least to Plotinus and the Neoplatonists after him. In fact, if we are to take the Plotinian universe as a system of \textit{émanation intégral} (see note 17 above), for Plotinus what is already there prior to production cannot be matter (for this is itself “produced” or derived from prior causes), but rather a more fundamental actuality, namely rest or self-abiding (\textit{μένειν}; cf. notes 123 and 185), which is the first activity (or activity of the essence) of a given hypostasis, and ultimately of the One. Thus, if Heidegger thinks that the pre-existence of matter as the stuff (\textit{Stoff},
is most perfectly productive. But again, no indigence in the One is presupposed in the procession: the Principle produces out of a necessary excess, hence not for the sake of a further end, and certainly not through external means. In this sense, the derivation of all things from the One implies no diminishment of power in the One and is closer to natural production and the production of logical and mathematical representations rather than to artistic production.¹⁸²

But in what sense is this most perfect productivity of the One erotic in nature? Fundamentally, it is erotic in the sense that the perfection of the One or its very being coincides with the One’s self-love; derivatively, in the sense that what overflows from the Principle bears the mark of the self-love of the One. When the self-love of the One is communicated to (or rather, as) what is other than the One, it becomes love for the One, hence no longer love of itself but love of the Principle qua other. (To explain how this happens specifically at the levels of Nous and soul, the second and third stage in the process of derivation of all things from the One, will be the goal of the next section.)

Superabundance, therefore, is the necessary result of the perfection of the One’s erotic self-identity. But the Principle is the unqualifiedly simple. Even if this simplicity is the productive simplicity of an erotic power, what can the One possibly produce? What

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can it possibly give if, abiding in itself, other than what derives from it, and ineffable, it possesses nothing other than itself? We saw that Plotinus explains the emergence of things other than the One from the One by means of the Principle of Double Activity; in the example of fire: the heat of the essence of fire is naturally productive of a heat that leaves the essence of fire. A metaphor of this kind may lead us to think that the difference between the two types of heat is merely one of intensity. But this is not so for Plotinus; or rather, intensity is definitely a problem, but only for the heat from the essence: the closer heat is to its source, the hotter it is. But fire itself (or, simply, Fire) is different from the heat derived from it not because it is more intensely hot, but because its heat is unsurpassed, unoriginated and undiminished. It is itself the inexhaustible source of its own heat: Fire itself. This illustration already betrays its own weakness, and the weakness of all metaphor, in its attempt to disclose the thing to which it points, for we are simply unfamiliar with something that owes its heat to nothing but itself. More importantly, every source of heat I am familiar with, precisely by diminishing in intensity as it sends out heat, shows that what it gives out is not different than itself.\textsuperscript{183} The One, by contrast, is expressly said to send out not itself, but something other than itself (the activity from the essence). But what does the One send out? What does it give?

Plotinus’ solution to this question sounds like a riddle. He asserts it repeatedly in

\textsuperscript{183} Cf. Rist (1971, 87). Thus, to someone who were to ask of Plotinus to provide an example of a kind of giving which, in giving, remains undiminished and other than what it gives, he would provide none, and aptly so, for no other reason that none is there to be provided. The example of teaching comes to mind as a possible instance of undiminished giving, for in teaching (say, Pythagoras’ theorem), there is no diminution of knowledge in the source. However, in this example what is given seems to be of the same nature in the giver and in the recipient. By contrast, in being given, not only does the love of the One not diminish in the One itself, but in the recipient from self-love it becomes love of another.
the *Enneads*. At VI.7 [38] 17.3–6 he writes: 184

[3] Now, there is no necessity [4] for anyone to have what he gives, but in this kind of situation [5] one must consider that the giver is greater, and that what is given is less than the giver; [6] for that is how coming to be is among the real beings.

For the sake of convenience, the principle according to which the giver gives what it does not have will be referred to as Principle of Henologic Giving. 185 First it should be noticed that this principle applies not to everything but to “real beings” (τοῖς οὖσι) only; 186 if fact, of all the principles listed in note 10 above (cf. also Table 6 on the last page of Chapter Four), the Principle of Henologic Giving applies only to the One as the first term of the process of donation: it is a strictly henologic principle. 187 In the present


185 A corollary of the Principle of Henologic Giving is that in generating, the One is not directly involved in what it generates, but abides unchanged beyond it (see V.4 [7] 2.26–27, 36–37, V.5 [32] 12.40–50; see also the references in note 123). This corollary applies not only to the downward relation between the One and *Nous*, mentioned in these references, but also to that between *Nous* and soul (V.1 [10] 3.4–15; V.2 [11] 1.13–18); it does not apply, however, to the relation between soul and that to which soul gives life, for soul, in giving of itself, is unable to abide unchanged (V.2 [11] 1.18–19). This last statement, I maintain, is not contradicted by VI.6 [34] 7.4–7, where soul, along with Nature, is said to imitate (μιμεῖται) *Nous* as it generates individual things in different place “while it is all together in itself” (lines 6–7: αὖτης ὡμοί ἐκατη ὁπόσης). The context of this passage is the unitary nature of Intellect, which soul imitates to the extent that it too, being incorporeal, is not separated spatially in the way individual sensible things are.

186 I believe that what at first makes the Principle of Henologic Giving appear nonsensical or riddle-like at best is its application to the sensible realm. And yet, it is through the sensible metaphor of vision that Plato put forward what is virtually the same principle: the sun is the giver of the (intelligible) visibility and existence of things (i.e., true beings, as opposed to the shadows in the cave) while itself remaining beyond such visibility and mode of existence (see *Republic* VI.509b2–10 and the story of the cave in book VII, which constitute the background of VI.7 [38] 15–23: cf. the critical apparatus of HS₁ and HS₂). See my reading of this in Subsection 1.5.2, especially pages 68–71.

187 Hadot (1988, 272): “Le problème ne se pose qu’à propos du principe premier, du Bien qui est absolument simple.” It may be argued that *Nous* gives to soul a dianoetic unity which it did not itself have, and similarly that soul gives to inanimate bodies a kind of organic unity that it did not itself possess in its pure state. This is true, but if the Principle of Henologic Giving is strictly henologic, Plotinus must
context the One is conceived of as the giver, whereas *Nous* is the recipient of the gift. In VI.7 [38], Plotinus spends nine whole chapters (15–23) to clarify this point (cf. V.3 [19] 15); in the context of this treatise what the One is said to give to *Nous* while itself remaining beyond what it gives is form and knowability (see VI.7 [38] 16.22–31).

This, however, is already a derivative gift, at least conceptually. In fact, as we shall see in Subsection 3.4.1, the form and knowability essentially constitutive of *Nous* are not given immediately but are dependent on a prior given, namely, the love for the One. So, the answer to the question “What does the One give?” or “What is this gift which the One gives without itself possessing it?” is: the One gives love for the One. More specifically, the primary otherness, or the One’s activity from the essence, is the outpouring of an infinite or boundless love already directed to the One, what Plotinus calls intelligible matter (see page 226). From this primordial energy erotically directed toward the Principle, *Nous* arises successively (though not in the chronological sense) as the contemplative attempt to replicate the unqualified unity of the One.¹⁸⁸

We might wonder whether the One, qua self-love, is not already identical with this energy. Plotinus does not think so, and for one simple reason: the One is different

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¹⁸⁸ I hope that this will become clearer as I consider the unity of Intellect (Subsection 3.4.1). For now, suffice it to say that in *Nous* thinker and object of thought coincide, and this coincidence constitutes the very activity of Intellect. This activity, however, is not entirely self-contained, for according to Plotinus it is _erotically_ directed toward the One, that is: *Nous* is not nor can it be the Principle because, despite the perfect and eternally actual unification of the multiplicity it contains (or rather, of the multiplicity with which it is identical, that is, the duality of thinking and intelligibles, and the very multiplicity of the intelligibles), its activity aims at imitating the unqualified unity of the One. Its other-directed _eros_ makes Intellect unsuitable to serve as the Principle of all.
than the erotic energy derived from it because this energy already aims at something other than itself, namely the One. This is all that differentiates this first “product” from the One, and this is why Plotinus says that the One and Intellect are separated merely by difference or otherness (διαφορά, ἑτερότης).\textsuperscript{189}

Another principle, strictly related to the Principle of Henologic Giving, is that according to which a cause is superior to its effect: briefly, the Principle of Superiority of Cause to Effect. Plotinus states it at V.1 [10] 6.37–39: “[37] And [38] all things when they come to perfection produce; the One is always perfect and therefore produces everlastingly; [39] and its product is less than itself” (my emphasis).\textsuperscript{190} When read in terms of love, the Principle of Superiority of Cause to Effect means that the One, insofar as it is perfect erotic self-identity, produces something that is not perfectly identical with the aim of its eros. When this product, in turn, acts as a cause and produces something other than itself, the distance of this successive product from the aim of its eros increases (and continues to increase as one proceeds downwards in the process of derivation).\textsuperscript{191}

The Principle of Henologic Giving and its corollary Principle of the Superiority of

\textsuperscript{189} See for instance V.8 [31] 9. I will return to this in Subsection 3.4.1 below.

\textsuperscript{190} V.1 [10] 6.37–39: [37] Καὶ [38] πάντα δὲ ὀσία ἡ ἑτεροτης τέλειον γεννᾶ· τὸ δὲ ἀεὶ τέλειον ἂν καὶ ἄδιαν [39] γεννᾷ καὶ ἐξαιτοῦ δὲ ἑαυτοῦ γεννᾷ. Likewise explicitly, at VI.7 [38] 17.5–6: “what is given is less than the giver; for that is how coming to be is among real beings” (see note 184 above for the Greek text). Cf. III.8 [30] 5.24–25, V.5 [32] 13.37–38; see also V.3 [49] 15.7–11 and 16.5–8, where the Principle of Superiority of Cause to Effect is given universal application. Cf. Porphyry, Sententiae XIII.5.10; Proclus, Elements of Theology 7. IGAL (I, 30–31) calls this principle “principio de la degradación progresiva.” For a classic treatment of this principle see Lloyd (1976). For an interpretation of this principle in terms of essence and existence, see Gerson (1994, 17); for a phenomenological reversal of this principle as it resurfaces, considerably recontextualized, in the third of Descartes’ Meditations (Descartes 1897–1910, VII, 40–41), see Marion (2002, 159–173).

\textsuperscript{191} More generally, the inferiority stated in the Principle of Superiority of Cause to Effect is one of unity and being (see Ham 2000, 256–258).
Cause to Effect can also be derived analytically from the vantage point of the One’s double causality, efficient and final (see page 181–182 and 191–192 and Section 4.2). As the kind of efficient cause it is (i.e., the unique, unqualifiedly simple First), if in giving, the One were to give (of) itself, it would have to bring about another itself. But “itself” is the uncaused Principle, while that to which the One would allegedly give (of) itself, by receiving anything at all, would immediately find itself in a subordinate position, and hence it would be incapable of being the Principle. At the same time, this incapability shows that what the recipient received was nothing that belonged to (or rather, was) the Principle. Therefore, the One, in giving, does not give (of) itself. Moreover, nothing that belongs to the One, or nothing that the One is, is accidental to it. If the One gave anything of whatever belongs to itself to something else, it would be giving itself, a proposition which was just found to be impossible. It is because of the nature of its uniqueness (see 3.1.1) that the One cannot give what it has, or what it is: the First as conceived by Plotinus does not beget another First; indeed it cannot. At the same time, this impossibility cannot be conceived of as lack of power, but rather as a rational necessity.

Along the same lines, and more in keeping with our central topic, the One does not give itself as a final cause either, for in order to give itself in such a way it would have to make the recipient of its gift the ultimate end of all, the highest desideratum or ἔρασμιώτατον (VI.7 [38] 32.25). But this, again, is inconceivable because the ἔρασμιώτατον is most loved for no other reason than for being the Principle, and the

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192 I gloss over the paradox of having to postulate the existence of the supposed recipient of the One’s self prior to the giving of the gift, when what the One gives is existence itself (see note 47 above), here interpreted as identical with love for unity and, ultimately, for the unqualified unity of the One.
Principle precisely of the *eros* which points back to the Principle as the Good. By contrast, the putative recipient of the status of universal end, precisely by being a recipient, cannot be the Principle, nor can it be, therefore, the highest *desideratum* or universal final cause.

An interpretation of the Principle of Superabundance and of the Principle of Henologic Giving (along with its corollary Principle of Superiority of Cause to Effect) in terms of *eros* also helps us to make sense of two apparently contradictory ideas surrounding the Principle of Prior Actuality (pages 195–196), namely: (i) the notion that the cause, which is prior in actuality to the effect, communicates to the effect a certain feature that it itself possesses (an idea to which we may refer as the Principle of Likeness of Cause and Effect);¹⁹³ and (ii) Plotinus’ caveat about attributing any feature (including causality, as in VI.9 [9] 3.49–54) to the One *taken in itself*. When the One’s nature in itself is understood as perfect erotic self-identity, (ii) can still hold if one understands the expressions “love” and “love of itself” (VI.8 [39] 15.1) as indicating unqualified unity. As for what is said to be communicated in (i), this is not, strictly speaking, a feature or a property, but the very love of itself of the One, which at lower levels necessarily becomes love *for* the One qua other and, indirectly, a way to catch a glimpse of the nature of the

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¹⁹³ A general formulation of the Principle of Likeness of Cause and Effect, simultaneously pointing at the necessity of the activity *from* the essence, is given at II.9 [33] 3.7: “each of necessity must give of its own to something else as well” (ἀνάγκη ἑκατὸν τὸ αὑτοῦ διδόναι καὶ ἄλλῳ). The principle is operative at all levels of reality: e.g., V.1 [10] 3.12–15 (on the intellectual nature of soul due to its origin in Intellect; cf. V.3 [49] 7.21–25), V.2 [11] 1.13–14 (on *Nous* resembling the One, or “being somehow it”: Ὁὗτος οὖν ὢν ὦν ὦν ἐκεῖνος ἐκεῖνος), and the whole discussion in IV.3 [27] 10 (on bodies being vivified by the presence of soul). All references to the likeness between lower and higher levels of reality can be cited in support of this principle: see especially Appendix C and Chapter Four notes 62 and 85. See also pages 339–340 below on further remarks on the Principle of Likeness of Cause and Effect. Cf. Spinoza, *Ethics* I.p3.
As I shall argue in the rest of this chapter, the love of the One for itself becomes love of the One qua other not only for the primary otherness directly derived from the Principle, but also for everything that succeeds the primary otherness in the process of derivation. For this reason, as I already mentioned, *eros* is the element that explains both the discontinuity and the continuity of the Plotinian universe, or, if one wishes, both the transcendence and the immanence of the Principle with respect to everything of which it is the Principle. It explains its discontinuity (transcendence), for the love possessed by the One is radically other than the love possessed by everything else; but it also explains its continuity (immanence), because the love possessed by all derived beings is a trace (*ἴχνος*) pointing back at the Principle, in which love is pure self-identity, self-positing, self-determination.

3.4 The *Eros* of Derived Reality: Intellect, Soul, Matter

As we saw, for Plotinus the Principle of Double Activity is not merely a way to account for the action of such phenomena as fire, snow, and smell; on the contrary, these are particular cases carefully chosen to illustrate a much more pervasive dynamics, one which in his view accounts for the relations among the hypostases: the very fabric of...
reality. In the previous section we saw how the nature of the One, the source of this
dynamics, can be explained in terms of eros, a perfect erotic self-identity, which in turn
coincides with the activity of the One’s essence. This activity is the very being of the
One, abiding in itself while being productive of otherness. This otherness, as we shall see,
is the second hypostasis in its incipient stage: intelligible matter (cf. page 226).

What the One gives, which it does not itself have, is a love directed to something
other than oneself. This love is desire of unqualified unity, hence a desire to become
perpetually identical with the aim of one’s desire. Even a quick reading of the first
hypothesis of the second part of Plato’s Parmenides should suffice to make one aware of
how hard it is merely to try to put unqualified unity into words (cf. also Subsection 3.2.2
above), if nothing else for the fact that the diachronic nature of all expression entails a
necessary departure from such unity. In tentatively speaking about it, Plotinus described
the One in terms indicating absolute self-containment. As cause and sustainer of unity or
existence (cf. note 52 above), the One is itself the cause and sustainer of its own unity or
existence; as will, it is necessary and spontaneous self-determination, free of all
deliberation and choice; and as love, it is perfect erotic self-identity. What I will attempt
to do in what follows is to show how these descriptions, in particular the one pertaining
to eros, undergo a fundamental transformation in everything derived from the One,
beginning with the hypostasis that immediately proceeds from it, Intellect or Nous.

3.4.1 Noetic Eros: Intellect as the Noetic Replica of the Unity and Eros of the One

From the viewpoint of the observer, the eros of Intellect, to which I will refer as
noetic eros, has a double identity: if one focuses on its origin, eros is the activity
springing from the One’s essence, whereas if one focuses on Nous taken in itself, it is identical with the activity of Intellect’s essence. But how does Intellect originate? How can its nature be explained in terms of eros? What does pure Intellect have to do with love? Does the erotic energy that constitutes the first otherness springing from the One already amount to the actuality of Nous? And in what sense can Intellect be said to resemble its cause, the One, if the One gives what it does not have and is, unlike Nous, unqualified simplicity? I think an effective way to answer these questions is to start from the notion of otherness as an initial description of Nous and then move on to explain how this primary otherness springing from the Principle becomes the full-blown hypostasis of Nous as the latter lovingly tries to replicate the unity of the One at its own level.

Noetic otherness basically means two conceptually distinct things, one in relation to unity and the other in relation to eros. With respect to unity, to be other means to be less than perfectly one or, said otherwise, to be one only in a qualified way; otherness, therefore, is here synonymous with multiplicity, a movement away from one’s source whereby each thing begins to constitute itself as a separate entity.\textsuperscript{197} With respect to eros, it means not to be perfectly identical with the aim of one’s desire, and hence to be erotically directed to something other than oneself (even while possessing the desideratum permanently, as in the case of Nous with regard to the One).\textsuperscript{198} This is true

\textsuperscript{197} The idea that a thing is separated from others through otherness may apply loosely to everything, but it is strictly true of incorporeal things; bodies, by contrast, are more specifically separated from other bodies spatially (see VI.9 [9] 8.29–34; cf. II.4 [12] 5.28–30).

\textsuperscript{198} In an important article, Rist (1971, 82–83) points out that otherness is explained metaphorically by recourse to motion (κίνησις), which Aristotel classifies as a process or incomplete activity (\textit{Metaphysics} IX.1048b18–36; \textit{Nicomachean Ethics} X.1174a4–b6); otherness is therefore associated with some kind of desire or striving, in the absence of which we would be left with the perfect stillness of the One (V.1 [10] 4.38–39; the association of otherness and motion occurs also in different contexts, e.g., VI.2 [43] 15.14–
of everything that derives from the One, but not in the same way for every thing. So, for instance, both Nous and soul are less than perfectly one and less than perfectly identical with the aim of their respective desire; however, the gap between the perfect unity or erotic self-identity of the One and the qualified unity and erotic status of what is derived from the One is wider in the case of soul than it is in the case of Nous. Let us focus on Intellect first.

That what derives immediately from the First should be Intellect and not, say, soul or a highly unified sensible organism, is due mainly to the fact that Intellect is taken to be the simplest possible thing besides the One. Put differently, if the source of unity is unqualifiedly simple, unique, and self-diffusive, then what derives immediately from it is the most intensely unified multiplicity. Plotinus takes this to be the one-many (ἓν πολλά), that is, Nous.

But how does Intellect come about or is generated from the One? And what kind of unity belongs to its multiplicity? Among the several passages in which Plotinus

199 When otherness is understood as multiplicity and other-directed eros, it is completely absent from the One (VI.9 [9] 8.33–34). As Rist (1971, 83) puts it, “in any particular being the element of otherness is recognizable in the fact that the being is finite. It is not the One; it is only its limited self, limited and hence striving for perfection.” The One, by contrast, strives for nothing. And as I mentioned earlier, the First is the transcendent par excellence; wholly other than the things derived from it (see III.8 [30] 8.9, V.3 [49] 11.18, V.4 [7] 1.6, V.5 [32] 10.2–5) not because it gathers the totality of what is multiple, but because it is distinct from everything multiple.


201 Here is a list of the chief passages where Plotinus describes the genesis of Intellect, with the main theme
presents the genesis of the first alterity from the One is the sequel of a text I cited earlier at page 210 as one of the formulations of the Principle of Superabundance; the text is V.2 [11] 1.7–13.\textsuperscript{202}

[7] This, we may say, is the first act of generation: the One, perfect because it seeks [8] nothing, has nothing, and needs nothing, overflows, as it was, and [9] its superabundance makes something other than itself. This, when it has come into being, [10] turns back upon the One and is filled, [11] and becomes Intellect by looking towards it. Its halt and turning towards the One [12] constitutes being, its gaze upon the One, Intellect. Since [13] it halts and turns towards the One that it may see, it becomes at once Intellect and being.

At least two stages or phases of the genesis of \textit{Nous} can be clearly identified in this passage: one in which the superabundance from the One comes into being, and another in which by turning toward the Principle, being filled by it and looking toward it, this superabundance becomes Intellect proper. Traditionally, these two stages have been called Loving Intellect and Thinking Intellect respectively (here capitalized for disambiguation), or what Plotinus himself refers to as “Intellct in love” (νοῦς ἐρῶν) and “Intellct in its right mind” (νοῦς ἔμφρων).\textsuperscript{203} He writes at VI.7 [38] 35.23–27.\textsuperscript{204}
[23] And that first one is [24] the contemplation of Intellect in its right mind, and the other is Intellect in love, when it goes out of its mind [25] “drunk with nectar”\(^{205}\); then it falls in love, [26] blooming\(^{206}\) in its enjoyment by

[38] the genesis of Intellect comprises four relatively parallel accounts (i.e., respectively VI.7 [38] 15.9–23, 16.10–32, 16.32–35, and 17.10–32), each comprising, not two, but three phases, namely: (1) \textit{Nous}, which is not yet \textit{Nous}, but rather an indeterminate proto-\textit{ένεργεια} or proto-Life; (2) The formation of \textit{Forms} within \textit{Nous} as a fragmentation and determination of the indeterminate proto-Life through a turning of \textit{Nous} toward the One; (3) Actual \textit{Nous} as the aware self-identity of the totality of Forms.

Hadot’s division is broadly followed and further explained by Pigler (75–130) in her treatment of noetic \textit{eros}. Thinking Intellect comprises both (2) and (3). Igal (I, 31–32, and 45–46) puts it well when he calls this dynamic “principio de la génesis bifásica,” and aptly refers to the first stage as “fase proódica” (i.e., Hadot’s first phase above) and to the second as “fase epistrófica,” which includes both the turning and the generated toward its generator and its own \textit{τελείωσις}, or fulfillment (i.e., Hadot’s second and third phase above).

204 VI.7 [38] 35.23–27: [23] Καὶ ἔστιν ἐκείνη μὲν [24] ἢ θέα νοοῦ ἐμφόρον, ἀναλήμμα ἢ νοῦς ἐρῶν, ὅταν ἄφρων [25] γένηται μεθυσθεὶς τοῦ νέκταρος· τότε ἐρῶν γίνεται [26] ἀπλωθεὶς εἰς εὐπάθειαν τῷ κόρῳ καὶ ἔστιν αὐτῶ πρόκλησιν [27] βέλτιον ἢ σεμνοτέρῳ εἶναι τοιαύτας μέθης. The translation that follows is Armstrong, minimally modified. The context of the passage is not that of the procession of all reality from the One, but of the ascent of the soul to it, hence the inversion of the order between the two stages of \textit{Nous}.

205 A clear reference to Plato, \textit{Symposium} 203b5, also occurring earlier in the treatise at VI.7 [38] 30.27. Another parallel in the \textit{Enneads} is III.5 [50] 9.2, where the referent of this drunkenness is not Intellect (generally represented by Cronos), but Poros. On the relation between the drunkenness of Poros (of Platonic descent) and that of Cronos (of Orphic descent), see Porphyry, \textit{Cave of the Nymphs} 16 (on which cf. Hadot 1988, 39–42).

206 The term I translate with “blooming” at VI.7 [38] 35.26 is ἀπλωθεῖς. The basic meanings of ἀπλῶ as found in LSJ (s.v.) are “make single,” “unfold,” “spread out.” In Sleeman and Pollet’s lexicon we are given to understand that Plotinus uses this verb only in the meaning of “unfolding” or “expanding” (cf. SP, s.v. ἀπλῶν). The term occurs only two other times in the \textit{Enneads}, at III.5 [50] 9.2 (in the sense of “spread out,” referred to Poros/logos) and at VI.7 [38] 1.56 (clearly in the sense of “unfolding”); cf. also ἀπλωθεῖς at VI.9 [9] 11.23. Hadot (1988, 174 note 309) voices his agreement with Ficino (1492: “seipsam diffundens”) and Cilento (1947–1949: “tutto steso”) as he translates ἀπλωθεῖς with “s'épanuissant” and insists that this blooming occurs “dans l’ivresse et la jouissance” (see also Faggin 2002: “si abbandona”; IGAL: “desencogida”). ARMSTRONG translates ἀπλωθεῖς at VI.7 [38] 35.26 with “simplified” (see also MacKenna 1917–1930 and MacKenna and Page 1969: “it is made simplex”; Bréhier 1924–1938: “se simplifiant”; Harder 1956–1971: “einfach geworden”; Mizuchi, Tanogashira and Tanaka 1986–1988: 単一化し, \textit{tan’itsuka shi}). The context and its parallel at III.5 [50] 9.2 suggest that “simplified” is probably not the more desirable translation of ἀπλωθεῖς at VI.7 [38] 35.26. However, from a philosophical standpoint, one will observe that Loving \textit{Nous} is indeed more intensely unified than Thinking \textit{Nous}. Moreover, the perspective of the passage is one from below, so to speak: what is involved in the assimilation (cf. Subsection 4.3.1) of the ascending soul to Loving \textit{Nous} is also a process of simplification. This is true, I maintain, despite what Aleknienė (2010) writes in a recent article on the use of the words ἀπλῶ and ἀπλωθεῖς in Plotinus and a few other authors of the first five centuries A.D. Aleknienė’s focus is the word ἀπλωθεῖς as it appears at line 23 in \textit{Enneads} VI.9 [9] 11.22–26; her chief contention is that in this passage the noun ἀπλωθεῖς means, not simplification or simplicity (for which another noun, ἀπλῶτης, is generally used, for instance at V.5 [32] 6.32), but rather a self-opening of the soul to the One as this is encountered in the so-called mystical union. Aleknienė’s analyses are valuable and highlight an important aspect of the contact between the soul and the One that constitutes the last stage of the Ascent, namely the notion that union is not a closing of the soul upon itself, but a complete
having its fill; and it is better for it [27] to be drunk with a drunkenness like this than to be more respectably sober.

Loving or pre-noetic Intellect is what elsewhere is called infinite life\(^{207}\) or, more technically, intelligible or noetic matter (ἡ νοητὴ ὑλή)\(^{208}\) and the indeterminate or indefinite dyad (ἡ ἀόριστος δύας).\(^{209}\) All these expressions are synonymous in Plotinus. It is the very “first movement” or otherness\(^{210}\) away from the Principle, the most intensely unified reality immediately derived from the One. All this movement or otherness amounts to, apparently, is that unlike the One it is erotically directed not to itself but and confident abandonment to the source of all things. This is partially confirmed by the nouns that precede and follow ἄπλωσις at VI.9 [9] 11.23: ἐκστάσις and ἐπίδοσις. Both words imply the very opposite of a retreat into oneself; ARMSTRONG’s translation, I believe, is quite appropriate: “a being out of oneself” (ἐκστάσις) and “giving oneself over” (ἐπίδοσις). However, I think it would be excessive to play “simplification” against “self-opening” in the experience of union, as if the two concepts were totally incompatible; I believe, instead, that they are complementary. Thus, Alekniêné’s point must indeed be noted, but it should not detract from the idea that the confident abandonment or self-opening of which she speaks is in fact a simplification of the soul in the philosophical sense of the term: a becoming one single reality, undivided openness, total abandonment to the Good, or, as we shall see by the end of Chapter Four, pure eros for the One. Cf. also Chapter Four note 249.

\(^{207}\) VI.7 [38] 17.14–15: ζωὴ... ἀόριστος. Cf. VI.7 [38] 17.32–33: “the life which is a universal power” (ἡ μὲν ζωὴ δύναμις πᾶσα); III.8 [30] 9.33: “first life” (ζωὴ πρώτη).

\(^{208}\) Plotinus refers to intelligible or noetic matter with different expressions, most notably ἡ ἐκεῖ ὑλή (II.4 [12] 4.6–9, II.5 [25] 3.9), ἢ ἐν τοῖς νοητοῖς ὑλή (II.4 [12] 5.13–14, 38, 15.18, III.8 [30] 11.4), and ἡ νοητὴ ὑλή (III.5 [50] 6.44; cf. Chapter Two note 89). Aristotle, too, speaks of an intelligible (νοητὴ) kind of matter in contrast with a perceptible (αἰσθητὴ) kind, but for him intelligible matter means either the matter of mathematical objects when these are abstracted from all that is perceptible (Metaphysics VII.1036a9–12) or else the generic element in a definition and in a species (Metaphysics VIII.1045a33–35; see W. D. Ross 1924, 199–200, 238); cf. I GAL (I, 44).


\(^{210}\) See II.4 [12] 5.28–30; at 5.30, the expression ἡ κίνησις ἡ πρώτη ἑτερότης found at V.1 [10] 1.4, where the expression refers to the separation of soul from Intellect, which as Atkinson (1983, 7) points out, presumably is called first only from the perspective of soul. However, the two expressions are not unrelated, as one can infer by comparing V.1 [10] 1.4 and 4.34–44: “in each case,” writes Atkinson, “the word suggests separation and distinct individuation.”
already to the One qua other. This connatural inclination toward the Principle is the very mark or trace (ἴχνος) of the One on all that is derived from it. And since the One was positively described in terms of eros, this mark is itself erotic in nature. Although Plotinus states this explicitly only once in the Enneads, the reference is significant. In describing the ascent of the soul toward the One, he remarks that “[a]s long as there is anything higher than that which is present to it [viz., the soul], it naturally goes on upwards, lifted by the giver of its love” (VI.7 [38] 22.17–19; my emphasis). In terms of the Principle of Double Activity (Subsection 3.2.3), we could say that this eros, the trace of a superior reality on an inferior one, constitutes the very essence of the lower reality and at the same time the second activity (or activity of the essence) of the higher one. In terms of the Principle of Reversion (pages 205–207), eros is the very force that allows for the reversion toward the Principle (and with it, the emergence of a new hypostasis) to take place.

Now, this primary otherness (i.e., Loving Nous or intelligible matter or the indeterminate dyad), being in its very nature erotically charged and directed toward the

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211 At V.1 [10] 6.53 Plotinus explicitly states that the One and its immediate offspring are separated only by otherness (τῇ ἑτερότητι μόνον κεχωρίσθαι).

212 On Plotinus’ use of the term ἴχνος see Appendix C.

213 VI.7 [38] 22.17–19: [17] Καὶ ἐκὼς τί [18] ἑστιν ἀνωτέρω τοῦ παρόντος, ἄφηται φύσιν ἄνω αἰρομένη [19] ὑπὸ τοῦ δόντος τὸν ἔρωτα. ARMSTRONG (VII, 157 note 2) aptly remarks about these lines: “This is the clearest statement by Plotinus of something implicit in his whole system, that our desire to return to the Good is given by the Good.” See also VI.7 [38] 34.1–2, where Plotinus refers to the One as “that which produces these strangely powerful longings” ([1] τὸ τοὺς δεινοὺς πόθους [2] παρέχον). See also Chapter Four note 167.

One, is described by Plotinus in visual and desiderative terms (see note 201). Before it fully constitutes itself as a hypostasis, *Nous* in its incipient stage is “only desire and unformed sight” (V.3 [49] 11.12: ἔφεσις μόνον καὶ ἀτύπωτος ὄψις). Successively, from the vision of its connatural desideratum, the One, Loving Intellect becomes Thinking Intellect. Plotinus offers a description of this transition at V.6 [24] 5.5–15:\textsuperscript{215}

[5] For thinking does not come first either in reality or in [6] value, but is second and what has come into being when [7] the Good [already] existed and moved what had come into being [viz., Loving *Nous*] to itself, and it [8] was moved and saw. And this is what thinking is, a movement towards the Good [9] in its desire of that Good; for the desire generates thought and [10] establishes it in being along with itself: for desire of sight is seeing. The Good itself [11] then must not think anything: for the Good is not other than [12] itself. For when what is other than the Good thinks it, [13] it does so by being “like the Good”\textsuperscript{216} and having a resemblance to the [14] Good, and it thinks it as Good and as desired by itself, and [15] as if it had a mental image of the Good.

Similarly, at V.3 [49] 11.8–12 Plotinus describes the emergence of Thinking *Nous* in terms of a fragmentation of the One’s unity grasped in the sight of Loving *Nous*:\textsuperscript{217}

[8] The sight, again, certainly has the impression of what is seen:

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\textsuperscript{216}V.6 [24] 5.13, ἀγαθοειδὲς: a likely reference to Plato, Republic VI.509a3; cf. also V.1 [10] 7.2: δεῖ ποιὸς εἶναι ἐκείνον (see notes 230 and 269).

otherwise it would not have allowed it [9] to come into existence in itself. But this impression became many out of one, [10] and so Intellect knew it and saw it, and then it became a seeing [11] sight. It is already Intellect when it possesses this, and it possesses it as Intellect; but before [12] this it is only desire and unformed sight.

This connatural desire and unformed sight of the One is as if impressed with the nature of its desideratum or object of vision. What this means is that the desire for the One which is intelligible matter, on the one hand is always naturally directed toward its desideratum, and, on the other, is already a desire to replicate the unity of the One, or to become that unity. But in order to do so while remaining other than the aim of its desire, this incipient Nous must break down its desideratum, as it were, into parts due to its inability to grasp it whole; in order to emerge as the thinking hypostasis, Nous must turn its vision into a multiplicity.

The multiplicity of Nous is not a multiplicity of discrete parts, but a multiplicity internal to itself, the self-thinking and self-enclosed multiplicity of reciprocally implicating or interpenetrating parts: the intelligibles, Forms, or Ideas. Thus, on the one hand it would seem more precise to say that Loving Nous is not unqualifiedly simple rather than it is multiple, for it is not yet (logically) broken down into the plurality of the Ideas, but it is simply not identical with the aim of its desire. On the other hand Thinking Nous, or the actual second hypostasis, is rightly called multiple in at least two respects: first, because qua thinking it remains minimally other than its object (i.e., the intelligibles); and secondly, because its object itself is a multiplicity. 218 This multiplicity is

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as highly unified a multiplicity one can conceive of, but a multiplicity nonetheless, and to this extent a necessary failure to be unqualifiedly simple. Noetic multiplicity is due to the fact that since the One is, strictly, unthinkable, Nous exercises its thinking activity on itself as a diluted image or replica of the One. Its act of thought is its being, which alone is true being. The identity of thought and being in Nous constitutes the purest activity, a noetic-intuitive vision in which nothing external to be

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220 Thus, Pigler (115) writes correctly that “[d]ans le Noûs s’achève ainsi l’acte de voir, qui est aussi acte de penser: parce que l’Intelligence ne peut posséder l’Un dans sa vision, elle le pense en elle-même dans la multiplicité des formes, et ce qu’elle pense, ce qu’elle contemple, a une « ressemblance avec le Bien ». La pensée est donc bien l’œuvre du désir, désir de voir l’Un sans y pervenir (c’est pourquoi ce désir s’achève dans l’acte de penser), mais aussi désir de posséder l’Un sans y parvenir (c’est pourquoi ce désir s’achève dans la multiplicité des formes).”

221 Rist (1971, 83) writes: “The peculiar mark of νοûς thinking is that it recognizes its own contents as they are, and they are a plurality (τὰ ἐν αὑτῷ βλέπει). Noûς in fact recognizes its own otherness. The peculiar mark of intuitive thought is that it is an attempt to think the One, but a failure to grasp the One without otherness; and otherness implies recognizable parts.” When in its ascent to the One the soul reaches the level of Loving Nous, its condition is a kind of blending (οἵον συγχέασα: VI.7 [38] 35.33) with the One, which it sees as a whole. To this extent, the loving state of Nous is superior to its thinking state due its greater proximity to the One and to the infinity of its love for the Principle, a love which is the very trace of the One. As Pigler (107) remarks, “cette empreinte est, dans la hiérarchie ontologique, double: à la fois vie et amour; et c’est ainsi qu’elle constitue la meilleure image de l’unité absolument simple puisque, la Vie de l’Un est Amour.”


223 This is Plotinus’ interpretation of Parmenides’ dictum, τὸ γὰρ αὐτὸ νοεῖν ἐστίν τε καὶ εἶναι (DK 28.B3, on which see Chapter Two note 126), appearing in the Enneads some seven times (see Index Fontium of HS2). The identity of thought and being is simultaneously an affirmation of Nous as pure actuality (V.3 [49] 5.25–48, V.9 [5] 8.15–19; cf. note 233 below).
“seen” is needed (V.3 [49] 11.10–12). In this sense, the conversion of intelligible matter toward itself is its own self-knowledge\textsuperscript{224} and, indirectly, the attempt to reproduce, \textit{as thought}, the unqualified unity from which it sprang. This act of self-knowledge is the very being or the life of \textit{Nous},\textsuperscript{225} but such a life, I must stress, is rooted in the superabundance of the One, which by leaving a trace of itself in its closest product, allows for the genesis of the second hypostasis as the noetic replica of the unqualified unity of the Principle.\textsuperscript{226}

The unity in multiplicity that is proper of \textit{Nous}, the one-many, is also characterized by Plotinus as “friendship” (φιλία),\textsuperscript{227} a kind of internal \textit{eros} or a perfect harmony of parts that are never separated and can be understood as an image of the self-love of the One, where no multiplicity is to be found. As an image of the unqualified unity of the Principle, noetic unity expresses itself in the multiplicity of thought. Put differently, the One cannot be thought as it is, that is, as pure unity, and so in order to become thinkable, its unqualified unity needs to be made multiple: as we saw, this is the


\textsuperscript{226} See V.9 [5] 2.26–27, where \textit{Nous} is explicitly described as being “like an impression of it [i.e., the One] in greater multiplicity, while the Good remains altogether in one” ([26] ὅσπερ ἐκείνου [27] τόπος μᾶλλον ἐν πλήθει ἐκείνου πάντη μένοντος ἐν ἑνί). And at V.4 [7] 2.26 the thought of \textit{Nous} is called “an imitation and image [μίμημα καὶ ἔιδωλον]” of the One. See also Appendix C.

\textsuperscript{227} See III.2 [47] 1.30–32, VI.7 [38] 14.20–23.
birth of Intellect as the thinking hypostasis. The thought of Nous, however, is not one whose object is external and whose parts unfold in (relatively) orderly succession (as in the Soul-Hypostasis), and whose contemplation is intermittent (as in a rational individual soul); it is rather a thought that contains all its parts as eternally present and mutually implicating or interpenetrating: not discursive thought (διάνοια, or διανόησις, as the proper mode of thought of soul), therefore, but intuitive thought (νόησις).228

But what about the desire of Intellect? What kind of desire is it? What kind of ερώς is noetic ερώς? It is satisfied ερώς: desire fulfilled. Plotinus explains it in a passage that is worth citing in full, III.8 [30] 11.15–25:229

[15] For Intellect needs the Good, but the Good does not [16] need it; hence too, when it attains the Good it becomes conformed to the Good and is completed by the Good, since the form [18] which comes upon

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it from the Good conforms it [19] to the Good. A trace of the Good is seen in it, [20] and it is in the likeness of this that one should conceive its true archetype, [21] forming an idea of it in oneself from the trace playing upon Intellect. [22] The Good therefore has given the trace of itself on Intellect to have by seeing, [23] so that in Intellect there is desire, and it is always desiring and [24] always attaining, but the Good is not desiring—for what could it desire?—or attaining, for it did not desire [to attain anything].

It would seem that a desire which always possesses its desideratum as a matter of course could hardly be called desire. Nevertheless, it is important to emphasize that, although permanently attained, the desire of Nous remains desire, that is, unlike the eros of the One, a love for something which Intellect needs because it is not identical with it. The self-sufficiency of Nous, \(^2\) therefore, is due to the fact that Nous is always unfailingly in the condition of noetically contemplating the One, thanks to which Intellect can be the kind of unity it is, a one-many containing the object of thought within itself. But this self-sufficiency must be qualified by the fact that Nous is not the object of its own desire, but aims at the One, whose eros alone aims at nothing other than itself. \(^3\)

A similar qualification is in place with respect to the actuality of Intellect, that is, the identification of Intellect and pure actuality or being. \(^4\) Plotinus claims that the

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\(^2\) **PIGLER** (107) writes that the One represents for Intellect “la plenitude de la Vie et de l’Amour sans objet.” And she explains that noetic self-sufficiency is a trace of the One’s self-love, while the One, on its part, “n’a pas besoin de lui-même, car il se possède immédiatement, il est donc hypernoèsis, car en lui il n’y a nulle multiplicité à penser, nul besoin de conquérir l’unité qu’il est” (PIGLER 111). Cf. III.9 [13] 9.4, V.1 [10] 6.42–43, V.3 [49] 16.25.

thinking of *Nous* is ever actual not simply because what we might refer to as its noematic side (i.e., the Ideas or intelligibles) is eternally contemporaneous with its noetic side (i.e., the act of thinking), but more fundamentally because the intelligibles are never external to *Nous* and so the two are a unity. However, even the actuality of this unity would cease to exist unless a prior actuality were already in place. This is the unqualifiedly first actuality of the One, an actuality which, as Plotinus remarks, is the actualization (ἐνέργημα) not of something else, but of itself. In other words, the actuality of *Nous* is the actualization of the unity or the self-love of the One in a noetic mode (much like soul is the actualization of *Nous* in a dianoetic or discursive mode). The actuality of the One, by contrast, only actualizes itself, for that toward which it is erotically directed is nothing but itself. Therefore, the actualization of *Nous* qua thinking hypostasis is posterior in being to, or is a consequence of, the infinite power of the One. The infinity of this power is replicated in *Nous* as the infinite movement of thought within the limits of the second hypostasis.

saying that there ever was a moment in which *Nous* was in a state of potency from which it developed into actual (i.e., thinking) *Nous*, but rather that it is necessary to postulate a conceptual distinction of stages, potential and actual, although Intellect was always already actual (see Corrigan 2005, 184–185). In this passage Plotinus may also be hinting at the idea that the eternal activity of *Nous* is not self-sufficient, because it depends for its actuality on the contemplation of the One much like vision depends on the object of sight. This is also true of soul with respect to *Nous* (V.1 [10] 3.15–16), but with the difference that the thought of *Nous* (νόησις), unlike the thinking of soul (διάνοια), is never potential, but is a sustained actual vision (cf. V.1 [10] 5.18–19).

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236 The resemblance of the One in *Nous* is more precisely what in *Nous* lacks form, namely the unlimited and infinite life that constitutes Intellect in its first stage, the indeterminate life of intelligible matter as a trace of the One (see VI.7 [38] 17.12–14). For a treatment of this issue in terms of Beauty and light, see Pigler (121–128) and Hadot (1988, 307–319); cf. V.5 [32] 7.16–35, V.8 [31] 4.3–15, VI.7 [38] 22.1–7.
Now, if the actuality which is *Nous* is the wholly self-enclosed effort to replicate noetically the unqualified unity or erotic self-identity of the Principle, how are we to justify the generation or procession of soul from *Nous*? The answer must be that a trace of the One in Intellect implies not only unity, though of a noetic kind, but also production, that is, not only an activity of the essence but also an activity from the essence. Thus, just as *Nous* is at the same time the activity of its own essence and the activity from the essence of the One, likewise soul will be at the same time the activity of its own essence and the activity from the essence of Intellect. Moreover, the generation of soul will not be arbitrary, but a necessary act of love springing from the very nature of its generator. And finally, it is by turning upon itself and toward its generator that soul will emerge as a distinct hypostasis, with its own proper mode of unity and of *eros*, to which I will refer as psychic unity and psychic *eros*.

### 3.4.2 Psychic *Eros*: Soul as the Discursive Replica of the Unity and *Eros* of *Nous* and In-forming Principle of the Sensible Universe

The third hypostasis is the most complex in Plotinian metaphysics, and understandably so, for by its nature soul is an intermediate reality between two very different realms: the intelligible and the sensible. This is not the place to try to provide a detailed mapping of the hypostasis of soul, but a basic outline is nonetheless necessary.\(^{237}\)

As I already had occasion to point out less schematically in the previous chapter (Subsection 2.3.2), the basic divisions of the structure of the third hypostasis are the following:

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\(^{237}\) For a valuable detailed exposition of the structure of the hypostasis soul see Andolfo (1996).
(1) The Soul-Hypostasis, sometimes called Whole Soul (πᾶσα ψυχή, ὅλη ψυχή),\textsuperscript{238} Separate Soul (χωριστὸν ψυχή or χωριστή ψυχή), and Pure Soul or Soul alone or simply (μόνον or μόνη ψυχή, ἁπλῶς ψυχή; here capitalized to avoid equivocation\textsuperscript{239}), that is, soul eternally contemplating Intellect without directly interacting with the sensible.\textsuperscript{240}

(2) The soul which is involved in the ordering and maintenance of the sensible. This is in turn divided in:

(a) The World-Soul (otherwise referred to as Soul of the Whole or of the All, and Cosmic Soul or Soul of the Cosmos: ἡ τοῦ παντός ψυχή, ἡ τοῦ ὅλου ψυχή, ἡ τοῦ κόσμου

\textsuperscript{238} Thus far I have been unable to dispel some doubts about the adjectives ὅλη (whole) and πᾶσα (all, entire, every, nothing but) as they are used to qualify the term ψυχή (soul). Both adjectives can be used to refer alternately to the Soul-Hypostasis (ἡ ὅλη ψυχή: IV.3 [27] 1.33, 2.55; πᾶσα ψυχή: III.9 [13] 3.1, VI.7 [38] 12.21) and to the the World-Soul (ἡ ὅλη ψυχή: I.1 [53] 11.14, II.9 [33] 18.40, IV.3 [27] 4.30; πᾶσα ψυχή: e.g., II.2 [14] 1.39, II.9 [33] 7.11–12, III.3 [48] 1.4). Part of the doubts I have in grasping the usage of these qualifications of soul in Plotinus may depend on the fact that the distinction between Soul-Hypostasis and World-Soul, although maintained in the exposition of IV.3 [27] 1–8, sometimes is either blurred or at least hard to pinpoint merely on the basis of terminological usage in the Enneads (for some valuable terminological clarifications on the usage of the adjectives πᾶσα and ὅλη in connection with soul, particularly as they occur in IV.3 [27] 1–8, see Helleman-Eldersma 1980, 132–147; for grammatical notes on the usage of πᾶς and ὅλος see Smyth 1956, §§ 1174–1175). For instance at II.3 [52] 17.15–16 the World-Soul (here ἡ τοῦ παντός ψυχή) is mentioned immediately after Nous; and at IV.4 [28] 10.9–15 the World-Soul’s (or at least its higher part’s: see Table 5 below) contemplation of Nous does not seem to differ from the Soul-Hypostasis’ contemplation of Nous. This problem of demarcation of boundaries may in turn be a consequence of another more fundamental, if only occasional, “blurring” of such boundaries, namely that between the Soul-Hypostasis and Nous (on which see Armstrong 1967, 250; Blumenthal 1974; Wallis 1995, 82). Patently, the issue requires more attention than I can reserve to it in the limited space of a footnote.


\textsuperscript{240} In the remainder of this chapter I will also refer to the Soul-Hypostasis as the higher or superior soul, ἡ ἄνω ψυχή (see III.5 [50] 3.19, III.9 [13] 3.5–6, V.2 [11] 1.23).
ψυχή), which makes of the sensible a cosmos by governing it in accordance with
the contemplation of Nous via the Soul-Hypostasis.

(b) Individual, particular, or partial souls (ἡ ἐκάστου ψυχή, ἡ ψυχή καθέκαστα; ἡ
μερικὴ ψυχή), such as those of particular human beings, animals, and plants.

(3) There is also a third distinction to keep in mind, that between vegetative soul
(φυτική), sensitive soul (αἰσθητική), appetitive soul (τὸ ἐπιθυμητικόν), and

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tοῦ ὅλου ψυχή see IV.3 [27] 1.36, IV.7 [2] 1.9 (τῆς τῶν ὅλων ψυχῆς). On ἡ τοῦ κόσμου ψυχή see I.2
Elgersma (1980, 134) points out, the expression would apply more properly to the
Soul-Hypostasis. In order to avoid confusion, I will stay away from the expression altogether. For a concise reading of
Plotinus’ retrieval of the psychology of the World-Soul in the Timaeus through Aristotelian lenses, see
IGAL (I, 52–53).

terminology of individual soul see Chapter Two note 83.

characteristic activities, generation, nutrition, and growth, hence the distinction of a generative power (τὸ
nutritive power (τὸ θρεπτικόν: III.6 [26] 4.32, IV.9 [8] 3.23, 25, IV.3 [27] 23.36), and the power for
growth or accretive power (τὸ αὐξητικόν: see I.1 II.6 [26] 4.33, IV.3 [27] 19.20, 23.36; cf. I.1 [53] 8.21). Both for these powers and those referenced in the following few notes, Plotinus obviously owes much to the distinctions put forth by Aristotle in books II and III of De anima (cf. Igal 1979).

244 For ἡ αἰσθητικὴ ψυχή see IV.3 [27] 23.22, IV.4 [28] 19.5, IV.9 [8] 1.5; more frequently, the sensitive

soul is often called τὸ ἐπιθυμοῦν (e.g., at III.6 [26] 2.28, 60, 4.4, 32, IV.3 [27] 28.10–11, 16, 21, IV.7 [2] 81–23).
spirited soul (τὸ θυμοειδές or τὸ θυμούμενον,\textsuperscript{246} which Plotinus seems to reduce to one, τὸ ὀρεκτικὸν or desiring soul\textsuperscript{247}), imagining soul (φανταστική),\textsuperscript{248} and rational or reasoning soul (λογική or λογιζομένη).\textsuperscript{249} It is evident, however, that the “souls” mentioned in this division are not to be taken as particular souls, but rather as powers, faculties, aspects, or parts of soul.\textsuperscript{250}

An individual human soul that identifies itself primarily with its lesser powers (i.e., those that function in relation to the sensible: basically all with the exception of the rational part) is a soul of an inferior kind and is variously called irrational (ἄλογος)\textsuperscript{251} and passive (τὸ παθητικὸν).\textsuperscript{252} By contrast, a human soul which identifies primarily with its rational powers is a higher kind of soul.\textsuperscript{253} This soul, soul unmingled with body or, perhaps less extremely, soul not viewing bodily concerns as primary, is taken to be the human being itself or truly (IV.7 [2] 1.22: αὐτὸς ὁ ἄνθρωπος): our true self, “we

\textsuperscript{246} For τὸ θυμοειδές see III.6 [26] 4.4, IV.4 [28] 28.65; the alternative expression τὸ θυμούμενον is found at I.2 [19] 1.18 and IV.4 [28] 28.45.


\textsuperscript{248} For ἡ φανταστική ψυχή see IV.3 [27] 23.22; in the same treatise this power of the soul is also called τὸ φανταστικόν, e.g. at IV.3 [27] 23.32, 30.5–11.


\textsuperscript{252} For τὸ παθητικὸν see III.6 [26] 1.19, 4.1–6, 31, 34, 44, 5.3, 23.

ourselves” (ἡμεῖς; cf. IV.4 [28] 18.10–19),254 “what we most are” (VI.8 [39] 12.5–6:

οὐ μᾶλλα ἐσμέν.255) In its purity, the human soul is identical with the subject of one of

Plotinus’ most peculiar doctrines, the doctrine of an undescended or unfallen part of the

254 The use of the pronoun ἡμεῖς (“we”) and the related possessive ἡμέτερος in Plotinus is very complex, variously indicating “we” as members of the noetic realm, the higher part of our souls, the individual capable of deliberation and choice, etc. (see SP, s.v. ἡμεῖς; the entry, being marked with an asterisk, is incomplete and yet takes up about three columns of the Lexicon Plotinianum). Most importantly, the term ἡμεῖς seems to be Plotinus’ term of choice for what today we would call the “self.” Major treatments of Plotinus’ notion of the self are: O’Daly (1973), Gerson (1994, 139–151), Remes (2007), Aubry (2005, 15–61; 2008), Tornau (2009); I refer to some of these studies in my discussion on Forms of individuals in Subsection 4.4.1.

255 The fuller text of VI.8 [39] 12.5–6 reads: [5] κατὰ δὲ τὴν ψυχήν καὶ ὃ [6] μᾶλλον ἐσμέν. I take the καὶ on line 5 to be epexegetical (so Leroux 1990 and Faggin 2002; also, implicitly, D’Ancona Costa 2002, 540–541, but not necessarily ARMSTRONG, whose translation she follows). If this not the case (e.g., besides ARMSTRONG, in IGAL), the expression ὃ μᾶλλον ἐσμέν could actually be taken to refer to the best (undescended) part of the soul of which I speak in the rest of the paragraph and in Subsection 4.3.2.

256 See I.1 [53] 7.21, III.5 [50] 5.14 (ἄνθρωπος ἡ ἀνθρώπου ψυχή); VI.7 [38] 4.10–12, 36–37, V.3 [49] 4; cf. also IV.7 [2] 1.1, 20–25. The background of this view is certainly Plato (especially Alcibiades I 129e9–130c6, on which see Aubry 2004, 15–32; see also Phaedo 115c4–116a1, Republic IX.589a6–b6, Laws XII.959a4–b5; cf. Republic IX.590a9–b1, 588c7, X.611b5–612a6), as well as Aristotle (De anima III.430a10–25, Nicomachean Ethics IX.1166a16–23, 1168b28–1169a3, X.1178a2–7; On the Pythagoreans, fragment 2 = Iamblichus, On the Pythagorean Way of Life VI.31; Protrepticus, fragment 6 = Iamblichus, Protrepticus VII.42.3–4). I will deal more extensively with the notion of the best part of the soul in Subsection 4.3.2.

In other passages (i.e., VI.5 [23] 6.6–15 and VI.7 [38] 6.9–21), Plotinus speaks of a trinity of men within man, or rather, of three levels of humanity. The first man is the intelligible man (i.e., the Form of Man or the Man itself, corresponding to the αὐτοόνθρωπος of V.9 [5] 13.2, 14.18); the second man is the higher (i.e., rational) level of the soul, corresponding, I take it, to the subject of the references cited in the first paragraph of this note (and presumably to the undescended part of the soul, on which see the next note); finally, the third man is the embodied man, a reflection of the soul in body, or the subject of the affections related to the bodily condition. For an enlightening commentary on VI.7 [38] 6.9–21, see Hadot (1988, 209–225); for a shorter account see Kalligas (1997, 218–220).

In connection to this, it may be asked what happened to Plato’s tripartition of the soul as presented in book IV of the Republic (as well as in the description of the charioteer in the Phaedrus, 246a3–d2, if this can legitimately be thought of as a parallel or a complementary account of Republic IV.434d2–441c3), and to what extent this view might be true of Plotinus’s conception of the individual human soul. More specifically, does tripartition apply to the human soul as such or only to the human the soul in its disembodied condition? With Gerson (1994, 155), I believe that the latter hypothesis is more sensible, although as Igal (1979; cf. also Igal I, 87) argues, for Plotinus even the spirited and the appetitive parts are everlasting (this, as well as the fact that these parts are not necessarily connected to the body, would be confirmed by the image of the charioteer from the Phaedrus, in which the two horses are possess by both human and divine souls in a disembodied condition: see Phaedrus 246a7–b1, b7–c4). Moreover, as Gerson points out on the same page, perhaps the view of tripartition already underwent modification in Plato himself (see especially Timaeus 69c5–d6, 41b7–d3, 90a2–7); cf. also Igal I, 83–88).
individual soul ever connected to the noetic realm. Analogously, the World-Soul
might be divided in a higher and a lower part. The higher part is what in the previous
chapter (page 129) was called its intellect and was found to be represented by Zeus in
treatise III.5 [50]; the lower part is this soul as it is immanently at work in the cosmos.

Table 5. Basic Divisions of the Hypostasis Soul

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soul-Hypostasis</th>
<th>World-Soul (Nature)</th>
<th>Higher part: intellect of the World-Soul</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Pure Soul, Whole Soul, Separate Soul, Soul simply, Soul alone)</td>
<td>(Soul of the Whole, Soul of the All, Cosmic Soul)</td>
<td>Lower part: immanent Nature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Individual souls and their powers</td>
<td>Lower (descended) soul: vegetative, sensitive, imaginative, desiring, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(particular souls, partial souls</td>
<td>Higher (undescended) soul: rational part</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>and their faculties, aspects, parts)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is this complexity that justifies Plotinus’ description of the hypostasis soul as
“one and many” (ἕν καὶ πολλά) and its presence at several levels of Plotinus’

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257 On the undescended (part of the) soul see in particular IV.8 [6] 8 and V.1 [10] 10.13 ad fin.; see also a
number of passages where this may be alluded: e.g., I.1 [53] 13.5–8, II.9 [33] 2.4–10, III.8 [30] 6.35–36,
See Subsection 4.3.2 below, especially pages 341–345.

258 See IV.4 [28] 13.19–25. We may also call the totality of the World-Soul “Nature,” while mindful of the
distinction between a higher and a lower part in it, that is, respectively its intellect and Nature proper,
immanently at work in the cosmos. Cf. Subsection 2.3.2.

259 Let it be noticed again that Plotinus seems to follow the terminology outlined in the opening pages of
the present subsection quite consistently, but not with technical strictness (cf. note 228 above). Thus, for
example, at IV.8 [6] 8.13 the World-Soul is called “the soul which is a whole and is the soul of the
whole” (ἡ μὲν ὅλη καὶ ὅλου; epexegetical καί; that it is the World-Soul, and not the Soul-Hypostasis, to
be designated by ἡ μὲν ὅλη can be easily inferred from the context). A similar ambiguity can be detected
in the different referents of πᾶσα ψυχή and ἡ ὅλη ψυχή (see note 238). See also the somewhat unusual
designations of Νοοῦς as ἓν καὶ πολλά and ἕτεροι καὶ πολλοί mentioned in note 260.

(πολλά καὶ ἑν). At VI.2 [43] 21.7, 48 it is Νοοῦς that is called ἓν καὶ πολλά, and at IV.8 [6] 3.10, ἕτεροι καὶ
πολλοί. Given the context, I believe that these references point to a noetic, rather than discursive, ἕν καὶ
πολλά. The more common description of Νοοῦς is one-many (ἕν πολλά: cf. note 200). See Chapter Two
note 28 for the Platonic background of this terminology.
metaphysical hierarchy. Table 5 above may suffice as an incomplete synopsis of the major divisions of the third hypostasis I just outlined.

Despite its complex structure, of which I here introduced only a bare and incomplete outline, the entire reality of soul derives from one single psychic source, namely the Soul-Hypostasis, which is the immediate origin of both the World-Soul and of the multiplicity of individual souls that come to act on different portions of matter (see page 131 above). But how does Soul come into existence from Nous? The description

261 Cf. III.4 [15] 3.21–27, where the soul is said to be present at different levels, most notably in the intelligible and, through some kind of outflow (ἀπόρροια), in the sensible. ARMSTRONG (I, 150, note 1) aptly comments: “Plotinus thinks of soul as a rich, complex unity capable of existing on many levels and operating in many ways, which can be distinguished but must not be separated.” He adds that this way of thinking will be rejected by later Platonists, who take the different levels of the hierarchy of being as more emphatically separate (e.g., Proclus’ remarks on Parmenides 134a in his Commentary on Plato’s Parmenides V.984.14–20); cf. also Chapter Four note 89.

262 To this classification we might add two more items found in the Enneads, namely that of Forms or Ideas of individuals or of particulars (τοῦ καθέκαστον ἰδέα; see especially V.7 [18] On the question whether there are Ideas of particulars; see Chapter Four note 110 for further references) and that of Soul itself, the Form or Idea of Soul (αὐτοψυχή; see V.9 [5] 13–14). For the latter see Schneewind (1988, 200–205); important observations are found also in F. Ferrari (1997, 36) and Kalligas (1997, 218 note 45). There is a considerable amount of literature (and controversy) on Forms of individuals and individuality in Plotinus; I briefly assess this issue in Subsection 4.4.1 below.

263 See especially treatise IV.9 [8] On whether all souls are one; cf. III.3 [48] 1.4–8, III.7 [45] 13.66–67, IV.3 [27] 2.1–10, 54–59, 6.10–15, 8.54–55, IV.4 [28] 10.15, VI.2 [43] 11.11, VI.4 [22] 4.3, 34–45, VI.6 [34] 7.1–7. What this means is that psychic life, in spite of its variety, has a single origin. This, to be sure, is true also of noetic life and, ultimately, of all life as participating in the arch-Life of the One (see note 171 above). The basic insight, I surmise, is that life cannot be derived from what utterly lacks life, much like intelligence cannot be derived from what utterly lacks intelligence, and existence, from what is utterly non-existent. Or rather, one can claim that life might have emerged from the non-living, but I am not aware of a convincing explanation of how this is possible (cf. Clark 1999, 277–279).

264 Soul is said to be both indivisible (ἀμέριστος) and divisible (μεριστή), and this in two senses. In a general sense, it is indivisible insofar as it is wholly united to Nous, but it is divisible insofar as it leaves the intelligible realm in order to mix with body. In another sense, even when it is mixed with body, soul is said to be indivisible insofar as it gives itself whole to every part of the body; embodied soul is also divisible, however, insofar as the intrinsically divisible nature of body is unable to receive soul indivisibly. In neither sense does psychic divisibility entail divisibility of discrete parts. I hope I am not departing excessively from what Plotinus had in mind if I interpret the divisibility/indivisibility of soul in its relation to body as an instance of the later dictum, Quidquid recipitur per modum recipientis recipitur (see for instance Thomas Aquinas, Scriptum super Sententiis I.d17.q1.a1.s.c.1, Summa theologiae
of its generation is similar to that of the generation of *Nous* from the One. Of the principal passages in which Plotinus describes the genesis of Soul, I will focus on V.1 [10] 7.36–48:  

[36] ...for Intellect generates soul, [37] since it is perfect Intellect. For since it was perfect it had to generate, [38] and not be without offspring when it was so great a power. But [39] its offspring could not be better than it in this case either, [40] but had to be a lesser image of it, and in the same way indefinite, [41] but defined by its parent and, so to speak, given a form. [42] And the offspring of Intellect is a rational form and an existing being, that which [43] thinks discursively; it is this that moves round Intellect and is [44] light and trace of Intellect and dependent on it, united to it [45] on one side and so filled with it and enjoying it [46] and sharing in it and thinking, but on the other side [47] in touch with the things which came after it, or rather itself generating what [48] must necessarily be worse than soul.

This passage was worth citing in full because it clearly highlights some of the major themes of the derivation of a hypostasis from a higher one.

One of these themes is the necessity of generation due to the perfection of the
generating hypostasis (lines 36–38). This is a qualified replica of the Principle of Superabundance—qualified because it takes place at the noetic level. In this scheme, soul is the second activity of Nous, or the activity from Intellect’s essence. Another theme is the idea that the generated hypostasis is an image of the generating one, a notion which in our text is coupled with the Principle of Superiority of Cause to Effect (lines 38–40, and successively 47–48). Still another theme is the double stage of the generated hypostasis of soul, analogous to that found in the generation of Nous (pages 224–229), though not so explicitly formulated (lines 40–41). A final theme is the double activity of the generated hypostasis (lines 42–48), which here is described respectively as a kind of thinking (46: νοοῦν) which amounts to a discursive or dianoetic contemplation (line 43: διανοούμενον) of Nous (i.e., the activity of soul’s essence: 42–46), and the generation of something inferior after itself (i.e., the activity from soul’s essence: line 46–48).

A lesser image (line 40: ἔλαττον... εἴδωλον) of Intellect, soul is both similar to and different from its generator. Like Nous in its incipient state, soul is indeterminate (line 40:ἀόριστον) and needs to be given form by its generator. In this sense, soul is the very matter of Nous, “informed” (line 41: εἰδοποιούμενον) by Nous as soul reverts its

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267 For references about soul as the second activity of Nous see note 265 above. Incidentally, to ascribe a second activity to Intellect may be an implicit way for Plotinus to reject Aristotle’s critique of Plato’s Ideas as unsuitable to serve as causes (αἰτίαι) of things in the realm of becoming (γίγνεσθαι) on the premise that an efficient cause (τὸ κινῆσον) is needed to connect Ideas and things (e.g., Metaphysics I.991b3–9). If soul is understood both as the offspring of Intellect and as responsible for linking Ideas to sensibles (i.e., as the efficient cause required by Aristotle, as Plotinus in fact conceives it), then Nous can indeed be called cause of things in the realm of becoming, though in a qualified way, that is, remotely. As Dodds (1960, 3) remarks, “[t]he Platonic Forms are no mere static archetypes, as Aristotle mistakenly supposed.” I assume that the mistake Dodds (and Plotinus) has in mind is a philosophical one. Philologically, Aristotle is mistaken only if an interpretation of Platonic Ideas as somewhat identical with Plotinian Nous is tenable.

contemplative gaze toward its generator. As with Nous in relation to the One, so with soul in relation to Nous, the movement that allows for the emergence of a fully formed hypostasis is one of reversion (ἐπιστροφή, ἐπιστρέφειν) toward the generator, which in this case is Nous (see pages 204–207 above). Further, just like the One produced Nous while remaining in itself, so now Nous produces Soul without leaving itself, or without becoming something other than itself. And finally, just like Nous was an attempt to replicate the unqualified unity of the One, now too soul is an attempt to replicate noetic unity at its own level. The nature of this psychic replica of Nous is what concerns us here.

In the passage from V.1 [10] 7 cited on page 242 Plotinus states that the proper activity of soul, or the activity of its essence, is an enjoyment of and participation in Nous.

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269 On soul as matter in relation to Nous, see II.5 [25] 3.13–14, III.9 [13] 5, V.1 [10] 3.23, V9 [5] 3.20–37, VI.7 [38] 28.23, 33.36. On soul as form in relation to what is inanimate, see II.4 [12] 10.31–34, IV.3 [27] 10.13–14, 20.38–39, IV.7 [2] 1.22–25, V.9 [5] 2.16–18, 3.20–37, 6.20–24, VI.7 [38] 25.24–26, 28.21–22, 33.34–35. In all these references, we find again the hylomorphic relation that characterizes all genesis (see page 133 above); this includes the genesis of Nous from the One, although not literally, for as Pigler (135 note 1) rightly remarks, “le Νοῦς n’est pas, à proprement parler, matièr de l’Un, puisque l’Un ne relève pas la dimension eidétique. Si le Νοῦς était la matière de l’Un, il faudrait considérer ce dernier comme ce qui donne forme à cette matière et donc comme étant lui-même forme, ce qui est proprement impensable,” as Plotinus clearly states (VI.7 [38] 17.41–42). And Pigler concludes: “Ce n’est pas le cas de l’Âme qui est, au sense plein matière de l’Intelligence.” I am not wholly persuaded about this last remark, for even Plotinus feels the need to make his statement more precise by qualifying εἰδοποιούμενον with οἷον at V.1 [10] 7.41. After all, in-formation of matter refers literally to the in-formation of lower matter, and is predicated of the relations among the three hypostases only figuratively (see Atkinson 1983, 181). These relations are brought out also terminologically: when Nous is in-formed by the One by thinking it (or, perhaps less imprecisely, by thinking about it) noetically, it is said to be made like the Good, or “boni-form” (ἀγαθοειδής: III.8 [30] 11.15–19, V.3 [49] 16.18–19, V.6 [24] 4.5, 5.13, VI.2 [43] 17.28, VI.7 [38] 15.8–13, 23–24, 16.5, 18.1–27, 21.2–9; see Chapter One note 195 for references in Plato), and like the One, or “uni-form” (ἑνοιεδής: VI.9 [9] 5.26); and when soul is in-formed by Nous, it is said to have the form of Nous (νοοειδής: V.1 [10] 3.23, V.3 [49] 8.49), or to be ἀγαθοειδής via Nous (I.7 [54] 2.7, I.8 [51] 11.16, V.3 [49] 3.10, VI.7 [38] 22.33).


Now, since Nous as a full-blown hypostasis is essentially thinking, the activity of soul must also be thinking. However, the thinking of soul is of a different kind than that of Intellect in at least three respects: first, it is not intuitive but discursive, not νόησις but διάνοια or διανόησις; second, it does not possess the object of its thinking within itself, but borrows it from without, namely from Intellect; and third, while the thought of Nous is permanently actual, the thought of soul implies a passage from potentiality to actuality (V.1 [10] 4.19–25). This difference between noetic and psychic thinking is what constitutes the alterity of soul vis-à-vis its generator. For like Nous, soul too is a kind of thought, but the unity of this thought is diminished when compared to the pure thought of Intellect. Being discursive, the thought of soul externalizes and unfolds in succession what in Nous is strictly simultaneous. Moreover, since it does not possess...


274 The passage from potentiality to actuality in the discursive mode of thinking of soul is not meant to indicate that soul in its pure state does not possess the contents of Nous, but only that it possesses them piecemeal or, rather, that while these contents are constantly available to it, soul does not have the power to focus on all of them at once, but can do so only successively, though eternally (cf. Appendix D).

275 V.1 [10] 3.6–9: “[6] For, although it [i.e., soul] is a thing of the kind which [7] our discussion has shown it to be, it is an image [εἰκόν] of Intellect; just as a thought in its utterance [λόγος ὁ ἐν προφορᾷ] [8] is an image of the thought in soul, so soul itself is the expressed thought [λόγος] of Intellect, and its [9] whole activity [ἐνέργεια], and the life which it sends out to establish another reality [ὑπόστασιν].” The distinction between inner (ἐνδιάθετος) and expressed (προφορικός) logos is first found in Chrysippus (SVF II, 135 = Galen, In Hippocratis de officina medici 3, XVIII/2.649–650; Sextus Empiricus, Against
the intelligibles within itself, soul must depend on Nous for thinking; therefore, its thinking is actual only to the extent that it is contemplatively directed toward its generator (a predicament in which the Soul-Hyopstasis and the World-Soul, but not all individual souls, find themselves permanently, if differently).

As we saw (pages 224–229), in Nous Plotinus distinguished two stages (the prenoetic or loving stage, and the thinking stage). An analogue of these two stages can be found also in soul (V.1 [10] 7.40–48). Originally, soul is a pure indeterminate desire projected toward its generator, a stage which we might call pre-dianoetic or pre-discursive. This desire is a desire to possess its desideratum as undividedly as possible, but in order for this to happen, this unity must be divided further due to soul’s lesser power compared to its generator. Therefore, just like Nous, in order to think the One, divided the latter’s unqualified unity noetically and in so doing emerged as the second hypostasis, so now soul, in order to think the superior unity of Intellect, divides it dianoetically or discursively and constitutes itself as the third hypostasis. Thus, soul is a kind of intelligence knowing itself not intuitively, but discursively.²⁷⁶ Soul’s essence, insofar as it is rational, is still intellection,²⁷⁷ but an intellection directed outside of itself,

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²⁷⁷ See III.6 [26] 6.1, III.3 [48] 5.17–18. It is because of its close connection to Nous (and, in turn, because of Nous’ connection to the One) that soul is also called divine (θεῖα: II.9 [33] 17.21, IV.2 [4] 1.68) or a divine thing (θεῖον: IV.8 [6] 5.24, V.1 [10] 3.1–6, 10.11), even in varying degrees depending on what soul Plotinus is referring to (III.2 [47] 18.27, III.5 [50] 2.20, IV.3 [27] 17.2, V.3 [49] 9.1, VI.1.7 [38] 5.21; at IV.8 [6] 2.31 it is the World-Soul that is called divine), and it is counted among the limited number of divine beings (τὰ θεῖα: V.1 [10] 7.49). In its purified state, soul is said to be similar or to belong completely to the divine (τὸ θεῖον: I.2 [19] 3.19–21, I.6 [1] 6.14–15, IV.3 [27] 24.23–26; cf. IV.2 [4] 1.5,
and so its ontological status is that of a trace and an image of Nous in that it possesses unity in an inferior way: not one-many, but one and many (VI.2 [43] 6.13–20; cf. note 260).

The eros of soul, therefore, is essentially directed toward Intellect, and like all eros, psychic eros too is desire to possess its desideratum (Plato, Symposium 206a6–7) even to the point of trying to become it. To the extent that soul remains contemplatively directed toward Nous (and, through Nous, toward the One), it “possesses” its desideratum; it does so, however, only in the inferior manner of discursivity and, more importantly, as something that remains other than itself. For this reason, soul has the additional desire to bring about the harmony it sees in Nous as something that belongs to itself. In trying to do this, soul, or rather, its lower part, directs itself toward what is inferior, that which lacks soul: lower matter. In its relation to matter, or in its lower part, soul is not only the contemplator of Nous, but it performs an organizing function as well, one by which it attempts to replicate, and thus appropriate, the unity of Intellect by imposing order (i.e., form and/or life) on the soulless. Thus, soul is naturally more than just discursive thought and an erotic relation to Nous; in addition to this eros, it also has a

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278 This is so because just like the discursive unity of soul is an imperfect image of the noetic unity of Intellect, the latter is in turn an imperfect image of the unqualified unity of the One. See the analogy at V.6 [24] 4.16–18: the One is light, Nous is the sun, and soul is the moon receiving light through the sun.

279 In this sense we could speak of a kind of alienation of a lower hypostasis in relation to a higher one.

280 For the time being, I will limit my remarks to the relation of soul to matter. I will deal with the questions of the origin and eros of matter and of the different kinds of matter distinguished by Plotinus in the next subsection. In the present subsection, I will refer to the matter informed by the lower soul as “lower matter” only to distinguish it from intelligible matter, although later the expression “lower matter” will be used to indicate both cosmic and pre-cosmic matter (see the opening paragraphs of the next subsection).
desire to express itself externally, a desire on which it acts by organizing lower matter. One could say, briefly, that the organizing activity of the soul over matter is the lower soul tout-court, that is, Nature or the World-Soul. This organizing activity, in turn, depends on the World-Soul’s connection to the contemplation of Nous by the Soul-Hypostasis.

The desire of the lower soul is a power (δύναμις) by which time, Platonically understood as a sensible image of the intelligible, comes into being. Otherwise stated, the organizing activity of the lower soul is the temporalization of the higher soul’s contemplation of the eternal noetic model, and time is thus the very form of life of the lower soul, or the very modality of its activity (see III.7 [45] 11.30–43).

This act of transmission of the logos of higher realities to the sensible is called illumination.

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281 See IV.7 [2] 13, IV.8 [6] 3.21–28. Notice that to manifest itself externally is something necessary to the nature of soul, which therefore comes to the sensible by a kind of “spontaneous inclination” (IV.8 [6] 5.26: ῥοπῇ αὐτεξουσίῳ). Moreover, the lower (organizing) part of the soul is not another soul, but is the outer expression of a single reality whose inner reality is the higher (rational) one emerging from Nous (see note 260 above; cf. II.1 [40] 5.5–8, IV.8 [6] 7.18–23, V.2 [11] 1.19–21). As Plotinus points out, the lower (organizing) soul proceeds from the higher (rational) one eternally as life from a superior life (III.8 [30] 5.9–17; cf. VI.7 [38] 31.2–4). This life is a vivifying and organizing activity brought about by the lower soul, which in its higher part (or intellect) remains constantly connected to the contemplative activity of the superior soul. PIGLER (156) writes: “Par son essence et son aspect rationnel, la partie supérieure est donc constituée par un désir (ἔφεσις) d’intelligence et de contemplation motivé par l’amour que l’Âme éprouve pour l’Intelligence, amour qui lui vient du supérieur et qui s’exprime en désir d’union avec son générateur. Mais par sa partie inférieure, qui rend raison de sa venue à l’être, l’Âme a pour fonction d’exprimer l’Intelligence, d’en être le logos. La partie inférieure est ainsi comme un logos extérieur et expansif non immanent à l’Âme. Ce logos est ce qui permet l’expansion de l’être, parce qu’il est l’ἔρως de l’Âme.”


284 The issue of time (and eternity) in Plotinus is complex and to deal with it even in a merely introductory manner would take us too far afield from our main topic. Nevertheless, some general remarks are needed if we are to understand the activity and kind of eros of the lower soul, along with the discursive nature of soul as a whole. I placed these remarks in a separate appendix (Appendix D), to which I will refer whenever the questions of time, eternity, and discursiveness surface in our discussion.
(ἔλλαμψις, ἐλλάμπειν), and the active relation of the lower soul to lower matter is described as a relation of care (ἐπιμέλεια, ἐπιμελεῖσθαι). In other words, for the soul to be embodied means to be engaged in the communication of form and life to that which lacks them by organizing or attending to it—literally to in-form it and to animate it. This activity of illumination of the sensible and care for it is the peculiar activity of the lower part of the soul, including the individual embodied souls. Soul is thus understood as the intermediary hypostasis, which in communicating the contents and life of Nous to lower

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285 In reference to soul, Trouillard (1955b, 12–14) divides the activity of illumination in illumination créatrice and illumination ordonnatrice, respectively belonging to the World-Soul and to individual souls. This classification is very helpful, although Plotinus usage is, as usual, not easy to pin down. The soul’s activity on the sensible as illumination (ἔλλαμψις, ἐλλάμπειν) is variously performed by different “subjects,” or different manifestations of soul: at I.1 [53] 10.10–11 and VI.4 [22] 3.22, 15.16 the (individual) soul illumines body with life; at I.1 [53] 11.14–15 the life of beasts is made to derive from the illumination of the World-Soul (ἀπὸ τῆς ὅλης ὁλης); at VI.7 [38] 7.12 the World-Soul illumines matter. And as already in the passages I just mentioned, so in other passages the activity of illumination has also different recipients: for instance, at II.3 [52] 9.33 it is the World-Soul that illumines souls that are in the body; at II.3 [52] 17.15 (cf. also IV.4 [28] 13.4) it is the Soul-Hypostasis that illumines the World-Soul (in fact, the whole of II.3 [52] 17 illustrates the chain of transmission of logoi from Nous down to the sensible, a transmission which starting at the level of soul is called “illumination”), while at III.5 [50] 3.23 the Soul-Hypostasis illumines the heavens as “the original, intelligible source of light in the physical heavens” (WOLTERS 111); at IV.4 [28] 22.7, 26.27, the heavens irradiate the vegetative power on the earth; at V.3 [49] 8.23, the soul is made intelligent by illumination from Nous; at VI.9 [9] 7.14–16 the soul is said to be illuminated by the One. Cf. also II.9 [33] 10.19–26, where Plotinus reports a Gnostic version of illumination. On the basis of these references, we see that the activity of illumination reflects the complexity of soul.


287 Both the World-Soul and individual souls care for the inanimate, but they do so in different ways. Most notably, the World-Soul is said to be always in control of and transcending (ὑπερέχειν) its body because it is constantly linked to the Soul-Hypostasis and, through it, to Nous; by contrast, individual souls are connected to higher realities only intermittently and for this reason they are not always able to control the portions of matter that have become their bodies. See III.4 [15] 4, IV.3 [27] 3.12, 4.21 ad fin., 6, IV.8 [6] 4, 7.23–32; cf. also the next note and note 348 below.

288 Once again, it is important to stress that the activity of illumination and care of soul on the sensible is not wholly identical for the World-Soul and for individual souls. Rist (1967, 116) aptly writes that “[t]he individual soul governs what is short-lived and therefore partial; the World-Soul governs something that will endure in some sense in its completeness and perfection.” See the previous note.
matter brings about the sensible universe. Further still, soul is the energy or \textit{logos} of \textit{Nous} whereby the life of the One itself is transmitted to the sensible.\footnote{289}{See III.2 [47] 14.1–6, 16.20–31; II.3 [52] 17. Plotinus goes as far as saying that without body the soul would be wholly in the intelligible (IV.5 [29] 1.5), and that the body is the major impediment to this possibility (IV.7 [2] 10.19–21, IV.8 [6] 3.4–5).}

As we saw, every generated hypostasis is erotically directed toward the hypostasis that generated it. This \textit{eros} is what arrests, or reverts, the flux of procession by introducing a movement contrary to it. At the same time, it is on the basis of this \textit{eros} that a hypostasis can emerge as this particular hypostasis. So, as I argued in my analysis of \textit{Nous}, it is because Intellect is originally an erotic energy directed toward the One that in a successive stage it can emerge as the thinking hypostasis, whose thought is a noetic fragmentation of the unity it contemplated in its loving stage. Something analogous happens with soul. The double direction in which the third hypostasis is spread out (i.e., toward the intelligible and toward the sensible) implies that the \textit{eros} of the higher soul differs from that of the lower one and that as a hypostasis soul has not one but two types of \textit{eros}. The \textit{eros} of the higher soul is wholly and permanently directed toward \textit{Nous} as

\footnote{289}{See V.1 [10] 3.7–9, 6.44–45. Plotinus insists on this point because in his view everything must unfold according to reason, an originary \textit{logos} which has its seat in \textit{Nous} and does not happen by chance. The origin of this rational unfolding is beyond \textit{Nous}, but it too is not a chance event, but the very self-love of the One as a necessary self-positing act that is beyond both \textit{dianoia} and \textit{noesis} while not being irrational (see the whole treatise VI.8 [39] \textit{On Free Will and the Will of the One}, particularly 10, 14, 15.28–36; cf. also pages 188-191 and 202–204 above). In descending order, the last guarantor of this rational unfolding of reality, which is a communication of the unity originating in the One (cf. VI.9 [9] 1.20–31), is the World-Soul or Nature, which governs the sensible according to reason (\kata\lambda\omicron\nu\omicron\nu\iota\omicron\nuος: II.3 [52] 13.4, 34, 14.30, 16.5, III.2 [47] 8.30, 11.4, 17.24, 37, 63, 18.15, IV.3 [27] 10.10, 16.6, 16, 17.19, IV.4 [28] 35.8–24, 39.12; see also V.8 [31] 1.24, VI.2 [43] 22.31, VI.9 [9] 1.29; cf. Plato, \textit{Phaedrus} 246c1–2), that is, by never losing sight of what is above it, so that Plotinus explicitly refers to it with the appellative of \lambda\omicron\gamma\omicron\omicron (III.8 [30] 2.19 \textit{ad fin.}). For a discussion of this point (and a negative answer to the question of whether \textit{Nous} should be called the \textit{logos} of the One), see PIGLER (165–173). In passing, we might add that logos, like Nature (see note 294 below), is not a separate hypostasis between \textit{Nous} and soul: see II.9 [33] 1.31–32, V.1 [10] 3.20–21, 6.49; cf. Rist (1967, 90–99), Wallis (1995, 68–69), Graeser (1972, 35).}
its generator and, through it, to the One (cf. VI.7 [38] 35.19–45).\textsuperscript{291} The \textit{eros} of the lower part, by contrast, is not unequivocally directed to the intelligible realm and the One but, upon receiving from the superior soul a report, as it were, of the latter’s contemplation of \textit{Nous}, it organizes lower matter accordingly into a cosmos. Thus, through soul the sensible is able to participate, if only in a distant manner, in the intelligible (IV.3 [27] 12.30–32). The activity of the lower soul, insofar as this attempts to externalize a superior unity which it is unable to replicate within itself, is like a will of independence from \textit{Nous}, although this activity occurs naturally as part of the process of derivation.

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In this connection, it may be worth summarizing Pigler’s interpretation of the figure of Penia, an interpretation that bears directly on the reading of the treatise on \textit{eros} (III.5 [50]) that I analyzed in Chapter Two and that sheds some light on the interplay between lower and higher soul.\textsuperscript{292} Pigler begins by arguing that intelligible matter can be understood as meaning two related things: on the one hand, it is the primary otherness derived from the One, or the raw erotic energy that constitutes \textit{Nous} in its loving stage; on the other hand, it is “what remains of this product once the hypostases have achieved the status of complete and separate realities.”\textsuperscript{293} This “left over” or remainder, after \textit{Nous}

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\textsuperscript{291} This \textit{eros} is the one pure \textit{eros} that belongs most properly to Aphrodite \textit{Urania}, whom we found in Plotinus’ treatise on \textit{eros} (III.5 [50] 2.19–32).
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\textsuperscript{292} PIGLER (180–198).
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\textsuperscript{293} PIGLER (181): “la matière intelligible peut donc se comprendre, d’une part, comme le produit dérivé de l’Origine absolue, la proto-vie, d’autre part, comme ce qui \textit{reste} de ce produit de fois que les hypostases se sont constituées en réalités achevées et séparées.”
\end{flushright}
and the Soul-Hypostasis have constituted themselves as complete and separate realities, is an erotic energy whose intensity is insufficient to revert toward the reality above it so as to be “in-formed” and thus constituted as a separate hypostasis.

Mostly on the basis of III.5 [50] 7 (especially lines 1–9) and III.8 [30] 5 (especially lines 10–17), Pigler identifies intelligible matter in its last degree of procession with the lower soul (i.e., the World-Soul or Nature), and thinks that in Plotinus’ reading of the Symposium myth of Eros’ birth this “remainder” of which I just spoke is represented by Penia. We thus find here a hierarchy of decreasing intelligible unity from Nous down to the lower soul, with Nous as both thinking (νοῦς) and object of thought (νοητόν), the higher soul or Soul-Hypostasis as only intellectual (νοερά; cf. II.9

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294 It is not clear to me whether in Pigler’s interpretation it is higher and lower soul (or Soul-Hypostasis and World-Soul) that constitute the psychic analogue of the double state of Nous, Loving and Thinking, or whether a double state of soul must be presupposed before the emergence of the World-Soul, with Loving Soul being the first remainder of intelligible matter after the constitution of Nous as a fully formed hypostasis, and (dianoetically) Thinking Soul being the fully formed third hypostasis (i.e., the Soul-Hypostasis). I take the second alternative to be the more plausible one, first, because the Soul-Hypostasis is already a fully formed hypostasis and not raw erotic energy still to revert toward its generator, and second, because Nature, like logos (see note 290 above), is not a hypostasis in Plotinus (see Rist 1967, 92–93; pace ARMSTRONG I, xxii–xxiii). As we just saw, Pigler herself points out that the World-Soul or Nature is the second and last remainder of intelligible matter, which however, due to its diminished intensity, is unable to revert and become an independent hypostasis.

295 As Pigler (184) herself puts it, “Pénia est donc le surplus, le reste, inhérent à toute information par la réalité supérieure, elle représente l’excédent de la puissance infinie et indéterminée, de la proto-vie qui n’a pas trouvé place dans le processus eidétique de constitution de l’hypostase, elle est cette pure énergie érotique qui sourd de l’Un et qui n’a pas pu s’achever en réalité eidétique.” Commenting on III.5 [50] 7, Dillon (1969, 35) had already observed about Penia that “[s]he is the as yet unformed Soul, animated by a vague desire for self-fulfillment,” although for him this unformed Soul seems to correspond, not to the remainder mentioned by Pigler which results in the World-Soul, but to a pre-hypostatic psychic intelligible matter that will become the fully formed Soul-Hypostasis. I agree with Dillon that it is plausible to recognize such an element in Plotinus’ view of soul (which I take to correspond with the second highlighted row in Table 4 above; see previous note), but I am not persuaded by his identification of this kind of matter with Penia, nor by his claim that the permanent “unboundedness” (ἀοριστία) of the soul corresponds to the the intelligible matter treated in Ennead II.4 [12] (see Dillon 1969, 36; cf. Farther 2 note 89). I rather follow Pigler in identifying Penia with the remainder of intelligible psychic matter after the Soul-Hypostasis has already been formed and which will result in the World-Soul or Nature (cf. note 300 below). Once again, “before” and “after” do not indicate temporal succession, but priority and posteriority of being or power (cf. III.5 [50] 9.24–29).
[33] 1.32), and the lower soul or Nature as having no thought of its own but receiving it from its higher generator like a report of which it never loses sight and on whose basis it brings order to lower matter. Within this framework, what the higher soul communicates to the lower one is a kind of blueprint of its contemplation of Nous, a light beam which brings with itself intelligible content and that Plotinus identifies with logos. In III.5 [50] the product of logos is not so much a multiplicity of derivative logoi in the lower soul, but eros itself: an imperfect eros, of course, lacking what it desires (III.5 [50] 7.12–14), in contrast with the eros of Nous and the eros of the Soul-Hypostasis, each possessing its desideratum according to its proper nature. The imperfection of the eros of the lower soul is due to the fact that it issues from a logos, that of the higher soul, which is not itself the perfect logos of Nous but is derived from it (III.5 [50] 7.18–19).

Therefore that, as Pigler puts it, we see that

in the order of hypostatic procession, unity is the result of a greater aptitude to think and to think oneself. However, we also know that, in the order of conversion, what determines the greatest approximation to the Good, and even the union with the Good, is the greatest purity of love, a love which must be superior to thought since the One that loves itself is ὑπερνόησις.

296 In light of this interpretation, what throughout Chapter Two I referred to as the “parts” of the World-Soul (cf. Table 3) should be understood not as discrete independent entities but as aspects of the same entity.

297 See III.2 [47] 16.13–17; a mythical version of this explanation can be found at V.1 [10] 7.28–34.

298 PIGLER (180) calls the eros of the lower soul “l’ultime trace du Principe que l’Âme donne à l’obscurité que vient après elle.”

299 PIGLER (186): “dans l’ordre de la procession des hypostases, l’unité est le fruit d’une plus grande aptitude à penser et à se penser. Cependant, nous savons aussi que, dans l’ordre de la conversion, ce qui détermine le plus grand rapprochement avec le Bien, et même l’union au Bien, est la plus grande pureté de l’amour, un amour qui doit être supérieur à la pensée puisque l’Un qui s’aime lui-même est ὑπερνόησις.”
This means that the greatest resemblance with the Good is not in the field of thought, but in that of \textit{eros}. And if for soul to love \textit{Nous} as its proper \textit{desideratum} means to acquire a certain (dianoetic) unity in thought, \textit{Nous} already points to the One as the ultimate \textit{desideratum}, the \textit{ἐρασιμωτάτων} (VI.7 [38] 32.25). This \textit{eros} of the soul which, in contemplating \textit{Nous}, is further directed to the One, is called divine and belongs to the soul essentially (III.5 [50] 3.19–23). As I showed in the previous chapter (Section 3.4), without this \textit{eros}, the soul would be unable to see its true goal, the Good. This is the \textit{eros} of a pure soul, proper of the Soul-Hypostasis and ever directed toward the One. And as Pigler argues, when soul is wholly directed in this way toward the One, it is similar not so much to the fully formed hypostasis of \textit{Nous}, but to \textit{Nous} in its loving state, always united with its object (see VI.7 [38] 35.30–41). It is only because of this prior tendency, or this “eye” already filled with vision (III.5 [50] 3.13), that soul can be directed to \textit{Nous} and, by dianoetically contemplating it, can become a fully formed hypostasis. But prior to this formation, soul, like \textit{Nous} in its first state, is an erotic energy naturally directed toward the Good.\footnote{300 PIGLER (186–188). Pigler writes that the \textit{eros} of the higher soul resembles that of Loving Intellect. Resemblance, of course, is not identity. What the difference is between Loving Intellect (pre-hypostatic intelligible \textit{noetic} matter, or, simply, intelligible matter) and the \textit{eros} of the yet unformed Soul-Hypostasis (to which we might conveniently refer to as Loving Soul, pre-hypostatic intelligible \textit{psychic} matter or, simply, psychic matter) remains unclear. The reason for this lack of clarity is probably due to my own failure to understand whether according to Pigler we should admit a psychic analogue of Loving and Thinking Intellect prior to the emergence of the World-Soul: the problem I raised in note 294. If this analogue is admitted, then I take the difference between intelligible and psychic matter to be one of intensity. Intelligible matter, being closest to the One, is more intensely directed toward it than psychic matter. We can thus say that Pigler’s reading of \textit{eros} in the \textit{Enneads} has brought to light two stages of intelligible matter, (i) and (iii) below, to which I add a third, (ii) below, on the assumption that it is plausible to admit a psychic analogue of Loving and Thinking Intellect prior to the emergence of the World-Soul. These three stages, highlighted in Table 4 above, are: (i) intelligible matter (this is intelligible matter strictly, that is, the first stage of \textit{Nous} or Loving Intellect, hence the appellative “pre-}
down discursively or diaphoretically the content of its vision, and filled with its desideratum, insofar as it is directed toward it without reservations. The proper goodness of this erotic energy lies not so much in the possibility of being informed, thus putting an end to its indetermination, but in the very fact of being wholly taken up in its vision, fully in possession of what it desires.

The eros of the lower soul (or of Penia), by contrast, is by nature deficient (III.5 [50] 7.1–16). Its goodness is not derived from its indetermination, as was the case with the eros of higher realities, but from the fact that this indetermination can be “in-formed” or given a limit. This means that the lower soul (Penia) has the vague presentiment that its good lies in the One (V.5 [32] 12.8, VI.7 [38] 29.21) but it is unable to “revert” so as to synthesize within itself the intelligible contents it receives from above, thus failing to establish itself as an independent hypostasis. As a consequence, the lower soul orients its unsatisfied and agitated erotic power (III.7 [45] 11.20–21) outside of itself by generating the temporal realm, on which it bestows the intelligible content that it was unable to hold wholly and stably within itself. Thus, the World-Soul or Nature becomes a creative power active in the sensible.\textsuperscript{301} Strictly, although the lower soul does not proceed from

\textsuperscript{301} It should be observed that the erotic power of the lower soul is also a trace of the One, although it lacks the strength to revert and manifests itself rather as creative power. As PIGLER (192) writes, “l’engendrement du sensible est, quant à lui, l’effet d’une insatisfaction propre à l’Âme inférieure qui reproduit dans le sensible les logoi qu’elle ne peut contenir en elle-même. Pour le dire autrement, cette Âme exprime le dernier degré nécessaire de la procession pour qu’il puisse y avoir, après elle mais

hypostatic”; this is elsewhere called the indefinite dyad or primary otherness: page 226); (ii) intelligible psychic matter (i.e., the analogue of Loving Intellect at the level of soul, hence also pre-hypostatic); (iii) the remainder (i.e., what is left of intelligible matter after soul has emerged as a fully formed hypostasis). Very generally, what distinguishes (i), (ii) and (iii) is the intensity of eros; more specifically, what distinguishes (iii) from both (i) and (ii) is the fact that (iii) is unable to revert toward its generator and emerge as a full hypostasis. For this reason, I maintain, the eros of (iii) is said to be deficient; for the same reason, the World-Soul or Nature is not a separate hypostasis (see again note 294), and hence it is subsumed under the hypostasis soul as the lower part of the latter.
the higher soul as a hypostasis, it is necessarily linked to it by its *eros*, and through this *eros* it is connected to the originary love of the One. The position and function of the lower soul, therefore, is an intermediary one: on the one hand, it is directed toward what lies above it as it tries to imitate the higher soul’s contemplation of *Nous*; on the other, this imitation occurs externally as the organization (i.e., illumination and care: see pages 248–250) of the sensible in accordance with that contemplation. For this reason, we can say that its *eros* is inextricably double: both for higher realities and for the sensible.

We thus come to the last stage in the process of derivation of all reality from the One: lower matter.

### 3.4.3 Hyletic *Eros*: Lower Matter as the Last Stage of Derivation.

**Utter Inability of Erotic Reversion, and Evil**

The issue of the erotic status of lower (as opposed to intelligible) matter (ὕλη) is closely related to several questions surrounding its origin and nature, most notably: Does Plotinus think that matter is generated or not? If it is not generated, can we still consistently refer to the One as the Principle of *all* reality? If, conversely, matter is generated, what generates it, why, and how? Does matter participate in higher hypostases? And finally, why does Plotinus associate it so closely with evil? These

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302 PIGLER (195) writes: “A partir donc de l’Âme inférieure, l’unité s’exprime non plus par la conversion mais par la participation; puisque la fonction de cette Âme est de donner forme et vie à la matière sensible, de créer le monde sensible, il y a bien, dans l’ordre de la procession, une raison à son avènement ontologique, car cette Âme a pour mission d’exprimer le Νοῦς et d’en être le *logos.*”
questions have not been met with answers that are widely agreed upon by those who investigated the subject extensively, and the controversy and literature surrounding them would provide enough material for a thick monograph. As a consequence, my treatment of these interrogatives in the present subsection amounts to a summation of my (at best tentative and likely provisional) conclusions on the subject. I will limit my exposition to sketching a bare outline of some of the main alternatives offered in reply to the questions asked above. Although I happen to agree with much of what Pigler has to say on the issue because of the arguments she offers, the reason for privileging her account and for endorsing much of what she says is also pragmatic: her solution throws light on a number of problems surrounding the status of matter from the standpoint of eros, a perspective which is central to the present study. Nevertheless, I believe that Pigler’s interpretation does not dispel all doubts about Plotinus’ views on matter, views about which no single solution has succeeded to free me from the sense that we might be dealing with an aporia in Plotinus himself.

At the outset of our brief discussion, a classification of matter is in place. This classification is at the same time a summation of what I have said on the topic up to this point and an introduction of the concepts that I will consider in the next pages.\footnote{For an analogous classification see Pigler (201 note 2, 217–225, 227 note 2).}

In descending order, first we have (1) \textit{intelligible matter} (or the indeterminate dyad), that is, the erotic energy or primary otherness directly issuing from the One and constituting the first state of \textit{Nous} (i.e., Loving Intellect; see pages 224–227); we might also refer to it as \textit{pre-hypostatic noetic matter}. Less appropriately, (2) intelligible matter
is also the energy that remains, but with diminished intensity, “after” *Nous* has constituted itself as a full hypostasis (see note 300). This energy is the first state of soul, what we might refer to as *pre-hypostatic psychic matter* (i.e., Loving Soul as a psychic analogue of Loving Intellect; see pages 224–227 and notes 294 and 295 above), and, after soul has emerged as a fully formed hypostasis, (3) *the last remainder of intelligible matter*, which is unable to revert and become a full-blown hypostasis, namely Nature, or the World-Soul, or the lower soul, mythically represented by Penia (pages 251–256).

Finally, we have *lower matter* (as distinguished from intelligible or higher matter), which comprises (4) *sensible or cosmic matter* (or body, whether merely informed or also animated) and (5) *pre-cosmic matter* (or matter *tout court*). Sensible matter is pre-cosmic matter after this has been informed by the lower soul. What distinguishes higher or intelligible matter, that is, (1), (2), and (3), from pre-cosmic matter is that while higher matter *by itself* is capable of “reversion,”304 lower matter is not, and so it needs an external agent (i.e., soul) to inform it and turn it into sensible matter. Moreover, pre-cosmic and cosmic matter are not two kinds of matter, but rather the same matter respectively taken “before” and “after” (logically, rather than chronologically) this has been “illuminated” by the ordering activity of the lower soul. In short, we may say that Plotinus recognizes only two kinds of matter, *higher or intelligible* (which strictly is

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304 The difference between (1), (2), and (3) is that although in a sense they are all intelligible matter, only (1) and (2) are intense enough to constitute themselves as separate hypostases possessing their *desideratum* according to their proper mode of existence, while (3) lacks the intensity to constitute itself as an independent hypostasis and thus is always a desire that is not in possession of its *desideratum*. Alternately, the reversion of (3), the last remainder of intelligible matter constituting the World-Soul, must be considered at least partial, in the sense that although the World-Soul never emerges as a fully formed hypostasis in its own right, it does remain permanently linked to the Soul-Hypostasis’ contemplation of *Nous*. Cf. note 300 above.
identical with (1), and has (2) and (3) as remainders of considerably different decreasing intensity) and lower or sensible (which strictly is identical with (4) but has (5) as its logically necessary condition).

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Plotinus states that divine things (V.1 [10] 7.49: τὰ θεία) or real beings (IV.4 [28] 13.20: τὰ ὄντα), that is, the three hypostases, end at soul: what is under them is said to be but imitation (τὰ μιμήματα). The question here is about the origin, not merely of this imitation, which for Plotinus occurs as an act of care and illumination of soul on matter (see pages 248–250), but the origin of that which is illuminated and informed: pre-cosmic matter. The alternative around which revolves much of the controversy surrounding this problem is stated in an early text of the Enneads, IV.8 [6] 6.18–23.305

[18] The nature of matter, then, either existed for ever, and it is impossible [19] for it, since it existed, not to participate in that which grants all things as much good as [20] each one of them can take; or else its coming into being [21] was a necessary consequence of the causes before it, and not even so [22] was it required to be separate because that which gave it existence as a kind of gracious gift [23] became stationary through a lack of power before it came to it.

Before I take into account some of the major views about the generation of lower matter, it will be useful to supplement this passage with three other main texts that are objects of controversy. I will be referring constantly to these four passages as I report the views of other authors on the subject. The second text is III.4 [15] 1, from which I will

At lines 5–7, Plotinus writes about the soul’s “power of growth which extends also to plants” (line 3: φύσιν καὶ μέχρι φυτῶν):

[5] Does this power of growth, [6] then, produce nothing? It produces a thing altogether different than itself; for after it there is no [7] life, but what is produced is lifeless.

Plotinus calls this lifeless product “absolute indefiniteness” (lines 11–12: ἀοριστίαν... παντελῆ; line 13: πάντη ἀόριστον) and goes on to write about this product:

[14] When it is perfected it becomes [15] a body, receiving the form appropriate to its potentiality, a receptacle [16] for that which produced it and brought it to maturity.

The third text is III.9 [13] 3.7–16:

[7] The partial soul, then, is illuminated [8] when it goes towards that which is before it—for then it meets reality—but when it goes towards [9] what comes after it, it goes towards non-existence. But it does this, when it goes towards [10] itself, for, wishing to be directed towards itself it makes [11] an image of itself, the non-existent, as if walking on emptiness and [12] becoming more indefinite; and the indefinite image of this [13] is in every way dark; for it is altogether without reason and unintelligent and [14] stands far removed from reality. [But if the soul goes] towards the intermediate region it is in its own [15] world, but when it looks at the


image again, as it were directing its attention to it a second time, it forms it and goes into it rejoicing.

Finally, the fourth text is I.8 [51] 14.51–54.309

[51] For if the soul itself generated matter, [52] being affected in some way, and if it associated with it and became evil, [53] the cause was the presence of matter; for [the soul] would not have come to it unless [54] its presence had given [the soul] the occasion to come to be [in it].

The alternative presented in IV.8 [6] 6.18–23 is generally taken to mean either that matter existed always (and thus that it is independent of the One for its existence) or that it was generated (and so that it depends on the One for its existence).310 The major

309 I.8 [51] 14.51–54: [51] καὶ γὰρ εἰ αὐτὴ ἡ ψυχὴ τὴν ὕλην ἐγέννησε [52] παθοῦσα, καὶ εἰ ἐκοινώνησεν αὐτῇ καὶ ἐγένετο κακή. [53] ἡ ὕλη αἰτία παροῦσα· οὐ γὰρ ἀν ἐγένετο εἰς αὐτὴν μὴ τῇ [54] παρουσίᾳ αὐτῆς τὴν γένεσιν λαμβοῦσα. In my translation I followed IGAL, who, unlike ARMSTRONG, renders the first condition on line 51 as simple past, not as unreal (ARMSTRONG: “Even if soul had produced matter...”)—rightly so, I maintain (see Smyth 1956, §§ 2297–3001). Here is IGAL’s translation: “[51] Porque si bien es verdad que el alma misma engendró la materia [52] como resultado de alguna pasión, y si bien es verdad que se asoció con ella y se hizo mala, [53] la causa está en la presencia de la materia. Porque el alma no se habría encarnado en la materia si no fuera porque por la [54] presencia de ésta tomó ocasión de encarnarse.”


(i) Bréhier believes that Plotinus outlines the alternative without taking a side, but rather espouses a double viewpoint (cf. also Narbonne 1993, 139–140). Bréhier’s position on the generation of lower matter is part of a broader reading of matter in Plotinus, whose views he understands as characterized by a constant conflict of perspectives on its status, namely a conception of matter as both an active principle of evil and as mere appearance and pure negativity.

(ii) Rist, having expressly criticized Bréhier’s reading, goes on to argue that the alternative is not between whether matter is generated (and so ultimately dependent on the One) or ungenerated (and so independent of the One), but between whether it is generated temporally or a-temporally. He argues that Plotinus’ claim is that “even if” (οὐδ’ ὧς, at IV.8 [6] 6.21) matter was created in time, it would not be independent of the One for its existence. He concludes that matter is the last product in the process of derivation and is produced by the World-Soul.

(iii) IGAL thinks that the first alternative—that matter always existed—is based on a literal interpretation of the *Timaeus*, while the second one, that matter is a necessary consequence of causes prior to it, is Plotinus’ own philosophical interpretation of the state of affairs, through which he also rejects the literal reading of the *Timaeus* that he already attacked earlier in the treatise (cf. IV.8 [6] 4.35–42, 5.10–16, and IGAL’s notes *ad loc.*). Neither Rist nor IGAL deny that matter is generated, therefore, but only that whatever this generation entails, it does not make matter independent of the One or altogether separated from it (cf. II.9 [33] 3.17–21). See also Henry (1962, lvi–lvi), who calls Plotinus a relaxed dualist. Henry
supporter of the first hypothesis is Schwyzer. A milder version of this hypothesis, and one with which I am in agreement on many counts, is that of Narbonne, who raises serious doubts about the generation of lower matter, arguing that the Enneads do not afford full clarity on the issue. Those who endorse the claim that for Plotinus lower

311 Schwyzer (1973). Much of Schwyzer’s argument against the generation of lower matter hinges on an interpretation of the protasis of the crucial passage of I.8 [51] 14.51–54 as irrealis (so rendered by ARMSTRONG; see also Guthrie 1918, ad loc., who translates the correlative εἴτε/εἴτε at lines 18 and 20 with “since”). Another of Schwyzer’s main points in arguing that matter is not generated in the Enneads concerns the text of III.9 [13] 3.7–16. In his view this passage describes, not the generation of matter, but of body, that is, the process by which soul gives form to a preexisting (i.e., ungenerated) formlessness or indefiniteness (see especially Schwyzer 1973, 275–276). For positions similar to Schwyzer’s see Pistorius (1952, 117–133), Armstrong (1954; but Armstrong 1967, 256 will modify his position), and Benz (1990, 110–111, 165). For a critique of Schwyzer’s overall position see O’Brien (1991, 27–41; 1993, 61–68); cf. also Corrigan (1986, 172–176).

312 Narbonne (1993; 2001a, 113–147; 2006b; 2007a; 2007b; 2009). Narbonne fundamentally argues that a careful analysis of the texts in which what he takes to be a merely alleged generation of matter is described shows that these texts are not only inconclusive but actually point to a rejection of the hypothesis favoring generation and, a fortiori, of generation by soul. In the order Narbonne (1993, 139–169, 202–204) treats them, these texts are (passages cited above in the body of the text are given in italic): IV.8 [6] 6, IV.7 [2] 3, II.4 [12], III.4 [15] J, IV.4 [28] 13.17–20, 22–23, III.8 [30] 2, V.8 [31] 2, VI.7 [38] 11, 27.11–13, 32.9–12, 33.30–38, VI.12 [43] 22, III.2 [47] 2, 12.1–2, III.3 [48] 1.4–7; III.9 [13] J; Narbonne (1993) earlier excepts I.8 [51] 14.51–54 from this list of passages, but in his later publications he argues that I.8 [51] 14.51–54 is not Plotinus’ own position, but an allusion to a Gnostic view he already rejected in II.9 [33] 12 (Narbonne 2006b; 2007a; 2007b, especially 123–141). Narbonne claims that if matter (which is identified with radical evil) ever came into existence, this event never occurred as a process of generation or production from higher realities, but as some kind of “by-product” (Narbonne 2007a, 85) or a “collateral damage” (Narbonne 2009, 73) of the overall process of derivation. Higher realities are thus thought to be innocent of the existence of matter: in fact, they do not generate it but rather curb its corrupting influence (I.8 [51] 15). Finally, what soul produces (since as a complete reality it is by nature productive) is not matter but a place (τόπος) for the body on which it exercises its ordering activity (cf. IV.3 [27] 9.15–26; see Narbonne 2007b, 135–137; 2009). Narbonne’s position is well summarized in the following statement: “Du déni pur et simple à l’affirmation inconditionnée de l’engendrement de la matière, l’éventail est vast. Les écrits de Plotin ont pu susciter un tel éventail de solutions et un telle confusion que parce qu’il sont eux-même, sur ce point particulier, hesitants et confus” (Narbonne 2001a, 145). I am inclined to agree with this statement.
matter is generated\textsuperscript{313} find support in a number of texts, chief of which are III.4 [15] 1 (which according to Corrigan constitutes the only positive unambiguous statement about the generation of lower matter in the \textit{Enneads}\textsuperscript{314}) and III.9 [13] 3.

It is clear, however, that if lower matter is said to be generated at all in Plotinus, generation ought to be understood in non-temporal terms.\textsuperscript{315} In other words, there never was a moment in which lower matter did not exist,\textsuperscript{316} for if matter, just like everything else (though not in the same way), \textit{ultimately} derives from the One by an activity that has no temporal beginning, then matter itself has no temporal beginning. To this extent, then, Plotinus may be understood as the epitome of the Greek tradition, in which the cosmos itself is considered eternal.\textsuperscript{317} So, to say that matter is generated does not mean that it has a temporal beginning, but that it depends, not only for its in-formation but also for its


\textsuperscript{316} I am aware that positively to predicate the verb “to exist” of lower matter is an unfortunate choice of words, for Plotinus describes matter as non-being (see note 328 below), but I could not find a less unfortunate way to express myself. Suffice it to say that much like in speaking about the One, in talking of lower matter one ought to be conscious of the \textit{heightened} ambiguity of such terms as “being” and “existence.”

\textsuperscript{317} See O’Meara (1993, 77–78); cf. references in notes 14 and 21. Evidently, the eternity of the cosmos is infinity of time, thus differing essentially from the eternity that is the proper way of being of \textit{Nous} (see Appendix D).
existence, directly on its generator (and ultimately on the One), and in this precise sense it must be understood as something derived. Patently, therefore, generation here should not be understood as a chronological affair, but as derivation, that is, the radical inability, on the part of all that is generated (γενητός), to maintain itself in existence without a prior principle. We might add in passing that in this strict sense the only ungenerated (ἀγένητος or ἀγέννητος) reality is the One (V.4 [7] 1.18–19; cf. Plato, Phaedrus 245d3).

As anticipated, a controversy within the controversy concerns the question of the identity of the generator of lower matter and the modality of this generative act. Concerning the first problem, the identity of the generator, those who agree that matter is generated generally also agree that the generator is soul, but they may disagree on whether this means simply the partial soul mentioned at III.9 [13] 3.7 and III.4 [15] 1.3, the lower soul (i.e., the World-Soul or Nature), or, in light of the expression

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319 A fairly recent exception is Phillips (2009), who in an overall critique of O’Brien’s position argues that matter is certainly said to be generated in the Enneads, but that the identity of the generator is far from clear. In fact, he thinks that the passages on which O’Brien (see next note for references) comments to prove that the generator of matter is the “partial soul” or the soul “which comes to be in plants” (i.e., III.4 [15] 1 and III.9 [13] 3.7–16) speak not of the generation of matter but of what he calls the “soul-trace” or “soul-image,” that is, the lowest level of soul, lower even than vegetation (cf. Phillips 2009, 122–133), and which elsewhere seems to be identified with the παθητικόν (see Igal 1979, 324–329; IGAL I, 86–87).


321 Pigler (227–237). Pigler’s main thesis is that the lower soul engenders pre-cosmic matter by replicating the inaugural gesture of henologic superabundance. But this replica is an inverted analogue of the pre-hypostatic intelligible matter that derived from that gesture because the production of lower matter is not a consequence of the perfection of soul. On the contrary, it occurs because in soul “il y a une perte d’unité et une perte d’energeia par rapport aux réalités intelligible qui lui sont antérieures” (Pigler 232), so that pre-cosmic matter is but a residue of the primal energy springing from the One, “l’excédent qui
Concerning the mode of generation, there seems to be a certain agreement that while the One and Nous generate because of their perfection or completeness and by remaining in themselves, soul is unable to do so (V.2 [11] 1.7–9, 16–19). By contrast, (lower) soul generates matter out of its own indefiniteness and inability to constitute...
itself as a separate hypostasis. For this reason soul produces something other than itself, something toward which it may move (V.2 [11] 1.18–19; III.9 [13] 3.7–12) and which may receive it (IV.3 [27] 9.22–23, IV.8 [6] 5.24–27)\(^{324}\) in its attempt to replicate externally the unity above it.\(^{325}\)

Finally, as to why soul generates matter, there is virtually no disagreement that two main reasons are found in Plotinus: first, because matter is the necessary condition for the existence of contraries in the sensible universe; second, because there must be an end to the process of derivation from the One, and this end is matter.\(^{326}\)

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\(^{324}\) See O’Brien (1999a, 182–183), to whom I owe most of the references in this paragraph. O’Brien (1999a, 183) remarks that the differences between the One/Nous and soul are not limited to the way they generate, but “continue \textit{ex parte prolis}. Intellect, Soul, and intelligible matter, when they are generated, turn back of their own accord toward the principle from which they have issued, and intelligible matter, when it does this, ‘is defined’ (V.2 [11] 1.9–13 and 19–20; II.4 [12] 5.33–35). None of this is true of the matter of the sensible world.”

\(^{325}\) It may be worth summarizing Pigler’s position on this point (PIGLER 227–231). Her main thesis is that “l’Âme inférieure, en créant le sensible, rompt avec la continuité de la procession et qu’elle répète, tout en le pervertissant, en générant l’indétermination absolue qu’est la matière précosmique, le geste \textit{inaugural de l’Un}” (PIGLER 228). As we already saw at the end of the previous subsection, within the intelligible what is superior necessarily engenders an inferior image of itself which, in turn, possesses the power to constitute itself as a hypostasis by “converting” toward its generator. “De cette façon, l’acte/conversion est le moment radicalement constituant de la procession, le coup d’arrêt qui place d’emblée l’image dans l’être. L’acte/conversion \textit{résorbe} donc l’écart insitué par la procession et permet ce contact ineffable, immatériel, instauré par la contemplation de l’être générateur” (PIGLER 229). This is true down to the higher soul, but no longer so with the lower soul. “En effet, lorsque cette dernière tente de se contempler elle-même dans un acte de conversion vers soi, lorsqu’elle désire être avec elle-même, elle fait, du même coup, \textit{avorter} le processus auto-constituant qui va de pair, en règle générale, avec le regard contemplateur. L’écueil de l’auto-constitution de l’Âme inférieure en hypostase produit néanmoins une image, mais celle-ci est sans réalité” (PIGLER 230). And as the lower soul tries to replicate the unity above it in the image below it, its activity and self-unification are never fully accomplished, and its desire never fulfilled. Cf. also note 321 above.

After this partial overview of the major themes and the basic literature surrounding the issue of the generation of matter, we can finally ask: What is the nature of matter? And what kind of *eros* belongs to it? I will try to answer the first question by briefly outlining the three chief descriptions of pre-cosmic matter discussed by Pigler: matter as non-being, matter as the principle of entropy, and matter as evil.\(^{327}\)

To describe matter as non-being (μὴ ὄν; μὴ εἶναι), as Plotinus often does,\(^{328}\) does not mean to say that matter does not exist in any way whatsoever; rather, non-being here means complete privation of form,\(^{329}\) complete indetermination (ἀοριστία\(^{330}\)) in

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\(^{327}\) PIGLER (239–266, respectively 239–244, 244–250, and 250–256).

\(^{328}\) On matter as non-being: τὸ μὴ ὄν at II.4 [12] 10.35, 16.3, II.5 [25] 4.6–14, 5.13, III.6 [26] 7.11–13, 14.20 (πάντη μὴ ὄν; cf. also VI.9 [9] 11.36, VI.9 [9] 11.37; μὴ εἶναι at I.8 [51] 5.11–12, II.5 [25] 5.28, III.6 [26] 7.2. As I already pointed out earlier in the context of the question of Platonic hermeneutic (see Appendix E.4), O’Brien (1995, 19–25, 31–37, 43–88; 1999a, 172–174) argues that the notion of matter as non-being is to be traced back to the threefold distinction outlined by Plato in the *Sophist*: (i) absolute non-being as that which is not in any way at all (τὸ μηδαμῶς ὄν: *Sophist* 237b7–8), non-being itself by itself (τὸ μὴ ὄν αὐτό καθ’ αὐτό: 238c9), or Parmenidean non-being, absolute nothingness (a similar expression is found in the *Enneads*: τὸ παντελῶς μὴ ὄν at I.8 [51] 3.6–7, II.4 [12] 6.6; πάντη μὴ ὄν at VI.9 [9] 11.36; παντελὲς μὴ ὄν at VI.9 [9] 11.38); (ii) non-being as “an opposition between the form of being and that part of the form of otherness that is opposed to being” (*Sophist* 258a11–b4; O’Brien 1999a, 172–173); (iii) non-being as “that part of the form of otherness which is opposed to the being of each thing” (*Sophist* 258d7–e3; O’Brien 1999a, 173). According to O’Brien, Plotinus takes (iii) as a definition of lower matter (cf. II.4 [12] 16.1–3). To this classification of non-being we might add, with Narbonne (1992, 117–119), (iv) a distinction not found in the *Sophist*, namely non-being as that which is beyond being, namely Plato’s Good, or Plotinus’ One.

\(^{329}\) On lower matter as formlessness (ἀμορφία) or formless (ἀμορφος) see I.8 [51] 9.15–18, II.4 [12] 2.3, 10.27, 31–32, V.9 [5] 3.18–20, VI.7 [38] 33.30–31. In other similar passages, lower matter is said, by itself, to be deprived of, or opposed to all form (ἄμορφος: I.6 [1] 2.16–18, I.8 [51] 4.2, 9.11–18, II.4 [12] 6.17–19, 13.23–24, III.6 [26] 10.14–28, 19.23–25; μορφή: I.6 [1] 2.16–18, II.4 [12] 8.14–16, 13.23–24, VI.3 [44] 2.31–33, VI.7 [38] 33.32–33; cf. also VI.5 [23] 8, where the term ἰδέα is used). It may be objected that the the One, too, is formless (see note 59 above). Evidently, as in the case of power (see note 334 below) and unity (see note 332), formlessness is predicated differently of the One and of matter. In the former case, henologic formlessness is an indetermination of power, namely the nature of the One as that which is virtually all things but actually none (see note 74); in the latter case, by contrast, material formlessness is the indetermination of powerlessness, a perpetual state of potentiality (or, perhaps less imprecisely, of impotentiality: see note 334 below), which as such not only never turns into something actual, but which is also incapable of producing something after itself (cf. the next note and Chapter Four note 75). See also Hadot (1988, 329–336).
opposition to the complete determination of Intellect, absolute otherness
(αὐτοετερότης: II.4 [12] 13.18), as opposed to the relative otherness of Nous (i.e., an
otherness that also implies sameness), but also simplicity and continuity, once again in
contrast with the qualified unity of Nous (i.e., a unity that already implies a plurality
within itself and is productive of a plurality after itself). Thus, Plotinian matter is not
like Aristotle’s bronze or silver, which can be shaped into a statue or a bowl (Physics
II.194b24–26), but rather like a mirror (III.6 [26] 9.16–19), which only appears to take

330 On matter as indetermination (ἀοριστία) or as undetermined (ἀόριστος) see I.8 [51] 4.25–32, II.4 [12]
2.2–3, 10.13–17, 31–35, 11.29–43, 13.5–7, 14.24–30; almost synonymously with undetermined, matter is
also called unmeasured (ἀμετρός, ἀμετρία: I.2 [19] 2.20–21, I.8 [51] 3.427, 6.42, 8.37–43), and
unlimited (ἄπειρος, ἀπειρία: II.4 [12] 14.29, 15, III.6 [26] 7.8; cf. also VI.6 [34] 1.1). As Plotinus argues
in most of these passages and as we shall see in the next chapter, by associating with matter the
individual soul becomes more undetermined, much like by associating with the intelligible realm it
becomes more determined. It will be recalled that intelligible matter, too, is conceptualized as
indetermination (see pages 224–227; Chapter Two note 89). This is not incoherent, however, for
although Plotinus sees both lower and intelligible matter as undetermined, the former is what by itself
remains deprived of form and lacks the power to revert upon itself and toward its generator, while the
latter is what (logically) precedes the very realm of form, Nous, but, by being contemplatively and
erotically turned toward the One, eventually becomes form (cf. II.4 [12] 5.13–20). The same argument
can be made for the respective unlimitedness or infinity of intelligible and lower matter (cf. II.4 [12] 15–
16).

331 Plotinus expressly recognizes the Stoic view of the unity of all matter (II.4 [12] 1.8–9; see Calcidius,
Commentary on Plato’s Timaeus 292 = SVF I, 88; cf. also references in SVF II, 530–533). At II.4 [12]
8.1–2, 13 he specifically calls matter one (μία, ἕν), continuous (συνεχής), without quality (ἀποιος), and
simple (ἁπλοῦν); cf. also II.4 [12] 7.26, VI.1 [42] 25.29–33. It may be objected that although the contrast
between pre-cosmic matter and Nous on this point is easily recognizable, the same characterizations
attributed here to matter are elsewhere either explicitly inferred about the One, as in the cases of unity
and simplicity (so obvious and frequent as to need no reference), and absence of quantity (ἀμεγέθης: e.g.,
VI.9 [9] 7.11–16). But as in the cases of formlessness (see note 329) and power (see note 334), here too the kind
of unity, simplicity, continuity, and absence of quality predicated of matter are unlike those applied to the
One, for whereas the One is the Principle from which, being virtually all things, all things actually derive,
lower matter is a continuous field that merely reflects the form and life of higher realities while
generating nothing after itself. Thus, the One is the simple power whence comes the differentiation of all
reality; by contrast, when taken by itself, matter is that in which the differentiation of all reality ends.
the shape of whatever it reflects, while in fact assuming neither quality nor quantity (II.4 [12] 8–12, III.6 [26] 16–17), but remaining completely impassive to the informing action of what is ontologically prior to it (III.6 [26] 6–19). For this reason, matter is never actual but always potential (II.5 [25] 5334), and, by itself imperceptible (II.4 [12] 12.26–30), can be grasped only through some kind of “spurious reasoning” (II.4 [12] 10.11336). Finally, by being called “mother” (III.6 [26] 19.1: ὡσπερ μητέρα), matter is associated to the Platonic receptacle (see note 14; cf. Plato, *Timaeus* 50d3, 51a4); however, it is called “mother” only in a manner of speaking, for by itself (παρ’ αὐτῆς: VI.7 [38] 33.32)


334 Clearly, when matter is linked to potentiality (cf. II.5 [25] 4–5, on which see Narbonne 1998, 115–142), the meaning of the term δύναμις is not that of power, as we saw was the case with the One (pages 179–187 above; cf. V.3 [49] 15.33–40). However, I think it would be mistaken to conflate the potentiality of Plotinian matter with Aristotelian potentiality, which is the genuine capacity to take on or develop into a given form. By contrast, the potentiality of matter for Plotinus is one that will never be actualized and to this extent, perhaps more appropriately, not potentiality at all (since for Aristotle every potentiality is the potentiality for something actual, and so a principle of change, once the appropriate conditions are granted: see *Physics* VIII.25a11, b1–5; *Metaphysics* VI.1019a15–16, IX.1046a9–11, 1048a1–2, 13–16; *De anima* II.417a28), but, perhaps more appropriately, a factor of pure “impotentiality” (ἀδυναμία: I.8 [51] 14.14). Cf. note 329 above.

335 Matter’s lack of actuality is thus opposed to the pure actuality of Intellect (see the closing paragraphs of Subsection 3.4.2); for this reason, the only actuality matter is said to have is that of a mere image, or of a lie (II.5 [25] 5.23–24: ἐνεργείᾳ εἴδωλον, ἐνεργείᾳ ψεῦδος, ἀληθινὸς ψεῦδος; cf. III.6 [26] 7.21 ad fin.), and it is metaphorically associated to shadow (σκιά: III.6 [26] 18.29–31) and darkness (σκότος: I.8 [51] 4.32, 5.1–5, II.4 [12] 10.13–17, V.1 [10] 2.26; σκοτεινή: II.4 [12] 5.7, in connection with intelligible matter; ὀμμα ρά: II.4 [12] 12.26). It follows that the sensible universe, being impregnated with pre-cosmic matter, is itself in part an illusory realm (VI.3 [44] 8.10; cf. also II.3 [52] 17, II.4 [12] 15). However, unlike matter, the sensible has quantity, magnitude, and impenetrability (that is, a repugnance of bodies to a universal mixing with each other, the topic of treatise II.7 [37]). In this regard, space and time are the two principles of dispersion of the sensible (VI.4 [22] 8.14–15): the former makes extension possible, while in the latter bodies are corrupted and pass away (IV.3 [27] 8). See Pigler (142–144).

never has any form, but, in its permanent indetermination, it is sterile, it generates nothing (cf. III.6 [26] 19.14–25, VI.3 [44] 2.31–33, VI.7 [38] 33.32–33).

It is because its nature is of such sort as I have just described it that Pigler’s calls matter the principle of entropy. As we saw in the generation of Nous and of soul, each reality generates something similar to itself (the Principle of Likeness of Cause and Effect), but in a weaker form (the Principle of Superiority of Cause to Effect); the “offspring,” in turn, becomes limited and determined by turning toward its generator (the Principle of Reversion). Pigler thinks that in the case of lower soul, its product is pre-cosmic matter, in which the already weakened unity of the lower soul is weakened further to the point of becoming utter indetermination and lack of form. The lower soul has a desire to deploy its intelligible content in something external and does so in its product, matter. This is the birth of the sensible: thanks to the “in-forming” action of the lower soul, pre-cosmic matter is given order and limit and becomes body.\textsuperscript{337} But in spite of the ordering activity of the lower soul, matter remains fundamentally a dead thing (νεκρὸν: II.4 [12] 5.18; cf. also cf. also V.1 [10] 2.23–27); if it seems alive, it is only because of a life which it does not itself possess but merely receives from the lower soul,\textsuperscript{338} which is the only source of life in the sensible world (V.1 [10] 2.20–27). Therefore, matter is the principle of entropy because after it there is no further product; matter is the last term (τὸ ἐσχατὸν) in the process of derivation since with it the erotic energy that originated from the One comes to a stop, unable by itself both to revert and to produce something after

\textsuperscript{337} This ordering activity is something that has been going on \textit{ab aeterno} (IV.3 [27] 9.12–20).

itself.\textsuperscript{339}

But in the sensible cosmos matter is not left \textit{alone}, invested as it is by the activity both of the World-Soul and of individual souls. While the World-Soul rules the sensible universe as a whole, individual souls take charge of portions of this universe and deploy their powers in them by informing them and endowing them with different forms of life.\textsuperscript{340} Thus attended to by the World-Soul and individual souls, matter is shaped into a sensible universe. Like all levels of reality in the Plotinian process of derivation, the sensible, too, has its own proper \textit{eros}. We saw that the internal \textit{eros} of \textit{Nous} (as opposed to its external \textit{eros}, which is directed toward the Principle), or the perfect harmony subsisting in the multiplicity of the Ideas, was figuratively spoken of as a kind of friendship among the intelligibles (see note 227). Similarly, at the level of the sensible Plotinus speaks of sympathy (συμπάθεια, συμπαθεῖν\textsuperscript{341}). His usage of what originally appears to be a Stoic notion\textsuperscript{342} is quite nuanced, but in virtually all instances it basically indicates a coordination of discrete parts or distinct phenomena. This coordination is made possible on the basis of a single principle pervading those parts or phenomena, this principle being the one soul from which both the World-Souls and all individual souls

\textsuperscript{339} Cf. III.6 [26] 7.8–9, 30, VI.3 [44] 2.31–33.

\textsuperscript{340} Cf. V.1 [10] 3.7–9, 6.44–45.

\textsuperscript{341} Occasionally συμπάσχειν: e.g., at IV.4 [28] 32.19, IV.9 [8] 2.20.

\textsuperscript{342} On συμπάθεια in ancient Stoicism see for example references in SVF II, 170.532.14, 546.172.39, 912.264.8, 1013.302.25, 1211.347.24 (in all these passages sympathy is predicated of the different parts and phenomena of the cosmos and the organism). For a concise treatment of Plotinus’ use of this notion in relation to the Stoics see Graeser (1972, 68–72), Gurtler (1984).
At IV.3 [27] 8.1–3 all souls, including the World-Soul, are emphatically said to share in a relation of sympathy because they derive from the same Soul. What is important about this remark is that a sympathetic connection is possible only where there is a true principle of unity at work. Plotinus explicitly states that this principle cannot be something that is merely corporeal (i.e., an inanimate body), for inanimate bodies do not, by themselves, concur to form an organism (that is, the phenomenon to which the condition of sympathy belongs most conspicuously) unless soul is present. Most importantly, what displays sympathy is understood to be a kind of unity sympathizing with itself; this unity is soul (IV.7 [2] 3.5: \(\psiυχη \ δε \ αυτη \ σωματοθη\)). Plotinus never

343 Sympathy is used in a variety of contexts to explain phenomena as diverse as magic and sense-perception. Thus at II.3 [52] 5 sympathy occurs between reason and the non-rational parts of the soul; in IV.4 [28] 32 the whole universe is interpreted as a living being whose parts are kept together in a sympathetic relation (cf. also IV.4 [28] 35.8–9 and II.3 [52] 12.29–32); at IV.4 [28] 8.52–62 the movement of the heavens is described both in terms of sympathy and of harmony; at IV.9 [8] 3.1–4 different individual souls are said to stand in a mutual relation of sympathy; at IV.4 [28] 34.26–32 all the parts of the body harmonize (line 32: \(συμπαθουντα\)) in the activity of dancing. Notably, the whole treatise IV.5 [29] (On difficulties about the soul 3, or On sight) explains the phenomenon of vision through the notion of sympathy (the terms \(συμπαθεια\) and \(συμπαθη\) occur several times in this treatise: 1.35, 2.17, 3.17; 1.36, 2.22, 26, 3.19, 38, 8.3; \(ομοπαθεια\) is likely used as a synonym of \(συμπαθεια\) at 1.12, and see also IV.2 [4] 1.51, IV.7 [2] 3.2, IV.9 [8] 2.32. For a fruitful discussion of IV.5 [29] and the workings of sympathy in vision see Emilsson 1983, 36–62); and at IV.4 [28] 23.18–32 sympathy is singularly used to explain the phenomenon of sense-perception in a way vaguely reminiscent of adaequatio theories of truth common in the Middle Ages. See also III.1 [3] 5.1–15, where astrological theories exploit the relation of sympathy among different cosmic phenomena to try to foresee future events (ultimately going too far for Plotinus, since they end up denying the role of freedom and turn the sensible into a realm of determinism); similarly, at IV.4 [28] 26, 34, and 40–41 magical practices and even prayer are grounded in cosmic sympathy (see also IV.9 [8] 3.4–6). For a negative instance of sympathy, see I.2 [19] 6.23–27, where the soul endowed with higher virtue is said no longer to sympathize with what is inferior in it (contrast this with II.3 [52] 13.40–47; for the difference between higher and lower virtue see Subsection 4.6.1).

344 This expression is found in Plotinus’ attempt to refute the Epicurean theory that the soul is a convergence of atoms (IV.7 [2] 3.1–6; on the theory itself see scholium to Epicurus, Letter I.66 = EPICUREA fragment 311, 216.31–32; cf. also Epicurus, Letter to Herodotus 63 = EPICUREA 19–20; Lucretius, De rerum natura III.161–176) and is part of a larger portion of the treatise On the immortality of the soul (IV.7 [2] 2.1–8\(^7\).43), in which Plotinus extensively argues that the soul can be thought of as neither a body nor a property of a body (for a discussion of IV.7 [2] 3.1–6 see Longo 2009, 118–121).
says it explicitly, but I think that the sympathy found in the sensible universe (i.e., in matter already illuminated and cared for by soul) can be interpreted as the *eros* properly belonging to this level of reality. It is, in a sense, one last attempt—the *sensible* attempt—at replicating the unqualified unity and self-love of the Principle: *Nous* did it noetically and emerged as the realm of friendship among the intelligibles; soul did it at its own level by remaining contemplatively directed toward *Nous* and thus reproducing noetic unity discursively; finally, the lower soul, including individual souls, does it at the level of the sensible, by establishing a relation of sympathy among the different parts of individual organisms and of the sensible universe as a whole.

Now, as each individual soul directs its attention to a portion of the sensible universe by making it *its own* body, a further level of fragmentation is reached in the process of derivation, for the individual soul, though stably fixed in *Nous* through its higher or undescended part, often, in its lower part, is as if caught in the activity of information and animation of matter, and as if scattered in the multiple chores that this activity requires. This is so because its power is inferior to that of the World-Soul, which by contrast has complete control over the body of the universe by maintaining its vision fixed in the Soul-Hypostasis’ contemplation of *Nous* (see note 282 for references). Thus, delighted by the beauty of its own work, the individual soul runs the constant risk of taking this work as true reality, like a Narcissus craving to seize his own image reflected

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For this reason, in addition to the figurative feature of “friendship” found among the intelligibles (note 227 above) and of “sympathy” found among souls of which I have been speaking, the sensible universe intrinsically includes enmity, a likewise figurative *bellum omnium contra omnes* of cosmic proportions: “[2] for it is many and [3] divided into a multiplicity, and one part stands away from another [4] and is alien [ἀλλότριον] to it, and there is not only friendship [φιλία] but [5] also enmity [ἐχθρα] because of the separation, and in their deficiency one part is of necessity [6] at war [πολέμιον] with another” (III.2 [47] 2.2–6).
in water.\textsuperscript{345}

It is in this connection that the characterization of matter as evil comes into focus.\textsuperscript{346} The question here is not whether the generation of matter (if one is willing to concede that the \textit{Enneads} hold that lower matter is generated at all) was evil, for as Plotinus points out, matter stands for the last necessary stage in the procession of all things from the One (see note 326). Rather, the problem is, first, whether the “descent”\textsuperscript{347} of soul into matter is itself an evil act and, second, if it is not, in what sense matter can still be considered evil. Plotinus is unambiguous about the first half of the problem: the descent of soul into matter is not itself evil.\textsuperscript{348} After matter has been generated, the lower

\textsuperscript{345}On Narcissus, see I.6 [1] 8.6–15, V.8 [31] 2.31–35; for a brief discussion of this myth in the \textit{Enneads} see Pépin (1976, 199–200).


\textsuperscript{347}The treatise where Plotinus deals with the so called descent of the soul into body is IV.8 [6] (on the topic see Rist 1967, 112–129). It should be noted that in chapter 6 of this treatise Plotinus seems to have a more positive view of matter than those espoused in later treatises, II.4 [12] and I.8 [51] (cf. \textsc{Armstrong} IV, 394–395).

\textsuperscript{348}See O’Brien (1971, 142). \textsc{Pigler} (247) comments: “Le descente de l’Âme inférieure ou, si l’on préfère, de la Nature, est \textit{un substitut de la conversion} que l’Âme inférieure est incapable de produire car elle est déjà trop multiple. On peut pourtant analyser le fait de cette « descente » comme le moyen dont elle se sert pour se connaître elle-même, pour connaître ses propres contenus.” This descent is a necessity of the unfolding of the procession of all reality from the One (cf. IV.3 [27] 13). The World-Soul, is always completely in control of its body (and to this extent it differs from individual souls: II.9 [33] 7.7–18); cf. notes 287 and 288 above. Following Rist (1967, 112–129), \textsc{Pigler} (248 note 1) argues that the descent of the lower soul must be distinguished from that of the individual soul, adding that while the former is an ontological necessity, the latter is the expression of a particular will. Rist (1967, 121–122) clarifies that what is voluntary in the descent is not the movement by which the individual soul comes into matter to inform and illuminate it, which like all movement of procession occurs of necessity; what is voluntary is rather the attitude that the individual soul takes toward that which it illuminates. As Rist (1967, 122) observes, “[t]he pure soul can act in its descent as does the World Soul, and no harm is done. Most souls, however, will be overcome by their own handiwork and accept the necessity of descent so gladly as to forget the moral duty of return.”
soul turns toward it and gives it form, thus bringing about the sensible as a mixture of matter and form; successively, individual souls endow some portions of it with life and care for them. What remains to be discussed, then, is the second half of the problem, namely in what sense matter can still be called evil if we allow that its generation is a necessity of the overall process of derivation of everything from the One.

Briefly, the question can be answered by saying that matter is evil ontologically rather than morally. The matter at issue and which is called evil is not sensible, but pre-cosmic matter, since the sensible universe, though material, already shares in form and to that extent cannot be radically evil. Pre-cosmic matter, by contrast, is wholly deprived

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349 I am tempted to argue that the distinction between metaphysical and moral evil corresponds terminologically to the difference between τὸ κακὸν and κακία, but as usual Plotinus’ usage, while perhaps pointing at a solution of this kind, does not seem to be maintained strictly. As Rist (1971, 77–78) rightly remarks also in connection with other topics, this distinction is left implicit in the Enneads, although it can be made explicit on the basis of some passing remarks made by Plotinus. The clearest of these remarks is perhaps the one at I.8 [51] 5.30–34: “[30] Though there is matter with the visible [αἰσθητοῖς] [31] gods, evil [τὸ κακὸν] is not there, not the vice [τὴν κακίαν] which [32] men have—since not even all men have it; the visible gods master [κρατεῖν] [33] matter,—yet the gods with whom there is no matter are better—and they master it [34] by that in them which is not material [τῷ μὴ ἐν ὕλῃ].” What this text implies is precisely a distinction between metaphysical and moral evil. Matter is metaphysical evil insofar as it is the last necessary stage of the process of derivation from the One; and since the One is also the Good, what is farther away from it can rightly be called evil. But matter is not moral evil to the extent that it does not necessitate the performance of vicious actions. The sensible gods (i.e., the heavenly bodies) prove this by their ability to bring under complete control the bodies to which they are united; apparently this is true also of some better people, elsewhere called divine or godlike (θεῖοι: VI.9 [9] 11.49; cf. also VI.7 [38] 5.21), among whom Plotinus numbers Plato, the ancients (cf. Charrue, 1978, 18–23), and the Platonists (III.5 [50] 1.6, IV.8 [6] 1.23; II.9 [33] 6.36, 10.13; V.9 [5] 1.16). Matter does remain the necessary condition for moral evil, however, to the extent that the individual soul may succumb to it by making its own dealings with it its primary concern, thus losing sight of the fact that its own destiny lies elsewhere, namely in the intelligible. This defeat of the soul by matter is understood, not as the subtraction of something belonging to the soul, but as the addition of something alien to its nature, which in its pure or separate state is not weakened by matter (see I.8 [51] 14.17–24; on the notion of addition and subtraction in the context of the ascent of the soul to the One, cf. Section 4.5). For an account of how matter is evil for the individual soul (and a creative analogy of this relation), see O’Brien (1971; cf. also 1999a, 185–187), criticized for different reasons briefly by Blumenthal (1987, 559) and more extensively by Narbonne (2007, 125–128; see note 364 below).

350 On the sensible as not itself evil see I.8 [51] 11–12, III.2 [47] 3.1–9, IV.8 [6] 6; in connection with the polemic against the Gnostics, see II.9 [33] 8–9. It is fair to say that, being a hylomorphic entity, sensible matter or body still belongs somehow to the intelligible: in Platonic language, the sensible as an image of
of what, within the Plotinian universe, is considered good, and therefore it is called the first and true evil, by itself evil, and the substance of evil (see note 346). Thus, as we already saw, matter is non-being not in the sense that it has no existence, but in the sense that it is opposed to the realm of Being which is Intellect. In this view, matter reflects form like a mirror, but this reflection is like an illusion, for matter itself always remains devoid of form. Its status of evil, however, is not illusory, and so matter is truthfully a lie (II.5 [25] 5.24; see note 335). Evil, therefore, is not an illusion, but is real: it is pre-cosmic matter as pure and continuous dispersion that will never achieve unification and so, as Pigler argues, the inverted image of intelligible matter. Unable to revert upon itself and toward its generator (cf. note 168 above), if any, lower matter can do nothing but scatter: while pre-hypostatic noetic matter was infinity without multiplicity (the multiplicity of Nous, in fact, is posterior to it), pre-cosmic matter is utter dispersion, scattering in an infinite flight away from the Source. The lower soul puts a partial stop to this flight by informing matter, but lower matter, by itself, would irreversibly disperse ad infinitum.

Despite all this, matter is not deprived of all desire; and as with all desire inhering in what is posterior to the One, some lack is implied. Since matter is described as the

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351 As the last stage in the process of derivation from the One, matter stands as the very opposite of the Principle and of the intelligible realm as a whole, hence Plotinus’ description of it as non-being and as evil. As Pigler (263–264) rightly points out, this claim becomes problematic if we continue to understand contraries in Aristotelian terms, as for example Proclus and Simplicius did (see Proclus, On the Existence of Evils 31 and 37; Simplicius, Commentary on Aristotle’s Categories 109.5–110.25; cf. Narbonne 2007b, 158–163). For Aristotle, being has no contrary (Categories 3b25, De generatione et corruptione II.3 and 7; cf. also Physics I.192a13–25), while for Plotinus it does, and so evil is understood as itself substantial, and necessarily so within his own metaphysical parameters (cf. I.8 [51] 6; on the logical necessity of evil as the contrary of the Good in Plotinus see O’Meara 1999b, 124–133).
utter privation of being and form, its desire will be a desire of being and form; or, as
Plotinus puts it, matter is “an aspiration to existence” (ὑποστάσεως ἔφεσις: III.6 [26]
7.13). Here again I take it that Plotinus does not mean to say that matter, desiring
existence, is pure nothingness, but that it is the kind of non-being that is opposed to the
wholly determined being which is Intellect (and, derivatively, soul), or Being in the
technical sense (cf. note 70 above and Chapter One note 187). It will be objected that if
this is all that lower matter is, desire of form and being, then it does not differ very much
from soul; the intensity of their respective desires may differ, but their desideratum is the
same: form and being, or true Being as identical with Form. This may be conceded, but
the difference between lower matter and soul lies, not in the ultimate identity of their
desideratum, but in the way they approach it or receive it. More specifically, while soul is
actually shaped or informed by erotically directing its regard toward Nous, matter’s
participation in the intelligible (our fourth question in the opening paragraph of this
subsection) is fictional;\(^\text{352}\) its “aspiration to existence” is destined to remain permanently

As O’Brien (1991, 71–73) already noticed, if matter participates in form at all, its way of doing so falls short of unqualified participation; in Plotinus’ somewhat paradoxical expressions, matter “participates without participating” (πῶς μὴ μετέχει μετέχει: III.6 [26] 14.21–22), or “it participates in some way” (ἀμῃγέπῃ μεταλαμβάνει: III.6 [26] 11.38). But as Corrigan (1996, 264) has pointed out, there does not seem to be such a thing as unqualified participation, for everything participates according to its capacity (IV.8 [6] 6.17: καθόσον ἐκάστον οἶον τ’ ἄν μεταλαμβάνειν; 6.19–20: καθόσον δύναται ἐκάστον; VI.5
unfulfilled due to its nature, which is only able to reflect form without itself ever becoming actually informed. In Plotinus’ own words at III.6 [26] 7.16–29:

[16] It [viz., lower matter] always presents opposite appearances on its surface, [17] small and great, less and more, [18] deficient and superabundant, a phantom which does not remain and cannot get away

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either, [19] for it has no strength for this, since it has not received strength from [20] intellect but is lacking in all being. [21] Whatever announcement it makes, therefore, is a lie, and if it appears great, [22] it is small, if more, it is less; its apparent being [23] is not real, but a sort of fleeting frivolity; hence the things which [24] seem to come to be in it are frivolities, nothing but phantoms in a phantom, [25] like something in a mirror which really exists in a place but is reflected in another; [26] it seems to be filled, and holds nothing; [27] it is all seeming. “Imitations of real beings pass [28] into and out of it,”\textsuperscript{354} ghosts into a formless ghost, visibly reflected in it\textsuperscript{355} [29] because of its formlessness.

It is in light of passages like this that Plotinus interprets the \textit{Symposium} character of Penia in I.8 [51] 14 (especially lines 34–44) and III.6 [26] 14.5–17, where Penia as representing, not intelligible matter, as in III.5 [50] (cf. Chapter Two note 89), but lower matter. In I.8 [51] 14, Penia as pre-cosmic matter steals from Poros, who in this context represents the soul, part of his wealth (i.e., it powers), and in doing so, she is identified with \textit{real} evil, for despite all its merely negative descriptions, matter remains an \textit{actively} weakening power.\textsuperscript{356} This weakening effect of matter on the individual soul is described as a darkening of the illumination it receives from the soul (see note 323 and 308). The illumination, which as an informing activity is not in itself evil, is made evil when it encounters lower matter because matter does not allow it to ever achieve actuality by reverting toward higher realities. On the contrary, as Plotinus argues in III.6 [26] 14, matter deceptively reflects the forms that the soul makes available to it in its illuminating activity and thus tricks the soul, as it were, to turn its attention to it by passing itself off as

\textsuperscript{354} A reference to Plato, \textit{Timaeus} 50c4–5, cited again later in the same treatise, at III.6 [26] 11.2–3.

\textsuperscript{355} I translate \textit{ἐνορώμενα} at line 30 with “visibly reflected in it” to emphasize the mirror metaphor (cf. SP 386.37; IGAL, \textit{ad loc.}. ARMSTRONG, whose translation I otherwise follow, writes “visible”).

\textsuperscript{356} At I.8 [51] 14.35–36, lower matter, represented by Penia, is metaphorically attributed a kind of intentionality: “[35] and matter is there [viz., by the soul] and begs it and, [36] we may say [όλος] bothers it and wants [θέλει] to come right inside.” See also note 359 below.
true being.\footnote{357}

The power of matter, therefore, is at the same time a power of illusion, corruption, and death. Deception by matter for the individual soul often means falling (πτῶμα: I.8 [51] 14.44) or sinking (καταδῦναι: I.8 [51] 13.23) into what is ontologically inferior to it and may lead to its death.\footnote{358} For this reason, matter is equated to evil. Matter, in its ability to influence individual souls, has an \textit{active} role in their “fall” or corruption;\footnote{359} thus,

\footnote{357} PIGLER (260), commenting on III.6 [26] 14, puts it well: “En s’unissant au reflet issu de l’Âme-Poros, la matière-Pénia devient ainsi le substitut illusoire de la réalité authentique. Or, le pouvoir de la matière provient de ce que celle-ci « aspire à l’existence » [III.6 [26] 7.13], désirer l’être, et ce désir devient violence lorsque la matière veut se rendre maîtresse de l’image de la forme qui vient en elle [III.6 [26] 14.8–9].”

\footnote{358} For Plotinus the individual soul is immortal (cf. treatise IV.7 [2] On the immortality of the soul). It follows that the term death (θάνατος) applies to it metaphorically, since by “dying” the soul does not cease to be altogether, but rather its pure nature is turned into something worse, to wit, vice, and “[21] [s]o it dies as far as the soul can die, and its [22] death, while it is still plunged into the body, is to [23] sink in matter and be filled with it” (I.8 [51] 13.21–23: [21] Ἀποθνῄσκει οὖν, ὡς ψυχὴ ἂν θάνοι, καὶ ὁ [22] θάνατος αὐτῆ καὶ ἐτι ἐν τῷ σῶματι βεβαπτισμένη ἐν ύλῃ [23] ἐστὶ καταδῦναι καὶ πλησθῆναι αὐτῆς). Cf. Chapter Four note 153.

\footnote{359} This is an important point and, like many other statements made about matter in the \textit{Enneads}, the source of some controversy. I believe that in several passages Plotinus is emphatic about the \textit{active} role played by matter in the corruption of individual souls. In I.6 [1] 5.31–50, Plotinus asks rhetorically about the already weakened soul whether its ugliness (line 31: τὸ αἶσχος) was not in fact imported from the outside (ἐπακτὸν), so that the soul is made impure (line 33: ἀκάθαρτον) and no longer able to see what it would naturally see in its pure condition (lines 36–37: οὐκέτι μὲν ὁρῶσαν ἃ δεῖ ψυχὴν ὁρᾶν), Thus, at lines 48–50 he concludes: “So we shall be right in saying that the soul becomes ugly by mixture and dilution and inclination towards the body and matter” (I.6 [1] 5.48–50: [48] Λάμβαναν δὴ ψυχὴν λέγοντες μίξει καὶ [49] κράσει καὶ νεύσει τῇ πρὸς τὸ σῶμα καὶ ύλῃ ἄκαθαρτος ἀεὶ προσαιτῇ). At III.6 [26] 14.7–10 once again Plotinus attributes to matter the kind of evil intentionality that he will assert again at I.8 [51] 14.35–36 (see note 356): “[7] this other thing [viz., matter] by its presence [8] and its self-assertion and a kind of begging and its poverty makes a sort of violent attempt [9] to grasp, and is cheated by not grasping, so that its poverty may remain [10] and it may be always begging” ([7] τῇ δ’ αὐτοῦ παρουσίᾳ καὶ τῷ τόλμῃ καὶ οἷον προσαιτήσει καὶ πενίᾳ οἷον βασαάμενον [9] λαβαίν καὶ ἀπατηθέν τῇ οὐ λήψει, ἵνα μένῃ ὡς [10] καὶ ἀεὶ προσαιτῇ). And most explicitly, at I.8 [51] 14.40–54, matter is said to darken (ἐσκότωσε: line 41) the illumination coming from soul (lines 40–41); in this way, it weakens the soul (ἀσθενεῖς πεποίηκε: line 42) by providing it with the reason to generate and the occasion to come into matter, and this weakening is called the fall (πτῶμα: line 44) of the soul (lines 41–47, 50–54); finally, matter is said to hinder the powers of the soul, thus “[47] producing a kind of cramped condition, [48] and making evil what it has got hold of by a sort of theft” ([47] οἷον συσπειραθῆναι ποίησαι [48] ἐκκλίνην, δ’ ἐλαβεν οἷον κλέψασα ποίησαι κακῶν εἶναι) (lines 47–50). Cf. also II.3 [52] 9.20–24. To what extent all these statements about the \textit{active} involvement of matter in the fall of the soul and its status as evil should be taken metaphorically is, of course, a crucial point of disagreement in the debate.
matter is not merely an occasion or a condition for doing evil, but evil itself, for in its quasi-intentional deception of the individual souls, we could say that it enfeebles or clouds their power of reversion, that is, the *eros* that is given to them by the One. And yet matter cannot exist as a really independent principle; in fact, it becomes perceptible and desirable only because form comes to it through the soul, like a prisoner in golden chains.\(^{360}\)

O’Brien speaks of Plotinus’ views on matter as part of a kind of theodicy: “the designation of matter as evil is intended to be not so much a condemnation of matter as a means of protecting the realities of the higher world from any immediate responsibility for the evils which we see in this world.”\(^{361}\) I think this is basically correct; however, it may be misleading if it were to introduce the temptation of not recognizing the reality of evil, which Plotinus does identify with matter. This can be done, for instance, by interpreting evil merely as a kind of perspective emerging only when the soul comes to interact with matter.\(^{362}\) But in Plotinus lower matter is not called evil accidentally, but evil itself (see note 346); that is, matter is evil, not once soul interacts with it (in any event, there never was a moment in which soul did not interact with matter), but because whether something interacts with it or not, its nature is essentially deceitful (see note 335). It is true that someone or something must be deceived in order for deception to occur; but matter is deceitful as soon as something approaches it, always and without

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\(^{361}\) O’Brien (1999a, 189–190).

\(^{362}\) This is argued, for example, in an article by Schäfer (2004), of which my last telegraphic statement in the body of the text obviously can be only a caricature.
exception, thereby not only being itself essentially incapable of reverting toward higher realities, but also by naturally “tricking” the individual soul into turning its attention away from them. This, I think, is where O’Brien’s idea of lower matter as a necessary but not sufficient condition or cause of evil in the soul does not seem to do full justice to the textual evidence, for Plotinus attributes to matter a much greater active power to influence the soul than O’Brien admits.

The overall issue of the origin and nature of matter is part of a debate that goes back to antiquity. In *On the Existence of Evils* (*De malorum subsistentia*) 31.9–10, Proclus sharply drew the alternative facing the one arguing for a metaphysics of derivation of all reality from one single good source, or a system of “émanation intégral”: *aut bonum mali causam facere aut duo entium principia*. Proclus himself, in his discussion of the issue in *On the Existence of Evils* 30–37, escapes this alternative through a qualified denial of the reality of evil, or at least through a considerable weakening of evil as an active force. If one accepts a perspectival interpretation of

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363 The deviant kind of *eros* of which I spoke in the previous chapter, at the end of Subsection 2.3.1, could also be understood in these terms.

364 See O’Brien (1971, 143): “Thus matter is a necessary cause of evil in the soul. But it is not a sufficient cause, nor a sufficient condition, of there to be sin” (I take it that evil and sin are used synonymously in this context). O’Brien (1999a, 186): “But again matter is not a sufficient cause of evil in the soul, for, if it were, no soul where matter was present could be free from evil” (e.g., the soul of the visible gods I mentioned in note 349). “It is only the conjunction of the soul’s own excessive eagerness and of the presence of matter that will prove to be sufficient cause of evil in the soul. Even though each of those two elements on its own is causally necessary, it is only in conjunction that they are causally sufficient.” What O’Brien does not seem to see in the text—surely because it is not there, he would probably contend—is Plotinus’ insistence on the active character of this non-sufficient condition which is lower matter. In other words, matter does not merely await that the soul may or may not be deceived, but it is actively out to get it, as it were. Hence, I believe that O’Meara (1999b, 157) and especially Narbonne (2007b, 125–128) are right to criticize O’Brien on this point, although a thorough critique of O’Brien’s position should include a justification of why some souls can be and are deceived, others can be and are not deceived, and others still cannot be deceived at all even if regularly interacting with matter (see again note 349 on the identity of these souls). Compare also Bréhier’s position sketched in note 310 (i).
Plotinus’ understanding of matter as evil, then his or her views can be reconciled with those of Proclus. By contrast, I maintain that Plotinus accepts the tension of Proclus’ alternative and refuses to subscribe to a “perspectival” understanding, and so to a denial or weakening of the reality of evil. Thus, his position remains a paradoxical one, at least on the surface, namely: the affirmation of both one single good Principle and of the reality of evil.

The active role of matter in the soul’s “fall” from higher realities can hardly be underemphasized. And yet, the individual soul is not condemned in principle to be corrupted by matter. Plotinus is optimistic enough to think that the soul has the ability to purify itself through its own powers because there is a desire in it, its eros, which already directs it toward its origin, the One as the supremely loved. To investigate the workings of eros in the soul’s efforts to ascend to the One will be the task of the next chapter.

3.5 Conclusive Remarks

If the Principle of Prior Simplicity is taken seriously, neither soul nor Nous will

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365 This, I maintain, is what Schäfer (2004) does. For treatments of the issue supporting the difference between Plotinus’ and Proclus’ positions, though varying on other points, see O’Meara (1997; 1999b, 30–39), Opsomer (2001), Narbonne (2001a, 126–133; 2007b, 123–125), van Riel (2001). Despite my general agreement with PIGLER (201–266) on most issues, including that of the status of matter, I find that her reading of Plotinian metaphysics of derivation is not sensitive enough to the paradox in which this metaphysics results, namely the problem of evil (her position remains substantially unmodified in Pigler 2004, 147–163). To be sure, my difference of opinion here is less a question of plain disagreement than a matter of emphasis. This is due to the fact that among the thorny problems of every metaphysical system, including Plotinus’, evil, along with transcendence, is probably the thorniest. As I already pointed out in the opening paragraph of this subsection (cf. also Preface note 4, and the end of note 352 above), it is far from clear to me that Plotinus’ solution on the issue of evil is free of internal conflict, particularly if we espouse the thesis of “émanation integral” (cf. note 17 above) and admit that matter ultimately derives from the One.

366 One could sensibly argue that it is the very reality of evil that requires the paradox. In other words, without a paradox, evil would not be radical enough, hence not truly evil. However, I do not find any argument along these lines in the Enneads, an argument which one might find for instance in Philippe Nemo’s insightful reading of the Biblical book of Job (Nemo 1998).
suffice to account for the phenomenon of unity we experience in the sensible. In fact, while it is necessary to postulate soul in order to explain the unity of a body, soul does not explain its own higher but still qualified unity, for although the intelligible is eternally available to soul (in its disembodied state) as an object of contemplation, soul contemplates it as something external to, or other than itself; hence the necessity of postulating the hypostasis of *Nous*. But though correctly postulated, Intellect too is insufficient to explain its own unity, for not only does thinking imply the duality of thinker and thought, but the intelligible object (i.e., the Forms or Ideas) is itself multiple, and Intellect, while united eternally to the One as its *desideratum*, is also not identical with it.

The question may be asked, then, from the other side of the spectrum: If the ultimate ἀρχή of all is the One, why do we need to postulate further hypostases? After having accepted the Principle of Prior Simplicity and the Principle of Superabundance, what prevents us from deriving the whole of reality from the Source *directly*? The reply is that the One alone would not explain such phenomena as essence and goal-directed motion or unfulfilled desire. In order to account for essence or form, *Nous* is required, for the One itself is beyond all form. And yet, *Nous* would not be sufficient either, for it would leave goal-directed motion unexplained. In fact, since it possesses itself eternally as a replica of the One, *Nous* amounts to fulfilled or achieved desire, that is, desire constantly united with its *desideratum*; hence the necessity of postulating the hypostasis soul as the explanation of the phenomenon of unfulfilled desire. From an explanatory viewpoint, therefore, neither the postulation of *Nous* nor that of soul in all its
manifestations is otiose. For this reason they, too, are rightly called ἁρχαί, though in a highly qualified sense (see Chapter Two note 96).

In the present chapter I argued that the process of derivation of all reality from a single source, the One, can be explained in terms of eros. The One gives what it does not have, namely: love for something else (of something other, transcendent, and itself alone ultimately worth loving), which in the case of the multiplicity deriving from the Principle is an innate love for the One, an unqualified unity which multiplicity lacks precisely qua multiple. The One, on the other hand, is love of itself, not love of something else: pure erotic self-identity, self-positing, spontaneous self-diffusiveness. Table 4 above may be of help in visualizing the various (logical) stages of this process of derivation and the different kinds of eros and unity proper to each stage.

In Plotinus’ universe, the eros that the One bears to itself is the source of the unfolding of all reality. This eros is found as a trace at each hypostatic level as that which allows each hypostasis to emerge as a fully formed reality different from every other hypostasis. At the level of lower matter, the original eros of the One diminishes to the point of (almost) disappearing altogether. For matter, therefore, there is no possibility of “conversion” and “return” to the Source, nor of constituting itself as a separate hypostasis by reverting upon itself and toward its generator.\(^\text{367}\) If a “conversion” toward to the One is possible at all, it will have its basis in the presence, in the reality experiencing the “conversion,” of the same eros that initiated the process of derivation. The purpose of the next chapter is to analyze the workings of eros in what I will refer to as the return journey.

\(^{367}\) See Subsection 4.4.2, especially pages 364–367, for a clarification of the difference between such expressions as “return,” “conversion,” and “reversion.”
of the individual rational soul to the One. Before we turn to it, I will try to summarize the major claims of the present chapter in seven brief points.

(1) The source of the procession of all reality is the superabundance of the *eros* that the single principle of all, the One, bears to itself. Thus, the One is the source of all *eros*, and *eros* is originally a donative rather than an appetitive force: “the power of all things.” If this is not necessarily where Plotinus differs radically from Plato (see Chapter Two note 25), it is certainly where he makes the passing remarks by Plato which I listed at the end of Subsection 1.5.5 most explicit.

(2) This *eros*, in being communicated to all derived reality, from self-love becomes love of another, and specifically love of the One qua Good. Thus, *eros* is the element of both continuity and differentiation in Plotinus’ metaphysics: it is a trace of the One that pervades all reality. And yet, *eros* signals not only the presence of the One but also its absence, for the One remains always infinitely transcendent and absolutely different even with respect to *Nous*.

(3) The communication of all *eros* from the One is also what allows derived reality to structure itself hierarchically in fully formed hypostases. The unfolding of each hypostasis is to be understood as a threefold erotic process: first, the superabundance of erotic energy proceeding from the higher hypostasis; second, the erotic reversion to the generating hypostasis; third, the communication of (increasingly diminished) erotic energy that will constitute the first stage of the next hypostasis.

(4) The difference between the hypostases as they unfold from the Principle is to be understood as a decrease of their internal unity and a widening of the gap between
their identity and the ultimate goal of all desire, the Good. The One gives what it does not have (i.e., love for something other than itself, hence form) to Nous, which comes about as a fully formed hypostasis by noetically replicating the unqualified unity of the Principle. Noetic eros is understood as a kind of friendship that binds all the intelligibles (i.e., the Forms or Ideas) in a unity in which each form interpenetrates, reflects, or implicates all the others. Nous, in turn, gives what it does have (i.e., form) to soul, which becomes a fully formed hypostasis by contemplating dianoetically the contents of Nous. Finally, soul in its lower part (i.e., the World-Soul or Nature), restless because unable to emerge as a separate hypostasis in its own right, tries to replicate the noetic unity contemplated by the Soul-Hypostasis externally, by communicating the forms it receives from above to what lies below itself. In this way it gives shape to the sensible universe, with pre-cosmic matter as the necessary substratum of forms, and individual souls informing and animating portions of this universe. The sensible cosmos is understood as a living being whose eros coincides with the sympathy of its parts.

(5) The process of derivation does not reproduce a temporal sequence of events—a point hardly ever overemphasized—but it illustrates the relation of dependence of ontologically different levels of reality.

(6) At the lowest level of existence, we find pre-cosmic matter, which, whether generated or not and whether generated by soul or by something else, is the utterly un-unified element in Plotinian metaphysics in that, a mere “aspiration to existence,” it is both unable to revert toward the One and to produce something after itself. (I also noticed how the figure of Penia alternately represents intelligible psychic matter, as in treatise
III.5 [50] *On eros*, dealt with in Chapter Two, and lower matter, as in III.6 [26] 14 and I.8 [51] 14.) In addition to this, matter is the principle of evil in the sense that it *actively* deceives the individual soul by presenting itself as a surrogate of the forms it merely reflects, thus enticing the soul to take excessive interest in it and to forget its true destiny.

(7) However, individual souls that are active in the sensible universe are *not* necessarily deceived by matter. In fact, the *eros* originating in the One is also connaturally present in them as the fundamental resource that allows them to turn away from the sensible and make their way back to the One as the Good. It is precisely this journey of the soul to the One that I will investigate in the next chapter.
CHAPTER FOUR:

PLOTINUS’ METAPHYSICS OF LOVE:

THE RETURN OF THE SOUL TO THE ONE AS EROTIC ASCENT

"Εστι γὰρ ἕκαστον ὅ ἐστιν ἐφ’ αὐτοῦ· ἐφετὸν δὲ γίνεται ἐπιχρώσαντος αὐτὸ τοῦ ἄγαθοῦ, ὥσπερ χάριτας δόντος αὐτοῖς καὶ εἰς τά ἐφιέμενα ἔρωτας. Καὶ τοίνυν ψυχή λαβοῦσα εἰς αὐτήν τὴν ἐκείθεν ἀπορροήν κινεῖται καὶ ἀναβακχεύεται, καὶ οἴστρων πίμπλαται καὶ ἔρως γίνεται.

—Plotinus

tοῖς δὲ ἑρασταῖς ἅπασι ταῦτόν ἐστι τέλος, ἡ πρὸς τὸ καλὸν οἰκείωσις...

Πάσα τοίνουν ἡμῶν ἡ ζωὴ γυμνάσιόν ἐστι πρὸς ἐκείνην τὴν θέαν...

—Proclus

4.1 Introduction

If, as Plotinus claims, superabundance follows of necessity from the perfection or maturity of a given hypostasis, then the relation of the generator to the generated, and so the derivation of all reality ultimately from the One, cannot be interpreted as implying any need or lack in the Source. Even less can it be understood in terms of an undesirable excess, as if derivation were comparable to the drift of flotsam and jetsam from a universal shipwreck. That this cannot be the case for Plotinus becomes clear from his understanding of the nature of the primordial gift—eros. For if on the one hand the

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1 Plotinus VI.7 [38] 22.5–10: “For each is what it is by itself; but it becomes desirable when the Good colours it, giving a kind of grace to them and passionate love to the desirers. Then the soul, receiving into itself an overflow from thence, is moved and dances wildly and is all stung with longing and becomes love.” Proclus, Commentary on Plato’s Alcibiades I 48.8–9: “The end is the same for all lovers: assimilation to Beauty” (my translation). Proclus, Commentary on Plato’s Parmenides V.1015.38–39: “So all our life is an exercise in preparation to that vision...”
product of the One is determined by recourse to the specific character of its qualified unity, which separates it from the unqualified unity of the Principle, on the other, its nature is best grasped through the particular *eros* which characterizes the level it occupies in Plotinus’ metaphysical hierarchy. This *eros*, as I argued in the previous chapter (Subsection 3.3.2), is the gift of the One ultimately pointing back to the One itself. If no *eros* for the One were communicated to what derives from it, derivation would be the undesirable result of some momentous wreckage. But Plotinus understands *eros* as something connatural to the product,\(^2\) so that what from an “archeological” perspective is the derivation of all reality from one single source, from a “teleological” perspective is viewed as the possibility of return to that very source, here conceived of as the ultimate aim of all desire, or the universal final cause: the Good.

The journey of return, otherwise referred to as the Ascent (henceforth capitalized for the sake of disambiguation), is the central theme of the present chapter, whose main material is divided in five sections. In the first section (4.2) I provide a summary account of Plotinus’ views of the One as the Good or as the universal aim of desire. As such, the One is understood as the universal final cause which from the perspective of the desirer is conceptually distinct but actually identical with the One qua Principle. This identity is what explains why *eros* is naturally directed toward the One: the giver of all *eros* is at the same time the supreme goal of all desire. In the remainder of the chapter I shift the focus from the One as the ultimate goal of the Ascent to all the other elements involved in the journey of Ascent.

\(^2\) See the previous two chapters, particularly Subsection 2.3.1, Section 2.4, and pages 226–228.
In Section 4.3, I take into account two basic conditions of possibility of the soul’s Ascent to the One, namely the attunement that the soul needs to undergo in order to become assimilated to the One as the universal aim of desire (Subsection 4.3.1), and the fact that the Ascent to the One is possible on the basis of a prior affinity between the soul and the Good (4.3.2). In Section 4.4, I explain that the “subject” of the Ascent can be only the individual rational soul (Subsection 4.4.1), and provide some observations on the terminology of ascent (4.4.2) and on the distinction between eros as a method of ascent and eros as the regulative force of all ascending movement (4.4.3). In Section 4.5 I highlight four important features that are common to all stages of the Ascent: first, the movement from a lower to a higher stage entails, not an addition, but a subtraction of something that was present on the lower stage; second, the Ascent is an orderly movement, and therefore in ascending the soul cannot skip a stage; third, to move to a higher stage for the soul means an increase in unity and in the intensity of its eros; and fourth, whatever feature, practice or activity reintegrates the individual soul in the reality found on a higher states is not present in that reality. Finally, in Section 4.6 I describe the three fundamental steps that the individual rational soul is to take in order to return to the Source: purification (Subsection 4.6.1), intellification (4.6.2), and union (4.6.3). As with the other chapters, in the final section (4.7), I offer a summary of the conclusions reached in this chapter.

The overarching thesis of this chapter is that the ascending movement toward the One has eros as its origin, as its guiding force, as well as its goal, and that for the individual rational soul to ascend means precisely to grow in erotic similarity to the
Principle.

4.2 The One as ἐρασμιώτατον or Universal Final Cause

As I pointed out earlier in Subsection 3.2.3 and 3.3.2, the One as the principle of all reality is endowed with a double causality, or, perhaps less imprecisely, with one causality which from the perspective of the inquirer displays two major aspects: efficient and final.3 Chapter Three focused mainly on the former aspect: there the One was understood as an infinite erotic δύναμις from which derives the whole of reality. In the present chapter the One is approached from the opposite side of the spectrum, that is, from the perspective of the ascending individual soul, and thus is conceptualized as final cause (τέλος),4 the highest and universal aim of desire or the summum desideratum of all derived reality.

Plotinus writes at V.5 [32] 12.7–9: “For all things reach out to that [viz., the Good] and long for it by necessity of nature, as if divining by instinct that they cannot exist without it.”5 In an earlier treatise, at VI.5 [23] 1.8–9, he called a similar statement

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3 See pages 181, 188–191, and 217–218. For a concise treatment of the One as both efficient and final cause see Bussanich (1999, 45–57).

4 The One or the Good is explicitly referred to as end (τέλος) in the following passages: I.4 [46] 6.7–13, V.5 [32] 12.19–20, VI.2 [43] 11.37–39, VI.9 [9] 9.20–22; cf. also III.9 [13] 2, V.3 [49] 17.34. From the point of view of all derived reality, efficient and final cause are conceptually distinct but actually identical; from its own viewpoint, in itself the One is neither efficient nor final cause, neither Principle nor Good but simply the One as self-positing or causa sui (cf. Chapter Three note 53, where I explain in what sense the notion of self-causation may be applied to the One).

the “firmest principle of all” (πάντων βεβαιοτάτη ἀρχή: VI.5 [23] 1.9). In the language of *eros*, focus of this study, the One is accordingly referred to as the most loved or desired: ἐρασμιῶτατον. Here is the first of the two instances in which this superlative occurs in the *Enneads*, at VI.7 [38] 32.25:

[24] Truly, when you cannot grasp the form or shape [25] of what is longed for, it would be *most longed for* and *most loved*, [26] and love for it would be *immeasurable*. For [27] love is *not limited* here, because neither is the beloved, but [28] the love of this would be *unbounded*; so his Beauty is [29] of another kind and Beauty beyond Beauty.

For our purposes, two points deserve particular attention in this passage: one concerns the nature of the One qua most loved; the other, the love by which the One is to be approached. The broader context of the passage I just cited is chapters 31–35 of treatise VI.7 [38] *How the multitude of the Forms came into being and on the Good*. Part of Plotinus’ goal in these chapters is to try to show that the One is the End that attracts all reality, and more particularly the individual soul, to itself. In other words, he is telling us

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6 An echo of Aristotle, *Metaphysics* III.1005b8–11, 17–18. Plotinus’ statement to which I am referring, found at VI.5 [23] 1.11–12, is that “all things desire the good” (τοῦ ἄγαθοῦ πάντα ὀρέγεσθαι).

7 VI.7 [38] 32.25, 33.14: ἐρασμιῶτατον; cf. Plato, *Phaedrus* 250e1 (see Chapter One note 175), *Republic* III.402d6. At VI.8 [39] 16.15, the One is also called ἀγαπητότατον.

that while any other thing can under certain circumstances be a good, only the One can be the Good. Secondly, Plotinus wants to show that in order to grow near to the One qua supreme object of love, the soul is required to assume a certain disposition, or ought to attune itself to the desired. And since the desired is the One understood as infinite erotic power, the soul, in short, must not only be a loving soul, but its love for the most lovable ought to be love of an infinite kind. I will briefly consider the first point (i.e., the universal final causality of the One) in the remainder of this section; the second point (i.e., the necessity of attunement) is one of what I will refer to as the two preconditions of the soul’s ascent to the One, with which I will deal in the next section (Subsection 4.3.1).

In what sense is the One the only true universal desideratum? Why is the One not only the Simple, that is, the Principle whose postulation was said to be a necessity (a primarily explanatory necessity: see Appendix B) to be inferred from the inability of every multiplicity to account for its relative unity (see Subsection 3.2.1), but also at the same time the Good, that is, not any good, but the universal and ultimate goal of all desire? Or rather, granting that goodness conceived of in this sense can be predicated of the One only from the perspective of the desirer, why should it be predicated exclusively of the One? In what sense is any good other than the Good simply inadequate

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9 Throughout the Enneads, and especially in the last three treatises of the sixth Ennead, the One is associated with and explicitly called “the Good” (τὸ ἄγαθὸν, or, in the contracted form, τἀγαθόν) so many times that a complete list of references would result almost superfluous minimally to establish such a universally recognized connection in Plotinus. Sleeman and Pollet provide over five columns of references for τὸ ἄγαθὸν in the sense of the Good (SP, s.v. ἄγαθός (d)), while also alerting us to the fact that the term is “generally, but not always equivalent to τὸ ἕν, τὸ πρῶτον, τὸ ἐπέκεινα, ἡ ἠργή” (SP 3.53–55).

10 See Chapter Three note 84; cf. VI.7 [38] 24.13–16, 19–24. This is also true of causality, which can be predicated of the One strictly only from the perspective of the effect (see Chapter Three notes 131 and 147).
to serve as the ultimate goal of all striving? And why should the final cause coincide with the efficient cause, the τέλος of all with the ἀρχή of all?

The problem is vast and would require more attention than I could presently dedicate to it. In this context, I will limit my answer to a summary clarification of four points endorsed by Plotinus, all of which were established doctrine, if to different degrees, in the broad Platonic tradition of which he is both an heir and a representative.

These points are: (i) that whatever is called good is generally understood to be an object of desire, and that desire, in turn, can only aim at something good; ¹¹ (ii) that the Good is not good because it is desired, but is desired because it is good; ¹² (iii) that if there is an unqualified good at all (i.e., the Good), this good cannot be desired for the sake of some other good, but only for itself; ¹³ and (iv) that the Good cannot be identified with anything

¹¹ On desire as aiming essentially at some good, see for instance Socrates’ affirmation in Plato’s Symposium 205e1–3 that “love is neither of its other half nor of the whole, unless, my friend, this in some degree happened to be good” (see also 201a2–c9, especially c4–5, 205d1–206a13, and Subsection 1.4.2 and 1.4.3; see also the references in Chapter One note 213; less explicit passages include Philebus 20d7–10, 22b6–7, and Republic VI.505d11–e1). The locus classicus of the understanding of good as object not only desire, but of all goal-directed activity, is the beginning of Aristotle’s Nicomachean Ethics (I.1094a1–3): “[1] Every craft and every investigation, and likewise every action and [2] decision, seems to aim at some good [ἄγαθον τινὸς ἐφίεται δοκεῖ]; hence the good has been well described [3] as that at which everything aims [διὸ καλῶς ἀπεφήναντο τἀγαθόν, οὗ πάντ' ἔφιεται]” (Irwin and Fine’s translation). Cf. also the following references in Aristotle (with the desiderative terms he uses provided in parentheses): Topics III.116a19–20 (ἔφεσται), Physics II.195a23–26 (τέλος, ἔθελε), De anima III.433a27–29 (οὐκ ἐνεπάνεν τὸ ὀρεκτόν...), Nicomachean Ethics III.1113a15–16 (βούλησις), X.1172b9–15 (ἔφεσται, ἔφιεται), 1172b35–1173a5 (ἔφιεται), and Rhetoric I.1362a21–24 (ἔφιεται). As for Plotinus, when echoing the last line of the text of Aristotle’s Ethics I cited, he writes that the Good is “that ‘to which everything aspires’” (I.7 [54] 1.22: τὸ οὗ πάντα ἔφιεται), obviously he is already thinking, not of any good, but of the Good. The same passage of Aristotle is evoked also at I.8 [51] 2.3, VI.7 [38] 20.18 (cf. also I.3 [20] 1.1–4, VI.8 [39] 7.3–4); for further references on the universal desire for the Good in the Enneads see notes 4 and 5 above. In post-Plotinian Neoplatonism, cf. Proclus, Elements of Theology 7.23–24; Iamblichus, On the mysteries I.3.7.16–8.2.

¹² Plotinus poses this problem explicitly at VI.7 [38] 24.4–7 and clearly states his position at 25.16–18 and 27.26–27 of the same treatise. At VI.7 [38] 27.26–27 he declares: ‘it is not the desire which makes the good but there is desire because there is a good’ ([26] οὐχ ἡ ἔφεσις ποιεῖ τὸ ἄγαθον, [27] ἀλλ' ἡ ἔφεσις, ὅτι ἄγαθον); this is true a fortiori of the Good. See also I.6 [1] 7.3–4.

¹³ On the final Good as that which is not desired for the sake of some further good, see for example Plato,
which desires some (other) good, for being itself the Good, in it there is no desire for any (further) good.\textsuperscript{14}

I was unable to find a passage in which Plotinus states the first point—(i) that whatever is taken to be good is at the same time an object of desire, and that desire aims at something good—explicitly and formally.\textsuperscript{15} However, I believe that this point can be safely inferred from two claims generally endorsed by Plotinus, namely that whatever is good is good by reason of the Good (VI.7 [38] 22.6), and that the Good is naturally and eminently desirable (VI.8 [39] 7.3–4), so that whatever is in some way desirable must be to some extent good. Thus, nothing is desired which is not good \textit{at least in some respect} (which I take to be part of Socrates’ point in the \textit{elenchos} directed against Agathon in Plato’s \textit{Symposium} 201a2–c9; cf. note 11 above). In other words, it is a matter of understanding what is good as the proper intentional object of desire and, vice versa,

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\textit{Lysis} 220b4–5. In \textit{Nicomachean Ethics} I.1094a18–22, Aristotle entertains the possibility of a universal final cause while not necessarily committing himself to it (see Irwin 1999, 173, and cf. my remarks at pages 309–313 below); cf. also \textit{De anima} I.406b8–10 and the broader passages in which we find the references to Aristotle given in note 11 above. In Plotinus see most explicitly VI.8 [39] 7.31–32, where the Good is called the Good itself (line 31: τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ αὐτοῦ); cf. also I.6 [1] 6.21–32, 7.21–30 (in the context of the ascent to Beauty), VI.8 [39] 7.1–4 (the statement at lines 3–4 is especially telling: ἦ δὲ τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ φίλος αὐτῷ τὸ ἔφετον; this is an echo of Plato, \textit{Philebus} 60b10, and as regards the content, of \textit{Philebus} 20d7–10 and of Aristotle, \textit{Nicomachean Ethics} I.1094a2–3; cf. HS\textsubscript{2} ad loc.), 13.16–17.
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\textsuperscript{15} It may appear that Plotinus suggests this point at I.6 [1] 7.3–4: “It is desired as good, and the desire for it is directed to good...” (3) ἔφετον μὲν γὰρ ὡς ἀγαθόν καὶ ἡ ἔφεσις πρὸς [4] τοῦτο...). However, these lines are written specifically about the Good, not about any good.
desire as an intention essentially aiming at some good. This idea may become clearer if one considers the patent absurdity of a desire directed at an object in which nothing good can be detected. Ultimately, those who desire things considered evil in some way or another obviously desire them for the sake of some (at least prima facie) good that is attached to them, or for some aspect in them which is considered good, if not unqualifiedly, at least under certain circumstances.¹⁶ (This desire can include the hope or the inkling that some good may be found, by closer scrutiny, even in something which at first sight seems to lack all good.)¹⁷

¹⁶ The example of the fictitious author of Dostoevsky’s Notes from Underground mentioned earlier (Chapter Three note 161) may be again useful in this context. Although the self-debasing actions of this character are apparently absurd, self-debasement is not final, but is rather a means to individual self-assertion, and to that extent good in a qualified sense. Also the extreme situations of the sadist and of the masochist do not contradict the claim that only the good is object of desire, in the sense that these are cases in which the suffering of others and one’s own are sought not as ends in themselves, but as means to pleasure and the reawakening the feeling of life, or as expressions of the death drive (cf. Laplanche and Pontalis 1973, 400–404 and 244–245), etc.—all factors which are, at least under certain conditions, good. Even something admittedly evil may be desired—i.e., desired qua good—when compared with and chosen over a greater evil; cf. Epicurus, Gnomologia Vaticana Epicurea 16: “Nobody, seeing something evil, chooses it, but he catches the bait and is caught [when he takes it] as a good in comparison with a greater evil” (my translation). Cf. Plato, Philebus 22b6–8.

¹⁷ One might object that the very notion of something lacking all good is absurd, since insofar as such a thing has some existence, it may be envisioned as serving some purpose, and thus be intended as the aim of some desire, or as (a) good. This is so even in the limit case of Plotinian lower matter, which, although wholly undesirable as the principle of evil, serves a purpose as the necessary substrate of the sensible universe and as the endpoint of the process of derivation (see Subsection 3.4.3). The fact that with treatise I.8 [51] (On what are and whence come evils) lower matter is wholly undesirable in at least one of its aspects, namely as the principle of evil, obviously begs the question of whether this aspect might constitute the very object whose existence I claimed to be absurd—an object lacking all good. But this is precisely the one feature of Plotinian metaphysics which thus far I have been unable not to take as aporetic (see Subsection 3.4.3, particularly the opening paragraph and note 352; cf. Preface note 4). In 399, when already bishop of Hippo for about three years, Augustine will tackle the issue of matter in the context of his confrontation with the Manicheans in his work De natura boni. The Augustinian solution can be interpreted not only as a rebuttal of the Manichean views, but indirectly also as a way out of what I take to be Plotinus’ impasse regarding the status of lower matter. In his solution, Augustine will introduce at least two important modifications to Plotinus’ metaphysical system: first, that matter, although in itself formless, or incapable of imparting form on itself, can actually take on form, and does not merely reflect it, as in Plotinus (cf. page 268 above); and second, that the principle of evil is, not matter, but a willful misuse of what is good (see Augustine, De natura boni 18, 34–36; see also the comments on the issue by Reale 2001, 34–41, 47–51). The problem of explaining how matter, qua evil, could possibly derive from the Good (or God) will now become that of showing how an evil will is
The second point—(ii) that the Good is good not because it is desired, but it is desired because it is good—is simultaneously a refutation of subjectivism and already an anticipation of the necessity of attuning one’s desires to the End, a point with which I will deal more specifically in the next section and broadly in the rest of the chapter. Support for this view may come from a confrontation with that which in popular opinion was (and is?) ordinarily considered the strongest candidate to the title of highest good, namely pleasure (ἡδονή). According to Plotinus pleasure cannot be the Good, for it is not so much that there is (a) good because there is pleasure, as that there is pleasure because there is (a) good. In other words, generally speaking pleasure is to be considered an affection (πάθος) which follows as matter of course from the presence of some good, on which the affection depends essentially. For Plotinus one would not be satisfied with the mere affection if the good on which the affection depends (e.g., the child in whom a parent rejoices, the food that satisfies one’s hunger, the woman with whom a lover shares the joys of sex) were absent. Thus, pleasure is not itself the good we seek when we are possible in a being that derives its existence from an entirely good source.

See VI.7 [38] 24.10–11, 26.1–24. What about the sensation of pleasure dissociated from the corresponding reality/good on which pleasure is (supposedly) dependent? Is such a sensation even possible? Does neural stimulation detached from the reality/good which normally causes the stimulation (e.g., my brain’s artificially induced reception of apple flavor without my mouth’s actually being biting into an apple) prove that pleasure is possible without the reality/good on which it (allegedly) depends? If pleasure is not inherently dependent on the presence of (a) good, why should I not “plug” my brain into a device that induces pleasure (and/or neutralizes pain)—could we even say “that simulates pleasure” (and/or “the neutralization of pain”)?—by means of neural stimulations, without the need of the reality/good with which this pleasure (and/or absence of pain) is taken to be necessarily associated? Even if it were not unrealistic to foresee that developments in technology might actually bring about, in a not too distant future, what at the moment seems to be only a sci-fi scenario, I think that Plotinus would reject the possibilities opened by these developments for one simple reason, namely because they would fail to confront the main problem. The main problem, for the individual soul, is to become aware of the situation in which it often finds itself in its embodied condition, a situation in which the excessive dedication to the portion of matter allotted to it frequently distracts the soul from its higher possibility, that is, the coming to awareness of its true nature and origin, along with the endeavor to ascend to the One. To abandon oneself to a life of artificially induced pleasure might, on the surface, appear like a
in need of something, but is rather what essentially accompanies or completes the presence of that good, which alone satisfies the need.\(^{19}\)

In relation to the two higher hypostases, Plotinus thinks that since in the Good there is no need whatsoever, neither there will be pleasure—if, that is, “pleasure” is minimally taken to mean the state accompanying the presence of the good which satisfies a given need (see VI.7 [38] 25.1–16, 29.1–10). But the term “pleasure” can be used also figuratively, as Plotinus does in his discussion of the relation between pleasure and Intellect. In Nous, the fact that intellectual or spiritual activity is not accompanied by pleasure does not make of Nous less of a good, since Nous remains desirable to the extent that through it one already divines (ἀπομαντεύεται: VI.7 [38] 29.21) the Good which lies beyond it.\(^{20}\) Why, then, in Plato’s Philebus is it argued that the good to which human life should aim might have to be a mixture of pleasure and intelligence (φρόνησις, νοῦς)?\(^{21}\)

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\(^{19}\) Plotinus’ indebtedness to Aristotle’s discussion of pleasure is palpable in Enneads VI.7 [38], chapters 24–26 and 29–30 (see Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics VII.1152b1–1154b31 and especially X.1172a19–1176a29). Another primary source on this point is Plato’s view of pleasure as the restoration (ἀναχώρησις) of a harmonious mixture in the Philebus (see particularly Philebus 32b2–4); pain, by contrast, is the corruption or disintegration (φθορά) of such mixture. For the Socrates of the Philebus pleasure as restoration depends essentially on a need or lack, of which desire, conceived of as an emptiness seeking to be filled, is the fundamental manifestation (see Philebus 34d1–36c2). Thus, pleasure is understood as the process (γένεσις)—as opposed to stable being, or being simply (οὐσία)—which re-establishes the harmonious state. As such, pleasure stands to the harmonious state in a relation of a means to an end, and therefore it cannot be the good sought after (Philebus 53c4–55a11).

\(^{20}\) See VI.7 [38] 24.17–30, 27.28–29, 29.10–31. Nous, not being desired by all things, cannot be taken as the ultimate End (VI.7 [38] 20.16–24). In fact, if Nous is desirable at all, it is because it resembles the Good, as Plotinus argues at VI.7 [38] 15.1–13 (note the term ἀγαθοειδές at 15.9, an allusion to Plato, Republic VI.509a3; cf. pages 314–315 below). The question of what this resemblance consists of is posed repeatedly in this treatise (cf. VI.7 [38] 16.4–9, 18.1–3, 14–15, 48–51, 21.1–2).

\(^{21}\) See especially Plato, Philebus 20a1–22e3, 60b7–64c9. On Plotinus’ exegesis of the relation of pleasure and intelligence in the Philebus, see Enneads VI.7 [38] 25.1–16, 30.1–30. On Plotinus’ interpretation of
Plotinus thinks that this mixture does not mean that pleasure accompanies intelligence (νοῦς) in the usual way in which pleasure completes an activity, that is, “as a supervening end” extrinsically grafted into the substantial activity of intelligence. On the contrary, this distinctively noetic pleasure is itself intrinsically united with the activity of intelligence. It follows that if Plato speaks of “mixing” in the *Philebus*, he does so not literally but metaphorically (μεταφέροντες: Plotinus VI.7 [38] 30.27). Thus, by arguing that intelligence is mixed to pleasure, what Plato is (allegedly) saying is that the very activity (ἐνέργημα) and life of Intellect is itself a state (κατάστασις) “most pleasing and acceptable” (ἀσμενιστὴν καὶ αἱρετωτάτην: Plotinus VI.7 [38] 30.24). But since this is said figuratively, Plotinus insists that the pleasure at issue here is not to be conceived of as ordinary pleasure but as “pure and unmixed.” Thus, it can be associated to the kind of activity and life of Intellect, with which it constitutes an essential unity.

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23 I believe that on this point Plotinus may again have Aristotle in mind when the latter describes pleasure as an activity (ἐνέργεια) as opposed to a movement or a process (κίνησις); cf. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* X, chapters 3 and 4.

24 Plato, *Philebus* 52d6–7: τὸ καθαρὸν τε καὶ εὐλικρινὲς (cf. *Enneads* VI.7 [38] 30.22). According to Plotinus’ peculiar exegesis (VI.7 [38] 30.25–29), this kind of “pure and unmixed” activity and pleasure are figuratively expressed in images from Plato (*Symposium* 203b5: “drunk with the nectar”; *Phaedrus* 247a8: “to feast and entertainment”) and Homer (*Iliad* V.426, XV.47: “the father smiled”).

25 At first, there seems to be a patent discrepancy between different elements of Plotinus’ view of pleasure, specifically: in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, (i) the Aristotelian understanding of pleasure as a supervening end (see note 22 above) and (ii) the notion of pleasure as an activity as opposed to pleasure as a process or motion (see note 23 above); in the *Philebus*, (iii) the Platonic view of pleasure as a process of restoration (see note 19 above) and (iv) the understanding of pleasure as one of the two ingredients (the other being reason or intelligence) making up the mixture which is the human good. Plotinus seems to manage to salvage all these elements by interpretively relating them to different elements of his system. Thus, (i) Aristotle’s view of pleasure as a supervening end may still be true of ordinary pleasures but it applies to Nous only if the term “pleasure” is understood metaphorically and its accompanying of the activity of Nous is understood essentially rather than chronologically. By contrast, (ii) the Aristotelian
Once it is found impossible to identify pleasure with the Good, since pleasure essentially depends on the prior presence of goodness, Plotinus is in a position both to refute a subjective, that is, relativistic interpretation of the Good (i.e., that it is because of the desire attached to it that what is good is good) and at the same time to point us in the direction of what we might call an “education” of desire. I speak of “education” in the sense that, although for Plotinus all things instinctively desire the Good (according to the “firmest of principles” cited at the beginning of this section), among these some (i.e., individual rational souls) are also able to clarify this “instinctive” drive so as actually to dissociate themselves from their lower appetitive commitments and pursue the Good according to their proper (i.e., rational) nature. But for this “dissociation” to be possible, a process of education, or of attunement to the End, is necessary. I shall deal with this process particularly in Subsection 4.3.1 and Section 4.6 under the heading of the Ascent of the soul to the Good. What still needs to be clarified at this point is the nature of the Good itself.

I will attempt such a clarification by focusing on the third and the fourth points

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outlined earlier (pages 295–296)—(iii) that the Good can only be desired for its own sake, and (iv) that the Good does not itself desire some further good. These two points essentially belong together. What they express is fundamental to the very nature of the One as Good, for if this were desired for the sake of some other good or if it itself desired some further good, it could not be truly final. Obviously, if one rejects the possibility of the unicity of the End (i.e., the fact that the highest desideratum is one and one only), these conclusions will be untenable. But even if one concedes that the End is unique, an important question remains: Why should such an ultimate desideratum be identical with the One, the absolutely simple Principle of all? Why not stop at Nous or something like it, such as the Aristotelian First Mover of book XII of the Metaphysics?

I will try to answer these questions by way of a summary reading of the opening chapter of treatise I.7 [54] On the primal Good and the other goods. Here is the full text

27 At VI.7 [38] 24.13–16 Plotinus asks whether the Good can be good for itself, and remarks that a positive answer to this question is laughable, for it would imply some kind of lack in the Good (VI.7 [38] 27.22–24, and more explicitly 41.28–31). It may be objected that this does not sit well with our interpretation of henologic eros as an eros directed fundamentally to nothing other than itself (see particularly Section 3.3 above). In reality, I think that when Plotinus first says that the Good is not good for itself (VI.7 [38] 24.13–16, 27.22–24, 41.28–31) and then describes the One in terms of ἔρως (VI.8 [39] 15.1–2 and 16.12–14), he is stressing a fairly similar point but in two different contexts, or he is emphasizing two different aspects of the same issue. The first context (that of the passages from VI.7 [38] referred to in this note) is that of a Platonic transposition of the Stoic notion of “appropriation” or “affinity” (οἰκείωσις: see for instance SVF III, 178–189), that is, the natural love that every being bears toward itself. Plotinus’ view is that while other things are good both for themselves and for other things, the Good is such (that is, good) only for others (see Hadot 1988, 307; cf. Chapter Three note 84). The second context (that of the passages from VI.8 [39]) is the discussion about the freedom of the One, in which eros is not the expression of a lack but a productive spontaneity that gives rise to multiplicity. Thus, in the first case Plotinus is stressing that what it takes for something to be the Good, or the universal final cause in the general context of desire, is the very cessation of desire understood in its appetitive aspect. In the second case, instead, Plotinus is showing that for an unqualifiedly simple principle to be considered productive of multiplicity, its simplicity must be understood in terms of an infinite erotic δόνυμις, as I argued in Section 3.3.

28 Chronologically, this is the last treatise of the Enneads, written by Plotinus shortly before he died. At VP 6.24, Porphyry titles this treatise On well-being. As IGAL (I, 295–296, note 1) rightly points out, the alternate title given at VP 24.30 and maintained by all major editors and translators of the Enneads (i.e.,
of this passage (the divisions of the text, given in italic, are mine).\textsuperscript{29}

\textbf{I. Common presuppositions.}

1. The good of each thing is the thing’s proper activity according to nature.

[1] Could one say that the good for each thing was anything else than the activity of its life according to nature? And if something was made up of many parts [3] would not its good be the proper and never-failing activity [4] according to nature of the best part of it?

2. The good of the best soul is the Good.

So the soul’s [5] activity will be its good according to nature. Now if it is of the [6] best sort itself and its activity is directed towards the best, this best will not only be the good [7] for it, but it will also be the good absolutely.

\textbf{II. The primal good (the Good) is...}

1. ...that in which other beings participate...

Then if something [8] does not direct its activity toward another thing, since it is the best of beings and beyond [9] all beings, and all other things direct their activities towards it, it is obvious that this will be [10] the Good, through which other things are enabled to participate in good. [11]

\textsuperscript{29} For analogous divisions see IGAL (I, 296–297), Pigler (2004, especially 41–81), to which I will occasionally refer in the next few pages.

All the other things which have the good like this will have it in two ways, by [12] being made like it and by directing their activity towards it.

2. ...while itself abiding in itself beyond being, activity, and Intellect; ...

[13] So if the aspiration and activity towards the best [14] is good, the Good must not look or aspire to something else, [15] but stay quiet and be the spring and origin of activities [16] according to nature, and make other things in the form of good, not by [17] its activity directed to them—for they are directed to it, their source. It must be the Good not by [18] activity or thought, but by reason of its very abiding.31 [19] For because it is “beyond being,”32 it is also [20] beyond activity, Intellect, and intellection.

3. ...it is that on which everything depends and which everything desires. For, to put it another way, [21] one must assume the Good to be that on which everything depends and which itself [22] depends on nothing; for so the statement is true that it is “that to which everything aspires.”33

4. The center of a circle and the sun as illustrations of the Good.

[23] So it must itself abide, while all things turn back to it, [24] as a circle does to the center from which all the radii come. The [25] sun, too, is an example, since it is like a center in relation to the light which [26] comes from it and depends on it; for the light is everywhere with [27] it and is not cut off from it; even if you wanted to cut it off on [28] one side, the light remains with the sun.

The questions asked at lines 1–4 of this passage seem to be rhetorical. They are initially directed to establishing some common ground between Plotinus and his

31 At I.7 [54] 1.18 we have a textual crux. The major editors and translators variously endorse one of the following readings: (i) αὐτῇ μόνῃ (Harder 1956–1971, Cilento 1947–1949, HS1, IGGAL); (ii) αὐτῇ < τῇ > μόνῃ (Creuzer 1835, Kirchhoff 1856, Volkmann 1883, Pigler 2004); (iii) αὐτῇ μόνῃ (Bréhier 1924–1938); (iv) αὐτῇ μονῇ (HS2, ARMSTRONG); (v) τῇ μονῇ (Theiler, in Harder 1956–1971). The chief difficulty lies in choosing between the adjective μόνος (alone) and the feminine noun μόνη (staying, abiding). The literal meaning of these words is obviously different, but it seems to me that it does not significantly affect the philosophical sense of the passage, as a comparison of some of the translations proposed might confirm (e.g., Ficino 1492: “seipso tantum”; Creuzer 1835: “ipsa permanione”; H. F. Müller 1878–1880: “durch sein Verharren in sich selbst”; McKenna 1917–1930, and McKenna and Page 1969: “by its very rest within itself”; Bréhier 1924–1938: “parce qu’il rest ce qu’il est”; Harder 1956–1971: “eben vermöge eines Stillestehens”; Cilento 1947–1949: “solo per quel suo quieto restare”; Faggin 2002: “perché rimane quello che è”; ARMSTRONG: “by reason of its very abiding”; IGGAL: “por si solo”; Mizuchi, Tanogashira and Tanaka 1986–1988: ただただ自己自身にとどまっていること, tadatada jikojishin ni todomatte iro koto; Pigler 2004: “parce qu’il demeure lui-même”). The text printed in the previous note is from HS2.

32 Plato, Republic VI.509b9.

33 Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics I.1094a3.
predecessors, most notably Plato, Aristotle, and the Stoics. Thus, according to all these authors, including Plotinus, any given thing naturally possesses a specific operation (ἔργον), activity (ἐνέργεια), or excellence (ἀρετή), which is identical with the end (τέλος) or the good of that thing; if the thing is complex, its specific operation will be that of its best part or element. But this is also where the general agreement between these authors ends. In what follows I will limit my account to contrasting Plotinus’ and Aristotle’s positions on the matter, leaving aside the Stoics’ views.

According to Aristotle the proper ἔργον of soul is life, and that of the human soul, which is a kind of soul endowed with reason (λόγος), is a particular kind of life, namely the good life or the life of virtue (ἀρετή). The centerpiece of this life is an activity for whose sake all other activities should be performed, hence an activity which constitutes the good of human life. This activity is contemplation or study (θεωρία), as Aristotle argues in chapters 6–8 of *Nicomachean Ethics* X. However, according to the

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34 See Plato, *Republic* I.352d–354c; Aristotle *Nicomachean Ethics* I.1098b15–18 (and more broadly I.1097b22–1098a20; cf. note 36 below), II.1106a15–24, X.1177a12–17, *Eudemian Ethics* II.1218b37–1219a28, *On the Heavens* II.286a8–9, *Protrepticus*, fragment 6 (= Iamblichus, *Protrepticus* VII.41.15–43.25); for the Stoics see SVF III, 13 (= Cicero, *De finibus* XIV.14), SVF III, 16 (= Stobaeus, *Anthologion* II, 77.16–27). In these contexts, I take the terms ἔργον, ἐνέργεια, and ἀρετή to be used almost synonymously. More on this in Subsection 4.3.2.

35 For a concise treatment of the contrast between the Plotinian and the Stoic positions on this point see Pigler (2004, 54–57), who regrettably fails to provide precise references to Stoic sources on the matter.

36 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* I.1098a12–18: “[12] Thus, if [13] {we take the proper human operation to be a certain kind of life, and take this life to be an activity and action of the soul [14] that involve reason, and if the function of the excellent man is to do these things well and [15] finely, and finally if each thing is well accomplished [when done] in accordance with its proper virtue; if so,} [16] the human good will be an activity of the soul [17] in accordance with virtue, and if there are several virtues, in accordance with the best and [18] most perfect virtue” (my translation). The Greek text reads: [12] εἰ’ οὖτος [13] ἄνθρωπον ἔργον ἐνέργειαν καὶ πράξεις μετὰ λόγου, σπουδαίον δ’ ἀνθρώπου εὐ ταύτα καὶ [15] καλός, ἐκαστὸν δ’ εὖ κατὰ τὴν οἰκείαν ἀρετὴν ὀποτελεῖται [16] εἰ δ’ οὕτω, τὸ ἄνθρωπον ἐνέργειαν ἀρετὴν ἐνεργεῖται κατὰ ἁρετὴν, εἰ δ’ οὕτω, τὸ ἄνθρωπον ἐνεργεῖται κατὰ τὴν ἀρετὴν καὶ [18] τελείωτην. Bywater (1894, ad 1098a13–16) deletes the text between curly brackets at lines 13–15, noting: “repetitio esse videtur eorum quae praecedunt” (i.e., of 1098a3–8).
view that the soul is the first actuality (ἐντελέχεια) of the body, Aristotle does not admit of an end (a human end) prior to the interaction or joined status or the compound of soul and body, and so for a human being the activity of contemplation will always occur in an incarnate context.

For Plotinus, by contrast, the good of the soul cannot be that of a particular kind of soul, but ought to be the good of soul tout-court, that is, an activity (ἐνέργεια) that belongs to soul as such, and not this or that type of soul. But what is soul as such, soul qua soul? I observed that according to Aristotle the activity of contemplation is possible only intermittently for human beings, even in their best condition, since our incarnate state requires that we pay some attention to the needs connected to this state (Nicomachean Ethics X.1179a34–36). For Plotinus, instead, the soul is attached to body only incidentally; by itself, the soul is an immaterial principle. And while in its incarnate condition, part of the activity of the soul is to care for the body with which it is associated, in its disincarnate or purified state, which ultimately amounts to its rational part or power (τὸ λογιστικόν; see Chapter Three note 249 for references in Plotinus), the soul turns toward higher realities and its proper activity is the constant contemplation of


38 For Aristotle all sensible substances are a concrete compound (τὸ σύνολον) of matter and form; as such, they cannot exist if these two elements are separated. The individual human being is, as a sensible substance, the composite of body and soul (see De anima II.412b6–9, 413a3–10, Metaphysics VII.1037a29–33, 1039b20–27; cf. also Parts of Animals I.641a17–b10, Metaphysics VII.1035b14–27, 1036b28–32, VIII.1043a34–b4, XI.1060b23–30, XIII.1077b8–9).

39 On the immaterial or incorporeal nature of the soul see IV.7 [2] 10 (chapters 2–8 of the same treatise defend the thesis of the immateriality of the soul through a discussion and refutation of Stoic and Epicurean views; chapter 8 defends the same thesis against Aristotle’s theory of the soul as actuality of the body documented in the previous note), IV.8 [6] 7.1–17, IV.9 [8] 4.5–26; cf. also VI.4 [22] 5.
Nous.\textsuperscript{40}

Even so, for Plotinus Nous as the object of contemplation is not ultimate but is only the last step to the higher contemplation of the One/Good. This is because, as I argued throughout Subsection 3.4.1, Nous is already a secondary kind of unity, or a unity in multiplicity, which as such is always already erotically directed beyond itself, toward the One as the Source of all reality. In other words, if the highest or best element in soul is the rational element whereby the soul is constantly connected to Nous to the point of having Nous within itself, so to speak (see Subsection 4.3.2 below),\textsuperscript{41} then this connection already implies a directedness toward that unity which is prior to Nous, namely the One. But the One is also the Source, the Good whereby every thing is; therefore, as Plotinus points out at lines 5–7 of the first chapter of our treatise, I.7 [54], the good of the soul will be at the same time the Good unqualifiedly or simply (ἁπλῶς: line 7), that is, the universal final cause.

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Before we continue with our summary exegesis of I.7 [54] 1, we must ask: Why should the One be the universal good, the Good? And why should the One be both

\textsuperscript{40} On the purification of the soul in its embodied state see I.6 [1] 7, III.6 [26] 5, VI.9 [9] 7; cf. Plato, Republic X.608c1–611a2. On noetic contemplation as the peculiar activity of the purified soul, see IV.8 [6] 3.25–30, V.1 [10] 2.35–46, 3.16–20; cf. also I.5 [36] 10.10–23, III.8 [30] 5–6. The issue of the separation of the soul from the body is massive and a major hotbed of controversy between (Neo-) Platonists and pretty much all other Hellenistic schools of philosophy, including the Peripatetics. I will be unable to deal with it appropriately. I should only point out that in view of the soul’s ascent to the One, for Plotinus the actual separation of soul and body occurring in death is secondary; what truly matters is for the soul to be ready (i.e., to be purified) to come in contact with the Good. See pages 362–363 and note 174 below.

efficient and final cause, ἀρχή and τέλος of all reality? Let us begin with an observation: all the questions asked in the paragraph running across pages 294–295 above could be answered analytically (in the Kantian sense) with reference to our interpretation of henologic superabundance given above in Subsection 3.3.2. Thus, that the Principle is also the final cause, or universal desideratum, is necessarily part of the very concept of a Principle which, in giving what it does not have (i.e., in giving to what is generated a love for something other than itself), it endows all derived reality with a love directed to that very Principle qua Good. In other words, the One is the universal beloved, truly the ἔρασμότατον, because for all derived reality to be or to exist means to be erotically directed toward it: we love it because it made us to love it; or rather, to avoid the notion that the One needs to be loved, we love it because we were made as lovers of it (to love it is good for us, while for the One it is a matter of indifference, since it abides transcendentally in perfect self-sufficiency).

This argument is not explicitly worked out in the Enneads, but as I said, I believe it can be safely derived in analytic fashion from the concept of a universe in which what the Principle imparts on all that is derived from it is eros for the Principle qua Good and qua other. The point is less trivial than it might seem at first, for if one does not grant that it is the One itself that instills eros in the whole of derived reality, the very origin of eros is bound to remain unexplained and the identity of the final cause (if there is one to begin with, and whatever this may be) questionable. This argument is at the same time a necessary critical supplement to Aristotle’s observation that if there is no final aim of

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42 See note 14 above.
desire, desire itself will be empty and vain. The text where we find this observation is *Nicomachean Ethics* I.1094a18–22; it reads:43

[18] Suppose, then, that the things [19] achievable by action have some end that we wish for because of itself, and because of which we wish for the other things, and that we do not [20] choose everything because of something else—for if we do, it will go on without limit, [21] so that desire will prove to be empty and futile. Clearly, this end will [22] be the good, that is to say, the best good.

Now, if it is true that in order *not to be in vain*, all desire needs a truly final end (which is the core of Aristotle’s observation), it is likewise true that in order *not to be left unexplained*, desire also necessarily requires a truly original beginning (which is the supplement that one is allowed to infer from Plotinus, I believe).44 Moreover, if the truly final cause, formally understood as that which has no further end beyond itself (see notes 13 and 14 for references), provides desire with an end and saves desire from the danger of being empty and vain, the specific identity of this final cause, which in Aristotle is thought thinking itself (*Metaphysics* XII.1074b34–35), will remain arbitrary, unless this cause is at the same time the origin of the desire by which it is desired (which is precisely the case of the Plotinian One). Thus it will not be enough to say, with Aristotle, that the final cause is the universal beloved and that this moves the heavens by being loved (ὡς ἐρώμενον: *Metaphysics* XII.1072b3), but it will be necessary to add that the final cause can be so loved because it is at the same time the origin of this love, or because love for

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44 The kind of necessity I am advocating is, again, principally *explanatory*: cf. Appendix B.
the Principle qua other is what the Principle bestows on derived reality. From this perspective, *eros* is indirectly also the key to Plotinus’ critique of the Aristotelian First Mover as unsuitable to serve as the ἀρχή of all, not only because, from Plotinus’ viewpoint, the inescapable duality of the Mover’s activity, self-thinking thought, is at once an index of its lack of unity and erotic self-identity (which are prerogatives of the universal ἀρχή), but also because qua universal ἀρχή the First Mover would leave the desire directed to it ultimately unexplained.

In the commentary to his translation of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Irwin writes about the text of I.1094a18–22, which I cited on the previous page, that the options outlined by Aristotle in this passage are not two—i.e., either (a) we choose everything for the sake of something else or (b) we choose for the sake of a highest end—but three. In fact, “[t]he argument does not justify us in dismissing [(c)] the possibility of choosing

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45 See for instance VI.7 [38] 22.21–22; see Chapter Three note 213 for the Greek text of this passage. See also note 167 below.

46 See for instance VI.7 [38] 36–42; cf. pages 226–229 above.

47 The argument was already formulated by Proclus, who in his *Commentary on Plato’s Timaeus* (II, 267.4–12) writes: “[4] If in fact the cosmos [5] loves [ἐρᾷ] nous, just as Aristotle says [Metaphysics XII.1072b3], and moves [κινεῖται] [6] toward it, whence does it have that desire [ἔφεσιν]? For [7] since the cosmos is not the First, it is necessary that it possesses that desire from a cause [ἀπ’ ἀιτίας] [8] that moves it to love [εἰς τὸ ἐρᾶν]; in fact, [9] Aristotle himself says [Movement of Animals 701a1; Metaphysics XII.1072a26] that the desired is the mover of the desirer [κινητικὸν... τὸ ὀρεκτικοῦ]. If [10] this is true, and the cosmos has such an aspiration [ὀρεκτικὸν... τοῦ εκεῖνοῦ] through its own being [τῷ εἶναι] and [11] according to its own nature [κατὰ φύσιν], it is manifest that the whole being of the cosmos [12] derives from that same [source] from which comes its desire [τῷ εἶναι ὀρεκτικὸν]” (my translation). In a note to the French translation of this text from Proclus, Festugière (1966–1968, II, 108 note 4) aptly asks: “Pour désirer, il faut que le Monde existe: d’où lui vient l’être? Il est par nature désirant: d’où lui vient cette nature?” Cf. also Proclus, *Elements of Theology* 12 and 31 (including Dodg’s comments *ad loc.*; *Commentary on Plato’s Parmenides* III.788.12–28 (the conclusion at lines 27–28 is most explicit: “that cause of all will be not only final [τελικόν] but also efficient [ποιητικόν]”; my translation). Plotinus employs a similar language at *Enneads* VI.2 [43] 11.25–26 and most emphatically at 11.38 of the same treatise and at VI.9 [9] 9.21, where the One is explicitly called ἀρχή καὶ τέλος; at I.3 [20] 1.3 the Good is called ἀρχή. A similar jargon is found at V.8 [31] 7.44–47 (where Plotinus borrows from Aristotle, *Physics* I.188a27–30), but the focus of this passage is not the One but Intellect.
several things for their own sakes, without choosing everything for the sake of just one end.” Irwin is correct about Aristotle as far as the argument goes at this point of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. But if the problem of having to juggle several options subsists at all, it is because Aristotle never deduces the desire for whatever is good from a universal ἀρχή whose paramount gift to all derived reality is precisely an *eros* which, if followed correctly, will lead back to its own source, the Good by which all things are good. In other words, the possibility of showing that desire as a path toward an end which is both non-arbitrary and truly final is precluded unless that end is at the same time the very origin of desire. Or yet again, all desire does have some end, but one will hardly be able to argue persuasively for an end over another (which is what Aristotle *does* argue in the *Ethics*), unless the end in question is at the same time the ultimate efficient cause of desire in the desirer, or unless desire for a certain end is understood as the distinctive “gift” of that end to the desirer, a gift whereby end and origin of desire coincide. Surely enough, this argument fulfills a primarily *explanatory* function (see Appendix B), but one which cannot escape being fulfilled, unless we resign ourselves to the view that desire is thoroughly arbitrary. (This view, obviously, would not be an explanation but a renunciation of all explanation, a renunciation which, in its turn, will also have to be justified).  


49 Why couldn’t the End/Principle impart a love for something other than itself? At the very least, because it would not be the Good if it imparted a love for anything less than the Good, that is, less than itself.

50 Two (non-Aristotelian) objections to this way of thinking come to mind. First, it is not the One that imparts *eros* on reality; rather, the One is produced out of the desire for it. Second, the desire for the One is fictional and can be reduced to some other (allegedly more basic) form of desire. As we shall presently see, the two objections often work jointly. In reply to the first objection, it seems to me that both to admit
Aristotle himself does not seem to escape the logic which I see operative in Plotinus’ identification of efficient and final cause, although he does not go as far as Plotinus. In fact, in order to show that the virtue or excellence of what is best in us is the final end of human beings (which he conceptualizes in terms of happiness: εὐδαιμονία), he introduces the well known ἔργον argument (Nicomachean Ethics I.1097b22–1098a20), resulting in the conclusion that what we desire is identical with the properly human ἔργον, which is “an active life of the [part of the soul] that has reason,”\(^5\) or an “activity of the soul in accordance with reason or not lacking reason.”\(^5\) But the question could be asked of Aristotle: Why should we desire such an activity? And where does this desire come from? The answer presumably would be: “Because it is our proper ἔργον,” which is like saying that we desire it in principle, or as a principle, a starting point

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beyond which we neither need nor should go. In other words, for an Aristotelian to ask for the origin of such desire would amount to taking one step too many, for the desire for intellectual activity, the pure actuality of the Unmoved Mover, is itself a primary given rooted in our nature, so that to ask why we have such a nature is simply excessive.

On his part, Plotinus would be likely to contend that not only is this step not excessive, but that it is necessary, albeit in a primarily explanatory way (see again Appendix B). In fact, it is only by taking such a step that one is able to offer an account of the desire for the Principle. But in doing so, the very nature of the Principle undergoes a transformation: no longer the noetic ἐνέργεια of the First Mover, but the erotic δύναμις of the One. If this is granted, then the possibility of choosing several things for their own sakes (i.e., option (c) in Irwin’s commentary to Aristotle mentioned above at pages 310–311) is no longer an option, for according to Plotinus no derived thing (whether taken singly, together with some other derived things, or with the totality of derived things) will ever be able to explain how it can possibly be desired, let alone desired for its own sake,

53 Kant does something similar when in the first section of the Grundlegung he argues for a teleological view of reason (Vernunft) (Kant, Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals IV, 394–396). The difference between Kant and Aristotle, I believe, lies in their respective views of morality and happiness and in the place they assign to them in human life. For Kant reason is the key to a morality which is in absolute the highest end for all rational beings independently of whether reason in these beings is accompanied by sensible inclinations (Kant, Groundwork IV, 408, 425, 427, 442, 447–448; Critique of Practical Reason V, 32). The satisfaction of the sum total of these inclinations is called happiness (Glückseligkeit; cf. Kant, Groundwork IV, 399; Critique of Practical Reason V, 72, 147, 104, 147; cf. also Metaphysics of Morals VI, 480). For Aristotle, instead, happiness (εὐδαιμονία) is the virtue or excellence of what is best in us (or, as we just saw, our proper ἔργοι as human beings), while morality consists of a virtuous life understood as the possession of the virtuous states plus friendship described in books II–IX of the Nicomachean Ethics. By the end of the Ethics, this life seems to be happiness only in a secondary way, true happiness being identified with the activity of θεωρία or contemplation, which in turn is the proper ἔργον of our best part, namely reason (Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics X.8, especially 1178a9–10, 20–22). Plotinus is closer to Aristotle than he is to Kant on this count, in that for him all virtue (whether high or low), while necessary, is not ultimate but is for the sake of a higher end (see Subsection 4.6.1 below). However, Plotinus differs from Aristotle in at least one very important respect: for him the end of human life is not contemplation of the Aristotelian self-thinking Nous but assimilation to the One beyond Nous (see Subsection 4.3.1).
unless this thing is proved to be at the same time the origin of the very desire by which it is desired. But the only “thing” that can fulfill this condition is the One as both the universal ἄρχη and the universal τέλος.\textsuperscript{54}

In short, Plotinus simply thinks that the Aristotelian answer does not reach far enough. Therefore, he radicalizes Aristotle’s argument by making desire for the universal final end depend, not on the particular nature of a given being, but on the very end of this desire. This end thus becomes, quite literally, also the origin of the desire.\textsuperscript{55}

Let us now resume our direct reading of the first chapter of I.7 [34] from where

\textsuperscript{54} Consider my desire for a piece of fruit—say, an apple. Ordinarily, I seem to desire the apple either because I am actually seeing an apple or because I am reminded of an apple which I once tasted. Am I then justified in thinking that the apple is the origin—in the strong sense of ἄρχη—of my desire for apples I occasionally experience? For Plotinus the answer to this question can be positive only from a purely empirical standpoint, but ultimately and strictly it is negative. Put differently, I do desire an apple, empirically, either because I am actually seeing an apple or because I am reminded of one or more apples which I once tasted, but ultimately the apple as such cannot by itself ground the very phenomenon of desire which is in me, for the apple as such does not justify my desiring it any more than it justifies my hating it or my being indifferent to it, to mention but two other ways of relating affectively to an apple. I take it that for Plotinus the phenomenon of desire, in order not to be left unexplained, ultimately presupposes the identity of its efficient and final cause, an identity that obviously cannot be present in an apple nor in any other finite object of experience. For this reason, my desire for an apple cannot have the apple as its truly ultimate end, since the apple is only a means to some further desideratum or combination of desiderata (e.g., the satisfaction of hunger or thirst, of the desire for something sweet, of the reproduction of a memory in which the flavor of apple brings along a pleasant scenario, etc.). If so, then, the apple is only the proximate cause of a desire which points at something more remote, a desire which will not stop until it finds that which is sought after absolutely, for its own sake. This absolute desideratum or ultimate end of desire for Plotinus can be only that which is at the same time the origin of desire, namely the One as both the Principle and the End of all. Does this mean that the apple is in fact undesirable? No; it means rather that it is desirable when it is “colored” by the Good (VI.7 [38] 22.6).

\textsuperscript{55} In his opening notice to \textit{Enneads} I.7 [54], Bréhier (1924–1938, I, 107) remarks that the Aristotelian argument (chiefly in chapter 6 of \textit{Nicomachean Ethics} I) is directed against Plato’s Good, but that Aristotle’s refutation of Plato—Plotinus’ Plato, more precisely—makes sense primarily within a strictly Aristotelian framework. Thus, as Bréhier rightly points out, “les arguments d’Aristote contre Platon tirent toute leur valeur du point de vue pratique d’Aristote; l’Idée platonicienne du Bien n’est point en effet quelque chose que l’on puisse acquérir par l’action; il perdent leur valeur, dès que le but devient une union au Bien par assimilation.” For this reason, the practical realm (i.e., ethics), though necessary, for Plotinus is not the ultimate goal of human endeavors, no matter how unpalatable the idea may come across to modern sensibility. I comment briefly on the status of ethics for Plotinus in Subsection 4.6.1 (see especially note 202).
we left off at page 307. How is it that the Good is the Good? Plotinus’ answer, which we find at lines 7–10, is that the Good is such by granting all things participation (line 10: μεταλαμβάνειν) in goodness. It is by virtue of this participation that lower (i.e., qualified\textsuperscript{56}) goods are desirable and exist at all. At lines 10–12 Plotinus sketches two ways in which a thing can participate in the Good: by similarity (line 12: ὡμοιῶσθαι) and by directing its activity toward the Good. The two modes of participation correspond to the double causality which I have been discussing in the last few pages, similarity being a direct consequence of the coincidence of the Good (final cause) with the universal ἄρχη (efficient cause), and directedness toward the Good being the clearest expression of final causality. Put differently, if I am directed toward τάγαθόν, it is because I am ἀγαθοειδής (line 16); but I am ἀγαθοειδής because τάγαθόν is at the same time both my and the universal ἄρχη.

In Chapter Three we saw how the efficient causality of the Principle is operative in Plotinus’ metaphysics in accordance with the notion of eros. There the erotic superabundance of the Principle was the key to the hierachical structuring of reality. In the present chapter, and more specifically in the next two sections, it is a matter of showing how the same notion of eros is operative in conceiving of the Principle of all as identical with the End of all. For the moment, the point is simply to underline the fact that in Plotinus the two causalities are interdependent. Again, the soul desires τάγαθόν because it is ἀγαθοειδής; but it is ἀγαθοειδής, in turn, because τάγαθόν is the name of the ἄρχη of all from the perspective of the desirer, much like ἄρχη was its name from the

\textsuperscript{56} Cf. Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics VII.1152b26–27.
perspective of the generated, for in itself the ἀρχή/τάγαθόν, or Principle/Good, is simply the One.

Now, to be ἀγαθοειδής for the soul, as for Nous (cf. Chapter Three note 269), means to participate in the superabundant life of the One. As I argued in Subsection 3.3.2, this life is communicated to the whole of derived reality as eros for the Source, which qua universal and ultimate desideratum is identical with the Good. But this means that desire, or ἔρως followed correctly (Plato, Symposium 210a2, 4, e3, 211b5, 7; cf. page 70 above), is the very “locus” in which the manifestation of the identity of Principle and End is first given, the “place” beginning from which the explication of this coincidence becomes possible. And since this is true not only for soul but also for Nous, we may understand why in this context Plotinus introduces the identity between his Good and the Good of Plato’s Republic (VI.509b6–10), which is beyond being, and hence beyond Nous and the Aristotelian νόησις νοήσεως (lines 19–20). To the extent that the One is the origin and end of all desire, it cannot have a desideratum beyond itself. For this reason, it is said to abide in itself.57 However, this restfulness (line 15: ἐν ἡσύχῳ; cf. VI.7 [38] 32–33) of the One should not be understood statically but dynamically: what is at rest, or what in transcendentally self-abiding does not change, is the fact that the One does not direct its primary activity outside of itself.58

The two images employed in treatise I.7 [54] to express the self-abiding status of

57 See I.7 [54] 1.18; cf. note 31 above for remarks on the textual crux in this line. See also Chapter Three notes 123 and 185 for further references on the notion of abiding (μένειν).

58 The activity in question here is the first activity, or activity of the essence, with which I dealt earlier in Subsection 3.2.3.
Thus, the purpose of attraction by desire, developed through the mathematical image of the circle, is to unravel the eternalized sense of the production of the Good, as well as to frame the movement of procession within a necessary conversion to the Principle. This metaphor of the circle shows that the Good encompasses all things, that it is omnipresent, and that it guarantees the principle of a finality through which it is the good of all existing things.

As for the second image, that of the sun, through it Plotinus does not only place himself in the tradition of books VI and VII of Plato’s *Republic*, but introduces at the same time an important development in this tradition. For if in Plato the sun/Good provides the attuned eye/soul with the knowledge of what it illumines, but affords existence, arguably, only to Ideas (cf. Chapter Three note 12), in Plotinus the sun is both the source and the sustainer of light (line 26). Out of metaphor, this means that the One is both the giver and the sustainer of the existence of all reality, or of *Nous* proximately and of all reality remotely (cf. Chapter Three note 52). To illustrate this point, Plotinus alludes to the experiment of placing a screen in front of the sun or light source. I believe

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59 It is in connection with the metaphor of the circle that Plotinus calls what derives from the center of the circle “centri-form” (κεντροειδής: VI.8 [39] 18.10), and what is akin to the sun, “sunlike” (ἁλιοειδής: I.6 [1] 9.31; cf. Chapter One note 195 for occurrences of the same term in Plato). For a parallel of the metaphor of the circle in the context of cosmology, cf. II.2 [14] 2. For further references to these two metaphors in the *Enneads* see Chapter Three notes 78 and 79, as well as my remarks in notes 160 and 278 of the same chapter.

60 Pigler (2004, 77): “L’actraction par le désir, déployée par l’image mathématique du cercle, a aussi pour finalité de libérer le sens éternisé, ainsi que d’enchaîner la procession dans une nécessaire conversion au Principe. Cette métaphore du cercle montre que le Bien englobe toutes choses, qu’il est omniprésent, qu’il assure le principe d’une finalité par laquelle il est le bien de tout existant.”

61 See also VI.4 [22] 7.42–44; cf. Galen, *De placitis Hippocratis et Platonis* VII.617.5–8.
that what this experiment is meant to prove is, first, that light cannot sustain its own existence independently of its source: what the screen does is precisely to break the link between light and sun, so that the former is no longer able to shine (i.e., to be light, or to be simply) when cut off from the latter. Secondly, the illustration shows that the screen, while affecting light, does not directly affect the light source, in the sense that the sun still generates light despite being faced by the screen. It may be objected that an affection on the product already tells us something about the inability of the producer to overcome absolutely the origin of the affection (i.e., in our experiment, the screen). Two counter objections to this. First, we should remind ourselves of the necessity, in Plotinus’ metaphysics, of the fundamental Principle of Superiority of Cause to Effect (cf. pages 216–218 above), whereby the product must be ontologically inferior to the producer, and hence essentially open to varying degrees of affection depending on its “place” in the hypostatic hierarchy. Secondly, and no less fundamentally, we ought to emphasize the metaphorical character of the illustration (on which see also Chapter Three note 160). No illustration, precisely qua illustration, will do full justice to that which it is supposed to illustrate; this is true of the One to a particularly heightened degree.

As it was implied in my discussion on the ineffability of the One (Subsection 3.2.2), ultimately all attempts at grasping the One cognitively or theoretically (whether in noetic or dianoetic fashion) are bound to fail because for Plotinus the nature of the One is afforded only in the experience of union (cf. VI.7 [38] 36). And as we shall see more directly in Subsection 4.6.2 and 4.6.3, the fundamental feature of this experience is not cognition but love. For the moment we may turn briefly to the second point of interest in
the context of Plotinus’ description of the One as ἐρασμιώτατον at VI.7 [38] 32.25 and 33.14, namely the disposition that the individual soul ought to adopt if it is erotically to attune itself to the beloved.

4.3 Preconditions of the Ascent: Attunement and Affinity with the Beloved

As anticipated in the opening pages of this chapter, with the present section I begin the treatment of the central theme of this portion of our study: the journey of return to the One, or the Ascent. Before I shift the focus of our discussion to the actual process of the Ascent in the sections that follow, I will first introduce two fundamental factors that make the Ascent possible, what we might call its preconditions. The first precondition is the idea that was hinted in the closing paragraph of the previous section: that the individual soul must adopt a certain disposition in order to be able to love its desideratum, the One, in a way that is suitable to the status of the One as ἐρασμιώτατον or universal final cause (Subsection 4.3.1). For this attunement to the beloved to be possible, the lover has to be capable of assuming this disposition upon itself. In other words, the soul must be of a certain nature, such that the very possibility of the Ascent as self-transformation or attunement to the beloved is essentially open for it. This openness or possibility is the second precondition of the Ascent, a precondition which from the perspective of the ascending soul appears to be even more fundamental than the first and which I will refer to as the essential affinity of the soul with the higher hypostases or, in the language of eros, the affinity between lover and beloved (Subsection 4.3.2).
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4.3.1 First Precondition of the Ascent:

Attunement, or the Infinite Eros by Which the Soul is to Love the One qua Good

In the context of the Ascent, I am going to call the soul’s necessity to attune itself to its ultimate beloved (i.e., the One qua Good or universal final cause) the Principle of As-similation.62 Although Plotinus does not use such an expression, he does state the principle in concise, if not immediately transparent fashion at I.6 [1] 9.29–30: “For one must come to the sight with a seeing power made akin and like to what is seen” (the Greek text is given in note 65 below). The field from which Plotinus interpretively borrows this principle (or to which he applies it in this passage) is that of sense perception,63 and his likely source is Plato’s theory of vision in the Timaeus.64

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62 Cf. Darras-Worm (2007, 238); IGAL (I, 98) calls this principle “principio de la adecuación de la potencia con el objeto.” Here again I capitalize the expression “Principle of As-similation” in accordance with the indications given in Chapter Three note 10. I also hyphenate the term “assimilation” in this expression in order to underline its etymological meaning and to bring out its relation to a set of Greek terms which Plotinus uses to denote likeness or similarity: ὁμοίος, ὁμοειδής, ὁμοίω, ὁμοιότης, and finally ὁμοίωσις, the particular term that I translate with “assimilation.” Here is a list of the occurrences of these terms in the Enneads when used to indicate likeness to higher realities broadly in the context of the Ascent to the One: for ὁμοίος see I.6 [1] 9.29, VI.9 [9] 11.32; for ὁμοειδής see IV.3 [49] 4.30, V.1 [10] 2.44; for ὁμοίω see I.2 [19] (the verb alone is used some 22 times in this treatise, most notably 13 times in chapter 1, and 7 times in chapter 2), I.4 [46] 16.12, I.6 [1] 6.20, 7.28, I.7 [54] 1.12, I.8 [51] 8.43, V.3 [49] 8.24, 54; for ὁμοιότης see I.6 [1] 2.11–12, IV.7 [2] 10.40, V.3 [49] 8.56, VI.7 [38] 31.11–18, 34.11, VI.9 [9] 4.27, 8.28; for ὁμοίωσις see I.2 [19] 1.26, 3.1–11, 20, 5.2, 6.26, 7.27. The key Platonic texts at the basis of these references are those from Republic X.613a7–b1 and Theaetetus 176a8–b3, b8–c2 cited on page 92 above. As customary with Plotinus, this terminology is not rigid; thus, in the Enneads (and in the broad Neoplatonic tradition) the notion of assimilation in the context of the Ascent is conveyed not only by the group of terms I just listed in this note, but also by another cluster of words indicating kinship, affinity, appropriation, or adaptation (cf. SP 724–725): σίκεξις (III.8 [30] 6.21, 8.3, IV.7 [2] 10.13, V.5 [32] 7.24, V.6 [24] 4.17, V.9 [5] 1.20), σίκειν (III.8 [30] 6.18, 22), σικέσις (used negatively at III.6 [26] 13.27); see also συγγενής (II.4 [19] 4.14, I.6 [1] 6.15, 9.29, VI.9 [9] 4.28, 8.29); cf. note 85 below.

63 Cf. IV.4 [28] 23.19–35, VI.7 [38] 31.8–11. The Principle of As-similation is very closely related to the Principle of Affinity, which I will be discussing in the next subsection. See note 87 below for a list of references to the Principle of Affinity. At VI.7 [38] 31.8–18 Plotinus seems to present these two principles as two aspects of the same reality.

broader context of the principle itself is treatise I.6 [1] On beauty, one of the Enneads’ most read and anthologized treatises. This treatise may be summarily described as an ascent of the soul to the Good through an investigation of the experience of beauty. The Principle of As-simulation is stated as a necessity to which the soul must submit if it is to meet its desired terminus at the end of the Ascent. It is worth citing the text of the principle in the wider context of the passage from which it is taken, I.6 [1] 9.24–34:65

[24] ...this [25] alone is the eye that sees the great Beauty. But if anyone comes [26] to the sight blear-eyed with wickedness, and unpurified, or [27] weak and by cowardice unable to look at what is very bright, [28] he sees nothing, even if someone shows him what is there and possible [29] to see. For one must come to the sight with a seeing power made akin and like [30] to what is seen. No eye ever [31] saw the sun without becoming sun-like, nor [32] can a soul see Beauty without becoming beautiful. You must become [33] first all godlike and all beautiful if you intend to see God [34] and Beauty.

Although Plotinus explicitly employs what I here called the Principle of As-simulation in the context of the Ascent, the formal structure proper to the principle is not exclusive to Plotinus, nor, for that matter, is its application limited to the Ascent.66 For

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66 Possible antecedents of the idea conveyed by the Principle of As-simulation in Plotinus can be found in the Presocratics, for example Parmenides (I take the initiation motif in the poem on nature to express this idea, e.g. at DK 28.B1.3, 22–32 = Sextus Empiricus, Against the Mathematicians VII.111), Empedocles (DK 31.B109 = Aristotle, De anima I.404b8–15), Philolaus (DK 44.A29 = Sextus Empiricus, Against the Mathematicians VII.92), and Democritus (DK 68.B164 = Galen, Definitiones medicæae 439, XIX.449); in Plato (see all the references given in Chapter One note 263 and in note 62 above; cf. also Republic VI.508b9–10, VII.516a5–b2, 518a1–b2) and in Aristotle (see note 64 above; cf. also Nicomachean Ethics I.1094b1–14, 23–27); and if we are to trust Augustine’s account in Contra Academicos (see especially II.14–15, 24, III.37–43), the true reason of Academic skepticism was that of keeping the truth from as yet unpurified (i.e., unattuned) souls. Possible “echoes” of the principle may be heard through the history of philosophy after Plotinus in as different authors and contexts as Augustine’s insistence on purification
example, the principle can be found to be true also of the Aristotelian approach to the First Mover, which, as I already have mentioned several times, moves ὡς ἐρώμενον, by being loved (Metaphysics XII.1072b3). In fact, the kind of individual soul that can come lovingly to contemplate the divine Mover of Metaphysics XII, which I take to be identical with the highest object of contemplation (θεωρία) described in chapters 6–8 of the last book of the Nicomachean Ethics, is a rational one. Non-rational souls, and even rational souls that fail to actualize their rational power (which for Aristotle coincides “with the man himself”: Nicomachean Ethics IX.1166a16–17; see also 1168b35–1169a3; cf, Chapter Three note 256), are incapable of contemplation. That is, non-rational souls and souls which do not make an effort to become attuned to such an “object” will inevitably fail to contemplate it. From this perspective, the whole of the Ethics could be read as a journey of purification leading to happiness primarily conceived of as the contemplation of the object which in Aristotle’s view is most worth contemplating.

Now, since this object for Aristotle is thought thinking itself (νοήσεως νόησις: Metaphysics XII.1074b34–35), Aristotelian contemplation will be essentially noetic in nature. For Plotinus it is otherwise, since the One, rather than thinking, is “beloved and
love and love of itself” (VI.8 [39] 15.1; see Subsection 3.3.1). It follows that if the soul wishes to attune itself to the One, it is not sufficient for it to reach the level of *Nous*, but it must become love, and love of an infinite kind, since the object itself is both infinite love and infinitely lovable.\(^{67}\) Moreover, as I already hinted in the previous paragraph, it would seem fair to infer that for Aristotle non-rational beings are absolutely cut off from enjoying the contemplation of the First Mover, since its intellectual nature makes the Mover completely unavailable to beings that do not have a share in the same nature. The situation is different in the case of Plotinus’ contemplation of the One, for what is required, minimally but also most of all, in order to have some access to the One is a bare and most basic desire of the Principle as that which bestows on each thing its unity (which in this context is identical with the thing’s being and *eros*). But since the Source is, negatively, other than *Nous* and, positively, both love and most lovable, it will not in principle be closed off to the love directed to it from non-rational beings; instead, it will allow to be partially approached in love also by beings that have no active share in intellection.\(^{68}\)

\(^{67}\) It is this idea, I maintain, that may be at the basis of the view, developed particularly in the Middle Ages, according to which the human soul is “capax infiniti” (e.g., Thomas Aquinas, *Scriptum super Sententiiis* II.d34.q1.a5.arg2), or “capax” Dei (e.g., Augustine, *De Trinitate* XIV.11: “capax eius [i.e., “Dei”]; cf. also XIII.8.11; XIV.4.6: “summae naturae capax”; XIV.12.15; contrast Augustine, *Confessions* IX.28. See Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* III.q4.a1.ad2; *De veritate* q22.a2.ad5), with the important difference that for these authors, due to the debilitating effects of the Fall, divine Grace is needed as a gratuitous power superadded to human nature in order to restore that capacity in the human being (e.g., Augustine, *De quantitate animae* 38.34–35, *Confessions* VII.26, *De Trinitate* XV.14, *De civitate Dei* XV.21, XXII.22, *De correctione et gratia* 2.3; Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* I–II.q109.co, and cf. also I–II.q113.a10.co2). For Plotinus, by contrast, effort suffices (cf. Epilogue note 9).

\(^{68}\) From the point of view of procession, or the derivation of all reality from the One, this translates in the Procline principle, later reformulated in the opening lines of the *Liber de causis* (1.1–2), that “[e]very cause both operates prior to its consequent and gives rise to a greater number of posterior terms” (Proclus, *Elements of Theology* 57, 54.23–24: Πᾶν αἴτιον καὶ πρὸ τοῦ αἴτιατον ἐνέργηται καὶ μετ’ αὐτὸ πλειόνων ἔστιν ὑποστάτικόν). The difference between Proclus and Plotinus, I take it, is that in
Two critical observations on the idea of assimilation or attunement are in place before I turn to the second precondition of the Ascent. The first observation concerns the relation of love and knowledge (or intellection) as the soul becomes attuned to the One as universal final cause. I would like to emphasize that here it is not a matter of radically contrasting knowledge and love, as if the presence of the one would in principle imply the absence of the other, and vice versa. On the contrary, it is simply a question of understanding knowledge, both in its discursive and in its noetic form, as insufficient to relate to the One “correspondingly,” or as the specific “nature” of the desideratum requires. Thus, in the journey of return to the One, or the Ascent, it is

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proposition 57 of the Elements of Theology Proclus goes on to attribute privations of Forms (αἱ στερήσεις τῶν εἰδῶν: 57, 56.16) directly to the One, thereby denying that resistance to Form is to be found in lower matter and indirectly supporting the idea that this matter, too, is derived from, and participates in the One. Plotinus, by contrast, at times not only tends to attribute to matter “an active power of resistance,” as Dodds puts it in his commentary to proposition 57 of Proclus’ Elements of Theology (Dodds 1963, 231), but as we saw earlier he identifies matter with evil itself in treatise I.8 [51], thus making its derivation from the One at least problematic (see Subsection 3.4.3 above, especially pages 279–283). Therefore, I think it can be safely granted that for Plotinus beings that participate in Form but not in intellectual activity (e.g., beasts, plants, and rocks) are still endowed with a desire for the One that partially bypasses Nous, so to speak (partially, that is, because Form is still provided to these beings by soul on the basis of Nous, at least proximately: see pages 246–250 above). However, due to the ambiguous status of lower matter in Plotinian metaphysics (i.e., the likely aporia of which I speak in Subsection 3.4.3), it is not completely clear to me that one can easily maintain that the One is both the efficient and the final cause of lower matter. Put differently, I think that it remains at least problematic how in Plotinus lower matter, the principle of evil, could both derive from the One and desire the One.

In fact, I not only believe that such a stark incompatibility can hardly be attributed to Plotinus, but that as such this alleged incompatibility is essentially counterproductive, both speculatively and practically, and a misinterpretation of the matter at hand.

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69 In fact, I not only believe that such a stark incompatibility can hardly be attributed to Plotinus, but that as such this alleged incompatibility is essentially counterproductive, both speculatively and practically, and a misinterpretation of the matter at hand.

70 We may wonder whether the One is the only desideratum which, in order to be approached correspondingly, must be primarily loved rather than (merely) known; in fact, we can even ask whether the One is the only desideratum that ought to be loved with a love of an infinite kind in order to be loved correspondingly. Emmanuel Levinas’ reflection on the other human being, or simply the Other (Autrui), is a brilliant example of a thought in which a desire (Désir) of a very particular kind (i.e., very generally, one which in contrast to need—besoin—grows rather than decreases, as it approaches its desideratum) is required in order to relate to the Other qua Other (see especially Levinas 1969, 33–35, 114–117, 179–180; 1993, 82–84, 112–115). Like Plotinus’ One, Levinas’ Other (as well as his God) is never present to consciousness as an object, but only as a trace: signified, not forced into presence (Levinas 1987, 65–66, 102–107, especially 105, where Plotinus V.5 [32] 5.4–7, 12–14 is cited; the articles by Levinas that I am referring to are Phenomenon and Enigma and Meaning and Sense). However, from Plotinus’ perspective
essential that the soul come cognitively to discover the One as both the Principle and
the End; but the “discovery,” no matter how important, by itself is strictly insufficient.
What really matters is that with this discovery the soul becomes willing to be transformed
through a process of attunement to that which it came to discover as its proper
desideratum. If this attunement does not occur, all knowledge remains vain. We should
therefore admit that knowledge is a crucial aspect or even a necessary condition of love
(in the sense that it would be hard to imagine a love that knows, or even merely divines,
if only metaphorically, as in the case of a plant or a rock, absolutely nothing about its
beloved), but also that it is neither the whole of love nor the most important aspect of it.
According to Plotinus, through reasoning (λόγος) it is possible to make this love explicit
(cf. VI.7 [38] 33.11–13), but this operation brings the nature of love into focus without
actually replacing love as the proper attitude to relate correspondingly to the One. Thus,
for Plotinus knowledge is an essential element in the process of shedding light on the
nature of love, but it is not a substitute for love, nor an overcoming of love, whose
priority over knowledge never seems to be put into question.

In order to grasp the nature of this priority in the context of the Ascent, one need
only think of how utterly pointless knowledge would be in the Ascent if love were ever to

as I have interpreted it in Section 4.2, Levinas’ position remains problematic in the sense that although
the Other is conceived of as the truly originary origin of both the desire for the Other in me and of my
possibility of becoming a subject in substitution (see Levinas 1981, 99–102, 113–118, 126–127), it
cannot be understood as ἀρχή in the absolute sense (e.g., the Other is not the origin—and sustainer—of
my existence nor, for that matter of the existence of other beings. I am not sure about the extent to which
this would apply to Levinas’ understanding of God). A somewhat similar point can be made about Kant’s
notion of the human person as an end in itself (Zweck an sich selbst) highlighted in the third formulation
of the categorical imperative (Kant, Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals IV, 427–429): never a
means to a further end, the human person nevertheless cannot be conceived of as ἀρχή in the absolute
sense intended by Plotinus.
be missing, and of how superfluous knowledge becomes once the individual soul has
managed to reach the end of the return journey and to love the One correspondingly.\textsuperscript{71}

But love has priority over knowledge also in the sense that without it knowledge itself
remains impeded. Consider the ordinary inability of someone whose love is not purified
to think of the Ascent as something other than fancy. What I have in mind is not the case
of the \textit{eros} of plants and lower animals, whose connatural directedness toward the Good
remains unreflectively obscure; in this case the very knowledge of what is truly worth
loving is naturally impossible. What I am referring to is rather the condition of unpurified
rational souls, in which the connatural erotic directedness toward the Good is resisted due
to their attachment to lower goods; in this case a proper knowledge of what is truly worth
loving remains hindered, and the soul cannot quite understand (or cannot help
misunderstand) what is missing in the goods it is after. Plotinus seems to go as far as to
saying that a full grasp of love’s nature is given only to those who have had an actual
experience of the Good, as when he writes: “Anyone who has seen it [viz., the Good]
knows what I mean when I say that it is beautiful.”\textsuperscript{72} In the present context this means:
only the one who has experienced the beauty of the Good in love can understand. Thus,

\textsuperscript{71} In fact, it remains arguable whether intellectual activity is desirable at all by itself, without the love of the
truth(s) grasped in it and the joy connected to their attainment (cf. Damascius, commenting on Plato’s
\textit{Philebus} 21d6–e4, in his \textit{Lectures on Plato’s Philebus} 86–88, and the copious references given by
Westerink (1959, \textit{ad loc.}), including Plotinus IV.3 [27] 26 and IV.6 [41] 2). Of course, this love and joy
may be understood as essentially belonging to the true intellectual activity proper to \textit{Nous} (cf. my
remarks on the pleasure of Intellect at pages 299–301 above); if so, intellectual activity already means
more than it does in the ordinary sense.

Ὅστις δὲ εἶδεν, οἶδεν [47] ὃ λέγω... Cf. Pausanias, \textit{Description of Greece} I.37.4–5. As ARMSTRONG
points out in his note to VI.9 [9] 9.46–47, the phrase was probably used “by a mystery-initiate when
addressing others to avoid divulging secrets” (ARMSTRONG VII, 338 note 1). See also VI.7 [38] 40.1–2,
for Plotinus love is not only prior to knowledge in the sense that in union knowledge is superseded while love remains (on which see Subsection 4.6.3), but also in the sense that knowledge is possible at all only on the basis of the experience of love. Further still, this priority does not imply that love makes knowledge possible as a means to an end. On the contrary, love is both the ground of knowledge and the end of knowledge: I can know something about the One because I first love it, and I know what I know of it in order to love it better. In other words, if the One is known at all, it is known only because it is loved and in order to be loved further.\footnote{There is a likely parallel here between Plotinian knowledge (and, as we shall see in Subsection 4.6.1, Plotinian lower virtue) and the Christian theological virtues of faith and hope: both that knowledge and these virtues are superseded once the end is reached. There also seems to be a difference, however: while Plotinian union appears to take place as a love in which knowledge is, rather than absent tout-court, fundamentally superseded (since knowledge implies multiplicity, thus essentially antagonizing the simplicity of union), in the Christian eschaton—or at least in a version of it which owes much to Plotinus and Platonism, such as that of Augustine—love alone survives faith and hope but at the same time it is supplemented by vision (visio, videre) (see for instance Augustine, De Trinitate I.17, 21, IV.24, VIII.8, XIII.3, XV.44, De civitate Dei XXII.29, De doctrina Christiana I.42–44). The main Biblical passage underlying most of these references are 1 John 3:2 (Ἀγαπητοί, νῦν τέκνα θεού ἐσμέν, καὶ οὔπω ἐφανερώθη τί ἐσόμεθα. οἴδαμεν ὅτι ἐὰν φανερωθῇ ἡμών τῷ θεῷ, ἂν οὕτωσιν καθὼς ἐστιν) and especially 1 Corinthians 13:12 (βλέπομεν γὰρ ἄρτι δὲ ἐπιγνώσομαι καθὼς καὶ ἐπεγνώσθην). In this context, vision figures as an analogue of knowledge and as the proper replacement or apt reward of faith and hope, which are thus conceived of as strictly pre-eschatological virtues.}

Thus, it seems fair to say that for Plotinus love is the proper attitude that any given being ought to assume in order to draw near to the One. However, although non-rational beings can indeed love the One, they remain incapable of loving it correspondingly, that is, of loving it with an infinite kind of love eventually leading to union (cf. Subsection 4.6.3). But then in what sense is the One the highest desideratum or universal final cause if, after all, only that which has a share in rationality possesses the ability to desire and love it correspondingly? Briefly, in the sense that even those beings
which are not endowed with reason need the One in order to exist and depend on it for their subsistence. Therefore, even these beings desire the One in some way and can relate to it in love according to their capabilities.\(^74\) Thus, I suggest that in Plotinus the superlative ἐρασμιώτατον as referred to the One should be understood both extensively and intensively: extensively, in the sense that the One is the universal final cause, truly the beloved of all beings, and desired insofar as these beings would cease to exist if they completely lacked this desire; intensively, in the sense that only the One can be loved with an infinite love, although not all beings are capable of so loving it. I will return to this in Subsection 4.4.1.

My second observation concerns the formless nature of the One. This formlessness applies to the One qua Principle of all in the perspective of derivation as much as it does to the One qua End of all in the perspective of the Ascent. An argument supporting this conclusion can be found in chapters 32–33 of treatise VI.7 [38] *How the multitude of the Forms came into being, and on the Good*. We already saw that for Plotinus the One, in order to be the Principle of all, ought to be formless on the ground of the Principle of Superiority of Cause to Effect (cf. pages 216–218). In other words, since one of the universal features of derived reality is form (with the exceptions of both intelligible and lower matter: cf. pages 224–227 and Subsection 3.4.3), and since the One gives what it does not have (cf. Subsection 3.3.2), the Principle itself must be formless.

\(^{74}\) On the One as both the giver and sustainer of existence see Chapter Three notes 46, 47, and 52. On the ability of all things to participate in the One (and to love it), but in accordance with their natural capability, see note 112 below.
Now, this is also true of the One conceived of as the universal final cause; Plotinus makes this point in the passage where we find the second occurrence of the superlative ἐρασμιώτατον, VI.7 [38] 33.7–16: 

[7] When the Intellect [8] thinks one particular thing, it is diminished, as it is also even if it takes together all things that are in [9] the intelligible realm; if it thinks an individual thing, it has one intelligible form; if it [10] thinks all together it has a kind of variegated form, still in need: it must contemplate [11] that which is beyond the all-beautiful both variegated and not variegated,77 that which [12] the soul desires without saying why it longs for something like this, but our [13] reasoning says that this is the real thing, since the nature of the best [14] and the nature of the most lovely is in the altogether formless. Therefore, whatever [15] you bring into form and show to the soul, this seeks something else over it [16] which gave it form.

75 The formlessness of the One can be explained in terms of hypostatic generation: it is the simple infinite, the limitless and formless power from which Nous emerges, first as intelligible matter and then as the realm of the unified totality of Forms (cf. Subsection 3.4.1). But unlike the formlessness of lower matter, the formlessness of the Principle is one that imparts form on all reality while itself remaining beyond form, or, in the language of “measure” (μέτρον) which Plotinus borrows from Plato’s Philebus, the One is the measuring measure, that is, that measure which itself is not measured by another measure (see Plato, Philebus 64d9–e7, 66a4–8; on the association of the Good with measure see also Plato, Statesman 284a5–e8, Protagoras 356c4–357e8, Laws IV.716c1–d4; cf. particularly Aristotle, Politicus, fragment 2 = Syrianus, Commentary on Aristotle’s Metaphysics 168.33–35). In the Enneads see particularly V.5 [32] 4.13–14, where it is said that the One is “measure, and not that which is measured” (μέτρον γὰρ αὐτὸ καὶ οὐ μετρούμενον); at I.8 [51] 2.5, that it is the “measure and limit of all things” (μέτρον πάντων καὶ πέρας); and finally, at VI.8 [39] 18.3, that it is the “encompassment and measure of all things” (περίληψις πάντων καὶ μέτρον); cf. also I.6 [1] 9.21–22. The relation of all things to the One as their measure which is itself beyond measure is precisely what distinguishes the unmeasuredness of the One from the formlessness (ἀμορφία), indetermination (ἀοριστία), unmeasuredness (ἀμετρία), or unlimitedness (ἀπειρία) of lower matter (cf. Chapter Three notes 329 and 330 for references). For a later interpretation of the Principle (or God) in terms of measure (modus, mensura), see Augustine, De natura boni 3 and 22 (cf. Reale 2001, 62–68, to which I owe most of the references in this note), De Genesi ad litteram I.26 and IV.8.


77 The “all-beautiful both variegated and not variegated” (VI.7 [38] 33.11) is Nous, in which identity and difference come together (cf. VI.7 [38] 13).
In the broader context of this passage (i.e., chapters 32–33 of treatise VI.7 [38]), we see resurface the Platonic theme of the intrinsic association of the Good and Beauty as the proper intentional objects of eros (see Plato, Symposium 204c7–206a13; cf. Subsection 1.4.3). Plotinus explains this association through a detour into the formless, but in order to understand what he has in mind we must first grasp what he means by the terms “form” (μορφή or εἶδος, here used synonymously: cf. VI.7 [38] 33.30–38) and “Beauty” (κάλλος) in this context. As Hadot rightly remarks, each of these terms is used in two different senses.\(^{78}\) (i) Form in the ordinary sense is what by being superimposed on matter makes matter beautiful; as such, that which has form has it as received from elsewhere. But (ii) form in a stricter sense is what not merely has form, but what itself is form, namely Intellect. For this reason Nous is said to be both formless (in the sense that it does not have form as received from something else which is form) and form (in the sense that it itself is form) (cf. VI.7 [38] 32.35–33.7). The same applies to Beauty, which in the second or stricter acceptation refers not so much to one among the Ideas, as to the entire noetic realm.

Now, precisely qua form and Beauty in the second or stricter meaning, the hypostasis Nous is already a de-limitation of that boundless and formless power from which it springs. But this means that even Nous is formed form, yet not because like everything else it receives form from something else which is form, but because it derives it from that which is itself formless; or, in the language of measure (μέτρον) which I indicated in note 75 above, Nous owes its measure to a measure beyond measure or itself

unmeasured, namely the formless One (see VI.7 [38] 33.16–19). As we saw in Subsection 3.4.1, *Nous* constitutes itself as a full hypostasis in reverting upon itself and toward its generator; by contemplating and trying to replicate the perfect simplicity of the One in itself, *Nous* in its incipient states (i.e., Loving *Nous*) becomes the hypostasis *Nous* proper (i.e., Thinking *Nous*). Therefore, the One is also called Beauty, but in an even more peculiar expression: it is not Beauty, but Beauty beyond Beauty, and as such it is the ultimate object of *eros*. For although the soul in love is initially attracted by that which is informed by form (i.e., all beautiful things informed by *Nous* qua Beauty) and successively by that which itself is form (i.e., *Nous*), ultimately its connatural erotic movement directs it toward that which gives form while itself remaining formless (i.e., the One).

Here the formless nature of the One qua ἔρασμιώτατον also lends itself to be taken as a further reason for the priority of love over knowledge. What has form (or, as

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79 It follows that in the context of Plotinus’ metaphysics of derivation, the form and formlessness of *Nous* should also be understood as referring to the two states or stages of the second hypostasis: Loving or Pre-noetic Intellect (i.e., intelligible matter) and Thinking Intellect respectively (see pages 224–229 above; cf. Hadot 1998, 332).

80 See VI.7 [38] 32.29: κάλλος ὑπὲρ κάλλος; cf. also 33.11; in the specific expression “Beauty beyond Beauty,” the subject of the expression is Beauty as identical with the Good (for further references see Chapter Two note 47). Compare Plato, *Republic* VI.509a6–7, where the Good is called “an inconceivable beauty” (ἀμήχανον κάλλος), and provides knowledge and truth while being superior in beauty to both (ἐπιστήμην μὲν καὶ ἀλήθειαν παρέχει, αὐτὸ δ’ ὑπὲρ ταῦτα κάλλει). It may be also on the basis of these references from Plato that Plotinus identifies the Good of the *Republic* with the Beauty of the *Symposium* (see VI.7 [38] 40.26–28; cf. Hadot 1988, 336).

81 This understanding of Beauty will receive a more scholastic formulation in post-Plotinian metaphysics, for instance in Iamblichus (*Commentary on Plato’s Timaeus*, fragment 54.6–7; cf. also 50.21–22) and Proclus (*Elements of Theology* 23–24; cf. also 53), for whom every order of reality is subject to a threefold classification: (i) unparticipated (τὸ ἀμέθεκτον; i.e., in the case of Beauty, the Beauty beyond Beauty or formless Beauty of the One), (ii) participated (τὸ μετεχόμενον; i.e., the Beauty of *Nous*, or form, in which all beautiful things share), and (iii) participating (τὸ μετέχον, τὸ κατὰ μέθεξιν; i.e., the beautiful things having a share in the Beauty of *Nous*). For comments on this point see Dillon (1973, 33, 335–336); cf. IGR (III. 470–471 note 81).
we pointed out more precisely, that which is \textit{form}, namely \textit{Nous}) can certainly be known, and perfect knowledge (νόησις) is the proper way of relating to it, in the sense that \textit{Nous} itself neither exceeds nor falls short of such knowledge. (In fact, perfect knowledge takes place within \textit{Nous} as the coincidence of knower and known object: see pages 231–232 above). But one may ask: Could we not relate to \textit{Nous} through love? We certainly can insofar as \textit{Nous} is desirable qua good, or qua ἀγαθοειδής. The question, however, is not whether \textit{Nous} lends itself to be loved (for it does) but whether Intellect as such suffices to love (and this, it does not). Stated otherwise, love can be directed to \textit{Nous} and find it lovable insofar as \textit{Nous} is ἀγαθοειδής; but love will never find Intellect most lovable for one simple reason, namely because Intellect is identical with the realm of Form, while love is essentially (i.e., ultimately) directed toward the formless.

One might insist: Why love the formless? Why does form not suffice to \textit{eros}? Fundamentally, because love of all form, even love of that which is Form, is already essentially a limitation of love.\footnote{Hadot (1998, 331) aptly writes: “C’est parce que le Bien est sans form, sans mesure, sans limite, que l’amour est lui-même sans mesure et sans limite. L’infinité n’apparait pas ici comme imperfection qui résulterait de la passivité, de la privation inhérentes au désir, mais au contraire comme une énergie immense resultant de la force d’attraction infinie exercée par le Bien.”} In other words, love, in order to be infinite, must have an infinitely lovable object. More radically still, if it does not aim at that which is infinitely lovable, love itself is hardly love. That is, it is essential to the nature of love to seek what is infinitely lovable, \textit{not only because that which is infinitely lovable, in order to be loved correspondingly, must be loved infinitely, but also because love itself, in order to be truly love, must be directed to something that is infinitely lovable}. These aspects of the problem, to be sure, are the two sides of the same coin, and the Principle of
As-simulation refers as much to the transformation of the soul’s love, by which the soul becomes able to relate correspondingly to its infinitely lovable object, as it does to the soul’s discovery of the nature of the love which connaturally belongs to it (see pages 117–119 and Subsection 4.4.3). Thus, if love seeks something beyond Nous, it is because Nous itself does not suffice as the proper object of love (and if the totality of true Beings does not suffice for love, no thing will), or because by nature love aims at an object that is infinitely lovable. The infinite object of love cannot be lower matter, which in its utter indetermination is found to be, not the formless which gives form (VI.7 [38] 32.15–16), but that which by itself remains forever formless (on the knotty issue of the participation of lower matter in form, see Chapter Three note 352). Therefore, in Plotinus’ scheme this object can only be the One defined as infinite erotic δύναμις, an infinite power which as such, in turn, can be approached correspondingly not merely through love, but through a love that must itself be infinite. At this point, this conclusion should not come as a surprise, since as I suggested in Subsection 3.3.2 and further argued in Section 4.2, for Plotinus eros for the One qua infinite erotic δύναμις is the very “gift” of the Principle of all whereby the Principle comes to be qualified at the same time as the End of all.

4.3.2 Second Precondition of the Ascent:

Affinity, or the Similarity between the Soul and the One

The term “assimilation” in the sense used in the previous subsection implies a

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83 Is this circular reasoning? Without a doubt; but there is nothing wrong, in principle, with circles. In fact for Plotinus, once the One is explanatorily established as the necessary ἀρχή of all and, most importantly, of all eros, nothing less than a circle is required to account for the origin and nature of eros, for the erotic energy that springs from the One as the Principle of all is, circularly and simultaneously, the same energy that is directed to the One as the End of all.
movement, or a transformation toward that to which the soul becomes assimilated.

But in order to become assimilated to something, the soul must already be of a certain nature such that the very possibility of assimilation is opened for it. Plotinus understands this possibility in terms of likeness or affinity between the two terms of the assimilation process. In other words, assimilation is possible only on the basis of a prior similarity between that which is undergoing the change and the terminus with which it is going to be assimilated. According to Plotinus, if one fails to grant the similarity between the two terms, assimilation remains impossible. The necessity of this similarity is understood as the fundamental factor that allows for some kind of contact between two given terms, and the field to which it applies is broader than that of the Ascent. In the present subsection I will refer to this necessity as the Principle of Affinity (again, capitalized according to the directions given in Chapter Three note 10). In the context of the soul’s erotic Ascent to the One, the wider applicability of the similarity between two given terms refers

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84 IΓΑΛ (I, 98–99) calls it “principio de ‘lo semejante por lo semejante’” (cf. II.4 [12] 10.3, VI.9 [9] 11.32). See the fourth chapter of Arnou (1967, especially 147–156), who uses this principle to explain the difficult question of the immanence and transcendence of the One with respect to all reality. As with the Principle of As-similation, also the idea expressed by the Principle of Affinity both predates Plotinus and is found after him. At De anima I.405b15, Aristotle attributes this principle loosely and collectively to his philosophical predecessors and there he states it briefly: γιγνώσκεσθαι τὸ ὅμοιον τῷ ὁμοίῳ (on the previous Bekker page, at De anima I.404b13–15, as well as at Metaphysics III.1000b5–9, the principle is associated to Empedocles; see DK 31.B109; but see also Philolaus, DK 44.A29, and Democritus, DK 68.B164, all cited earlier in note 66); to limit my references to Aristotle to De anima, cf. also I.409b26–27, 410a24–25, III.427a27–28. As expected, there is frequent mention of the principle in several contexts also in Plato, if not explicitly and formally (cf. Laws IV.716c2–3), at least implicitly, for instance at Lysis 214a6 (= Homer, Odyssey XVII.218) and passim, Republic VI.490b4–5, X.611e2–3, and the references in Chapter One note 149; the principle is also assumed in Timaeus 37a2–c5 (cf. also 45b2–46c6), as Aristotle indicates at De anima I.404b17–18. Still prior to Plotinus, see also Corpus Hermeticum XI.20.12–13, while possible occurrences of the principle after Plotinus include: Porphyry, Sententiae XXV, 15.4–6; Proclus, Commentary on Plato’s Parmenides VI.1081.4–6, Commentary on Plato’s Timaeus II, 208.8–9. It can be argued that Augustine’s frequently repeated idea that we may get a glimpse of the mystery of the Trinity by appealing to “trinities” found in the human soul (animus) or mind (mens) might be inspired, in part, by the Principle of Affinity he found in his reading of the Platonists (e.g., Augustine, De Trinitate IX.2–8, X.9–18, XI.18, XIV.4–5, Confessions XIII.12, 19, De civitate Dei XI.25).
specifically to the affinity between the soul qua lover and the One qua ultimate beloved (or the presence of the One in the soul) as a precondition of the Ascent.\textsuperscript{85}

Plotinus points us to the Principle of Affinity as he draws some conclusions about the mythical figure of Eros at III.5 [50] 9.44–45: “for certainly that which is without a share in the Good would not seek the Good.”\textsuperscript{86} Among the several passages in which the principle is expressed, one in particular stands out, III.8 [30] 9.19–24. The translation of this text reads:\textsuperscript{87}


\textsuperscript{86} III.5 [50] 9.44–45: [44] οὐ γὰρ δὴ τὸ πάμπαν ἄμοιρον τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ τὸ ἀγαθὸν ἄν ποτε ζητήσειεν. ARMSTRONG’s translation, slightly adapted. Compare Plato, \textit{Philebus} 35b6–7: “Then, something in the one who is thirsty would have to possess quenching” ([6] Πληρώσεως 'ἀρα πῄ τῶν τοῦ διψῶντος ἂν ἐφάπτοιτο)–to possess (see LSJ, s.v. \textit{ἐφάπτω} II.4) it qua desideratum, that is, but to possess it nonetheless (see pages 44–45 above). It is indicative that in the broader context of this passage from the \textit{Philebus} (33c–36c) Plato makes desire depend on memory (\textit{Philebus} 35b11–c1), but shows awareness of the case of “someone who is empty for the first time” (\textit{Philebus} 35b11–c1). In her comments to the text, Frede calls this a “negligible case” (Frede 1993, 37 note 1) and denies reference to \textit{ἀνάμνησις} of a previous existence (Frede 1993, 35 note 1). The case may indeed be considered negligible and \textit{ἀνάμνησις} of a former life does not appear to be an issue in the context of the \textit{Philebus}, yet one cannot help wondering whether Plato is subtly suggesting the possibility of a different context. Pascal also comes to mind: “Console-toi, tu ne me chercherais pas, si tu ne m’avais trouvé” (\textit{Pensées} 736 [89], Brunschvicg 553 = Pascal 1954, 1313).

For, again, since knowledge of other things comes to us [20] from Intellect, and we are able to know Intellect by intellect, [21] by what sort of simple intuition could one grasp this which transcends the nature of Intellect? [22] We shall say to the person to whom we have to explain how this is possible, that it is by the [23] likeness in ourselves. For there is something of it in us too; or rather [24] there is nowhere where it is not, in the things that can participate in it.

Lines 20–21 of this passage clearly indicate that we can know Intellect only through intellect, but since the One transcends Intellect (i.e., the realm of Form or true Being with which Plotinus identifies the ὀὐσία in the expression ἐπέκεινα τῆς ὀὐσία of Republic VI.509b9), something other than Intellect is needed in order to grasp it. In this passage, the modality by which the One may be “apprehended” is what Armstrong translates as “simple intuition” (ἐπιβολή ἀθρόα). For the moment let us simply notice that the necessity of something other than intellect is required in order to grasp the One.
and is justified by recourse to the Principle of Affinity. Our immediate purpose is to indicate what the element in us is which is akin to the One and by which we are capable of coming in contact with the One.

As we already saw, for Plotinus the human being ultimately is identical with his or her soul (and within the soul, its best part: see Chapter Three note 256; cf. note 34 above), which is incorporeal, preexists the body, and is immortal (see especially treatise IV.7 [2] On the immortality of the soul). We also saw that in its incarnate state, the human soul, analogously to the World-Soul, comprises two distinct levels: the superior (i.e., rational or intellective) and the inferior (i.e., sensitive, vegetative, and sub-vegetative).89 Since for Plotinus soul qua soul (i.e., soul in its pure or unmixed state) is incorporeal, the several psychic functions or parts (i.e., the inferior level as a whole) are understood as something superadded to soul as this comes to interact with body. However, soul as such, or soul insofar as it is soul, independently of the body to which it has become attached, is ultimately identical with its higher level.

To this bare sketch, we must now add an important element, which constitutes the key to understand the affinity of the human soul with higher realities in general and with the One in particular. This element is the presence of the higher hypostases in the individual human soul, a point with which I already dealt more extensively in Subsection 3.2.4. There I remarked that the presence of higher realities in the human soul means precisely the ability of the latter to turn toward them and become assimilated with them. In the present context, this ability is grounded in the necessary affinity between the

89 See the opening pages of Subsection 3.4.2 above.
individual soul and those realities. In other words, for the soul to be able to turn toward higher hypostases and become like them, a point of contact between the two terms is needed. This was already somewhat true for Plato, who insisted on the affinity between soul and Ideas (see Chapter One note 149). Plotinus explicitly radicalizes this Platonic insight: since what is ultimate (both as Principle and as End) is not the realm of Form (i.e., Nous) but the One, if we are to become assimilated to the One there ought to be something in us which is akin to it. Thus, for Plotinus our Ascent to the One truly begins as an introspective dynamic, when we become aware of our inner affinity with the universal goal of our eros.

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90 As I argued in Chapter One (see particularly Subsection 1.5.1 and 1.5.2), the soul’s final grasp of the Good can only be hypernoetic. If I am correct in thinking this, it must be observed that unlike Plotinus, Plato did not feel the necessity to posit a supra-intellective element in the soul (cf. IGAL I, 98), although Plato’s own versions of the Principle of Affinity (see note 84 above) may be read as at least implicitly necessitating the postulation of such an element.

91 How are we to understand this affinity? The question is somewhat tricky, for if the One cannot be the object of intellection, the same may hold for whatever is akin to it in the soul. If we understand the One minimally as the unqualifiedly simple, we might say that what in the soul is akin to it ought at least to be simple. As I will argue in Subsection 4.6.3, this simplicity consists of the soul’s ability to have its eros wholly, permanently, and unswervingly directed toward the One.

92 On the importance of introspection for the Ascent, see I.6 [1] 5.5–19, and, most emphatically, the invitation at 9.7 of the same treatise: “Go back into yourself and look” (Ἀναγε ἐπὶ σαυτὸν καὶ ἴδε). At VI.5 [23] 1.16–21 Plotinus writes: “[16] but the ancient nature [ἀρχαία φύσις] and the desire [17] of the good, that is of itself [ἡ ὀρέξι τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ, ὃς ἐστιν αὐτοῦ], leads to what is really one [ἐν ὀντὶ μία]. And [18] every nature presses on to this, to itself. For this is the [19] good to this one nature, belonging to itself and being itself [τὸ εἶναι αὐτῆς καὶ εἶναι αὐτὴν]; [20] but this is being one [τὸ εἶναι μίαν]. It is in this sense that the good is rightly [21] said to be our own [οἰκεῖον]; therefore one must not seek it outside [ἐξω.].” See also I.4 [46] 11.8 and 16–17. V.9 [5] 5.31 (cf. Heraclitus: DK 22.B101 = Plutarch, Adversus Coloten 20: Moralia XIV,1118c), VI.9 [9] 2.35–36, 3.20–21, 7.16–18, 9.38–40. On this count, as on several others, Plotinus is an essential link in the tradition which goes from the Pythian γνῶθι σαυτόν through Plato (see e.g. Seven Sages: DK 10.A2 = Plato, Charmides 164d4, e7, 165a4–5, Protagoras 343b3; DK 10.A3.III.1, IV.9 = Stobaeus, Anthologiae III, 1.172) to the Augustinian homo interior (see e.g. De vera religione 39.72; cf. also Contra Academicos III.42, De ordine II.30, Soliloquia II.1, Confessions V.2, X.3) and beyond. This tradition has been masterfully reconstructed by Pierre Courcelle (1974–1975, I). Thesleff (1980, 107–108, 113) is correct to emphasize the inward tendency of Plotinus’ thought; however, I believe he overstates his case when he plays it against the upward tendency implied by the idea of Ascent; a quick look at the references in the notes throughout Subsection 4.4.2 should suffice to support my point.
Three questions will occupy us in the remainder of this subsection. First, what reason(s) do we find in Plotinus to justify the plausibility of the Principle of Affinity (at least as it is referred to the affinity between the soul qua lover and the One qua universal final cause)? Second, what is the element in us that is akin to the One? And third, how or in what sense is this element akin to the One?

The reason serving as the justification for the Principle of Affinity comprises two aspects, one that is negative and general, and another that is positive and particular. Negatively and generally, one will likely agree that a certain likeness between two given terms is necessary (if, that is, any “contact” between them is to be admitted) as soon as we think of what would happen when all similarity is denied. If two terms have absolutely nothing in common, all contact between them becomes impossible.\(^93\) However, even if this were conceded generally as a matter of principle, one might still ask: Why should I admit that the kind of similarity we just conceded is at work between the soul and the One? That is, the Principle of Affinity (i.e., the necessity of a similarity between two terms, no matter how remote, as the basis for their “interaction”) may very well be true; but why should it be true of precisely these two terms, the soul and the One? The answer to this question is the positive and particular aspect of the justification of the Principle of Affinity. It is an answer that constitutes one of the fundamental cornerstones of Plotinus’ metaphysical edifice, namely the Principle of Likeness of Cause and Effect.

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\(^93\) Let us remind ourselves that although the contact between two terms *ordinarily* implies some kind of change in *both* terms involved, in the case of the “contact” (see note 253 below for references) between the soul and the One it is only the soul that undergoes change—a change which is identical to the notion of assimilation which was introduced in the previous subsection. The One, on its part, remains completely unaffected. As we saw, this is already true of the process of derivation, where in generating, the One abides unchanged and does not get involved with derived reality (cf. also Chapter Three note 185). See also my discussion of the Principle of Participation in Section 4.5 below.
In its core, this principle states that the cause communicates something of itself to the effect. A very general formulation of the Principle of Likeness of Cause and Effect is found at IV.3 [27] 10.34–35 in the context of the discussion of the soul’s communication of life and form to lifeless and formless matter: “and this is of course common to all that exists, to bring things to likeness with themselves.”

What might appear problematic in the Principle of Likeness of Cause and Effect is that since in Plotinus’ universe there is only one source of all reality, the One, and since as it was argued in the previous chapter, this source is understood as a simple infinite erotic power, all reality should share in the same similarity with the Source. In the context of the Ascent, this means that absolutely everything should possess the ability to return to the One precisely on the basis of the similarity it bears with the Source. This is basically true, but in a highly qualified sense. First, as I shall argue more extensively in Subsection 4.4.1, it is only that which is of a certain nature and has enough strength (i.e., enough erotic power or, simply, enough eros) to turn or convert toward the Principle that can ascend to it. Secondly, even that which is capable of turning toward the Principle ought to leave behind lower commitments in order actually to ascend (this is, rephrased, the Principle of As-simulation). Thus, every soul is in principle capable of reverting toward the One, but in order to do so, it ought to free or purify itself of everything that is foreign to its nature so as to find within itself that

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95 As I indicated in Subsection 3.4.3, lower matter as such or by itself (i.e., prior to its being fashioned into sensible matter, or body, by soul) is the terminus of the process of derivation, or the point at which all eros comes to a stall; as such, it remains incapable of turning toward the One.
“element” which is most similar to the One and identify with it completely.

Now, what is the nature of this element? In order to answer this question we should return to a point on which I touch briefly at the beginning of my discussion of soul in the previous chapter (Subsection 3.4.2). There I spoke of the typically Plotinian doctrine concerning an undescended “part” of the soul which is permanently connected to higher hypostases, and to *Nous* in particular. 96 Plotinus uses several expression to name the undescended soul: he calls it the sovereign part of the soul (V.3 [49] 3.37: τὸ κύριον τῆς ψυχῆς; IV.4 [28] 18.14–15: ἡμεῖς δὲ κατὰ τὸ κύριον; cf. IV.7 [2] 1.22: Τὸ δὲ κυριώτατον καὶ αὐτὸς ὁ ἄνθρωπος97), the primary part of the soul (I.6 [53] 8.6: ψυχῆ τῇ πρώτῃ), the most divine (part) of the soul (V.3 [49] 9.1: τὸ ψυχῆς θειότατον; cf. IV.3 [27] 17.2: θειοτέρας; V.3 [49] 8.48: θεοειδῆ),98 the best (part) of the soul (V.3 [49] 4.13: τὸ τῆς ψυχῆς ἄμεινον; V.9 [5] 1.12: τὸ τῆς ψυχῆς κρείττων; IV.8 [6] 8.4: τὸ τῆς φύσεως ἄριστον, τῷ ἀρίστῳ αὐτοῦ), the superior (part) of the soul (IV.8 [6] 8.4: τὸ

96 See Chapter Three note 257 for references to the doctrine of an undescended part of soul in the *Enneads*. Later Neoplatonists will be divided on the issue; for instance, Theodorus of Asine will endorse it (so also Damascius, *De principiis* 400, II.254.3–7), while Iamblichus and Proclus will reject it (see Proclus, *Commentary on Plato’s Timaeus* III, 333.28–334.28; cf. also *Elements of Theology* 211); see further references in Dodds (1963, 309). For what concerns Plotinus, I think it is reasonable to see a connection between the concept of an undescended part of the soul permanently abiding in *Nous* and the controversial notion of Ideas or Forms of individuals, on which see Subsection 4.4.1 below.


98 The undescended (part of the) soul is very likely what Plotinus was referring to with the expression “τὸ ἐν ἡμῖν θεῖον” (accepting the reading of HS1 and Brisson et al. 1992, as against τὸν ἐν ὑμῖν θεῖον of HS2), which according to Porphyry’s report in VP 2.26–27 was part of the last words that the dying Plotinus uttered to Eustochius: “Try to bring back the divine in you to the divine in the All” (ARMSTRONG’s translation, modified to fit the reading I follow). Cf. D’Ancona Costa (2002).
τῆς ψυχῆς ἄνω\(^{99}\), the intellect of the soul (V.3 [49] 2.14: νοῦς ὁ τῆς ψυχῆς), or intellect in us (V.1 [10] 11.6: νοῦν ἐν ἡμῖν; cf. also III.4 [15] 3.25: μένομεν τὸ μὲν ἄλλο παντὶ νοητῷ ἐν ἡμῖν), or the soul which is about Nous (at I.4 [46] 10.4: ἡ ψυχή περὶ αὐτῶν; \(^{100}\) cf. V.3 [49] 8.49: νοοειδῆ). We can think of the undescended soul as of an ideal self of which we, in our embodied or empirical self, are aware only intermittently, if at all.\(^{101}\)

The intermediate goals of the work of the embodied individual soul in its process of ascent toward the One are, first, to become pure (καθαρά, ἀκήρατος) soul\(^{102}\) by leaving behind everything that hinders its assimilation to higher realities, and then to identify itself completely with its undescended part in Nous.\(^{103}\)

However, to stop at the general notion of an undescended soul permanently abiding in the noetic realm will not suffice as an answer to the question concerning the nature of our higher element, for as I mentioned in Section 4.2 and we will see in Subsection 4.6.3, the end of the Ascent is not Nous but the One. It follows that if assimilation to the One is to be possible, in keeping with the Principle of Affinity there ought to be something, either above the undescended soul or in it as its uppermost “part,” “element,” or “aspect,”\(^{104}\) which bears some resemblance not only to Nous, but to the

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\(^{99}\) This should not be confused with the superior or higher soul as referring to the Soul-Hypostasis (see Chapter Three note 240).

\(^{100}\) Cf. McGroarty (2006, 152).


\(^{104}\) As I already pointed out with regard to the process of derivation (Chapter Three note 5), so also in the
One itself; in Plotinus’ own words: “something of the One which the soul has within itself” (VI.7 [38] 31.8: ἐν αὐτῇ ἔχουσά τι αὐτοῦ) or “that which in us is similar to it” (III.8 [30] 9.22–23: τῷ ἐν ἡμῖν ὁμοίῳ), “the power in oneself akin to that which comes from the One” (VI.9 [9] 4.27–28: τῷ ἐν αὐτῷ δυνάμει συγγενεῖ τῷ ἀπ’ αὐτοῦ), “the god who is in each one of us one and the same” (VI.5 [23] 1.3–4: τὸν ἐν ἑαυτῷ ἡμῶν θεὸν ὃς ἕνα καὶ τὸν αὐτόν), or, simply, “what is akin to the One” (VI.9 [9] 8.29: τῷ συγγενεῖ).

All these descriptions confirm Plotinus’ commitment to the Principle of Affinity, but tell us little about the nature of this finest element in us. Plotinus is somewhat more explicit in other passages. To begin, he designates this element with several expressions, all of which point at its privileged status in Plotinian psychology. For example, in the chapter following the passage cited earlier on page 336 Plotinus refers to it as “the inside of oneself” (ἐντὸς αὐτοῦ: III.8 [30] 10.33). More in keeping with the theme of the kinship of this element with the One, he describes it with some of the images already employed to talk about the One, such as “origin” (see Chapter Three note 9) and “center” (see note 59 above, and Chapter Three note 78); thus, at VI.9 [9] 3.20–21 he calls this element “the origin in oneself” (τὴν ἐν ἑαυτῷ ἀρχήν; cf. also VI.9 [9] 11.31–32), and at VI.9 [9] 8.19–20 he speaks of it as “one’s center” (τὸ ἑαυτῶν κέντρον; see also VI.9 [9] 10.17, V.1 [10] 11.10–14). Moreover, since this element of the soul can only be the best aspect of its best part, and the soul’s best part is its rational part, elsewhere Plotinus shifts his descriptive focus to its noetic dimension and calls this element “pure intellect” or “the primary part of intellect” (VI.9 [9] 3.26, 27: καθαρῷ τῷ νῷ, τοῦ νοοῦ τῶν πρῶτων). But such present context all such terms as “above,” “in,” “beyond,” “level,” “part,” and so forth, are not to be understood spatially.
qualifications as “pure” and “primary” already point to the idea that the relation of our best element to the noetic realm implies a significant difference from Intellect. This difference consists not only of the fact that our best element, being an element of our intellect, is not strictly identical with the hypostasis Nous; what is more essential here is that the primary part of intellect implies at the same time a transcendence of the noetic altogether. In order to express this, Plotinus, as he habitually does when he speaks about the One (see Subsection 3.2.2), employs the language of both negation and transcendence. Thus, he refers to the best element of the rational part of the soul as “that of it which is not intellect” (V.5 [32] 8.22–23: τῷ ἑαυτοῦ μὴ νῷ), and “the origin, cause, and god of Intellect [...] in us” (V.1 [10] 11.6–7: ἐν ἡμῖν [...] τὴν νοῦ ἀρχὴν καὶ αἰτίαν καὶ θεόν). 105

But it is perhaps in the treatise On free will and the will of the One (VI.8 [39]) that we find the most extensive positive description of what from now on we may refer to as the center of the soul. Here is what Plotinus writes at VI.8 [39] 15.14–23: 106

105 One will notice that in all the references given in the last paragraph the best element of the (undescended) soul is described either in terms of negation or of transcendence. Far from being a problem for Plotinus, this simply points to the fact that the term of comparison of this highest element (i.e., the One) is itself ultimately ineffable (see Subsection 3.2.2). The similarity between the One and this highest element of the soul is not a purely verbal matter: the type of language used to describe these realities is due to their nature, or that factor which makes them similar and allows for the possibility of assimilation of the soul to the One. This nature, I maintain, can be positively, if tentatively, described in two ways: as unity and as love. Thus, the best aspect of the best element in us is where our eros is simplest (i.e., most focused). Here again Plotinus may be the indirect source of Augustine’s notion of the “acies mentis” (e.g., De Trinitate II.1, XI.11, XII.23, De Genesi ad litteram IV.25, De vera religione 3.4, De libero arbitrio II.36, Sermones 4.7, Enarrationes in Psalmos 150.1) or “acies animi” (De Trinitate II.1); cf. also the references in Chapter Two note 105 above.

if we ever see in ourselves a nature of this kind which has nothing of the other things which are attached to us by which we have to experience whatever happens by chance—[17] for all the other things which belong to us are enslaved to and exposed to chances and come to us in a way by chance, but this alone has self-mastery and self-determination by the activity of a light that has the form of the Good and is itself good, [20] and greater than that which belongs to Intellect, having its transcendence of Intellect not as something brought in from the outside; surely, when we ascend to this and become this alone and let the rest go, what can we say of it except that we are more than free and more than self-determined?

The context of the discussion is that of the freedom of the One, or rather, of its spontaneous self-positing in which freedom and necessity coincide (cf. pages 202–204 and 189–191 above). What I believe can be safely inferred from this passage about the nature of the similarity between the One and the best element in us is that the affinity of these two poles should be understood in terms of self-determination (τὸ αὐτεξούσιον), which for the soul follows directly from the activity (ἐνεργείᾳ) of its best element. This kind of self-determination is analogous to the freedom or spontaneous self-positing of the One, which I referred to as henologic freedom (see Chapter Three, page 190 and note 161). As I observed there, what constitutes the essential feature of henologic freedom is the total absence of distance between what the One is and that which it desires: a complete identity justifying the description of the One as simultaneously beloved, love, and love of itself (VI.8 [29] 15.1).

αὐτεξούσιον; The translation in the main text is by ARMSTRONG, with minor changes; the emphasis in the translation is mine.

107 See again Plato, Republic VI.509a3.


109 See Leroux (1990, 257–258) for some helpful comments on the meaning of the term αὐτεξούσιον.
Now, if the interpretation I just sketched in the previous paragraph is correct, the affinity between our best element and the One lies in the very possibility we have to identify ourselves with what is best in us, our ideal self. In this identification the gap between what we are (or what we have finally become) and what we desire has been reduced to a minimum;\textsuperscript{110} everything spurious has been left behind and does not determine our identity anymore, for we no longer desire it: we are no longer erotically committed to it. This identification of the soul with its finest element is a fundamental and unconditional “yes” that the soul says to what it has become. The soul is, in its purity, this “yes”: an \textit{eros} gathered unto itself, no longer scattered into a multiplicity of (often competing) directions and trajectories, but fully focused on the One as that which, being most worthy of love, in the end is \textit{actually} most loved (\textit{ἐρασμιώτατον}).

But in its embodied condition the soul is far from pure. Identification with its best element is real, but partial, and much needs to done if the soul is to reintegrate the \textit{eros} invested into all its lower commitments in its one true nature. This work of reintegration is what I referred to as the Ascent, which will be the direct focus of the rest of this chapter.

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In bringing this section to a close, let it be noticed that the second precondition of the Ascent (i.e., affinity between the One and soul) is prior to the first (i.e., assimilation of the soul to the One) only when we look at both conditions from the perspective of the

\textsuperscript{110}I speak of “a minimum” rather than of “nothing” because I maintain that for Plotinus even one’s identification with one’s best element is still not an unqualified identification with the One (i.e., an annihilation of the individual soul). I will have the occasion to comment further on this point in Subsection 4.6.3 as I deal with the issue of the soul’s union with the One.
ascending soul. The priority becomes at least blurred, however, if we consider that the incipient stage of the generation of a lower hypostasis from a higher one is that in which the generated is not only most akin to its generator but also already most assimilated to it. Perhaps it will be better to say that affinity and assimilation are mutually implicating, for if on the one hand it is true that assimilation of a lower term to a higher one depends on a prior affinity between two terms, on the other, the affinity of the two terms is either \( \textit{de facto} \) the most intense assimilation possible of the lower to the higher (e.g., of pre-hypostatic noetic matter to the One, or again, of pre-hypostatic psychic matter to \( \textit{Nous} \); cf. Table 4 above), or else it is \textit{already for the sake of} a more intense assimilation (thus, awareness of the affinity of the best element of a yet unpurified, or partially purified soul with higher realities already points to the task of perfecting its still partial assimilation to them).

\subsection*{4.4 Three General Observations on the Ascent and Its Relation to \textit{Eros}}

I will offer my account of the stages of the Ascent in Section 4.6. At this point, that account has already been prefaced by a clarification of the final destination of the ascent journey in Section 4.2 (i.e., the One as \( \textit{ἐρασμωτατον} \) or universal final cause), and, in the previous section, by an overview of the necessity of the assimilation of soul to the One (Subsection 4.3.1) and of the affinity of these two terms (4.3.2) as the reciprocally implicating preconditions of the Ascent. To all this I shall add the following: in this section, three general points about the Ascent and its relation to \textit{eros}; in the next section, some remarks on four features that are common to all the stages of the Ascent. The material of the present section is so divided: first, some important observations about
what we might loosely call the “subject” of the Ascent, namely the individual rational soul of a human being (Subsection 4.4.1); second, a word on Plotinus’ terminology of ascent, including the clarification of the notion of flight or escape (φυγή) and of an ambiguity concerning the term ἐπιστροφή (4.4.2); and third, an observation about the difference between eros as one of the possible paths of the Ascent, and eros as the fundamental regulative concept of all movement of ascent toward the One (4.4.3).

4.4.1 The “Subject” of the Ascent: The Individual Rational Soul
(with Some General Remarks on the Issue of Forms of Individuals)

Let us begin with the fundamental issue of the “subject” of the Ascent. So far, both in this chapter and in Chapter Two, I have been speaking generally of soul as that which ascends. This way of speaking needs to be made more precise. We can ask the question simply: Who or what ascends? That is, who or what undergoes the process of gradual transformation and assimilation to higher realities? Can a rock, an oak tree, or a trout ascend and thus be assimilated to the One? Or is the Ascent a prerogative of a human being? Can daimons and heroes ascend? And what about such higher realities as the World-Soul, the Soul-Hypostasis, and Nous: do they ascend? Does the whole of reality ultimately undergo a process of assimilation to its source, the One? I take it that Plotinus’ answer to these questions is unambiguous, but, as we shall see presently, not free of interpretive difficulties. This answer is that it is the human soul (by which I mean individual, or particular, rational soul belonging to a human being), and only the human soul, which is capable of Ascent. ¹¹¹ Neither what is below this kind of soul in the

¹¹¹ As Lloyd (1990, 123–124) argues, this answer applies not only to Plotinus, but to the Neoplatonic tradition as a whole. Ousager (2004, 33) cites I.3 [20] 1.1–18 as evidence of the fact that only human
metaphysical hierarchy (i.e., body and lower matter) nor what is above it (i.e.,
Intellect and, in a more qualified way, the World-Soul and the Soul-Hypostasis) do or can
ascend. From this point on, when I use the expressions “soul,” “individual soul,” and
“individual rational soul,” I will mean generally the soul of a human being.

To my knowledge, Plotinus never offers an extensive and explicit statement of
what I take to be his position on this issue and of the reasons undergirding it, but I believe
that it is possible to infer that this is in fact his position from some of the main tenets of
his metaphysics outlined in the previous chapter. In the first place, plants and lower
animals, while undeniably alive (i.e., possessed by soul), are incapable to ascend simply
because, despite being particular expressions of soul at the sensible level, they lack
reason and with it, I surmise, the highest element of the soul with which to identify in
order to ascend. In fact, we could say that to be a plant or a lower animal means to be
fully identified with the lower functions or aspects that characterize embodied souls (i.e.,
vegetation and sensation). In the language of eros, for all we can tell, a plant and an
animal do not possess that particular kind of eros which is βούλησις or rational desire,¹¹²

¹¹² See Chapter Two note 107; cf. also pages 74–77. This does not mean that plants and lower animals do
not desire the One, since as I already pointed out, for Plotinus it is plain that all reality seeks it (see
references in notes 4 and 5 above). However, they desire it in an unreflective manner at their proper level
of existence (i.e., vegetative life for plants, and vegetative plus sensitive life for lower animals), without
being capable of reflectively rising above this level. As Plotinus argues, everything seeks the One and
tries to attain it as far as its natural capacity allows (II.9 [33] 2.4, 3.3, 9.50, VI.5 [23] 11.29–30, VI.2 [43]
11.21, 27–32, VI.4 [22] 5.9–11, 8.38–40, 11.3–8, 15.1–6). That participation occurs in accordance with
the ability of any given thing is true of all participation of lower in higher reality (e.g., of soul in Nous at
I.8 [51] 2.20–21; of soul in the One at VI.7 [38] 31.7; of bodies in beauty through soul at I.6 [1] 6.30–32.
1.26, V.6 [24] 6.35). For a clear treatment of the Plotinian axiom that each thing receives whatever is
capable of receiving (or that each thing participates in something according to its capability) see Pradeau
and thus their way of being lacks the projection toward the assimilation to higher realities which is proper of an individual rational soul. This is *a fortiori* true of lower matter, which by itself not only lacks any psychic function, but is also utterly devoid of all erotic power of reversion toward higher realities.

The cases of the World-Soul and of the Soul-Hypostasis are different, since neither is descended, fallen, or otherwise inclined to identify itself with body (or with the activity of caring for the body): the latter, because it is thoroughly disembodied and never turned toward the sensible;\(^{113}\) the former, because while itself a particular embodied soul (cf. Chapter Two note 83), it remains in complete control of the body to which it is permanently united\(^ {114}\) (see Chapter Three notes 287 and 348).\(^{115}\) In both cases, their *eros* is constantly directed toward the noetic realm, and so for them there is no Ascent understood as the active transformation or assimilation into a higher hypostasis.\(^{116}\) As for Intellect, not only did it never “descend,” but the self-contained immutability that is proper to its nature, along with the fulfilled character of its *eros*, are intrinsically at

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\(^{113}\) On the issue of the Form or Idea of soul (αὐτοψυχή) see Chapter Three note 262.

\(^{114}\) This applies also to the souls of the gods and of the heavenly bodies (see Chapter Three note 349). On gods, *daimons*, and heroes see Lloyd (1990, 126).

\(^{115}\) A question may be raised about the fact that World-Soul, like individual human souls, has a higher part (i.e., its intellect, represented by Zeus: see pages 129, 239–240). If the individual human soul ascends to its higher part, why doesn’t the World-Soul also do that, since it, too, has a higher part? I think the basic answer to this question is that if the World-Soul were to retreat completely from the sensible, this would remain soulless, devoid of Providence. As I argued in Subsection 3.4.2, the specific *eros* of the World-Soul necessarily includes the care and in-formation of the sensible universe (cf. III.7 [45] 12, 13.29–30, IV.8 [6] 7.23–32).

\(^{116}\) I take it that the term ἀναβαίνειν (to ascend) at IV.7 [2] 12.8 in reference to the World-Soul (and the human soul) does not have the quasi-technical sense of Ascent as assimilation to the One, but it simply means the ability to envisage the One qua Principle and to be connected to it.
variance with the concept of Ascent (cf. IV.7 [2] 13.2–4, IV.3 [27] 13.22–23). In other words, Nous, in order to be Nous, ought to be such a determined entity, immutable in its kind: fulfilled desire that swings in neither direction of the metaphysical hierarchy (see pages 232–233). In different ways, this is also true of lower matter, of bodies, of the World-Soul, and of the Soul-Hypostasis, in the sense that none of them can leave its proper level of reality without ceasing to be the kind of thing it is.

By contrast, the individual rational soul can be conceived of as a fluid entity, one which is capable to move across the hierarchical layers of Plotinus’ metaphysics without losing its proper nature, that is, without becoming something other than an individual rational soul. Thus, an individual rational soul does not cease to be what it is when it is engaged in the information of the body to which it is united; likewise, it is still an individual rational soul when it turns its attention to the realm of Nous and dianoetically contemplates its contents; and as I will argue in Subsection 4.6.3, it will still be an individual soul even if it will succeed in moving beyond Intellect to be erotically assimilated to the One qua universal End and Principle. In short, none of the entities that we encounter in the Plotinian universe can ascend (in the strong sense of becoming assimilated to the One) and still be the kind of thing it is, except an individual rational soul, the soul of a human being.\(^{117}\)

A solution of this kind, even if plausible is not free of difficulty. The core of the

\(^{117}\) Lloyd (1990, 125) argues that there is no full answer as to why the human soul has “this apparently unique privilege” in Neoplatonism. I hope that the reasons I have sketched in the last three paragraphs might provide at least a feasible starting point for a less partial answer. To these reasons, Lloyd (1990, 125–126) adds a very important one, namely personal experience. I already cited Plotinus’ poignant statement in this regard in note 72 above: “Anyone who has seen it knows what I mean…” (I.6 [1] 7.2). As for Plotinus’ own experience, see VP 23.17–19.
difficulty (and of the scholarly controversy surrounding it), lies, I believe, in Plotinus’ understanding of individuality. The issue comprises at least two interconnected questions: First, what is that makes an individual (τὸ καθέκαστον, τὸ καθ’ ἕκαστον)\textsuperscript{118} an individual? In other words, what is the Plotinian principle of individuation?\textsuperscript{119} Second, based on the answer given to the first question, who or what can be an individual in Plotinus’ universe? The issue is as thorny as the question concerning the status of lower matter, both for a certain reticence on the topic in the Enneads\textsuperscript{120} and for the difficulty of systematically integrating it with the other elements of Plotinus’ metaphysics, as well as for a lack of substantial agreement among Plotinus scholars concerning the answers to be given to the two questions I just asked—a lack of agreement which, once again, suggests that we may be in the presence of an impasse in Plotinus’ system.\textsuperscript{121} For these reasons, I

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{118} Τὸ καθέκαστον and τὸ καθ’ ἕκαστον (also used in the plural and adverbially) are the standard expressions to indicate what is taken individually, the individual or the particular: see SP, s.v. καθέκαστα and καθ’ ἕκαστα. Another term sometimes used to designate the individual as contrasted with the species (εἴδος) is ἄτομον: see VI.2 [43] 2.8, 13, 33, 22.12, VI.3 [44] 1.15, 9.37, VI.7 [38] 17.22. Cf. Tornau (2009, 339 note 1) for further references and terminological observations.
\item \textsuperscript{119} Put in the terms of the principium individuationis (or principium individui) the question will be elaborated explicitly only later in the history of Western philosophy (e.g., in the Middle Ages, cf. Thomas Aquinas, Scriptum super Sententis I.d25.q1.a1.arg6, IV.d11.q1.a3.qc1, IV.d12.q1.a1.qc3.ad3; in modernity, cf. Leibniz, Disputatio metaphysica de principio individui of 1663 = Leibniz 1875–1890, IV, 15–26; see also Leibniz, New Essays on Human Understanding II.27 = Leibniz 1875–1890, V, 213–214). This does not mean that the concept of a principle of individuation is absent in Plotinus, although the background of the question and the answer given to it differ.
\item \textsuperscript{120} Cf. Bréhier (1924–1938, V, 122). F. Ferrari (1997, 37, 46, 60–61; 1998, 629–631, 652–653) rightly insists that V.7 [18], the treatise on whether there are Forms of individuals, should not be read as an organic discussion of such Forms, but rather as a quaestio whose purpose is to present some of the difficulties (and some tentative solutions) by which Plotinus’ system is faced once we accept the hypothesis of the existence of Forms of individuals (so also Tornau 2009, 337 note 1).
\item \textsuperscript{121} Obviously, whether the problems related to the issue of individuality are a consequence of a merely exegetical difficulty may be established only after the difficulty itself has been removed through a persuasive reading of the text of the Enneads (most notably of V.7 [18], V.9 [5] 12, and VI.5 [23] 8; cf. note 130 below for further references). Until this is done, the issue itself may have to be taken as another genuinely philosophical impasse of Plotinian metaphysics (along with the one concerning the status of lower matter: see Subsection 3.4.3). So far, I have been unable to find a satisfactory and widely shared
\end{itemize}
will limit my account to a bare sketch of the problem, providing the basic tenets of my (rather tentative) position in the main text and confining some of the controversial points to the footnotes.

In Plotinian scholarship, traditionally the issue of individuality has been discussed under the heading of “Forms of individuals.” O’Meara sharply remarks that “the question whether or not there are Forms of individuals must seem to the Platonist about as valid as the question whether or not there are square circles.” This is so because normally the role of Forms is minimally understood to be that of providing an explanation for whatever is taken to be identical (and thus referred to with the same name) in a plurality of different individuals (cf. Plato, Republic X.596a6–7). Thus,

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123 O’Meara (1999c, 263).

124 According to Aristotle a Platonic Form is, in his own expression, a “one-over-many” (ἐν ἕπι πολλοῖς: On Ideas, fragment 3 = Alexander of Aphrodisias, Commentary on Aristotle’s Metaphysics 80.14; ἐν ἕπι πολλῶν: Metaphysics VII.1040b29), namely an Aristotelian universal (τὸ καθόλου; see De interpretatione 17a39–40, Posterior Analytics II.100a6–7; cf. also Metaphysics III.1003a11, V.1023b29–32, VII.1038b16, 1040b25–30, Eudemian Ethics 1.1218a7). D’Ancona Costa (2002, 533–541, especially 530–541) emphasizes this key feature of Forms in Platonism as one of the fundamental difficulties in dealing with the question of Forms of individuals in Plotinus. The question remains as to whether Platonic Forms should in fact be considered identical with Aristotelian universals. For a negative answer to this question as implicitly operative in the broader context of Plato’s Parmenides 131e8–132b2, see M.
Gerson points out that according to this general view “Forms may themselves be individuals” (by which I take him to mean relative unities more than numerically distinct from other relative unities, given that the only absolute unity is the One), “but they are not of individuals.”

This view notwithstanding, the issue of whether or not there are Forms of individuals has a long history antedating Plotinus. What might have led some Platonists to consider the possibility of postulating Forms of individuals is the Aristotelian criticism of the (Platonic) argument that to establish the existence of Forms or Ideas from thinking (νοεῖν)—i.e., from the fact that the thought of a particular thing remains even when that thing has perished—will lead to postulate Forms of both particular (καθ’ ἕκαστα) and perishable (φθαρτά) things, such as Socrates and Plato.

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125 Gerson (1994, 72). As Gerson (1994, 76–77 and 278 note 24) explains, the main difference between Forms of individuals and other Forms is that while the latter (e.g., the Form of man) stand in a one-many relation (in the sense that the same Form of man applies simultaneously to both Socrates and Plato; see previous note), Forms of individuals stand in a one-one relation (in the sense that what we have come to call the Form of Socrates applies only to one embodied individual at a time, although it may apply to other embodied individuals, e.g., Pythagoras, at other times: see Plotinus V.7 [18] 1). On this view, Plotinus alludes to the doctrine of metempsychosis, whereby what he calls “an absolute Socrates” (V.7 [18] 1.4: Αὐτοσωκράτης is capable of becoming instantiated in different people (i.e., different embodied individuals) at different times, although only one at any given time (V.7 [18] 1). Plotinus’ support of the traditional Platonic doctrine of reincarnation can be inferred from several passages, (see for instance III.2 [47] 13.14–17, III.3 [48] 4.34–44, III.4 [15] 2, IV.3 [27] 8.50–60, 25.1–5, IV.7 [2] 14, IV.8 [6] 1, V.7 [18] 1, VI.7 [38] 6.21–36); cf. Rich (1957). He is aware, however, of the problem of admitting the reincarnation of the soul of a human being into a lower animal and even a plant, although he does not seem openly to deny it (cf. III.4 [15] 2.17–30, VI.7 [38] 6.21–23, 33–36); see Cole (1992). For a view denying that Plotinus endorsed the doctrine of metempsychosis, see Mamo (1969, 93–95), followed on this point by Vassilopoulou (2006, 375).


127 See Aristotle, On Ideas, fragment 3 (= Alexander of Aphrodisias, Commentary on Aristotle’s Metaphysics 81.25–82.7); cf. Metaphysics I.990b14. However, notice that the notion of something analogous to Forms of individuals might have been envisioned even by Aristotle (see Metaphysics XII.1071a26–29). Aristotelian passages that may point at Forms of individuals include: De anima
Thus, Platonists supporting the existence of Forms of individuals might have articulated their support for such a view as a consequence of this criticism by Aristotle (arguably stressing the “particular” and downplaying the “perishable” in the criticism), while those who opposed it would have had to make the initial Platonic argument in favor of Forms stronger, find a flaw in Aristotle’s criticism, or both.\(^\text{128}\)

Now, it appears that in contrast with most of his Platonic predecessors,\(^\text{129}\) Plotinus did think that there were Forms of individuals.\(^\text{130}\) The reason for this, other than that he

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\(^{128}\) For a rebuttal of Aristotle’s criticism, arguing for an equivocal use of the term νοεῖν in fragment 3 of *On Ideas*, see Gerson (1994, 73).


\(^{130}\) As I mentioned earlier, the texts in which the issue of Forms of individuals emerges explicitly are V.7 [18], V.9 [5] 12, and VI.5 [23] 8 (particularly lines 22–46). Other texts may include IV.3 [27] 5 (especially lines 8–11) and 6.15–17, VI.2 [43] 22.11–17, VI.4 [22] 14.17–31, VI.5 [23] 7, VI.7 [38] 8.1–5, 9.20–46, 11.14–15. Scholarly opinion is not unanimous about the import of the second set of passages, and even about the first set there is no agreement as to whether Plotinus always thought that there were in fact Forms of individuals. Most scholars now tend to favor a positive answer (although disagreeing as to the precise status of such “Forms”); on this point, see the fruitful debate between Rist (1963; 1970a) and Blumenthal (1966; 1971; 112–133). What follows in this note is only a rough outline of some of the major views in the debate about the issue.


(ii) D’Ancona Costa (2002, especially 559–561) argues for the view that what individualizes Socrates
was very likely aware of Aristotle’s criticism, which reasonably he might have wanted to counter, is that within his system the principle of individuation cannot be matter, since individuation is a kind of determination, while matter is not only free of all determination but is itself the principle of indetermination and privation of form. As such, matter is naturally incapable of serving as a determining or in-forming factor in any way.\footnote{For this reason, according to Plotinus all that matter can “contribute” are either types of privation, such as things which originate from putrefaction, savage beasts, dirt, and mud (V.9 [5] 14.7–11), or evils (I.8 [51] 1.11–12, V.9 [5] 10.17–20), both of which find no place in the intelligible world (see Blumenthal 1971, 113–114; Gerson 1994, 115; Gatti 1996, 159; O’Meara 1999c, 267; Reale 2004, VIII, 101; Aubry 2008, 283). Plotinus does recognize that there are some physical differences that may appear problematic, such as: (i) the difference between a snub nose and an aquiline nose (V.9 [5] 12.5–8); (ii)…} If this is correct, it must follow that the principle of individuation, if we are to is certainly an intelligible principle, but this is his undescended soul, not a Form, since a fundamental feature of Forms accepted by Plotinus is that they act causally as a “one over many” (see note 124 above), that is, they are those features which their particular participants only have. This implies that in the intelligible realm there are both Forms and souls. Unlike some authors gathered under (i) above, who tend to blur the distinction between souls and Forms in the intelligible to varying degrees (e.g., Kalligas 1997, 220, who speaks of “soul-forms”; cf. note 135 below), D’Ancona Costa seems to maintain a sharper distinction between the two entities.

(iii) Aubry (2008, especially 275–281) also favors the individual’s presence in the intelligible and agrees that for Plotinus individuality is determined by an intelligible principle, but, based on a reading of II.6 [17], the treatise chronologically prior to the one about Forms of individuals (V.7 [18]), she argues that this principle is not a Form but a λόγος, that is to say, the expression of a superior reality at a lower hypostatic level (cf. Ferrari 1997, 51), or as Aubry herself puts it, “la forme formatrice par l’intermédiaire de laquelle l’âme va déployer dans le sensible la Forme intelligible qu’elle contemple. À l’âme, ou l’intellect, individuell, s’ajoute donc le logos qui contient les caractéristiques de la Forme de l’Homme (plutôt que du démon, de l’animal \textit{etc})” (Aubry 2008, 276).


(v) Reale (2004, VIII, 101) claims that the view according to which Plotinus endorsed the existence of Forms of individual is “molto equivoco, dato che a Plotino manca proprio il concetto di individuo come singolarità irripetibile.” Along the same lines, Gatti (1998, 161) stresses the aporetic character of Plotinus’ position on the issue. For an earlier, different critique see Capone Braga (1954, 161–163).

(vi) Chiaramonna (2008, 284–286), echoed by Tornau (2009, 338 note 3) and against D’Ancona Costa (2002; see also other references in Chiaramonna), remarks that Plotinus’ purpose in speaking of Forms of individuals is not so much to establish an intelligible foundation of individuality, as to guarantee the possibility of Ascent for individual souls (see note 133 below). According to Chiaramonna (2008, 285–286), the issue of individuality was of little interest to Plotinus.

(vii) Heinemann (1921) goes so far as to consider treatise V.7 [18] spurious.

(viii) Vassilopoulos (2006) argues that Plotinus never postulated (and never needed to postulate) the existence of Forms of individuals.
admit that there are individuals at all, is to be “situated” in the intelligible realm.

In other words, at least for each human being (and arguably only for a human being), that

the difference between two aquiline noses belonging to two different individuals (V.9 [5] 12.8–9), or again between certain colors, as the differing hues of the skin of the hands and feet of the same individual, as well as the hues of the skin of two like-skinned individuals respectively living in Iceland and Sicily (V.9 [5] 12.9–11, VI.4 [22] 1.23–26; cf. Schniewind 1988, 200); (iii) the merely numerical distinction of two or more (at least apparently indistinguishable) bits of fire participating in the same Form of Fire (VI.5 [23] 8.39–46). The recognition of such differences certainly does not prove that matter contributes to individuation in the first case, (i), for it is still the Form of man that determines the snub and aquiline shape of the noses of different individuals as two specific differences (διαφοραὶ ἐν εἴδει) belonging to that Form, as Plotinus himself points out at V.9 [5] 12.6–8. The same holds for the third case, (iii), since two bits of fire are simply a case of separate instantiations of the same Form—the Form of Fire—differing solo numero. However, the question remains as to whether it may be precisely multiple instantiation that constitutes individuality in the case of particulars participating in the same Form. In fact, to say that there is no need to postulate a different Form for individual bits of fire is different than saying that these individual bits of fire are not individual bits of fire; that is, their individuality or particularity is hardly explained by mere reference to a common Form. But in this case one would have to admit that it may be that accounts for individuality, although still not for formal determination (which is precisely what is at issue here). The same reasoning may apply to the second case, (ii), with the addition that here Plotinus explicitly admits that the differences are due to matter or place (V.9 [5] 12.8–11). However, as Tornau (2009, 340 note 1) observes, in V.7 [18] (especially 1.18–23, 2.13–18, and 3.13–17), Plotinus grounds even purely material differences in principles called λόγοι, whose foundation is the intelligible realm of Forms (contrast Aubry’s position in note 130 (iii); cf. Plotinus V.9 [5] 3.30–37). Perhaps we may say that for Plotinus, if the differences mentioned in the three cases presented above are all that distinguish the things listed in those cases, then there is no necessity to postulate Forms of individuals. Put positively, it seems that for Plotinus Forms of individuals are needed to account for differences that are more than (i) specific differences of the same εἶδος, (ii) due only to matter or place, or (iii) merely numerical, although I believe that cases (ii) and (iii) remain somewhat problematic. According to O’Meara (1999c, 267), at V.9 [5] 10.1–2 Plotinus explicitly provides the formula that regulates the casuistry concerning Forms of individuals: “[1] All things, then, which exist as forms in the world of sense come [2] from that intelligible world; those which do not, do not” ([1] ὅσα μὲν οὖν ὡς εἴδη ἐν τῷ αἰσθητῷ ἐστι, ταῦτα [2] ἐκεῖθεν· ὅσα δὲ μὴ, οὐ). A parallel of this formula is found at VI.7 [38] 11.3–4, as O’Meara also suggests.

It is obvious that if by individuality one means indivisibility or utter simplicity, the only possible individual in Plotinus’ system will be the One, and human individuality will be only a likeness of it. This is the position of Ousager (2004, 15–119), which I will briefly discuss in Subsection 4.6.3.

But see the position of Chiaradonna (2008, 284–286) mentioned in note 130 (vi) above. For this author, Plotinus is not interested in establishing a principle of (human) individuality, but simply in providing a theoretical reason for the Ascent. F. Ferrari (1997, 38) already pointed out this reason (found the Enneads at V.7 [18] 1.1–3) for Plotinus’ discussion of the issue of Forms of individuals. To this reason, Ferrrari adds two more. One, which he calls “macrosistematica,” is the fact that to deprive individuals of all intelligible content (and/or to assume that individuals of the same species have the same intelligible content; cf. Gerson 1994, 74) would mean to diminish the instrumental causality of Intellect and, consequently, of the One. Another reason emerges in the context of the quarrel with the Gnostics, for whom all that is sensible is evil; for Plotinus, by contrast, sensible beings—and a fortiori rational individuals—are expressions of the intelligible.
is, for a sensible individual endowed with intellect, there is one Form, which as such
is “located” in Intellect as an integral member of Intellect. 134

If this is how matters stand, it would not seem unreasonable to identify the Form
of an individual human being with the undescended (part of the) soul of the same
individual (see pages 341–345 above), which is thought of as both one’s origin and the
condition of possibility of the Ascent (see notes 130 (vi) and 133). 135 Thus, Plotinus
writes at V.7 [18] 1.1–5 (my emphasis): 136

[1] Is there also an idea of each particular thing? Yes, if I and [2] each one
of us has a way of ascent to the intelligible, the principle of each of us [3]
is also there. If Socrates, that is the soul of Socrates, always exists, [4]
there will be an absolute Socrates in the sense that, insofar as they are

134 Tornau (2009, 344 note 3) points out that for Plotinus “individual soul” (IV.8 [6] 4.1: Τὰς δὴ καθέκαστα
ψυχὰς) basically means “human soul” (IV.8 [6] 3.1: τῆς ἀνθρωπείας ψυχῆς). However, there is
disagreement as to whether we should postulate Forms of individuals only for individuals with intellects
or admit such Forms also for other sensible particulars. Authors who argue that Plotinus postulates Forms
of individuals only for human beings include Gerson (1994, 76), Kalligas (1997), and Tornau (2009).
More cautiously, Rist (1970a, 1999) writes that “although it is probable that Plotinus accepts Ideas of all
individuals, he seems to find Ideas of men the most acceptable, Ideas of animals less so, and presumably
Ideas of inanimate things least of all.” Among those who support a wider reading and contend that
Plotinus might have envisaged the possibility of such Forms also for other sensible particulars are F.
Ferrari (1997, 43–44, 59, 61) and O’Meara (1999c, 268).

135 The identification of Forms of individuals with souls (in particular with the undescended part of the
soul) was voiced by Cherniss (1962, 508) and is variously advocated and developed, for example, by
Kalligas (1997), F. Ferrari (1997, 47–53), who however points out that Plotinus (V.7 [18] 3.7–23) may
be open to the idea that there may be Forms also for other sensible particulars (see previous note),
D’Ancona Costa (2002, 560) and, most recently, Tornau (2009). This identification may be supported by
reference to other passages from the Enneads where souls are said to be Forms and as such they abide
IV.4 [28] 16.18–19, VI.5 [23] 7; cf. also references in note 223 below. However, this position is far from
having been accepted unanimously. Rist (1967, 86–87), for example, openly criticizes Cherniss, arguing
that a solution of this kind would blur Plotinus’ distinction between soul and Nous to the point of making

Αὐτοσωκράτης, καθὸ ἡ ψυχή καθέκασται καὶ < ὡς [5] λέγεται > ἐκεῖ [ὡς λέγεται ἐκεῖ]. I follow the text
accepting the transposition of ὡς λέγεται from line 5 to lines 4–5 (as with Volkmann 1883, HS2,
ARMSTRONG, Igal 1973, 91–92 and IGAL; contra Cilento 1947–1949). The translation in the main text is
by ARMSTRONG, minimally modified.
soul, individuals are also [5] said to exist in this way in the intelligible world. However, it would be wrong to think that just because Plotinus in all likeness endorses the view that there are Forms at least for sensible individuals endowed with intellect or rationality, he must also equate this individual with its Form. For a human being (which, again, in the present context is what I understand by a rational individual or a sensible individual endowed with intellect), to be an individual is not necessarily the same as to be the Form of that individual. Two things, I believe, are likely to be true here. The first is that the issue of human individuality in the *Enneads* is broader than the issue of Forms of individuals; the second is that a speculative interest in individuality (whether in terms of the medieval question of the principle of individuation or in light of the modern emphasis on the uniqueness of the individual) is probably not Plotinus’ main purpose for breaching the issue of Forms of individuals.

The second point can be settled quickly by looking back to the previous page and to notes 130 (vi) and 135, where I already hinted that one of Plotinus’ major reasons to introduce Forms of individuals is to establish a permanent connection between the individual embodied soul and the noetic realm. From this perspective it is reasonable to believe that the Form of an individual is the undescended part of its soul. As for my first claim, authors generally agree that the question of individuality in Plotinus is broader that the issue of Forms of individuals. In fact, in addition to a specifically intelligible principle (whatever this may be: a Form, the undescended soul, a set of λόγοι), two other factors are involved in the composition of the human individual: the sensible living body and what Plotinus calls the “we” (ἡμεῖς), namely the historical person endowed with
consciousness and freedom of choice and who is a combination of the two previous factors (i.e., the intelligible principle and the sensible living body). The interaction of these three factors is what constitutes the texture of individuality, allowing some authors to speak of a double-self theory, with an ideal self on the one hand (i.e., the undescended soul, or the Form of the individual) and an endowed self (i.e., the embodied human soul, seat of consciousness and freedom choice) on the other. We can also speak of a lower and a higher self or of an ontological and an empirical self. What directly concerns us here is the fact that this distinction is directly connected to the major reason for which Plotinus might have introduced the issue of Forms of individuals, namely the Ascent. More specifically, the ideal self or ontological ground of individuality is not immediately available to the endowed self or empirical individual. On the contrary, to become identified with one’s ideal self depends on a decision which can rightly be called ethical. To act in accordance with this decision is identical with the process of ascent to that which, though always available to each individual soul, is not quite realized or integrated (yet). As Tornau writes, “the ‘ascent of the soul toward Intellect is the restoration of a state of happiness that always already exists, which the soul never truly loses, but which it has to actualize and bring to consciousness.” In a famous passage,

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138 The expressions “ideal self” and “endowed self” are by Gerson (1994, 139–151). Trouillard (1955b, 17–19) speaks of “homme intelligible” and “homme empirique.”


140 Tornau (2009, 335): “l’ ‘ascension’ de l’âme vers l’Intellect est la restauration d’un état de bonheur qui existe toujours déjà, qu’elle ne perd jamais vraiment, mais qu’elle doit actualiser et faire advenir à sa conscience.”
IV.8 [6] 4.31–34, Plotinus himself speaks of this double self, or rather, of this twofold condition of individual souls as “amphibious”:\[141\]

[31] Souls, then become, one might say, [32] amphibious, compelled to live by turns the life There and the life here: [33] those which are able to be more in the company of [34] Intellect live the life there more, [34] but those whose normal condition is, by nature or chance, the opposite, live more [35] the life here below.

 Needless to say, the purpose of the Ascent is to bring the individual soul to identify with higher realities, or to live “There” as much as possible.

4.4.2 The Terminology of Ascent

Plotinus uses several expressions to speak of the soul’s process of identification with its highest element leading to union with the One. Among the most frequently used terms are “ascent” (ἀναγωγή, \[142\] ἀνάβασις, \[143\] ἄνοδος), “elevation” or “return” (ἐπανάγειν, ἐπανέρχεσθαι, ἐπανείναι), “escape” or “flight” (φυγή), and “reversion” (ἐπανάβασις).

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or “conversion” (ἐπιστροφή). As a quick look at Sleeman and Pollet’s *Lexicon Plotinianum* will confirm, in none of the references listed in notes 142 through 147 are these terms used strictly or technically to indicate the soul’s process of assimilation to the One, what I have otherwise been referring to with the expression “Ascent.” Instead, they are borrowed from ordinary language and used metaphorically to express an experience of a different order.

With the exception of the last one (ἐπιστροφή), I believe that these metaphors are not particularly hard to explain if one bears in mind the broader framework of Plotinian metaphysics. Thus, the upward movement indicated by the terms for “ascent” can be explained as being very closely dependent on what Plotinus takes to be the superiority (with respect to unity, being, power, self-determination, *eros*, and overall perfection) of the hypostases of *Nous* and the One in comparison with soul. Similarly, the idea of “return” is conceptually implied by the fact that in the *Enneads* and through the Neoplatonic tradition the endpoint of the Ascent is identical with the source or origin of all reality (see particularly Chapter Three note 9, and Section 4.2 above), so that for the soul to become assimilated to the One may be understood as a sort of homecoming, a purifying journey leading the traveling soul to a final destination which is at the same

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148 Plato’s use of a similar language in the *Symposium* and elsewhere should also be mentioned as a source of inspiration on this point for Plotinus (cf. Chapter One notes 142 and 143).
time its true origin (see note 47 above): a journey back to what Plotinus calls its beloved fatherland or native country (πατρίς).

As for the concept of “escape” or “flight,” the focus of the metaphor shifts without changing its overall meaning and purpose: from the Good as that toward which the individual soul proceeds, to the lower involvements from which the same soul moves away in order to become assimilated to the Principle. In this context, it is important clearly to determine the identity of that which is to be left behind in this flight. What is that the individual soul should flee in its journey to the One? The answer to this question is at the same time a statement of Plotinus’ view about the sensible world in connection with the Ascent. If Plotinus is saying that it is the sensible as such that ought to be fled, his position will be no different than the radical dualism, both cosmological and anthropological, of certain Gnostics. If, on the other hand, it is not the sensible qua sensible that constitutes a problem in the perspective of the Ascent, from what exactly should the soul escape? Plotinus answers this question unambiguously at I.8 [51] 6.9–13,

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149 See I.6 [1] 8.16 (an echo of Homer, Iliad II.140) and 21, V.9 [5] 1.21. Obviously the theme of return to one’s native country, the fil rouge of Homer’s second epic poem, is a perfectly familiar one for someone steeped into the Greek tradition like Plotinus. References to the Odyssey in relation to this theme are explicit in the Enneads (i.e., Odyssey IX.29 and X.483–484 at Enneads I.6 [1] 8.17–20, and Odyssey V.37 at Enneads V.9 [5] 1.22). The same theme will be explored at greater length by later Neoplatonists (see Pépin 1982, 5–9 for references and an interpretation). The notion of return to one’s native land clearly squares well also with the metaphorical description of the One as Father (see Chapter Three note 9 for references; cf. also V.1 [10] 6.50–53).


a passage that contains a sequence of echoes from Plato’s *Theaetetus* 176a–b:152

[9] But when he [i.e., Plato] says that “we must take flight from thence” he is no longer [10] referring to life on earth. For “flight,” he says, is not going away from earth [11] but being on earth “just and holy with the help of [12] wisdom”; what he means is that we must fly from wickedness; [13] so evil for him is wickedness and all that comes from wickedness...

As Plotinus points out in the sequel of this passage and as we shall see more explicitly in Subsection 4.6.1, flight from wickedness is possible through virtue (ἁρετή), by which the soul both begins to regain access to its original nature and becomes able to master lower matter and its negative influence.153

If the metaphors used thus far to illustrate the process of assimilation to the One (ascent, return, flight) have been relatively easy to explain, the same cannot be said of the last image I introduced in the opening paragraph of the present subsection, the image of “conversion.” The difficulty is due mainly to the ambiguous use of the term ἐπιστροφή, and in particular to the fact that Plotinus expresses one of his most characteristic doctrines by means of the same term. This doctrine is well summarized in what in the previous chapter I referred to as the Principle of Reversion (cf. pages 204–206). Broadly, the principle states that every hypostasis (with the exception of the One, which is


153 See I.8 [51] 6.19–20, II.9 [33] 18.1–17; for references on the negative influence of lower matter on soul, see Chapter Three note 359. In this context, it is not necessary to take separation of soul from body in a literal sense, or as death. (It is indicative that at I.8 [51] 13.14–25 the condition of vice—κακία—is metaphorically called the death of the soul, not in the sense that the soul ceases to exist altogether in the way the composite ceases to exist in literal death, but in the sense that it “has changed to another nature, a worse one”—I.8 [51] 13.19–20; [19] ἔπειταν φόροιν τὴν [20] χείριν ἤλλαξαν. Cf. Chapter Three note 358). Rather, separation should be understood chiefly as a turning away from making one’s commitment to the body a primary matter of concern (cf. V.1 [10] 1.24–30, VI.5 [23] 12.27–29). Thus it follows that the sensible world is not itself evil (see III.2 [47] 3, II.9 [33] 8–9); in fact, since the sensible is a hylomorphic entity, it still belongs somehow to the intelligible, even if in a highly qualified way.
ungenerated: cf. V.4 [7] 1.18–19) emerges or establishes its identity as that particular hypostasis through a process of self-reversion which is at the same time a reversion toward its generator. If in the previous subsection I was correct in claiming that for Plotinus the Ascent to the Principle is possible only for an individual rational soul, the meaning of ἐπιστροφή which is at work in the Ascent cannot be that of the double movement (i.e., self-reversion and the reversion toward its generator) of a hypostasis that is expressed in the Principle of Reversion. What the term means in the context of the Ascent is rather a turning of the individual soul’s attention from lower commitments to higher realities, in order to be able to identify as much as possible with its best part (in this sense, the movement of conversion is also an inner turn toward oneself). But as we saw, this can never be the case for Nous and the Soul-Hypostasis (as well as the World-Soul). For this reason in the previous chapter I used the term “reversion” to express the former meaning of ἐπιστροφή (i.e., ἐπιστροφή as the movement whereby Nous and Soul emerge as full hypostases by erotically turning upon themselves and toward their respective generator), while reserving the term “conversion” to convey the latter meaning (i.e., ἐπιστροφή in the context of the Ascent).

Lloyd observes that “for practical purposes writers [i.e., Neoplatonists] often saw no need to distinguish reversion from the general notion of ascent to the One.”154 This seems to be the case in several of the post-Plotinian texts I cited in Chapter Three note 167. But Lloyd rightly qualifies the term “ascent” in his claim as a “general notion.” I do not believe that the Neoplatonists, least of all Plotinus, fail conceptually to distinguish

154 Lloyd (1990, 128).
this “general notion of ascent” from the Ascent technically understood as the process of assimilation of the individual soul to the One. Thus, I take it that the ascent of which Lloyd speaks means the (non-temporal) process by which a given hypostasis gains its identity or becomes that particular hypostasis (with all the problems that such a notion implies155). Such an “ascent,” or reversion, is unthinkable without the other two phases, rest and procession, with which it constitutes a single whole (see again Chapter Three note 167). This is something different than the Ascent of the individual rational soul, which by ascending to the One does not become the kind of thing it is but deliberately “moves” to, or becomes integrated in a higher level of existence while remaining the kind of thing it already was.

There is another important difference between the two “ascents,” or between what I have technically referred to as “reversion” and “conversion” respectively: the former occurs of necessity; the latter does not, not only in the sense that consciousness, deliberation and choice are needed for it to happen, but also in the more fundamental sense that it may not happen at all.156 This disheartening possibility is explicitly recognized by Plotinus at I.8 [51] 5.29–30, where he writes: “[29] there is ‘an escape

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155 See Lloyd (1990, 128–130); cf. Damascius, De principiis 75–78, II.123–137.

156 Dillon (in Dillon and Morrow 1987, xviii) mentions VI.5 [23] 7 as an instance of the threefold process of rest, procession and reversion that will become standard Neoplatonic doctrine after Plotinus (see Chapter Three note 167). If so, in this passage the term ἐπιστραφῆναι at line 11 will mean reversion in the sense I outlined above. I am not sure that this is the case, however. If one conceives (i) that the Ascent is possible only for the individual rational soul and does not occur of necessity, and (ii) the basic ambiguity of Plotinus’ use of term ἐπιστραφῆ which I have pointed out, I believe that the word ἐπιστραφῆναι at VI.5 [23] 7.11 means conversion rather than reversion. Thus the context of the passage will not be the emergence of a hypostasis through the movement of reversion upon itself and toward its generator, but rather that of the Ascent, the return of the soul to the One.
from the evils in the soul’ for those who [30] are capable of it, though not all men are.”157 As we saw throughout Chapter Two (as well as in my analysis of the Symposium ascent in Chapter One), even this possibility is not foreign to the dynamic of eros, for those who fail to ascend are not utterly deprived of all eros, but merely decide (at times against their better judgment, other times merely out of habit, other times still out of ignorance) to invest the eros with which they have been connaturally endowed in lower manifestations of higher realities, rather than direct it toward that of which these are manifestations: Intellect and, ultimately, the One.

4.4.3 Eros as the Fundamental Force Regulating All Movement of Ascent to the One

Contrasted with Hypostatic Eros and Eros as a Method of Ascent

The wide spectrum of eros at which I just hinted in the closing paragraph of the previous subsection brings me to my final observation for this section. Eros should be understood as a rather complex phenomenon whose internal divisions are essential to a proper understanding of it in the dynamics of the Ascent. In this subsection I will try to shed some further light on the classification I drew in my analysis of Plotinus’ treatise on eros, III.5 [50], in Chapter Two. Or rather, the classification of eros drawn in Chapter Two on the textual basis of treatise III.5 [50] will be supplemented here by a threefold division of the same phenomenon on the basis of my systematic treatment of eros in this and the previous chapter. The three types of eros at issue here are the following: hypostatic eros, eros as a method of ascent, and the connatural or inborn eros that regulates all movement of ascent to the One.

First, a word on what I called “hypostatic eros.” The context of this division is that of the procession or derivation of all reality from the One presented in Chapter Three. In short, hypostatic eros is the love that each hypostasis naturally and immediately bears proximately for its generator, and ultimately for the One, which in turn is the very source of this eros. This distinction is important to the extent that it reminds us that the very formation or structuring of the Plotinian universe can be understood in terms of eros and as a result of eros (a work of love: the general thesis of Chapter Three), and that the One as the universal source of this eros is only conceptually distinct from the One qua Good, universal desideratum or final cause (see Section 4.2). But more relevant for our present discussion of the Ascent are the next two distinctions and what differentiates them.

In the second distinction eros is understood as a method of ascent. This view of eros is found in the relatively short treatise On dialectic, I.3 [20], in which Plotinus outlines three arts, methods or practices (I.3 [20] 1.1: τέχνη ἢ μέθοδος ἢ ἐπιτήδευσις) of ascent, namely music, eros, and dialectic (or philosophy).\textsuperscript{158} Strictly, however, there is only one Ascent and the three “methods” are in fact practices that seem to apply to two different stages of the same journey. At I.3 [20] 1.12–18, Plotinus writes about these stages and those engaged in the journey:\textsuperscript{159}

\textsuperscript{158} An interpretation of a twofold method of ascent (i.e., eros and dialectic) in Plato such as the one presented in Subsection 1.5.2 above obviously reflects two of the distinctions drawn by Plotinus in I.3 [20]. As for the third method or distinction (i.e., music), I already mentioned that Plotinus may still have Plato in mind, who in several places seems to allude to an ascent to the Good under the aspect of Measure or Proportion, which can be understood as the regulative concept of music (see Chapter One note 176 for references; see also Jankélévitch 1998, 34–40).

\textsuperscript{159} I.3 [20] 1.12–18: Ἐστι μὲν οὖν ἡ πορεία διττὴ πᾶσιν ἢ ἄνω ἐλθοῦσιν· ἡ μὲν γὰρ προτέρα ἀπὸ τῶν κάτω, ἡ δὲ δευτέρα, οἷς ἤδη ἐν τῷ νοητῷ γένος.
There are two stages of the journey for all, one when they are going up and one when they have arrived above. The first leads from the regions below, the second is for those who are already in the intelligible realm and have gained their footing. There, but must still travel till they reach the furthest point of the region, that is the “end of the journey,”

Thus, in his commentary to *Ennead* I.3, Jankélévitch rightly speaks of an inferior and a superior dialectic. According to this view, inferior dialectic includes both music and *eros*, while superior dialectic is identical with dialectic proper, or philosophy. Plotinus sketches the differences between these three arts or methods of ascent through a summary description of their practitioners: the musician (ὁ μουσικός), the lover (ὁ ἐρωτικός), and the philosopher (ὁ φιλόσοφος).

The musician is described as “easily moved and excited by beauty, but not quite capable of being moved by absolute [παρ’ αὐτοῦ] [B]eauty” (I.3 1.21–23), so that “he must be led and taught to make abstraction of the material element [καὶ ἐπτοημένον] found in sounds, rhythms, and forms in order to be able to grasp “the principles from which their proportions and ordering forces [αἱ ἀναλογίαι καὶ οἱ λόγοι] derive” and “the beauty which is in these principles” (I.3 1.29–31).

In addition to this inclination toward beautiful things proper of the musician, the lover “has a kind of memory of beauty [μνημονικός ἐστὶ πώς κάλλους]” (I.3 2.2–3).

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160 An echo of Plato, *Republic* VII.532e3. ARMSTRONG (I, 153 note 2) writes: “The ‘end of the journey’ is the vision of the Good.”

But, adds Plotinus, the lover is unable to “grasp it in separateness, but he is overwhelmingly amazed and excited by visible beauties” (I.3 [20] 2.3–4). The lover’s goal is obviously to become capable to see Beauty by itself. Plotinus’ description of the way in which the lover may reach his goal, given in the second chapter of I.3 [20], is clearly patterned after the Greater Mysteries of love of Symposium 209e5–212a7, especially the synoptic view of the ladder of love at 211b7–d1 (see Subsection 1.4.1 and 1.5.1 above). Here is Plotinus’ text on the lover at I.3 [20] 2.5–13 (in italic within the text, I provide the headings for what I take to be loose parallels of the steps of eros’ ladder in the Symposium as given at page 49 above):  

[5] So he must be taught not to cling round...  
(1.b) A single body  
...one body and be excited by that, [6] but...  
(1.b) All bodies  
...must be led by the course of reasoning to consider all bodies and show the [7] beauty that is the same in all of them, and...  
(2.a) Souls  
...that it is something other than bodies and must be said to come from elsewhere, [8] and...  
(2.b) Practices (ways of life) and laws  
...that it is better manifested in other things, by showing him, for instance, beautiful ways of life and [9] beautiful laws—this will accustom him to [10] loveliness in things which are not bodies—and...

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162 I.3 [20] 2.3–4: [3] χωρίς δὲ ὄν ἀδυνατεῖ καταμαθεῖν, [4] πληττόμενος δὲ ύπο τῶν ἔν διαί ὕποι καλῶν περὶ αὐτὰ ἐπτόηται]. In this light, it seems possible to draw a loose parallel between music in I.3 [20] 1.19–35 and the eros without recollection (whether pure or mixed) presented in the treatise on eros, III.5 [50], as well as between the love of I.3 [20] 2 and the eros with recollection (whether pure or mixed) of III.5 [50] (see Subsection 2.3.1 above).

(3.a) Arts, sciences, virtues
...that there is beauty in arts and sciences and virtues. Then...
(3.b) Unity of beauties in Intellect
...all these beauties must be reduced to unity, and he must be shown their origin. But from virtues he can at once ascend to Intellect, to Being; and There he must go the higher way.

The introduction of the last step, (3.b), in this “Plotinian ladder of love” is at first problematic for two reasons, one internal and one external. First, within Plotinus’ own division, when the lover reaches Intellect, he is no longer a lover in the narrow sense in which the term ἐρωτικός is used in the context of treatise I.3 [20], but is ready to take on the practice of higher dialectic (i.e., dialectic proper or the peak of philosophical activity) in order to be at home in Intellect and, eventually, be able to move past it in the direction of the One. In this view, step (3.b) would seem to be, rather than the final step of the lover’s ascent, the trait d’union between lower and higher dialectic.

The second or external reason why step (3.b) may appear problematic is that if we compare my division of the “Plotinian ladder of love” at I.3 [20] 2.5–13 with the division of the parallel Platonic text of the Greater Mysteries of love from the Symposium given at page 49 above, we will immediately realize that in the Platonic scala amoris there is one further step (i.e., step (4): the vision of Beauty itself) which seems to be missing in the text from the Enneads.164 However, if we grant that what in Plato is Beauty itself can here be legitimately linked to the Plotinian Good (see Chapter Two note 47, and note 80 above), the Plotinian ladder of love will also have a fourth and truly final step, namely union with the One. For Plotinus, in order to be able to take this further step, the

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164 The importance of other differences between the two “ladders”—Plato’s and Plotinus’—especially in their respective steps (3.a) and (3.b), should not be underemphasized, but here I will not be able to deal with these differences explicitly in any detail.
individual soul has first to move not only beyond love as narrowly understood in I.3
[20], but also beyond the philosophical practice of superior dialectic, which in the present

text is introduced as “the higher way” (I.3 [20] 2.13: τὴν ἄνω πορείαν).

The fundamental feature distinguishing superior dialectic from both music and

love is the fact that the philosopher, in contrast with the practitioners of the other two
disciplines, is spontaneously directed toward the intelligible or, as Plotinus writes

borrowing the language of the Phaedrus (246c1, 249c4–5), naturally “winged” (I.3 [20]

3.2: ἐπτερωμένο; cf. also 1.9–10), disposed to learning (φιλομαθὴς) and virtuous

(ἐνάρετον) (I.3 [20] 3.7–8). What the philosopher still needs is a deeper familiarity with

the immaterial realm of Intellect, a familiarity which, like the student in the program of

higher studies of the Republic, one can acquire through mathematical studies,165 and then

through the practice of dialectic itself, until one becomes “a complete dialectician” (I.3


165 Plato, Republic VII.523a1–3, 525d5–8; cf. also Alcinous, Didaskalikos XXVIII.182.8–14.

166 For our purposes, it is not necessary to dwell on the details of the nature of dialectic. Let it suffice to cite

the description provided by Plotinus at I.3 [20] 4.2–6: dialectic “[2] is the condition [ἐξίς] which can

speak about everything in a reasoned way [λόγῳ], [3] and say what it is and how it differs from other

things and what it has in [4] common with them; in what class each thing is and where it stands in that

class, and if it really is [5] what it is, and how many real beings [tà ὄντα; i.e., intelligibles] there are, and

again how many non-real beings [tà μὴ ὄντα; i.e., sensibles, on which see I.8 [51] 3.1–12 and IGAL (I,

229 note 18)], different from [6] real beings” (ARMSTRONG’s translation, with minor changes). As

ARMSTRONG (I, 156–157 note 2) rightly remarks, it does not seem necessary to postulate any Stoic

influence in this description of dialectic; all its elements can safely be derived from Plato (see in

particular Sophist 253b8–254b6, Statesman 262a8–263a1, Philebus 14c1–17a7, Phaedrus 265c5–266b2,

Republic VII.531c9–535a2); see also IGAL (I, 228 note 17). In the remaining chapters of the treatise, 5

and 6, Plotinus adds two further qualifications of dialectic. First (I.3 [20] 5), rather than being identical

with philosophy, dialectic is “the valuable part of philosophy” (I.3 [20] 5.9: ἡ φιλοσοφίας μέρος τὸ

τίμιον; see also the reference to Philebus 58d6–7 at 5.4–5). As such, it differs from logic (I.3 [20] 5.10:

ὄργανον, according to Aristotelian usage) because it does not deal merely with “bare theories and rules”

(5.11: ψελά θεωρήματα […] καὶ κανόνες) but with “real beings” (5.12: τὰ ὄντα). Secondly (I.3 [20] 6), it

is because it knows real beings that dialectic is also the foundation of the other parts of philosophy,

namely, physics and ethics (I.3 [20] 6.1–5 and 6.5–24 respectively).
We thus come to our third division of *eros* announced in the title of this subsection: *eros* as the fundamental force regulating all movement of ascent. This is what in our present threefold distinction I referred to as “connatural *eros*” or “innate *eros*.” I already touched on it briefly in Chapter Two (pages 117–119), but I think it is important here clearly to distinguish it both from the *eros* by which a given stage of pre-hypostatic matter turns toward its generator and, in-formed by it, becomes a definite hypostasis, and, more sharply, from *eros* as a method of ascent as it is presented in the treatise on dialectic, I.3 [20]. That connatural *eros* and hypostatic *eros* are conceptually different should be clear from their respective outcomes: the latter brings about a hypostasis, whether *Nous* or soul, as a matter of necessity (in accordance with the Principle of Superabundance); the former is like a natural inclination toward the One but its outcome, rather than itself a hypostasis, is an assimilation to a hypostasis, or to a higher level of reality—leaving aside the fact that the soul is free to disregard the direction in which its inborn *eros* points and reject the possibility of such an assimilation (cf. the end of Subsection 4.4.2).

But more important for our discussion of the Ascent is the difference between *eros* as a method of ascent and that *eros* which here I have called connatural, a distinction that has generally gone unnoticed in studies of Plotinus’ thought. Put simply, connatural *eros* is not a method at all but rather the all-encompassing condition of possibility of all ascending movement (and, as such, of all “methods” of ascent). We might describe this *eros* as an inborn orientation of the soul toward the One qua Good.

In notes 4 and 5 above I provided references to passages in which Plotinus thinks
that the whole of reality desires and is oriented toward the Good. Only in some of those references does ἔρως (and its verbal and adjectival cognates) appear as the operative word of desire. But there are other places in which Plotinus uses the term precisely to express the soul’s inborn desire for the Good. Thus, while at V.5 [32] 12.7–9 Plotinus will write that all things desire (ἐφίεται) the Good by a necessity of nature (φύσεως ἀνάγκῃ), in an earlier treatise, at VI.9 [9] 9.24–26, he refers to the inborn character of the soul’s desire for the Good with the term ἔρως: “And the souls innate love makes clear that the Good is there, and this is why Eros is coupled with the Psyches in pictures and stories.” And just a little later in the same chapter, at lines 33–34: “The soul then in her natural state is in love with God and wants to be united with him; it is like the noble love of a girl for her noble father” (cf. Chapter Three note 9, and note 149 above on this image). Perhaps even more emphatically, at III.5 [50] 4.22–23, speaking of Aphroditē as the mythical representation of the soul, Plotinus writes: “Aphroditē is soul, and Eros is the activity of soul reaching out after the Good.” And close to the end of the same treatise, at III.5 [50] 9.39–41: “And so this being, Love, has from everlasting come into existence from the soul’s aspiration toward the higher and the good, and he was there always, as long as Soul, too, existed.” In addition to this, in two passages from VI.7 [38] Plotinus makes clear that it is the One itself that provides the soul with this eros: “And as long as there is something higher than that which is present to it [viz. to soul], it naturally goes on upwards, lifted by the giver of its love” (VI.7 [38] 22.17–19); and so the soul loves the Good, “moved by it from the beginning” (VI.7 [38] 31.17–18).167

167 Here is the Greek text of all the passages from the Enneads mentioned in the present paragraph in the order in which I referred to them. V.5 [32] 12.7–9: [7] Πάντα γὰρ ὀρέγεται ἐκείνου καὶ ἐφίεται αὐτῷ [8]
Thus, for Plotinus connatural *eros* is an inborn orientation toward the Good belonging to every soul. In particular, it is that factor which allows the individual rational soul metaphorically to climb the levels of the Plotinian hierarchy and approach the One. Like hypostatic *eros*, the innate character of connatural *eros* brings within itself an element of necessity, in the sense that the individual soul does not choose to desire the Good but simply desires it. Even if in its embodied state oftentimes the soul remains uncertain about the aim of its desire and only divines it in a distant manner (cf. V.5 [32] 12.7–9), it still desires the Good: “And the soul which has its love ready at hand, does not wait for a reminder from the beauties here, but because it has its love, even if it does not know that it has it, it is always searching...” (VI.7 [38] 31.18–21). This sense of necessity, however, is by no means identical with coercion, although it does seem to be something like a brute fact in manifestations of soul other than individual human souls. The difference, once again, seems to be that all other ensouled entities in the Plotinian universe possess a natural tendency toward the Good but in a manner that does not allow...

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φύσεως ἀνάγκη, ὡσπερ ἀπομεμαντευμένα, ὡς ἀνευ αὐτοῦ [9] οὐ δύναται εἶναι. VI.9 [9] 9.24–26: [24] Δὴ λοι ὅτι τὸ ἀγαθὸν ἐκεῖ καὶ ό ἔρως [25] ὅ τῆς ψυχῆς ὁ σύμφυτος, καθό καὶ συνεξεχειται Ἐρως [26] ταῖς Ψυχαῖς καὶ ἐν γραφαῖς καὶ ἐν μύθοις. VI.9 [9] 9.33–34: [33] Ἐρα ὅν κατά φύσιν ἔχουσα ψυχή θεοῦ ἐνωθήναι θέλουσα, [34] ὡσπερ παρθένος καλὸς πατρός καλὸν Εἰρων. IΙΙ.5 [50] 4.22–23: [22] Αφροδίτη ὁν ἔρως, ἔρως ἐν ἐνέργεια ψυχῆς [23] ἑκαθοῦ ὄργωνομένης. IΙΙ.5 [50] 9.39–41: [39] λεί δὲ οὐτῶς [40] ὑπέστη δὲ εἰς ἀνάγκης ἐκ τῆς ψυχῆς ἐφέσεως πρὸς τὸ [41] κρεῖττον καὶ ἀγαθὸν, καὶ ἔνα ἠαί, εἰς οὔπερ καὶ ψυχή. Ἐρως. VI.7 [38] 22.17–19: see Chapter Three note 213. VI.7 [38] 31.17–18: [17] ψυχή ἔρα μὲν ἐκείνου ὑπ’ [18] αὐτοῦ ἐξ ἀρχῆς εἰς τὸ ἐρᾶν κινητεῖσα. On a page that may sum up the meaning of these passages, Hadot (1993, 50–51) writes: “What Plotinus calls the Good is thus, at the same time, that which, by bestowing grace, gives rise to love, and that which, by awakening love, causes grace to appear. The Good is what all things desire; it is what is desirable in an absolute sense. We asserted that love and grace are unjustified; likewise, the Good is absolutely unjustified. It is not random or accidental, but by willing itself and being what it wants to be, it freely creates the love that beings feel for it, as well as the grace they receive from it.”

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them to depart from their assigned “position” in the hierarchical order and thus to become assimilated to the One. By contrast, while it remains true that the individual human soul is naturally (i.e., necessarily) endowed with a desire for the Good, or its connatural *eros*, this same soul can always choose either to follow the upward direction toward which its *eros* urges it, or else to turn away from the Good and commit itself to the pursuit of what for Plotinus are mere images of beauties. But even this “turning away” remains possible only insofar as the individual soul recognizes something desirable (i.e., something good, although qualifiedly so) in such images.

One will object: What is the significance of positing an inborn tendency toward the Good in individual souls (connatural *eros*), if, after all, these can disregard the direction to which this tendency points? That is, in what sense does connatural *eros* necessarily belong to soul if at least some souls, that is, individual rational souls or human souls, can move away from the goal indicated by their *eros*? A similar question can be asked about the doctrine of the undescended soul: In what sense is the best part of a human soul undescended if the individual human being to whom that part belongs has to struggle to ascend? The answer to these questions, as already in Plato (see pages 79, 96–97, and 99 above), is that although *eros* names an essential force or power present in the soul (a power without which no Ascent to the Good nor recognition of lesser goods would be possible, and in this sense the regulating force of all ascending movement), in order for the Ascent to be actualized, the direction indicated by this power needs to be recognized and the power itself needs to be put to work so as to bring about an active transformation of the soul. This transformation, the assimilation of the soul to higher
realities, is the fulfillment of the task indicated by its connatural eros: the Ascent itself. Plotinus expresses this metaphorically when in the oldest treatise of the Enneads, a description of the work that the soul ought to do in order to ascend to Beauty itself, he borrows and recontextualizes an image from Plato and writes: “never stop ‘working on your statue’” (I.6 [1] 9.13).169 The statue is one’s soul, and working on it means putting one’s efforts into reintegrating one’s endowed self into one’s ideal self (I will come back to this at the beginning of the next section). Less metaphorically, in the more technical language of his own metaphysical system, Plotinus states at V.1 [10] 12.5–21:170

[5] Not everything which is in [6] soul is immediately perceptible, but it reaches “us” only when [7] it reaches sense-perception. Whenever something is active and does not communicate with the [8] faculty of perception, it has not yet permeated the whole soul. So [9] we have no knowledge as yet, since we are involved with the sense faculty, and are not a part [10] of soul but the whole soul. Furthermore, each of the [11] parts of the soul is always alive and active by itself, but there is [12]

169 I.6 [1] 9.13: μὴ παύσῃ τεκταίνων τὸ σῶν ἄγαλμα. The allusion is to Plato, Phaedrus 252d7, with the difference that “in Plato it is the lover who works on the soul of his beloved, fashioning it into the likeness of the god they once followed together” (ARMSTRONG I, 259 note 1). For Plotinus one’s statue is one’s individual soul. See also I.6 [1] 5.24–58, where Plotinus expresses the same idea through the metaphor of the soul’s purifying itself from ugliness (τὸ αἰσχρόν) and impurity (ἀκάθαρτον); at lines 45–48 he writes of the soul: “[45] its [46] ugliness has come from an addition of something alien, and its business, [47] if it is to be beautiful again, is to wash and purify itself and so be again [48] what it was before” ([45] ὃ δὴ [46] τὸ αἰσχρὸν προσήλθη τοῦ ἀλλοτρίου προσῆλθε καὶ ἔργον [47] αὐτὸ, εἴπερ ἐσται πάλιν καλός, ἀπονιψαμένῳ καὶ καθηραμένῳ [48] ὅπερ ἦν εἶναι. ARMSTRONG’s translation, with minor changes).

recognition only when communication and perception takes place. Thus, if there is to be perception of what we have described as present, the power of apprehension must turn inwards, and must be made to attend there. Just as someone listening for a voice which he particularly wishes to hear stands aside from the other voices and pricks up his ears for the preferable sound until this arrives, so too in this case perceptible noises must be left aside, except insofar as is necessary, and the soul’s power of apprehension must be kept pure and ready to hear the sounds from above.

We are not always aware of what is already in us, nor do we always activate it, but higher realities in general and the One in particular are always present to the individual soul, as Plotinus remarks: “But if you went away, it was not from it [viz. the One]—for it is present—and you did not even go away then, but were present and turned the opposite way” (VI.5 [23] 12.27–29). In this light, the task indicated by our connatural eros is to turn our attention back to the One.

Elsewhere, in a quasi-Kantian tone that highlights the necessity of the efforts required to achieve happiness (εὐδαιμονία, which from this perspective may be understood as the stable condition of the individual soul in Nous; cf. Subsection 4.6.2), Plotinus states: “people must not demand to be happy who have not done what deserves happiness” (III.2 [47] 4.45–47). The patient polishing and chiseling of our statue, the work of activation of what is always already in us, the movement of conversion that


172 III.2 [47] 4.45–47: [45] οὐδ’ ἀπαγωγήν [46] τοῦτος τὸ εὐδαιμονεῖν ὑπάρχειν, οἷς μὴ εἰργασθαι εὐδαιμονίας [47] ἀξία (ARMSTRONG’s translation, modified). Kant’s passages I have in mind are his definition of morality in the Critique of Practical Reason (V, 130: “morals [die Moral] is not properly the doctrine of how we are to make ourselves happy but of how we are to become worthy [würdig] of happiness [Glückseligkeit]”) and his description of the good will (der gute Wille) as “the indispensable condition even of worthiness [Würdigkeit] to be happy” (Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals IV, 393); translations are by M. Gregor (in Kant 1996). Clearly, and as I already remarked earlier in note 53, Kant’s and Plotinus’ respective concepts of εὐδαιμονία and Glückseligkeit, which in English are both loosely rendered with “happiness,” do not coincide.
reverses our having turned away from the One, or the efforts, deserving of happiness, that we put into reintegrating our lower part or endowed self into our undescended part or ideal self: these are all complementary ways of naming the Ascent, whose general features and major steps or stages I will proceed to sketch in the next two sections.

4.5 Four Features Common to All the Stages of the Ascent: Subtraction, Implication of Lower stages, Intensification of Eros, Non-reciprocal Participation

Before I deal with the actual stages of the Ascent, I will provide an overview of four features of the Ascent that I take to be common to all its stages. In the order in which I will present them in this section, these features are: first, in relation to the sage preceding it, each stage implies, not the addition, but the subtraction of something that was present at a lower stage; second, every stage presupposes the ones prior to it; third, proceeding upwards, each stage implies an increase in unity and in the intensity of eros; fourth, that which assimilates the individual soul to a higher stage is not necessarily found on the higher stage.

The first of these features is the idea that each of the stages of the Ascent implies not the addition of an element previously absent to the individual soul, but the subtraction of something which is only incidentally present and hinders one’s reintegration into what is present always and essentially. In this light, the metaphor of the sculptor working on his statue (cf. page 377 above), initially chipping away the surplus material, next carefully smoothening its rough edges, and finally patiently polishing its uneven surface, should not be understood as a description of the efforts by which an originally or naturally shapeless and coarse piece of material is turned into an artwork through some
technique or art—*artificially*. It is just the other way around. What is original is the statue itself, perfectly formed and polished. The surplus material does not belong to it naturally but came to it as something added from without, subsequently and incidentally. The work of the sculptor is to bring the statue back to its original splendor, now lying hidden under layers of impurities, rather than imparting on it a form and a look alien to it.¹⁷³ Thus the artist is strictly not a sculptor, but a restorer of a work not of his own making. The responsibility for the restoration, however, is entirely his, for he is that statue, the soul itself. An appropriate understanding of this metaphor is important in order to grasp the nature of the Ascent. For the individual soul, to make its way to the Good does not mean to take upon itself something that originally was not its own. On the contrary, it means precisely to eliminate that which does not belong to it essentially, something which is fundamentally foreign to its nature and which ultimately causes the soul to lose sight of the direction indicated by its connatural *eros*. Every stage of the Ascent is understood as much in terms of what is left behind as it is in terms of the plateau to which it leads the individual soul. Thus, Plotinus writes with his customary brevity: “You will increase yourself then by rejecting all else, and the All will be present to you in your rejection” (VI.5 [23] 12.24–25). More laconically still, on the very last line

¹⁷³ In the dramatic poem *Michael Angelo* by Henry W. Longfellow, the aging Renaissance sculptor Michelangelo, perhaps influenced by Platonizing ideas that had been recently popularized in the Latin West by Ficino’s translations of Plato’s dialogues and of the *Enneads* into Latin, is portrayed as saying to his helper, Urbino: “Some have eyes | That see not; but in every block of marble | I see a statue,—see it as distinctly | As if it stood before me shaped and perfect | In attitude and action. I have only | To hew away the stone walls that imprison | The lovely apparition, and reveal it | To other eyes as mine already see it” (Longfellow 1922, 582). In a letter to Benedetto Varchi, Michelangelo himself wrote: “Io intendo scultura, quella che si fa per forza di levare...” (*Letter* 462 = Buonarroti 1875, 522); cf. Aristotle, *Physics* I.190b8–9.
of treatise V.3 [49]: “Take away everything!”

The second feature common to all the stages of the Ascent is the fact that for Plotinus every stage presupposes the one(s) prior to it. Thus, union is not possible.

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174 VI.5 [23] 12.24–25: [24] Αὔξεις τοίνυν σαυτὸν ὄψεις τὰ ἄλλα καὶ πάρεστι σοι τὸ [24] πᾶν υφέντι. V.3 [49] 17.38: Ἀφέλε πάντα (besides VI.5 [23] 12.24–25, this formula has several parallels in the Enneads, most notably I.2 [19] 4.6, I.6 [1] 8.25, V.5 [32] 13.11, 6.19; cf. also V.1 [10] 12.18, VI.9 [9] 9.50, VI.7 [38] 34.4). See Gatti (1996, 211–216), who speaks of this ἀφαίρεσις precisely as a subtraction of alterity, the elimination of what in the soul is alien to its nature. As I pointed out earlier in my remarks on the term φυγή in Subsection 4.4.2, the concept of flight or escape cannot be reduced to the simplistic idea of a literal departure from the body, but rather a voluntary dissociation from wickedness. In the present context, too, restoration should not be understood immediately as separation from the body. If this were the case, suicide would suffice to bring one’s statue back to its original splendor: a shortcut to the Good and a substitute for the Ascent. But as Plotinus makes clear in the last, brief treatise of the first Ennead (I.9 [16] On going out of the body), suicide is not admitted (see also II.9 [33] 18.14–17), though both in the same treatise (I.9 [16] 1.9–14, 17) and elsewhere (I.4 [46] 7.31–32, 43–45, 8.5–10, 16.17–29) he seems to consider it an acceptable way to release the soul from the body, but only for someone who cannot advance further toward ἐνυδαμοσία, and only if the decision to commit suicide springs from a rational disposition. In other words, only the one who is already a sage (σπουδαῖος) can discern when suicide is opportune. It is significant that Plotinus advised Porphyry against suicide, as testified in VP 11.11–19. The sixth-century commentator Elias, in his Prolegomena to Philosophy VI.15.23–16.2 (a text reported and translated at the end of the first Ennead in Armstrong I, 324–325) refers to a treatise by Plotinus “On reasonable departure” (παρὶ ἐνυδαμον ἐξαγωγῆς) and writes that Plotinus rejects all the five reasons for suicide considered acceptable by the Stoics (these are listed in SVF III, 768 = Anecdota Graeca IV.403.27–405.2: a grave emergency, coercion to act immorally, a prolonged illness impeding the use of the body, extreme poverty, and madness; cf. Olympiodorus, Commentary on Plato’s Phaedo I.8.19–39). In light of the actual contents of Plotinus’ treatise I.9 [16], it is not clear that this is the treatise that Elias had in mind (as Olympiodorus confirms in his Commentary on Plato’s Phaedo I.8.17–18), though we have no other treatise on suicide in the Enneads (in I.9 [16] and in the passages from I.4 [46] cited in the present footnote Plotinus seems to accept the second, third, and fifth reason given by the Stoics). For a discussion of suicide in Plotinus see McGroarty (2006, 126, 128–129, 131–132, 199, and especially 205–206). Thus, restoration, much like flight, must be conceived of as a process of dissociation from what does not originally belong to the soul, in particular from the morbid attachments to—and even the identification with—the needs and desires of the body. It follows that although separation can be understood also literally, its literal meaning is not its primary meaning. Put simply, for Plotinus dissociation from the body appears to be a necessary condition only for a permanent reintegration of oneself into higher realities, but a temporary reintegration can be experienced even in (spite of) one’s embodied condition, as Plotinus’ own experience as reported by Porphyry (VP 23.17–19) seems to confirm.

175 One will find the theme of the Ascent treated explicitly in a number of passages in the Enneads, most notably I.6 [1], III.8 [30], V.8 [31] and V.5 [32], II.9 [33], VI.7 [38] 31–36. The three “ascents” in (i) III.8 [30], (ii) V.8 [31] and V.5 [32], and (iii) II.9 [33] are part of what according to Harder (1956–1971, IIIb, 365) is one single treatise, the so-called Großschrift (cf. Cilento 1971 and Elsas 1975; against Harder, see Wolters 1981, criticized in turn by IGAL II, 231–232 note 2). Notice that the third ascent of the Großschrift, that of II.9 [33], is spurious: in it Plotinus presents a Gnostic view of the ascent only to contrast it with the true (i.e., Platonic) view given in V.8 [31] and V.5 [32]. I will not focus on any of these passages in particular, but draw freely from them and, particularly in the first two stages (purification and intellification), from I.2 [19] On virtues.
without either intellification or purification (on which see Section 4.6), and intellification is pure fancy if it is not preceded by purification. This is an important aspect of the Ascent to bear in mind, for it simply tells us that there are no shortcuts to the end of the journey. Plotinus’ earlier quoted remark that “people must not demand to be happy who have not done what deserves happiness” (III.2 [47] 4.45–47; see note 172 above) becomes understandable in the light of this feature of the Ascent. The task indicated by one’s connatural eros is an orderly affair: skipping steps only brings to failure in the Ascent. So, for example, a moral life, which is the clear sign of a purified soul, is by no means superfluous to a life in Intellect; not in the sense that one acts virtuously in Intellect qua member of the noetic realm, but in that one will never come to be reintegrated in Intellect without having first become virtuous in an ordinary sense. Therefore, higher steps of the Ascent do not obliterate lower ones, nor do they simply overcome them in the sense of making them no longer necessary. Rather, a higher stage subsumes a lower one under itself by completing it and by fulfilling its purpose, thus maintaining it in existence as an accomplished task. But since this accomplishment is a matter of subtraction, what is maintained in existence is present precisely \textit{qua subtracted}. We could say that a lower step would be pointless (i.e., it would not be what it claims to be) if it were not taken up as accomplished in a higher one; conversely, at least from the

\begin{footnote}
When in the treatise on dialectic Plotinus writes that the philosopher is naturally predisposed to the noetic and “winged” (I.3 [20] 3.1–3), this does not mean that as a philosopher one may disregard morality, but that he or she is already living morally; if not, that person is simply not a philosopher in the sense in which Plotinus understands the term. At VI.7 [38] 36.6–10 Plotinus writes that we learn about the One by comparing and negating what we know about its effects, but that “[8] we are put on the way to it by purifications \textit{[καθάρσεις]} [9] and virtues \textit{[ἀρεταί]} and adornings \textit{[κοσμήσεις]} and by gaining footholds in the intelligible and [10] settling ourselves firmly there and feasting on its contents.” Cf. Rist (1967, 220), ARMSTRONG (I, xxvi–xxvii).
\end{footnote}
perspective of the ascending individual soul, a higher step would be pure fancy if what was achieved in a lower one were completely effaced. One wonders if we would even be capable of desiring an existence at the level of Intellect without purification, and union without intellification. Ascent, therefore, is not only a work of purification of the soul indicated by its connatural *eros*, but a purification of *eros* itself, which if followed aright and purified or educated, leads the soul to a newly desirable *desideratum*.

In this connection, it should be observed that the division in clear-cut stages is somewhat artificial, and this for two reasons. First, because it is not always given explicitly by Plotinus, although I believe that it can be derived safely from the text, and certainly that it may serve a pedagogical purpose. The second reason for considering a division of the Ascent in rigid stages as somewhat artificial is that not only the Ascent as a whole is fundamentally a movement comprising several stages, but each of its stages is also a movement made up of sub-stages. In this movement, the last sub-stage of a given stage is simultaneously the first sub-stage of the next stage (with the obvious exception of perfect union). It follows that, although it is possible conceptually to distinguish precise stages in the Ascent, the division in stages should point less to the independence of these stages from the movement taken as a whole than to the continuity in the process understood as a trajectory toward union. This fact is significant because it indicates that *eros*, while displaying internal qualitative differences (i.e., the stages of the Ascent), is fundamentally a unitary phenomenon; it also shows that the erotic Ascent is an orderly

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177 Thus, just because each of us “possesses” an undescended soul, it does not mean that we do not need to be purified. Purification is precisely the beginning of a process of identification with what is best in us—our undescended soul—and what in it is most similar to the One (the so called center of the soul, on which see pages 341–345 above).
process, and that precisely because lower stages are essentially implicated in higher
ones and lower ones essentially point to higher ones, either to skip a stage or to stop at an
intermediary stage will result in the failure to ascend.178

We thus come to our third general feature of the Ascent. While the process of
derivation of all reality from the One qua Principle implied an increase in multiplicity and
a decrease of unity in derived reality, the movement of assimilation toward the One qua
Good implies a reverse dynamics: a decrease of multiplicity and an increase in unity.
Thus, the artist’s work of restoration is at the same time a work of “simplification” or
“unification,” an increase in the inner unity of the individual soul. More importantly for
the subject of our study, while in derivation the eros of derived reality implied an
increase in the gap between oneself and one’s desideratum, the soul’s the ascending
movement toward the Good displays a decrease in this same gap (see Chapter Three,
particularly pages 222 and 203–204). In other words, to become assimilated to the One
qua Good means at the same time to reduce the distance that occurs between oneself and
the aim of one’s desire. The result of this “reduction” can be understood as a fundamental
transformation not only of the individual soul, but also of its eros. The breadth of eros
decreases, in the sense that things that were desired at a lower stage of the Ascent (e.g.,
bodily pleasures and superfluous needs, memory, and even consciousness: see Subsection
4.6.2) are left behind as no longer necessary nor, strictly, desirable. At the same time, the

178 The implication of lower in higher stages of the Ascent (an implication which may be called vertical) is
present also within smaller steps within each stage; thus, for instance, the possession of higher virtues
presupposes the possession of lower ones (I.2 [19] 7.10–30). But there is also another type of implication
(which we may call horizontal), as that by which virtues on a given level reciprocally imply each another,
context of the Ascent, see Subsection 4.6.1 below.
intensity of *eros* grows, in the sense that as the individual soul becomes aware of the increasing superiority of its *desideratum*, the very *eros* which is connatural to it increases and is transformed to suit its goal, ultimately aiming at becoming infinite *eros* in order to meet that which is infinite love and infinitely lovable (*ἐρασμιώτατον*), that which alone is at the same time “beloved and love and love of itself” (VI.8 [39] 15.1).

The *fourth* and final feature which I take to be common to all the stages of the Ascent is the idea that what assimilates the individual soul to a higher stage is not necessarily found on that higher stage. We may take this formula as a preliminary version of what I will call the Principle of Participation. This last feature of the Ascent will require a more extensive treatment than the previous three. The issue can be clarified with reference to the first two chapters of Plotinus’ treatise *On virtues*, I.2 [19], more precisely to I.2 [19] 1.1–2.10. I will focus on the rest of this treatise in my account of the first stage of the Ascent (purification) in Subsection 4.6.1, where I will provide a sketch of Plotinus’ understanding of virtue and its degrees. For the moment, what we need to know is that for Plotinus the individual soul is assimilated to the divine World-Soul through virtue, both lower and higher (I.2 [19] 1.21–26), but, in accordance with our preliminary formulation of the Principle of Participation, he maintains that virtue is absent in the divine. How is this possible? And why does Plotinus think that? Put differently, how is the individual soul made godlike by coming to possess a feature, virtue, which the god does not itself possess?

179 There is an excellent commentary on treatise I.2 [19] by Catapano (2006), to which I already referred in the previous note and of which I will make abundant use in my discussion of the issue of purification in the remainder of this section and in Subsection 4.6.1.
Plotinus’ answer to these questions is found at I.2 [19] 1.6–2.10. As suggested by Bréhier, this answer may be Plotinus’ implicit reply to one of the objections that the old Parmenides raises against the young Socrates’ defense of the Forms as paradigms (παράδειγμα) in Plato’s Parmenides.180 The relevant passage of the dialogue between the two characters is Parmenides 132c12–133a7; the text reads:181

[SOCRATES:] [132c12] This, he said, is not reasonable, Parmenides; [132d1] what seems much more reasonable to me is this: these Forms [d2] are like paradigms fixed in nature, while other things [d3] resemble them and are likenesses of them; and for the other things this participation [d4] in the Forms is nothing other than to resemble them. [d5]

[PARMENIDES:] Well, he said, if something resembles the Form, is it possible for that Form [d6] not to be like that which has come to resemble it, insofar as it has become like it? [d7] Is there any way in which what is like is like what is not like it? [d8]

[SOCRATES:] There is not. [d9]

[PARMENIDES:] Rather, is it not indeed necessary for what is like to participate in one [e1] and the same Form? [e2]

[SOCRATES:] It is. [e3]

[PARMENIDES:] But if like things are like by participating in something, will that not be [e4] the Form itself? [e5]

[SOCRATES:] By all means. [e6]

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180 Bréhier (1924–1938, I, 50 note 1); cf. also ARMSTRONG (I, 132 note 1), Dillon (1983, 96–97), Pradeau (2003, 124–125); see especially Catapano (2006, 22, 34–37, 106–107), who gives a clear account of the problem and provides further bibliographical references.

[PARMENIDES:] Then it is not possible for anything to be like the Form, or for the Form to be like anything else; otherwise another Form will always appear alongside the Form, and should that be like something, another again; and a new Form will never stop coming into being, if the Form comes to be like that which participates in it.

[SOCRATES:] You are quite right.

[PARMENIDES:] Then it is not by likeness that the other things participate in the Forms, but it is necessary to look for something else by which they participate.

[SOCRATES:] So it seems.

The main point of Parmenides’ objection can be summed up thus: if two things (‘X’ and ‘Y’) are similar, or alike, in virtue of their participation in a common Form (‘F’), it follows that ‘F’ is like ‘Y’ and ‘X’. But then ‘X’, ‘Y’ and ‘F’ will be like in virtue of their participation in a second Form (‘F-1’). The same argument applies to the similarity between ‘X’, ‘Y’, ‘F’ and ‘F-1’, so that a third Form (‘F-2’) is required; and so on ad infinitum.

For Plotinus’ refusal to assign virtue to the god, Parmenides’ objection would translate in the observation that if it is through virtue that the individual soul becomes godlike, then the god must be virtuous (cf. I.2 [19] 1.5–6). Plotinus’ reply to this objection presupposes that the nature of the divine World-Soul (which is the god in question here) is superior to that of the individual soul precisely by not possessing that by which the individual soul becomes like it, that is, virtue. But how is this possible? Plotinus’ answer is based on a fundamental clarification of the meaning of participation (μεταλαμβάνειν: I.2 [19] 1.40, 44, 47). The leading principle of his solution, the

\[^{182}\] Before outlining his solution, Plotinus had introduced two arguments in the form of questions, whose answers he must have taken to be negative. First, “if something is hot by the presence of heat, must that from which the heat comes also be heated?” (I.2 [19] 1.31–33). A negative answer to this question will give rise to the objection that the heated thing (i.e., the individual soul) becomes hot (i.e., virtuous) by
Principle of Participation, may be reconstructed more precisely from I.2 [19] 1.40–42

(numbered terms in italic indicate the elements involved in this principle):^{183}

(i) *that in which* (ii) *something* participates is other than (iii) *that because of which* (ii) *it* participates in (i) *it.*

Plotinus throws light on this principle by distinguishing two ways in which likeness or assimilation (ὁμοίωσις: I.2 [19] 2.4) can occur (I.2 [19] 2.1–10). The first is reciprocal or symmetrical, as that between particular items deriving from the same principle (e.g., several particular reflections of myself in a series of mirrors). The second way is non-reciprocal or asymmetrical (I.2 [19] 2.7: οὐ ἄντιστρέφον), as when of two similar things one is primary (e.g., I and my reflection in a mirror). The first kind of likeness is that between several copies deriving from the same original; the second is receiving heat (i.e., virtue) from fire understood as a heat-source external to the heated thing and possessing heat connaturally (i.e., the World-Soul as the external source of virtue possessing virtue connaturally) (I.2 [19] 1.35–38). Second, “if something is made hot by the presence of fire, must the fire itself be heated by the presence of fire?” (I.2 [19] 1.33–35)? Again, a negative answer would be met by an objection: fire (i.e., the World-Soul) is not heated (i.e., made virtuous) by the presence of fire simply because fire is the principle of heat, or heat itself (i.e., virtue itself) (I.2 [19] 1.38–39). As Catapano (2006, 20) rightly comments, “[p]er sfuggire a tali difficoltà occorre abbandonare il piano degli esempi e spiegarsi in termini strettamente metafisici,” which is precisely what Plotinus is going to do.

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^{183} Here is I.2 [19] 1.40–42, Plotinus’ text from which the Principle of Participation can be derived: [40] Ἀλλ' εἰ μὲν οὗ μεταλαμβάνει [41] ψυχὴ τὸ αὐτὸ ἦν τῷ ἀφ' οὗ, οὕτως ἔδει λέγειν· νῦν δὲ [42] ἕτερον μὲν ἐκεῖνο, ἕτερον δὲ τοῦτο. ARMSTRONG’s translation reads: “[40] But if that in which the soul [41] participates was the same as the source from which it comes, it would be right to speak in this way; but in fact [42] the two are distinct.” In his commentary on I.2 [19] Catapano provides several useful variations of roughly the same principle: “ciò di cui (οὗ) un soggetto partecipa è diverso da ciò a causa di cui (ἀφ’ οὗ) ne partecipa (μεταλαμβάνει) e a cui si assimila grazie a tale partecipazione”; “il modello non è ciò di cui (οὗ) le copie partecipano, ma ciò a causa di cui (ἀφ’ οὗ) esse partecipano di una proprietà comune”; “[i]l principio della partecipazione è altro dal partecipato; il partecipante dunque non partecipa del principio, ma dal principio, ossia a causa (causa esemplare) di esso” (Catapano 2006, 20, 36, and 100 respectively). Plotinus exemplifies his point in the ensuing lines of the treatise, at I.2 [19] 1.42–52, where he explains that arrangement, order, and proportion are the way in which a perceptible house is a likeness of the intelligible house, but that these features do not exist in the intelligible. Similarly, virtue is a form of harmony, order, and arrangement of the soul by which we participate in the divine; but since in the divine there is no such arrangement, neither will there be virtue. As ARMSTRONG (I, 130, note 1) explains, “[o]rder, arrangement, and proportion only appear when a form is ‘extended’ in matter, and are not present in the archetypal unity of the intelligible form; they are its expressions on a lower level. This is a principle of great importance in Plotinus’s theory of art; cp. V.8 [31] 1.”
between copy and original.¹⁸⁴ It seems fair to maintain that while in the former case
the similarity between several items requires a common principle that acts as the cause of
their similarity (both ontologically and explanatorily),¹⁸⁵ in the latter case no further
principle is necessary since the thing which between the two is primary is such a
principle. It is only in the reciprocal similarity between copies of the same original that
recourse to a third thing, that is, the “paradigmatic” original, is necessary to explain the
similarity; the explanation of the non-reciprocal similarity between a copy and its
original, on the other hand, needs no third thing beyond the original involved in the
similarity.

Plotinus must conceive the assimilation to the divine through virtue envisioned in
I.2 [19] as an instance of non-reciprocal participation, from which he can conclude that it
is not necessary for the divine to be virtuous in order to explain the soul’s assimilation to
it by virtue.¹⁸⁶ As for the objection from the Parmenides, Plotinus’ reply, never formally
stated in the Enneads but rather assumed and made operational in the discussion of topics
such as virtue,¹⁸⁷ must be that this objection relies on an inadequate understanding of
participation. It is only if participation is taken to be a strictly reciprocal affair that an
infinite regress in the postulation of Forms ensues; but matters are different if

¹⁸⁵ On an interpretation of Plotinus’ view of the causality of Forms as instrumental causality, in part against
Aristotle’s critique of Plato (e.g., Aristotle, Metaphysics VII.1033b26–29, XII.1070a26–29, 1071b14–
17), see Gerson (1994, 42–58).
¹⁸⁶ We hear Psellus still echoing a similar conclusion some eight centuries after Plotinus: ὁ γὰρ θεὸς ἐπέκεινα ἄρετῆς
ἔπεκειαν ἄρετῆς (De omnifaria doctrina 66.12 [On virtues] = PG 122, 718d).
participation is understood as non-reciprocal. Thus, the relation of Forms to things is not one between items partaking in the same property, but one of cause to effect, like the relation between myself and several images of myself in a series of 188 mirrors. 189

In the particular context of the treatise on virtues, I.2 [19], the Principle of Participation and the argument against a reciprocal view of participation concern the assimilation of the purified (i.e., virtuous) individual soul to the divinity of the World-Soul. But one might ask: Do the same argument and principle hold for the soul’s assimilation to Nous and, further still, to the One? That is, can intellification and union also be regulated by the Principle of Participation? To be able to answer these questions is of fundamental importance for our broader discussion of the Ascent qua erotic Ascent. For the eros of all derived reality is directed toward something other than the reality in which it inheres (i.e., precisely to the One qua Good and qua other), while the eros of the One, henologic eros, is a wholly self-contained eros, a pure self-positing in which nothing is affirmed, loved or desired beyond itself. But if the endpoint of the Ascent is the assimilation to an eros of an altogether different kind than the one regulating the soul’s ascending movement toward the Good, how can it be through the latter that we

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188 We could say that a gap is maintained between Forms and things, which is the gap that exists between a cause and its effects. So, when just acts participate in Justice, these are like Justice in the sense that they are possible because the agent somehow grasps Justice; however, Justice is not like them, in the sense that while these are images of likenesses of Justice, Justice itself is not an image, but the cause of all such images. If this explanation is feasible, the next task, I surmise, would be to reply to the (Aristotelian) objection that Forms cannot be causes. For reasons of space, I will be unable to deal with this objection; cf. note 185 above.

189 Thus, Plotinus’ view of participation should be understood at the same time as a refutation of the so-called third man argument, which is based on a strictly reciprocal notion of participation (see Aristotle, On Ideas, fragment 4 = Alexander of Aphrodisias, Commentary on Aristotle’s Metaphysics 84.21–85.12, and see also 92.30–93.7; Sophistical Refutations 178b36–179a10, Metaphysics 1.990b17, VII.1039a2–3, XI.1059b8–9; cf. Plato, Parmenides 131e8–132b2). See Catapano (2006, 36).
achieve assimilation to the former? In other words, how can the _eros_ at work in the Ascent be a trace of, or a participation in henologic _eros_ if the two are fundamentally different kinds of _eros_? One can immediately see that if the argument and principle concerning participation which we derived from the first two chapters of I.2 [19] may be legitimately extended beyond the relatively limited context of the treatise in which they are found, the questions just asked about the process of Ascent would be met with an answer whose systematic import for Plotinus’ metaphysics is enormous.

What I am suggesting is precisely that (i) the Principle of Participation should indeed be extended beyond the limited field of application of treatise I.2 [19], to the point that a non-reciprocal relation of participation will be said to apply universally to the relation of lower to higher realities. I am also suggesting that (ii) such a systematic “extension” of the Principle of Participation is a consequence of the concomitance of several other principles that we have encountered thus far in this study (i.e., most notably, the Principle of Superiority of Cause to Effect, the Principle of Likeness of Cause and Effect, and, ultimately, the Principle of Henologic Giving) from the vantage point of the Ascent.\(^{190}\) Stated otherwise, what the Principle of Henologic Giving (along with its corollary principles: of Superiority of Cause to Effect, and of Likeness of Cause and Effect) accomplishes from the perspective of derivation, the Principle of Participation accomplishes from the perspective of the Ascent, namely, to secure both the transcendence of the _eros_ of the One and the continuity of all _eros_ as ultimately dependent on henologic _eros_.

\(^{190}\) For a synoptic view of the principles introduced in this study see Table 6 on the last page of the present chapter.
My first suggestion—(i) that in Plotinus’ metaphysical hierarchy the Principle of Participation (or a non-reciprocal view of participation) applies universally to every relation of things of an inferior level to those of a superior level—would seem to be standard Plotinian doctrine. For example, when soul turns matter into a sensible body by communicating life to it, the body participates in the life of soul in the way in which an effect participates in its cause, that is, non-reciprocallly in the sense outlined above. Therefore, both body and soul are said to be alive, but their similarity is not measured by a third kind of life that applies to them in the manner of an Aristotelian universal, for their ways of being alive are fundamentally different: the former is a life principle, while the latter is alive as a recipient of life. The same reasoning applies to Form and everything that participates in it: the participation is of the latter in the former, not of both in a third term. Likewise with the One: every unity, even the unity of Nous, is a likeness of a unity which, not participating in any further unity, is unlike any other unity; this unity is the perfectly Simple from which all complexity and multiplicity must be derived (in accordance with the Principle of Prior Simplicity). Thus, even what in us is most similar to the One, the center of the soul (see pages 341–345 above) participates in the One in a non-reciprocal way. From the perspective of the Ascent, this means that we achieve union through a reintegration in what in us is most similar to the One (according to the Principle of Affinity and, implicitly, the Principle of As-similation); however, this similarity does not imply that our best part and the One share in a common property, but rather that our best part (specifically, the unity of its eros) is like the One in the sense that it is related to it like an effect is related to its cause.
As for my second suggestion, (ii), the universal applicability of the Principle of Participation is the necessary counterpart of the Principles of Superiority of Cause to Effect and the Principle of Likeness of Cause and Effect from the vantage point of the Ascent and, ultimately, a consequence of the Principle of Henologic Giving. Thus if it is true that, according to the Principle of Likeness of Cause and Effect, an effect resembles its cause, it is likewise true, in accordance with the Principle of Participation, that this resemblance is precisely the resemblance between an effect and its cause, not the resemblance of both to a third item, hence the necessity of the Principle of Superiority of Cause to Effect as the natural companion of the Principle of Likeness of Cause and Effect (and vice versa). That is, the two terms in question do not stand in a reciprocal relation of participation of effects in a common cause, but resemble each other non-reciprocally precisely qua cause and effect. Further, this is so because the cause gives what it does not itself have: the Principle of Henologic Giving. Strictly, this principle applies only to the One (see Chapter Three note 187). However, I believe that a loose applicability can be envisioned also with respect to the other hypostases. Thus, Intellect is Form and gives form to soul; but soul possesses form without being Form, and so to this extent Intellect, too, gives what it does not have, that is, form as possessed form, while Intellect is Form. Similarly, soul is life and gives life to what is lifeless; but what is made alive possesses life without being life, and so to this extent also soul gives what it does not have: life as possessed life, whereas soul causes life while itself being essentially alive.

We thus come to the One: what does the One give which it does not itself have? As I argued in Subsection 3.3.2, the One is described in terms of eros: itself “beloved and
love and love if itself” (VI.8 [39] 15.1). As the erotic δύναμις which is the One overflows and generates something other than itself (cf. the Principle of Double Activity and the Principle of Superabundance), its “gift” to all derived reality (or derived reality as this very gift) is also erotic in nature (per the Principle of Likeness of Cause and Effect): it is love for the One qua other. The One alone, however, possesses an eros which is not directed to something other than itself, in accordance with the Principle of Superiority of Cause to Effect. Therefore, the One gives what it does not have: the Principle of Henologic Giving. Both the One and all that derives from it are characterized by eros, and to this extent there is a clear continuity in Plotinus’ metaphysics. However, since nothing in derived reality can be legitimately called the cause of eros except the One, the similarity between the One and everything derived from it is not a horizontal relation in which they both depend for their eros on a third erotic nature, but precisely a similarity between that whose eros is directed outwardly (i.e., the eros of all derived reality for the One qua Good) and that whose eros is a pure self-positing in which nothing further is sought (i.e., henologic eros: the eros of the One), as per the Principle of Participation. Therefore, it seems that the Principle of Participation can be applied consistently to every level of Plotinus’ hierarchy and that it is systematically connected with the other basic metaphysical principles introduced in this and the previous chapter.

Having outlined four major features that are common to all the stages of the Ascent, I shall now turn to the stages themselves.

4.6 The Stages of the Ascent: Purification, Intellification, Union

I will present the work of reintegration of one’s soul into higher realities, or the
task indicated by the soul’s connatural eros, in what traditionally have been understood as the three main stages of the Ascent: reintegration into soul or purification (Subsection 4.6.1), reintegration into Nous or intellification (4.6.2), and reintegration into the One or union (4.6.3).

4.6.1 Ascent to Soul: Purification

The goal of this stage of the Ascent is to realize that one’s deeper identity lies neither in the body nor in the association with it at the level of the composite (συναμφότερον), but rather in the soul taken by itself (see Chapter Three note 256 for references). The result of this realization is a turning away from the material and a conversion (ἐπιστροφή) toward the immaterial, Nous, as that to which the soul is most akin (cf. I.2 [19] 4.13–18).

One might conjecture that since first and foremost we are souls, what we do in our embodied condition is of little or no consequence to our deepest identity. This is definitely not Plotinus’ position; on the contrary, the process of identification with one’s soul immediately requires a disciplining of our empirical or endowed self, both with respect to our body and in our relations with the world, including others.192 Thus,

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192 It is significant that Porphyry records some facts about Plotinus’ life that clearly indicate his master’s ethical stance, a stance that one will not hesitate to call ascetic (so Inge 1918, II, 167; Dillon 1999, 315). Thus, we are told that Plotinus was a vegetarian, to the point of refusing to take medicines containing parts of wild animals (VP 2.3–5). From Enneads I.2 [19] 5.18–19, one might also infer that Plotinus advocated and practiced celibacy (cf. Porphyry, Sententiae XXXII, 34.7–8; see Inge 1918, II, 167–168; for a different opinion on the matter see Ousager 2004, 270–274, especially 271). In his public life, we know not only that he was the active leader of a philosophical circle, but that one of his main activities was the care of orphans (both for their education and for the administration their property) entrusted to him by wealthy parents, who held him in high esteem and thought that he would make “a holy and godlike guardian” (VP 9.9: ἱερῷ τινι καὶ θείῳ φύλακι). From Porphyry we also learn that Plotinus had an
purification in a general sense means identification with, or reintegration in soul, but still as members of this material universe. This condition is what in treatise I.2 [19] *On virtues* Plotinus, echoing Plato’s famous text from *Theaetetus* 176a3–177c5 (especially 176b1–3; see page 92 above), calls “to be made like god” or “to be assimilated to god” (I.2 [19] 1.3–4: θεῷ... ὁμοιωθῆναι). As I already mentioned in the previous section, the specific “god” that Plotinus has in mind at this stage is the soul that rules this universe while remaining intent on higher realities, that is, the World-Soul (I.2 [19] 1.13–14). But how does this “divinization” take place? How does a human individual not only come to the basic awareness that his or her deeper identity lies in soul, but also become like the most divine soul in this universe? Plotinus’ answer is plain: through virtue (ἀρετή; cf. I.2 [19] 1.5). While using material from other treatises as well, in this subsection I will primarily engage the arguments presented in the treatise *On virtues*, I.2 [19].

According to Plotinus, from the perspective of the individual soul that is still in the process of ascent, virtue is of two kinds, or has two degrees. There are (i) lower, inferior or lesser virtues (ἐλάττους: see I.2 [19] 5.11, 7.11–14), more commonly called political or civic (πολιτικά: see I.2 [19] 1.16, 30, 2.14, 23, 3.2–10, 7.25), and there are (ii) higher, superior or greater (μείζους: see I.2 [19] 1.22, 26, 3.1–5) virtues, more commonly called purificatory or, strictly, purifications (καθάρσεις: see I.2 [19] 3.8.

accommodating character when dealing with others, but was inflexible when it came to self-discipline: “Yet, though he shielded so many from the worries and cares of ordinary life, he never, while awake, relaxed his intent concentration upon the intellect [τὴν πρὸς τὸν νοῦν τάσιν]. He was gentle [πρᾷος], too, and at the disposal of all who had any sort of acquaintance with him. Though he spent twenty-six whole years in Rome and acted as arbitrator in very many people’s disputes, he never made an enemy of any of the officials” (VP 9.16–22). Cf. also Brisson (1992, 14–25).

193 The adjective “purificatory” (καθαρτικά) as referred to higher virtues is found, not in Plotinus, but in Porphyry (*Sententiae* XXXII.26.1, 27.1, 8, 30.8, 31.6, 9), who also calls these virtues “contemplative”
11). But as Plotinus points out at I.2 [19] 7.9, all virtues are purifications, hence the collective designation of this stage of the Ascent as “purification.” In addition to civic virtues and purifications, Plotinus distinguishes two further kinds or degrees of virtues, although without assigning them any technical name: (iii) the virtues of the one who has

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194 Passages from Plato in which Plotinus is likely to have read this division of the virtues are: (i) for lower or political virtues, Republic IV.427e6–434d1 (see the adjective πολιτική referred to courage at IV.430c5) and VI. 500d4–8 (notice the adjective δημοτική, “of the people,” referred to virtue at line d8), and Phaedo 82a11–b1 (where the phrase τήν δημοτικήν καὶ πολιτικήν ἀρετήν occurs); (ii) for higher virtues or purifications, Phaedo 69a6–c3 (at b1–2, 8 virtue is described as true: τῶν ὄντων, ἀλήθειας; at c1–2, the virtues considered true are said to be a purification and a cleansing: κάθαρσις, καθαρμός). Plotinus voices the necessity of both kinds of virtues on the background of the theme of assimilation to the divine of Theaetetus 176a8–c2 as well as key passages from the second speech in praise of love in the Phaedrus (cf. pages 92 and 59 respectively).

Prior to Plotinus, we find several attempts at classifying virtue of more or less overt Platonic inspiration. In the pagan milieu, some 150 year before Plotinus, Plutarch divided virtue in moral or ethical (ήθικη) and contemplative or theoretical (θεωρητική) in the treatise On Moral Virtue in the sixth book of his Moralia. However, Catapano (2006, 42 note 83) rightly notices that Plutarch’s classification was “una distinzione non di grado, bensì di sede e di natura, la virtù morale essendo insita nella parte irrazionale e consistendo di una medietà rispetto alle passioni, la virtù contemplativa inerendo invece alla ragione e all’ intelletto di per sé impassibile” (see Plutarch, De virtute Morali I: Moralia VI.440d–2–3, 3.441d5–442c6, and 5.444e9–d9). The same appears to be true of the division between “rational” (λογικαί) and “irrational” (μετὰ τί ἄλογον αὐὴς μέρος συννοιεύματα) virtues found in chapters XXIX–XXXI of Alcinous’ Didascalikos (see especially XXIX.182.19–31); Alcinous follows Plato’s division of the soul and the virtues proper to each of its parts as presented in the fourth book of the Republic. Prior to both Plutarch and Alcinous, one can find a division of virtue by Philo, in the Jewish milieu (Philo, Legum allegoriae I.56–108, III.125–147), while in the context of Christianity there are classifications by Plotinus’ older contemporary, Origen (Homily on Numbers XXVII.12 = PG 12, 793b–800b; Commentary on Matthew’s Gospel XII.13 = PG 13, 1007b–1012a; Commentary on Paul’s Letter to the Romans II.7 = PG 14, 886a–890a; Exhortation to Martyrdom 5 = PG 11, 567c–570b). Dillon rightly points out that, compared to Plotinus’ division, the articulations found in both Philo and Origen appear “somewhat vague and inchoate” (Dillon 1983, 102).

195 This seems to be Plotinus’ position also in chapters 4–6 of his earliest treatise, I.6 [1]; in particular, at I.6 [1] 6.2 he writes that “every virtue is a purification” (πᾶσα ἀρετὴ κάθαρσις). It is possible to detect a parallel between the division of civic virtues and purifications of I.2 [19], and the distinction between natural (φυσικής) and perfect (τέλεια) virtues found in I.3 [20] 6.18–24 (probably a re-élaboration of Aristotle’s distinction between natural virtue and virtue in the proper sense—φυσική and κυρία—found in Nicomachean Ethics VI.1144b1–21, which Plotinus may be combining with the affirmations found in the references from the Phaedo cited in the previous note); on this issue see Catapano (2006, 198–199).
already achieved purification (I.2 [19] 4.4–5), and (iv) the virtues that are in Intellect as paradigms, that is, the Forms of the virtues (I.2 [19] 7.1–3).  

In reference to I.2 [19], Dillon (1999, 333 note 10) writes that “it does not in fact seem to be Plotinus’s intention to postulate further grades of virtue,” but I am not sure that this is the case. It rather seems to me that these two further distinctions are in fact drawn (cf. Olympiodorus, Commentary on Plato’s Phaedo VIII.2.12–14), but that they play a relatively small role in I.2 [19]. It is Porphyry who will make them explicit: he will qualify the former distinction, (iii), with a periphrasis, as “the [virtues] of the one who has already achieved perfect contemplation and already enjoys vision” (Sententiae XXXII.23.1–2: ἄι τού ἕδη τελείου θεωρετικοὶ καὶ ἕδη θεατοὶ; see also 28.6–29.7), and will call the latter kind of virtues, (iv), “paradigmatic” (παραδιγματικαί: Sententiae XXXII.28.6, 29.9, 31.8, and cf. 23.2–3). In the XI century, Psellus will refer to the nameless virtues, (iii), as both νοεραί and, perhaps depending on Proclus (e.g., Commentary on Plato’s Republic I, 13.5) but against Porphyry’s own usage indicated in note 193 above, θεωρητικαί (Psellus, De omnifaria doctrina 66.6–7 [On virtues] = PG 122, 717c). However, in other places Psellus follows the Porphyrian division and reserves the adjective θεωρητικαί for the purificatory virtues or purifications, i.e., (ii) in the body of our text (see Psellus, Philosophica Minora II, 32.109.20–22 [On virtues]; Theologica I, 30.54–64 [Interpretation of Climacus’ dictum]).

In post-Porphyrian Neoplatonism, other distinctions or degrees of virtue will eventually be incorporated in this basic fourfold division, in particular: (a) below the civic virtues, Proclus (e.g., Commentary on Plato’s ALCibiades I 96.7–10), probably following Iamblichus (cf. Westerink 1976, 117), and later Olympiodorus (Commentary on Plato’s Alcibiades I 30.4, 155.3–7, 159.5; Commentary on Plato’s Phaedo VIII.2.2–3) speak of “natural” (φυσικαί) and “ethical” (ἡθικαί) virtues; (b) at an even lower level than natural virtues, there are those that Damascius calls “servile” (ἁνδραποδώδεις) but these are only “so-called” (καλούμενα) virtues, since they are mixed with their contrasting vices (Damascius, Commentary on Plato’s Phaedo I.145; cf. Plato, Phaedo 69b7); (c) at the top of the hierarchy, Iamblichus (cf. Marinus, Life of Proclus 26.22; Damascius, Commentary on Plato’s Phaedo I.143.1–144.4) places the “theurgical” (θεουργικαί) or “priestly” (ἱερατικαί) virtues (cf. also Psellus, De omnifaria doctrina 67.6 [Still on virtues] = PG 122, 720a). As shown by Westerink (1962, xxxix–xI), the order of ten of Plato’s dialogues found at the end of the tenth chapter of the Anonymous Prolegomena to Platonic Philosophy (X.219.17–220.45) is based on a more complex division of virtue which apparently had become common by the late sixth century A.D., the probable date of composition of that work (cf. also Damascius, Commentary on Plato’s Phaedo I.138–145; Olympiodorus, Commentary on Plato’s Phaedo VIII.2). Several classifications of virtue, both simpler and more complex than the fourfould Porphyrian (and, I believe, Plotinian) division, are still attested in the XI century by Psellus (De omnifaria doctrina 66–69 = PG 122, 717c–720d; 70, 71–74 = PG 122, 720d–724a).

In the Latin Christian tradition we hear likely echoes of the original Plotinian-Porphyrian division in Augustine’s Contra Academicos III.37 (where he mentions only the twofold division between civic virtues and purifications, which he calls civiles, or veri similes, and verae), possibly in De animae quantitate 33.73–76 and De musica VI.13.37–16.55, and, if of Augustinian origin (as argued by Dolbeau 1996), especially in the Liber XXI sententiarum 15.248–251, repeated verbatim at 19b.450–453 (where we find three genera virtutum: civiles politiorum, purgatoriae, and exemplares). The full fourfold division of the virtues will be endorsed again by Bonaventure (Collationes in Hexaëmeron VI.24–32) and Thomas Aquinas (Summa theologiae I–II.q61.a5.s.c.), both of whom refer to Plotinus via Macrobius’ Commentary on Scipio’s Dream 1.8.5–11, where we find the Latin version of the four genera virtutum which was partially anticipated by Augustine and which will become scholastic: politicae, purgatoriae, iam purgati animi, and exemplares.

For a brief but precise reconstruction of the history of the degrees of virtue from Plotinus through the Middle Ages containing further references to primary sources, see Catapano (2006, 37–49), to whom I owe all but the first reference to Augustine, the reference to Psellus’ Theologica, and those to Marinus and Bonaventure. Cf. also Trouillard (1955b, 166–186).
I will try to clarify the meaning of purification and the basic difference between the degrees of virtue, in particular the first two (the civic virtues and the purifications), by addressing two fundamental issues taken into account by Plotinus in treatise I.2 [19] On virtue. First, since the civic virtues alone are not sufficient to reach assimilation with the divine, in what sense are they still necessary for it? Second, how do the higher virtues or purifications differ from the lower ones?\(^{197}\)

Let us begin with the first question. The civic virtues for Plotinus are the four traditional virtues found in book IV of the Republic: wisdom (φρόνησις) for the rational part of the soul (τὸ λογιστικόν, called τὸ λογιζόμενον in treatise I.2 [19]); courage (ἀνδρία) and temperance (σωφροσύνη) respectively for the spirited (τὸ θυμοειδές, called τὸ θυμούμενον in treatise I.2 [19]) and appetitive (τὸ ἐπιθυμετικόν) parts understood as two distinct manifestations of the part of the soul that lacks reason (τὸ ἄλογον); and justice (δικαιοσύνη) as the harmonious condition of soul resulting from the hierarchical ordering of the parts of the soul (I.2 [19] 3.17–19) under reason,\(^{198}\) or the situation in which each part “minds its own business” (οἰκειοπραγία\(^{199}\)). Through these virtues the individual soul becomes aware that its attachment to the body, especially bodily pleasures, does not belong essentially or originally to its nature. The practice of virtue and the acquisition of a virtuous state (διάθεσις) signify a conversion for the soul: it is the

\(^{197}\) There is a third fundamental issue faced by Plotinus in I.2 [19]: since it is through virtue (primarily the higher virtues, but also the lower) that the soul becomes assimilated to the divine, why does Plotinus maintain that the divine does not possess these virtues? I already dealt with this problem in the previous section in my discussion of the Principle of Participation.

\(^{198}\) See Chapter Three notes 243–252 for references to all these parts or powers of the soul in Plotinus.

\(^{199}\) See Plato, Republic IV.434c8; Plotinus I.2 [19] 1.20, 6.20–21, 7.5.
beginning of a resolute turn away from merely bodily concerns and toward the immaterial realm of Intellect to which the soul is akin (I.2 [19] 3.19–22). It is in this sense that Plotinus understands the civic virtues as a reordering of the soul’s priorities or, as he puts it, as the measure (μέτρον) and limit (ὅρος) of the unmeasuredness (ἐμετρία) and unlimitedness (ἀοριστία) which the soul experiences when it is subject to the desires and opinions intimately connected with the body. Plotinus writes at I.2 [19] 2.13–22:

[13] The [14] civic virtues, which we mentioned above, do genuinely set us in order [15] and make us better by giving limit and measure to our [16] desires, and putting measure into all our experience; and they abolish false opinions, [17] by what in general is better, that is, by [the soul] being endowed with limit and lying outside of the unlimited and [18] indefinite and being that which has been measured. And having themselves been limited, [19] insofar as they are a measure for a matter which is the soul, they are made similar to the measure There and [20] have a trace in them of the Best There. That which is altogether [21] unmeasured is matter, and so altogether dissimilar: but in so far as it participates [22] in form, it becomes similar to that [Good] which is formless.

The necessity of civic virtue for the Ascent becomes clear in a passage from the so-called Großechrift in which Plotinus criticizes Gnostic “morality” (II.9 [33] 15.18–40). According to Plotinus the Gnostics, despite their claim of already possessing salvific knowledge or gnosis fail to give tangible proof of this in their conduct; instead, they turn

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200 I.2 [19] 2.13–22: [13] Αἱ μὲν τοίνυν [14] πολιτικαὶ ἀρεταί, ἃς ἄνω που εἴπομεν, κατακοσμοῦσι μὲν ὄντως [15] καὶ ἀμείνους ποιοῦσιν ὁρίζουσαι καὶ μετροῦσαι τὰς [16] ἐπιθυμίας καὶ ὅλως τὰ πάθη μετροῦσαι καὶ ψευδεῖς δόξας [17] ἀφαιροῦσαι τὸ ὅλως ἀμείνον καὶ τὸ ὄρισθαι καὶ τὸν ἀμέτρον καὶ [18] ἀοριστὸν ἐξω εἶναι καὶ τὸ μεμετρημένον· καὶ αὐτὰ ἀριστεῖσαι, [19] ἣ μέτρα γε ἐν ὑπη τῇ ψυχῇ, ὁμοίωμα τῷ ἐκεί μέτρῳ καὶ [20] ἔχουσιν ᾨγος τῶν ἑκεί ἀρίστου. Τὸ μὲν γὰρ πάντῃ [21] ἀμετρον ὅλη ἐν πάντῃ ἀνωμοιοῦται· καθ’ ὅσον δὲ μεταλαμβάνει [22] εἴσοδος, κατὰ τοσοῦτον ὁμοιοῦται ἀνειδέῳ ἐκείνῳ ὅντι. There is a crux at line 18: (i) most manuscripts read καὶ τὸ μεμετρημένον; (ii) the Addenda at textum in both HS1 and HS2, followed by IGAL, write κατὰ τὸ μεμετρημένον. I follow (i) with Catapano (2006, 111–112), where one can also find a helpful discussion of this issue. Three points are worth noting: first, the first καὶ at line 17 is epexegetical; further, the second τὸ at line 17 rules three infinitives, that is, ὀρίσθαι on the same line, εἶναι on the next, and an implied εἶναι, which "funge da copula e forma con τὸ μεμετρημένον un predicato nominale" (Catapano 2006, 111–112); finally, all these infinitives refer not to the virtues but to the soul. My translation is based on ARMSTRONG but attempts to reflect these observations.
to pleasure and the satisfaction of their individual bodily needs while showing indifference to virtue.\textsuperscript{201} In this perspective, therefore, the practice and acquisition of civic virtue, or the habit of the good ordinary moral conduct summed up by the four virtues of the \textit{Republic}, is not itself the end of the journey, but a necessary means to a higher end and, secondarily, a way of showing that one is serious about pursuing such an end.\textsuperscript{202}

\textsuperscript{201} II.9 [33] 15.22–29: “[22] Yet those who already have the \textit{gnosis} [τὸὺς ἤδη ἐγνωκότας] should [23] start going after it here and now, and their pursuit should first of all [24] set right their conduct here below, as they come from a divine nature; for that nature [25] is aware of nobility and despises the pleasure of the body. [26] But those who have no share of virtue [ἀρετῆς μὴ μέτεστιν] would not be [27] moved at all toward that higher world. This too is evidence of their [28] indifference to virtue, that they have never made any treatise [λόγον] about virtue, but have [29] altogether left out the treatment of these subjects...” We will hear Augustine repeatedly voicing a very similar complaint, though from a different perspective, against the Manicheans (e.g., \textit{De moribus Ecclesiae et de moribus Manichaeorum} II.19.67–20.75). For an introductory account of the meanings of \textit{gnosis} see Rudolph (1987, 55–57).

\textsuperscript{202} The question of the status of ethics in Plotinus has been the subject of a number of studies yielding somewhat different results. Besides the commentaries on treatises dealing explicitly with ethical issues (see particularly: Catapano 2006 on I.2 [19] \textit{On virtues}; Linguiti 2000 and McGroarty 2006 on I.4 [46] \textit{On well-being} [ἰούδαιμονία]; Linguiti 2000 and 2007 on I.5 [36] \textit{On whether well-being increases with time}), the following recent studies are worth noting: Plass (1982), Dillon (1983; 1999), Gerson (1994, 185–202), A. Smith (1999b), Schniewind (2003; 2005), Remes (2006), Song (2009). If we are to trust Porphyry’s witness (see note 192 above), there is little doubt that Plotinus was a person who followed a moral conduct; he did so, moreover, as a matter of principle, that is, because assimilation to higher realities would not be possible without a corresponding dissociation from making the commitment to the body and its pleasures a primary matter of concern (his critique to the Gnostics mentioned above is particularly telling in this regard). What is likely to bother those contemporary readers of Plotinus who study the \textit{Enneads} not only as a historical relic but also as philosophy, or a possible source of inspiration (for better or for worse) on how to live a certain kind of life, is precisely Plotinus’ attitude toward ethics. Specifically, there are four aspects of the issue that seem to be worrisome to modern readers: (i) whether Plotinus’ ethics is elitist; (ii) whether its focus on transcendence comes at the expense of immanence (i.e., as a failure to work at making \textit{this} world a better place); (iii) whether it values other human beings for their own sake; (iv) whether it is realistic.

(i) If by calling Plotinus’ ethics “elitist” one means that outward ethical behavior is possible only for those who are committed to pursuing assimilation to higher realities, I do not think that Plotinian ethics is elitist. I see no reason to deny that someone who is unaware of one’s connection to higher realities could still behave in accordance with an established code of conduct (e.g., by habituation), although I am not sure about the extent to which such behavior would constitute virtue for Plotinus, if at all (it will for later Platonists, e.g., Damascus and Olympiodorus, who will refer to this type of virtue as ethical: Damascus, \textit{Commentary on Plato’s Phaedo} I.139; Olympiodorus, \textit{Commentary on Plato’s Phaedo} VIII.2.7–9). Happiness or well-being (ἰούδαιμονία), on the other hand, is possible only as the identification with one’s higher or ideal self in the noetic realm (see Subsection 4.6.2). But on the basis of the doctrine of the undescended part of the soul (see pages 341–345 above), this possibility is in principle open to all human souls. Thus, to call Plotinus’ position elitist merely on account of the inability of some individual souls to
In the fourth chapter of the treatise on virtues Plotinus explains that the degree of virtue varies depending on whether one is in the process of purification (I.2 [19] 4.3: ἐν τῷ καθαίρεσθαι) or at the end of this process (I.2 [19] 4.3–4: ἐν τῷ κεκαθάρθαι). It is obvious that the process of purification—by which I take that Plotinus means the process of becoming wise, temperate, courageous, and just (i.e., the lower virtues), whereby the individual soul puts order in its priorities and redirects itself away from the sensible and be reintegrated in their better part, would be even more unreasonable than qualifying as elitist the requirement that in order to be able to play on a professional soccer team, one has to be in possession of excellent soccer skills. Desiring the end, one ought to desire to possess the means to that end as well; otherwise, the very desire for the end as a truly final end becomes questionable, as Plotinus seems to imply in his criticism of the Gnostics. One may object that some souls lack the most basic external conditions that would favor the pursuit of εὐδαιμονία. Plotinus seems to have little regard for this objection, since in his view every soul occupies its proper place in the universe according to a providential plan (cf. for instance III.2 [47] 12). (It is this last idea, I sense, that offends modern sensibility—perhaps with good reasons—more than the fact that εὐδαιμονία requires the assimilation to higher reality, and hence purification.)

(ii) Is the sage (σπουδαῖος) less concerned about this world because of his or her focus, or “intent concentration” (VP 9.17), on the noetic dimension? If one considers that assimilation is, initially, assimilation to that god which is the World-Soul and that the relation of the World-Soul to the sensible cosmos is characterized chiefly as Providence (see particularly the long treatise on the subject, split in two parts by Porphyry: III.2–3 [47–48]), it seems hard to imagine that the sage should not care for the sensible universe. On the contrary, Plotinus consistently promotes a positive attitude toward the cosmos (besides the treatise on Providence I just mentioned, see his extensive critique of the Gnostics’ negative attitude toward the sensible world in II.9 [33]). In IV.4 [28] 39 Plotinus argues that even the works of virtue are woven in the order of the universe, and from VI.8 [39] 1–6 one can reasonably infer that to be truly free as an embodied individual means to cooperate with the World-Soul in the providential ordering of the cosmos (see Song 2009, 95–158). The mere fact that Plotinus highlights the necessity even of lower virtue for “deification” should at the very least bring us at least heavily to requalify the otherwise hard-to-miss otherworldliness of his thought. As I pointed out in the previous section (pages 381–383), in ascending, the individual soul cannot skip stages, and lower virtue is one such stage.

(iii) Based both on (ii) and on Plotinus’ own practice highlighted in note 192 above, it is fair to conclude that the Plotinian sage would be genuinely concerned about the welfare of others. However, this is different than saying that others are valued for their own sake, and so I believe that the answer to the third question remains negative. I also believe that my remarks about Plato’s position on the same issue (see Subsection 1.5.5 above) apply all the more sharply to Plotinus (see also Section 5.2 in the Epilogue).

(iv) Finally, I believe that to ask whether Plotinus’ ethics is realistic means to doubt whether happiness (εὐδαιμονία) as he envisions it (on which see pages 409–413 below) can ever be achieved by a human being. The doubt is fair and, given the counterintuitive character of some of Plotinus’ views on the subject, even natural. However, this doubt should be directed primarily to Plotinus’ metaphysics (and psychology), since it is on this that his ethics depends. Only if his metaphysical views are found to be untenable does his ethics become questionable. But to be questionable in this context should be taken to mean that as human beings we are without doubt incapable of a Plotinian ethics, not that what we may be capable of is perceived as unsatisfactory or incredible at the level of the composite. For a lucid exposition of this point see Gerson (1994, 185–191).
toward the intelligible (I.2 [19] 3.11–22)—cannot itself be the good, since it is a
means to an end. From the limited perspective of lower virtue, the end is the achieved
state of purification, or the actual possession of the civic virtues as states of the soul. This
amounts to the first step of the reintegration into one’s higher self: it is the realization that
one’s true nature lies in the soul, that the soul is other than the body, and that the soul’s
attachment to the body and its pleasures as primary matters of concern do not belong
originally to the soul’s nature but are added on to it as an alien element. The soul in its
pure state, therefore, is what is left (I.2 [19] 4.10: τὸ καταλειπόμενόν) at the end of the
process of purification and at the same time the goal of this process, or, as Plotinus puts
it, already a sort of perfection (I.2 [19] 4.5: οἶον τέλος ἤδη) and something like the good
(I.2 [19] 4.12: ἀγαθοειδῆ). One could say that what virtue does is simply to reawaken the
soul to its true nature and resolutely direct it toward Intellect.

But despite these descriptions of the purified state, Plotinus also argues that this
condition cannot be the true end of the process of assimilation. And this for one simple
reason: because the soul is “not a nature capable of remaining in the real good, for it has a
natural tendency in both directions” (I.2 [19] 4.12–13). Lack of stability is part of the
nature of the individual soul even in its purified state. In order to achieve such stability,
the purified soul, that is, the soul disengaged from its identification with the desires and
the opinions derived from its intercourse with body and initially directed toward the
intelligible, needs something extra, some further training, as it were. It is here that the
higher virtues or purifications come into the picture. But before this is possible, the soul

ought to be purified. The journey toward Intellect starts where one’s identification with soul, or purification, is achieved.

This stage, the stage of achieved purification, acts as a sort of boundary between the process leading up to it, or purification proper, and the process starting from it, or the actual knowledge of the intelligibles that follows from a previous conversion to them. As a boundary, in a sense it belongs neither to the process that precedes it nor to the one that follows it; but in another sense it belongs to both as the link between them that warrants the continuity of the Ascent as a single movement. Let us go back, then, to the second question asked earlier on page 399: How do the higher virtues differ from the lower ones?

A sketch of the function of the higher virtues is provided at I.2 [19] 4.13–29, immediately following the description of soul as that whose nature is incapable of remaining in the real good (see note 203). After arguing that for the soul to be purified means already to be converted toward the immaterial intelligible realm as that which is both contrary to body and akin to soul (I.2 [19] 4.13–18), Plotinus, at I.2 [19] 4.18–25, writes about the condition resulting from the purification/conversion in the soul:204

towards that which gives them light. It did not have the realities themselves but impressions of them; so it must bring the impressions into accord with the true realities of which they are impressions.

According to this text, to acquire the higher virtues means to activate a connection with the intelligible realm which at this particular stage of the Ascent lies only potentially in the soul. But this activation is not possible unless the soul is already purified or converted toward the intelligible through the lower virtues. Thus, it would seem that what distinguishes the lower from the higher virtues is that the former lead to the point at which the individual soul is aware of its kinship with the intelligible and resolutely turns toward pursuing assimilation to it, while the latter are the very practice by which a mere, albeit necessary, turning toward the intelligible becomes actual knowledge of it.

Thus, in a sense the practice and acquisition of the higher virtues is already the beginning of the process of assimilation to Intellect. This practice is also a process of purification in the sense that in order to become habituated to be effortlessly connected with the intelligible, the individual soul ought to master the distractions that come to it from its relation to the body (cf. I.2 [19] 5). In this context, the four virtues of the Republic, which at the civic level were ordinary practices leading to good social conduct and the realization of one’s kinship with something other than body, are now redefined to

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205 As Catapano (2006, 146–147) rightly points out, Plotinus here loosely borrows from Aristotle the principle that knowledge is not, properly speaking, an alteration (ἀλλοίωσις), but a passage from potency to act (or rather, from first to second actuality: see pages 180–181 above). See Aristotle, De anima II.417b5–12; cf. also Alexander of Aphrodisias, Commentary on Aristotle’s De anima 86.4–5. For parallels in Plotinus see III.6 [26] 2.34–54, III.9 [13] 5, IV.6 [41] 3.10–16.

206 Although Plotinus was quite convinced that the soul, being inessentially connected to body, can persist even after the dissolution of the composite in physical death (cf. treatise IV.7 [2]), it will be useful to remind ourselves once again that both in this and the next stages of the Ascent dissociation from the body should not be understood in a literal sense, at least not immediately (see pages 363–364 and note 174 above). Plotinus makes this clear in chapter 5 of treatise I.2 [19], where the activity of the higher virtues or purifications takes place in the context of an embodied existence.
fit their higher purpose. Thus, at the superior level wisdom (σοφία μὲν καὶ φρόνησις: I.2 [19] 6.12) has no connotation of applied discursive reasoning on the part of the soul, but “consists in the contemplation of that which Intellect contains [viz., the intelligibles], which Intellect has by immediate contact.” 

The same is true of the other virtues. Justice, far from always requiring a plurality of parts each “minding its own business” (see note 198 above), belongs to a unitary entity. Something similar can be said of the other virtues, as Plotinus explicitly writes at I.2 [19] 6.22–27:

[22] True absolute justice is the disposition of a unity to [23] itself, a unity in which there are no different parts. So the higher justice [24] in the soul is its activity towards Intellect, its [25] being temperate is its inward turning to Intellect, its courage is its freedom from affections [26], in the likeness of that to which it looks which is free of affections by nature [i.e., Intellect], [27] so as to prevent its sharing in the affections of its inferior companion [i.e., the part(s) of the soul lacking reason].

Through achieved purification, the individual soul becomes godlike, joining the condition of the World-Soul, which is able to master its body while maintaining its concentration intent on Intellect via the Soul-Hypostasis (cf. pages 249–250 and 219 above). In this way, the individual soul is already on the threshold of Intellect. But what does it mean for it to come to abide in Intellect? Or, in the somewhat clumsy expression that I will be using in the next subsection, what does it mean for the soul to achieve

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207 I.2 [19] 6.12–13: [12] Ἡ σοφία μὲν καὶ φρόνησις ἐν [13] θεωρίᾳ ὃν νοῦς ἔχει· νοῦς δὲ τῇ ἐπαφῇ. The translation is ARMSTRONG’s, with minor changes. IGAL (I, 217 note 18) rightly observes that the technical distinction between σοφία and φρόνησις is Aristotelian (see Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics VI.1139b16–17, 1140a24–b30, 1141a9–b9, 1143b18–a11), but the two tend to be blurred in both Plato and Plotinus; so also Catapano (2006, 185–186), who aptly refers us to Enneads VI.6 [34] 18.33, I.4 [46] 9.17–18.

“intellification” or the be “intellified”?  

4.6.2 Ascent to Nous: Intellification

Let us take a step back and consider what the embodied individual soul has achieved through purification from the vantage point of eros. By the habitual practice of virtue the soul has come to realize that its true identity lies away from the body. This does not mean that through such a realization the soul abandons the body or stops taking care of it, but rather that its affective commitment to the body, or the eros which the soul invests in an embodied existence, is not (or no longer) prior. The care of the embodied self for its own sake meant an attachment to something foreign to the soul’s nature, since unlike Aristotle, who thought of the soul as the ἐντελέχεια of the body, Plotinus maintains that the soul is not necessarily connected to the body. Thus, while for the soul to be erotically or affectively committed to the body is in a sense natural insofar as it is related to a body as the soul of that particular body, in another sense to make of its body a primary matter of concern is a kind of alienation, and specifically an erotic alienation: it means for the soul to be affectively directed to something that is not only essentially other than itself, but also ontologically inferior insofar as it lacks permanence and is only the image of a superior kind of unity. Thus, purification reverses the direction of the soul’s eros but at the same time it sharpens its sense of alienation as the soul finds itself

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209 Speaking about the relation of the sage to his body, Plotinus writes at I.4 [46] 4.25–30: “[25] What he seeks [26] he seeks as a necessity, not for himself but for something that belongs to him [οὐχ αὑτῷ, ἀλλὰ την τῶν αὐτοῦ]; [27] that is, he seeks it for the body which is joined to him; and even granting that this is a living body, [28] it lives its own life, and not the life which is that of the good man. [29] He knows its needs and gives it what he gives it without [30] taking away from his own life.”

210 See note 37 above and Chapter Two note 105.
subject to the “regime of exteriority”\textsuperscript{211} that is proper to the body.

Now, in the further process of intellification the individual soul, turned inwards and having broken its affective ties to what is other than itself through purification, seeks to identify with a higher level of unity, something that is more intimately itself than the connection with its particular body: Intellect. In what Hadot indicates as the only autobiographical passage in the \textit{Enneads},\textsuperscript{212} IV.8 [6] 1.1–11, Plotinus describes what may be understood as an experience of\textsuperscript{213} intellification:\textsuperscript{214}

\begin{quote}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{211} Cf. Trouillard (1955b, 28–46).

\textsuperscript{212} Hadot (1993, 25).

\textsuperscript{213} I write “may” because interpreters disagree on whether this famous passage from the first chapter of IV.8 [6] should be understood as a description of unification with Intellect or with the One. Among the authors supporting identification with Intellect, which I also tend to favor, are Trouillard (1955b, 98), O’Meara (1974, 1993, 104–105), Hadot (1987, 14–15), Schroeder (1992, 5–6), Gatti (1996, 142), Blumenthal (1999, 95); among those supporting identification with the One, see Rist (1967, 56, with 253 note 4), who refers to the Arabic Plotinus (the so-called \textit{Theology of Aristotle}), in which the expression υπὲρ πᾶν τὸ ἄλλο νοητὸν ἐμαυτὸν ἱδρύσας at lines 6–7 is translated as “to be above the entire intelligible universe (cf. HS\textsubscript{1} ad loc.), and more extensively Ousager (2004, 61–66), where one can also find a helpful account of the disagreement and further references.

and now, descend, [9] and how my soul has come to be in the [10] body when it is what it has shown itself to be by itself, even [11] when it is in the body.

I will limit my summary treatment of intellification to the two sides of this experience, one negative and the other positive. The negative aspect is the explication of the first general feature of the Ascent at this stage, namely that like in the other stages, also in the assimilation to Intellect there occurs not an addition but a subtraction. What is left behind or subtracted is not only all that is bodily, but also all that is connected to the body, such as memory, anticipation, and consciousness of one’s embodied condition. The positive aspect will be a brief account of what it means for the individual soul to come to abide or to be reintegrated in the noetic realm, namely εὐδαιμονία. Since these two aspects are closely connected, they will be treated jointly.

The individual soul’s entrance into Intellect coincides with what for Plotinus is happiness or well-being (εὐδαιμονία), the subject of treatise I.4 [46]. Put differently, eudaimonia is the life of the individual soul in Nous, or as a member of Nous (see references in note 135 above). There is no denying that ordinarily, from the perspective of the embodied and yet unpurified individual soul, life in Nous must sound like dangerous madness at worst and innocuous fancy at best. For this reason the process of reintegration in the noetic realm cannot take place prior to purification, without which the individual soul would fail to reform its erotic commitments and in all probability would

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215 On the difficulty of providing a proper rendering of the pregnant term εὐδαιμονία, see McGroarty (2006, 40–41), the author of a full commentary on treatise I.4 [46] to which I will be referring occasionally in this subsection (cf. also ARMSTRONG I, 170–171 note 1), and to which I am indebted for some of the extra Plotinian references related to this treatise. Following McGroarty’s lead, from this point on I will transliterate the terms εὐδαιμονία (eudaimonia) and εὐδαίμων (simplified without the long quantity: eudaimon).
not even be able to appreciate noetic life. At the same time, both purification and intellification will have to be supplemented by arguments and demonstrations understood not so much as mere mental exercises, but as a method of Ascent.216 One could read the entirety of the *Enneads* not simply as a series of treatises about topics of philosophical relevance, but as an arsenal of arguments and demonstrations aimed at facilitating the Ascent. If this is plausible, it can be argued that intellification conceived of as the process leading to *eudaimonia* or life in *Nous* consists also in the efforts by which we strive to familiarize ourselves with all such arguments and demonstrations and become erotically committed to what they signify.217

The kind of life that is *eudaimonia* is in principle available to every human being; the one who succeeds in making it actual is called a sage (σπουδαῖος).218 After having spent the first two chapters of I.4 [46] to refute Aristotelian, Epicurean, and Stoic doctrines about *eudaimonia*,219 Plotinus offers a sketch of this life in *Nous* in the next two

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217 Becoming erotically committed to what the arguments signify is crucial: without such commitment, the arguments would be no different (or perhaps different only in terms of intensity) than entertaining oneself by engaging in amusing pastimes—a possibility which, if we are to listen to Rosen (1987, xxx–xxxi), Plato himself entertained (cf. Laws VII.803c1–8).

218 On the notion of σπουδαῖος see Schniewind (2003).

219 Plotinus’ main contention against Aristotle and those who agree with him is that if *eudaimonia* is equated either to living well (Τὸ ἄλλο ἀληθεύουσα I.4 [46] 1.1) or to the achievement of the end (τέλος: I.4 [46] 1.10) of the desires which living beings possess by nature (cf. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* I.1098b20–21, *Magna Moralia* I.1184b22–30, *Eudemian Ethics* II.1219b1–2), then we will have to admit that even animals and plants can be *eudaimon*. Against the Stoics (and, more obviously, the Epicureans for the primacy they assigned to pleasure), Plotinus argues that their denying *eudaimonia* to plants on account of their lack of sensation (I.4 [46] 1.21–23) mistakenly emphasizes the importance of sensation in *eudaimonia* (cf. I.4 [46] 2.1–31; for the Stoics cf. Epictetus, *Discourses* II.8.5; for the Epicureans, cf.
chapters, I.4 [46] 3–4. He insists that eudaimonia should not be understood as life in
general, or as a feature that is common to all that is living, nor is it rational life as a
species of the genus life; instead, it is rational life understood as life at its best, or as that
life of which all other forms of life are traces or images. On this basis, it follows that
among individual souls in the sensible universe eudaimonia will be available only to
those souls that are capable of partaking in reason, that is, human souls. 220

Another important aspect of eudaimonia is its close connection with the
distinctively Plotinian doctrine of the undescended (part of the) soul. As we saw earlier at
pages 341–345 above, Plotinus maintains that our best part never leaves the intelligible
realm, but as one might infer from the passages from V.1 [10] 12 and IV.8 [6] 1 cited
above (notes 170 and 215), embodied souls do not seem to be always in touch with this
part. 221 Thus, even if it is true that our best part abides in Nous in a permanent status of
eudaimonia, in our embodied condition we are only potentially connected with it. The
explanation of this connection in terms of potentiality and actuality is precisely what we

Letter to Menoeceus 127 = Epicurea 62.8–12; Letter to Herodotus 82.1 = Epicurea 31.34). And
although the Stoics recognize the importance of rational life for eudaimonia (SVF III, 687 = Diogenes
Laertius, Lives of Eminent Philosophers VII.130), their emphasis on primary things according to nature
(τὰ πρῶτα κατὰ φύσιν: I.4 [46] 2.37, 41–42; cf. SVF III, 140 = Stobaeus, Anthologiaion II, 79.18–80.1;
SVF III, 141 = Stobaeus, Anthologiaion II, 82.11–15; SVF III, 181.43.38–44.1 = Gellius, Attic Nights
XII.5.7) either subordinates reason to the pursuit of these things, or else, if it does not, it still fails to
provide a satisfactory account of rational life (I.4 [46] 2.31–45) and, as a consequence, of eudaimonia.

220 I.4 [46] 3.33–40: “[33] We have often said that the perfect [34] life, the true, real life [ἡ τελεία ζωὴ καὶ ἡ ἀληθινὴ καὶ ὄντως]
is in that intelligible nature [τῇ νοερᾷ φύσι], [35] and that other lives are
incomplete, traces [ἰνδάλματα] of life, not [36] perfectly or purely and no more life than [37] its opposite. And
now let us put it shortly; [38] as long as all living things proceed from a single source [ἐκ μιᾶς ἀρχῆς], but have not [39] life to the same degree as it, the origin must be the first and [40] most perfect life” (ARMSTRONG’s translation, slightly modified).

find in the fourth chapter of the treatise on *eudaimonia*. We read at I.4 [46] 4.6–17.222

[6] ... man has perfect life by [7] having not only sense-life, but reasoning and true [8] intelligence. But is he different from this [9] when he has it? No, he is not a man at all unless [10] he has this, either potentially or actually, (and if he has it actually we say that [11] he is in a state of *eudaimonia*). But shall we say that he has this perfect kind of life [12] in him as a part of himself? Other [13] men, we maintain, who have it potentially, have it as a part, but the [14] man who is already *eudaimon*, who actually is this and [15] has passed over into identity with it, [does not have it but] is this. Everything else is just something he wears; [16] you could not call it part of him because he wears it without wanting to; [17] it would be his if he united it to him by an act of the will.

Here again the gap that exists between oneself at the embodied level and one’s better, undescended part can be understood in terms of *eros*. As Plotinus goes on to explain in the rest of the chapter, to actualize one’s connectedness to this part means to reintegrate oneself in it, or to achieve a condition of self-sufficiency (I.4 [46] 4.23:

Αὐτάρκης), in which nothing alien is desired simply because it is not (or no longer) found worth desiring in comparison to what one actually has become. The gap between what one has come to identify with and one’s desideratum has been reduced to a minimum: one is what one used to desire. In Plotinus’s universe this newly achieved identification is in fact a re-unification with what each individual human soul always already was in its highest part as a member of the intelligible universe. Plotinus puts it clearly in two passages, IV.7 [2] 10.32–37 and VI.5 [23] 7.1–8.223 The first passage, IV.7 [2] 10.32–37,


[32] For he will see [33] an intellect which sees nothing perceived by the senses, none of these mortal things, [34] but apprehends the eternal by its eternity, and all the things in the [35] intelligible world, having become itself an intelligible universe full of light, [36] illuminated by the truth from the Good, which [37] radiates truth over all the intelligibles.

And here is the second passage, VI.5 [23] 7.1–8:

[1] For we and what is ours go back to real being [2] and ascend to that and to the first which comes from it, [3] and we think the intelligibles; we do not have images or imprints of them. [4] But if we do not, we are the intelligibles. If then we have a part of true knowledge, [5] we are those; we do not apprehend them as distinct within ourselves, [6] but we are within them. For since the others, and not [7] only ourselves, are those, we are all those. So then, being together [8] with all things, we are those; so then, we are all and one.

Thus, for the individual soul eudaimonia does not simply mean the complete assimilation to Nous understood as something other than soul, as if this state were an experience in the radical, etymological sense of attempting or going through (-periri: πείρα, περάω) something external to (ex-) or wholly other than the soul; it is rather a re-integration into something that is most deeply itself. For the soul this is indeed a departure, yet not from itself, but form all that in it is less than noetic; therefore, it is a departure that is essentially a return to what in the soul is most purely itself.

Just like all movement to a higher stage of the Ascent, reintegration in Intellect implies a subtraction: one’s statue takes on its full shape only by the chipping away of superfluous materials. We ask: What are these “materials” at the level of intellification? Certainly they cannot be the individuality or particularity of a given soul in its highest part, since this part permanently subsists in Nous as a member of the intelligible. At the level of intellification, these materials left behind are the memories related to one’s bodily existence. In his treatment of memory, covering twenty full chapters of his lengthy treatise On Difficulties about the Soul (IV.3–5 [27–29]), Plotinus first establishes that memory belongs to the soul rather than to the composite and that its seat is the power of imagination (τὸ φανταστικόν) (IV.3 [27] 25–32). He then goes on to argue that when the individual soul has identified completely with its highest part and has come to abide purely in the intelligible, memory must be absent there because the way of being of Nous is timelessness or eternity (cf. Appendix D): in it everything is present wholly at once without any transition, and the highest soul abiding in Intellect has a unified apprehension of all its objects (IV.4 [28] 1).

This view may be related to what Aristotle writes about memory in the first chapter of On Memory and Recollection. Aristotle remarks that memory is neither of the present nor of the future but only of the past, and that time and the consciousness of time are necessary conditions for memory.224 For Plotinus Intellect is a totus simul, both as the identity of thinker and object of thought, and as the simultaneousness and reciprocal implication of the totality of the intelligibles: this is, roughly, what it means for Nous to

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be eternal. But if the way of being of Nous is eternity, it follows that there cannot be memory in Intellect nor, consequently, for the soul that has achieved intellification (unless this soul decides to reactualize its memories by leaving Nous; cf. IV. 4 [28] 3–5).

In fact, the soul that has achieved intellification will not even have memory of itself, but will be given over completely to its object of contemplation (θεωρία) and will be one with it. And since the intellified soul’s object of contemplation is the soul itself as belonging to the realm of Nous, in contemplating itself the soul simultaneously contemplates the entire noetic dimension (IV.4 [28] 2).

There is more. Absence of memory in Nous is strictly related to absence of consciousness. By consciousness I mean not only the ordinary awareness of one’s embodied condition, which as such is obviously foreign to noetic activity, but more radically the apprehension (ἀντιληψις) of the very noetic activity taking place in intellification. Thus, at IV.3 [27] 30.13–16 Plotinus writes:

[13] The intellectual act is one thing and the [14] apprehension of it another, and we are always intellectually active, but do not always

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225 On this point, too, Plotinus is fundamentally in agreement with Aristotle, who appears to concede this much at De anima I.408b25–30. However, Plotinus, anticipating the medieval disputes on the relation between the intellect and the power of the imagination, denies that intellection requires the presence of an image (φαντασία, φάντασμα; see I.4 [46] 10.17–21), as Aristotle seems to contend in On Memory and Recollection 449b31–450a1 (cf. I GAL II, 369 note 223) and perhaps in De anima III.431a16–17 (but see Sachs 2001, 146 note 117).

226 IV.4 [28] 2.10–14: “[10] But if he is himself in such a way [11] as to be everything, when he thinks himself, he thinks everything at once [ὅταν αὑτὸν νοῇ, πάντα ὁμοῦ νοεῖ]; so that [12] a man in this state, by his intuition [ἐπιβολῇ] of himself, and when he actually [ἐνεργείᾳ] sees [13] himself, has everything included in this seeing, and by his intuition of everything [14] has himself included.” We might borrow Gerson’s expression, which he applies to his interpretation of the Form of an individual as a disembodied intellect, and say that in intellification the individual soul becomes “cognitively identical with all Forms” (Gerson 1994, 75).

apprehend [15] our activity; and this is because that which receives it does not only [16] receive acts of intellection, but also, on its side, perceptions.

As Armstrong rightly remarks about this passage, “consciousness in the ordinary sense, with memory, is thus secondary, dependent on our own physical condition, and relatively unimportant. As it appears in an early, a middle-period, and a late treatise, Plotinus seems to have held this doctrine consistently throughout his writing period.”

From this passage one might infer that we can in fact become reflectively aware of the noetic activity of our higher part, but since such awareness implies discursiveness, this awareness cannot itself belong to or constitute noetic activity.

Perhaps more importantly for our topic, what has been said of memory applies also to anticipation understood as an intrinsically temporal phenomenon (cf. I.5 [36] 2). Due to the way of being of Nous (i.e., eternity) not only is there no memory in Intellect, but there is also no anticipation, since as a member of the intelligible the fully intellified soul has a simultaneous grasp of the totality of Being and is constantly directed toward the One and engaged in the activity of replicating the superior unity of the Principle at the noetic level (see Subsection 3.4.1). However, I believe that we would be mistaken if we thought that absence of anticipation must imply absence of eros. We should rather say that lack of anticipation entails absence of eros only in its appetitive aspect, not absence of eros altogether. The reason for this is that the eros of the fully intellified soul is no longer directed toward desiderata which, because of their transient nature, will cause it to be restless and ultimately are bound to frustrate it. In other words, noetic eros is an eros

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228 ARMSTRONG (IV, 130–131 note 1).

that is no longer wanting: no longer a need or a lack. Thus, in Intellect *eros* has the character of *fulfilled eros*, an *eros* unswervingly directed to and permanently in possession of its *desideratum*, the One, which unfailingly sparkles and sustains it. For the same reason, if *eudaimonia* coincides with the condition of the individual soul fully integrated in its higher part in the intelligible realm, it must follow that such a condition is complete and nothing can be added to it to increase it or perfect it as that particular condition. Thus, in the short treatise I.5 [36] *On whether eudaimonia increases with time*, Plotinus answers the indirect question posed in its title negatively,230 for if *eudaimonia* is intellification understood as the soul’s reintegration in the life of *Nous*, and if the proper way of being of *Nous* is eternity (or timelessness), it follows that the one who is truly *eudaimon* will not become more *eudaimon* with the passing of time simply because time is not of the essence of *eudaimonia*.231

But the very fact that *Nous* is in its essence an attempt to replicate the unqualified unity of the One already means that *Nous* is not identical with that unity (cf. Subsection 3.4.1). Accordingly, that even in the identity of Intellect and intelligibles there is still left

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231 A similar point may be made about memory. In the last three chapters of treatise I.5 [36] Plotinus asks whether memory of the past can increase *eudaimonia*, particularly in the case of memories of virtue and intelligence and memories of pleasures and noble actions. Unsurprisingly, his reply to this question is negative. Memories of virtue and intelligence do not increase one’s present condition of *eudaimonia* because this condition entails a greater—in fact, the greatest—degree of virtue and intelligence. Nor do memories of past pleasures increase *eudaimonia*, since pleasure is something that is essentially realized in the present and according to Plotinus nothing is added to it by a mere memory of it (I.5 [36] 8). As for memories of noble actions, they too do not increase *eudaimonia*, even if one were to have a longer time to accomplish a greater number of such actions. The reason for this is that it is not noble actions, however many one may happen to perform, that cause *eudaimonia* and the kind of pleasure connected with it, but one’s inner disposition (I.5 [36] 9–10); as Plotinus observes, “[t]o place *eudaimonia* [τὸ εὐδαιμονεῖν] in action is to locate it in something outside virtue and the soul” (I.5 [36] 10.20–22). For a commentary on I.5 [36] 8–10 see Linguiti (2007, 97–106).
a minimum of multiplicity, that is, both the duality of Intellect and intelligibles and the plurality of the intelligibles themselves. This is due to the fact that, although Intellect (and, in it, the fully intellified soul) is permanently in possession of its desideratum, this possession is of a mediated kind: Nous is not truly united with the One, but possesses it reflectively in the activity of thinking the intelligibles toto simul, as a perfectly unified totality (cf. V.3 [49] 11). For this reason, its eros is still something other than its essential activity (i.e., thought) and in this sense a gap is still open between what Nous essentially is (i.e., self-thinking thought) and what it loves (i.e., the One). The fact that Intellect and the intelligibles are mutually implicating but really distinct is but an indication of the minimal but all-important distance that still separates Intellect from the One, or their modes of unity, noetic and unqualified respectively.232

From this it follows that the condition of the fully intellified soul is one in which the soul, thoroughly reintegrated in its higher part and a member of the intelligible realm, shares in both the activity and the eros of Intellect as two aspects of the same condition.

232 This view of Intellect is at the same time a criticism of Aristotle, who identifies the best sort of life with thinking (νόησις) without admitting or realizing that even this life is not perfectly one, for as Gerson (1990, 199) explains, it “possesses a fundamental feature of every other life imperfectly one, namely, desire.” Plotinus puts it well at V.6 [24] 5.8–10: “[8] And this is what thinking is, a movement toward the Good [9] in its desire of the Good; for the desire generates thought and [10] establishes it in being along with itself: for desire of sight is seeing” ([8] Καὶ τοῦτό ἐστι νοεῖν, κίνησις πρὸς ἀγαθὸν [9] ἐφιέμενον ἔκεινον· ἡ γὰρ ἔφεσις τὴν νόησιν ἐγέννησε καὶ [10] συνυπέστησεν αὐτῇ· ἔφεσις γὰρ ὄψεως ὄρασις. This passage both echoes and modifies Aristotle, Metaphysics XII.1072a29–30. Cf. also Plotinus V.3 [49] 10.49–52). Desire is a kind of lack of the desired object, which for Intellect is expressed in the fact that the intelligibles, themselves already multiple, are one with it and yet are not perfectly identical with it, for thinking as such implies a minimal distance from what it thinks. This minimal distance between Intellect and intelligibles is indicative of its imperfect unity, or the fact that its eros is not truly one like the One, but is a desire “to be perfectly what its own eternal activity shows it to be imperfectly, namely, a unity” (Gerson 1990, 199). Perfect unity, by contrast, is the One, which for Plotinus is other than Nous (as in V.6 [24] 5.8–10 above) or beyond Nous (V.4 [7] 2.2–3). Gerson (1990, 200) sharply concludes: “Desire precedes thinking in the order of explanation. Desire itself defines the relationship between a multiplicity and its principle. Since finite being is multiple, there is nothing more fundamental within being than desire,” even in the true Being that is Intellect.
Its activity is the simultaneous cognitive grasp of all the intelligibles and of itself as one of the intelligibles (see note 223), while its *eros* is *fulfilled eros* in the sense that it permanently possesses its *desideratum*; it possesses it, however, not by being one with it, but in a mediated way, namely as mirrored or reflected in the act of thinking, in the permanently unified totality of the intelligibles and that which thinks them. The unity of Intellect, therefore, is as perfect a unity as one can envision in a multiplicity, but it is still the unity of a multiplicity. If the soul is to overcome this last remainder of multiplicity and become *eros*, purely and simply, in union with the Good, one final step ought to be taken and one last stage reached. It is this last stage of the Ascent that we will be investigating in the next subsection.

4.6.3 Ascent to the One: Union

In this subsection I will confine my exposition to some observations on two closely related issues directly pertaining to the question of union: first, whether in union the individual soul ceases to be an individual soul as it comes in contact with the Source of all things; second, whether in union the *eros* of the individual soul, understood (like the *eros* of all derived reality) as *eros* directed to something other than itself, comes to an end. I shall argue that Plotinus’ answer is negative on both counts.

It is evident from several passages that for Plotinus intellification is not the final stage of the Ascent.\(^{233}\) It is also clear that in intellification the individual soul maintains its identity; in fact, it is precisely by dissociating itself from sensible affective commitments and rejoining its higher part that the soul is most truly itself. Now, the

question is: Does the soul, insofar as it is an individual soul completely reintegrated in its higher part and thus having come to abide in the intelligible, continue to exist as this particular soul even in union? If it does, what is subtracted and what is left behind in the transition from intellification to union?

In a classification occasionally referenced in Plotinian studies, Zahener is said to have distinguished four types of mystical experience: (i) pantheistic or natural (also called “panenhenic”), in which the goal of the individual soul is to become one with nature; (ii) ascetic, whereby the soul aims at dissociating itself as far as possible from the world through the so-called mortification of the flesh; (iii) monistic, in which the soul becomes absorbed in the source(s) of all reality; (iv) theistic, whereby the soul achieves union with God without thereby becoming identical with it.\(^{234}\) That the first two forms of mysticism do not correspond to Plotinus’ views (or at least cannot be considered final in a properly Plotinian Ascent) should not be hard to establish if one considers that the One, which for Plotinus is the truly final end of the Ascent, is neither nature nor all things—against (i)—and that to detach oneself from the world is only a stage of the Ascent, not its end—against (ii). The problem therefore seems to subsist only in regard to the latter two kinds of mysticism, monistic and theistic. Rist argues that the so-called mystical union of the soul with the Plotinian One is of the theistic kind, and that therefore the individual soul is not completely absorbed or annihilated in union.\(^{235}\) Without necessarily endorsing


the label “theistic,” a good number of interpreters nonetheless agree that union does not entail the obliteration of the soul’s individual existence.\footnote{\textsuperscript{236}}

An exception to this view is Ousager, who resolutely voices a monistic interpretation. More precisely, he argues that unification of the individual soul with the One comprises two stages: the first stage is a non-cognitive contact with the Principle in which the particularity of the soul is still preserved, while the second stage is where unification proper takes place in the form of a complete annihilation of the individual soul.\footnote{\textsuperscript{237}} We may postpone the treatment of the (alleged) first stage of unification and deal first with the claim that in union with the One the individual soul is completely annihilated. Ousager provides a plethora of references to the *Enneads* (and several parallels to Plato) in which he finds support for this claim. It would be impossible to deal with all these references here, but I should take into account at least some of the most

\textsuperscript{236} See for instance Arnou (1967, 263), Dodds (1928, 141), Burque (1940), O’Daly (1973, 85), Armstrong (1977, 59), IGAL (1982–1998, 1, 100–101), Seidl (1985, 263), Charles-Saget (1985, 96), Wallis (1995, 89), O’Meara (1993, 106), Gerson (1994, 292 notes 46–47, 293 note 50), Corrigan (2005, 34, 180–181); cf. also Hadot (1987; 1988, 66–67, 339–345), for whom the condition of the individual soul in union is analogous to that of Intellect in its incipient phase: Loving *Nous* or intelligible matter (cf. Chapter Three note 221). Mamo (1976) thinks that Plotinus is a monist, but denies that the soul is annihilated in union: “what remains is the admittedly strange notion of a mind whose formal and intelligible structure is still intact (and still known by all other form-minds) but whose normal awareness is lacking because it is now ‘a mind senseless and in love’ (νοὸς ἄφρων καὶ ἐρῶν)” (Mamo 1976, 206; the reference to Plotinus in the quote from Mamo is VI.7 [38] 35.24). Further sources on the subject can be found in the references to Burque and Gerson cited in this note, and in Ousager (2004, 95–104). I believe that Bussanich (1988, 192) is correct to raise reservations about the appropriateness of the conceptual distinction between monistic and theistic mysticism in connection with Plotinian union (however, Bussanich goes on to argue in favor of the identification of soul and the One in union, which I am here opposing: Bussanich 1988, 180–193; 1994, 5325–5328). The text from Mamo (1976) just quoted, for one, shows how the meaning of the word “monism” may be rather fluid; the same could be said about “theism” (Rist’s clarification of the terms “theistic” and “monistic,” mainly in reply to Mamo 1976, are appropriate: see Rist 1989, 184–190). I agree with Ousager (2004, 17) that in this particular context, the two terms may be used conventionally to indicate no more than annihilation (monism) and persistence (theism) of the self in union. If Plotinus is to be called a “theist,” it will be mainly in this qualified sense.

\textsuperscript{237} Ousager (2004: 94–95 for the first stage, and 95–104 for the second).
significant ones, in the hope that to show how I think Ousager’s interpretation fails to apply to these should suffice at least safely to indicate that it may fail to apply to the others as well.

One of these references is VI.7 [38] 22.17–19, where Plotinus writes that “as long as there is something higher than that which is present to it [viz. to soul], it naturally goes on upwards, lifted by the giver of its love” (see Chapter Three note 213, and note 167 of the present chapter for the Greek text of this passage). Ousager takes this text to imply that at this stage of the Ascent “the soul can be lifted further only by the One and no longer by itself.” One need not disagree with this claim in order to realize that it is far from evident that either to be lifted or to be lifted further ought to entail complete annihilation.

Ousager goes on to cite II.9 [33] 9.45–54 (in which at line 50 Plotinus qualifies assimilation to the divine with the restriction, “as far as the human soul can”: ὅσον ἐστὶ δυνατὸν ψυχῇ ἀνθρώπου) as the only passage openly contradicting a monistic interpretation of union. However, he rightly observes that this passage was written against the Gnostics, who apparently thought that assimilation to the divine was immediately available to the soul desiring it. By contrast, at this stage of the Ascent it is the One that “takes over and becomes our self,” as Plotinus seems to suggest at V.1 [10] 11.9–10, where he writes that the One is “in each and every one of those capable of

238 Ousager (2004, 95).

239 Ousager (2004, 97).
receiving it as another self." But again, it is not clear beyond reasonable doubt that Plotinus is speaking of annihilation of the self in this text. On the contrary, in the lines that follow the passage I just cited, V.1 [10] 11.10–15, Plotinus compares the relation between the One and the individual soul taking place in union to that between the center of a circle and its radii. He writes that the One abides in itself undividedly while those capable of it receive it as another self, just as the center of the circle exists by itself, but every one of the radii in the circle has its point in the centre and the lines bring their individuality to it. For it is with something of this sort in ourselves that we are in contact with god and are with him and depend upon him; and those of us who converge toward him are firmly established in him.

It seems to me that there is no mention of annihilation in this text. If anything, expressions such as contact, dependence, convergence, and establishment may indicate that the soul in its very center (see pages 341–345 above) is still minimally distinguished from the One, though in direct contact with it by being wholly and undividedly committed to it.

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242 On Plotinus’ use of the term θεός to refer to the One see Chapter Three notes 9 and 11.  
243 At IV.3 [27] 5.4–5 Plotinus writes of Socrates that “he will cease to be, precisely when he attains to the very best” (4) ἀπολέσεται δὲ, ὅταν [5] μάλιστα γένηται ἐν τῷ ἄριστῳ. Leaving aside the fact that here Plotinus seems to be speaking of Socrates’ soul in its embodied condition, Ousager (2004, 101) again omits to refer to the very next few words of this passage, IV.3 [27] 5.5–6 (“Now no real being ever ceases to be”—[5] Ἡ ἀπολέσει τοῦ ὄντος τῶν [6] ὄντων), where the reference appears to be the soul of Socrates as a denizen of the noetic realm (i.e., most likely the Form of the individual which in its
Perhaps the passage that most explicitly appears to support a monistic interpretation of union is VI.9 [9] 10.14–21: 244

[14] So then the seer does not see and does not distinguish [15] and does not imagine two, but it is as if he had become someone else and not [16] himself and does not count as his own there, but has come to belong to that and so [17] is one, having joined, as it were, centre to centre. For here too [18] when the centres have come together they are one, but there is duality when they are separate. This [19] also is how we now speak of ‘another’. For this reason the vision is hard to put into words. [20] For how could one announce that as another when he did not see, [21] there when he had the vision, another, but one with himself?

In this case, too, it seems to me that the obliteration of the self is neither stated clearly nor again suggested. On the contrary, in this passage Plotinus takes pains to stress the difficulty of putting this experience into words (lines 19–21). He is not suggesting that the individual soul is indiscernible from the One and completely annihilated in it (which would be quite easy to say), but rather that while in unitive vision what is “seen” is one thing only, in actuality the soul and the One remain distinct. 245 Moreover, the context of the passage does not seem to be that of the Ascent proper and of final (i.e., embodied state is called Socrates; see my remarks on the subject in Subsection 4.4.1 above).


245 In speaking about the differentiation of particular intellects and souls, Ousager (2004, 34) offers an impressive list of references to support the claim that Plotinus subscribes to the “Principle of the Identity of Indiscernibles” (according to which two indiscernible things are identical “not only subjectively, but logically and objectively”), as well as to its inverse, the “Principle of the Non-Identity of Discernibles” (for Leibniz’s version of the Principle of the Identity of Indiscernibles” see Discours de Metaphysique 9 = Leibniz 1875–1890, IV, 433–434; cf. also Monadology 9 = Leibniz 1940, 705). If my non-monistic reading of union is correct, in light of this claim we will have to say that the soul’s union with the One is an experience in which the two terms are only “subjectively” identical but numerically still distinct.
irreversible, like all genuine annihilation should be, I surmise) union, but a momentary experience of union while the individual soul is still in an incarnate condition. Dodds was probably right when he described this experience as “the momentary actualization of a potential identity between the Absolute in man [i.e., the innermost center of the soul mentioned earlier at pages 341–345] and the Absolute outside man [i.e., the One].”

The difficulty of the issue is certainly due to the complexity of Plotinus’ view of the self or the individual (on which I touched in Subsection 4.4.1), as well as to what Ousager thinks Plotinus understands by “a self” (τις αὐτό). It is clear that from the perspective of the individual soul to be a self can mean quite different things depending on the stage of the Ascent at which the soul is “located.” But in stricter and almost technical terms Ousager believes that for Plotinus to be a self means to be unqualifiedly simple or indivisible. It follows that the only true self in Plotinus’ universe can be the One, and that if ascending to the One means to be reintegrated in what is most truly oneself, union with the Principle will have to mean annihilation of all that was merely called a self at lower stages of the Ascent, and ultimately annihilation of the individual soul as such in all its parts, aspects, or manifestations. The main problem with this


247 This is the thesis of the first part of Ousager’s work (Ousager 2004, 15–120). Ousager (2004, 98) cites V.3 [49] 15.10–14 as a key passage in support of this view: “[10] What [Τί (ARMSTRONG writes ‘When’: most likely a typographical error)] then is more deficient [ἐνδεέστερον] than the One? That which is not one [τὸ μὴ ἕν]; it is therefore many [πολλά]; but all the same [11] it aspires [ἐφιέμενον] to the One; so it is a one-many. For all that is not [12] one is kept in being [σῴζεται] by the One, and is what it is by this ‘one’: for if it had not [13] become one, even though it is composed of many parts it is not yet what one would call a [14] self [τις αὐτό (ARMSTRONG: ‘itself’)]] (cf. also VI.6 [34] 1.10–20). On the plausibility of the translation of the Greek pronoun αὐτός with the noun “self,” see O’Daly (1973, 89–90); cf. also Ousager (2004, 99 note 153).
interpretation, I maintain, is that while it may be plausible to refer to the One as a self, and perhaps even to infer that all other selves are diluted images of this absolute self, it does not follow that these are annihilated in union. More importantly, it remains highly questionable whether in Plotinus there is in fact a doctrine of the self conceived of as that which is indivisible or unqualifiedly simple.

But if the self is not effaced in union, what new “form” does it take? What is subtracted from it as it transits beyond Nous, and what is left in this final stage of the Ascent? Let me first give the short version of the answers to these questions: what is subtracted in union is intellection (νόησις), the proper activity of the intellified soul; what is left, or the new, final, and exclusive “form” retained by the soul in union is eros, love for the One. In trying to offer a slightly fuller account of these brief answers, I will at the same time provide a reply to the second question introduced at the beginning of this

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248 Bréhier (1961, 178–179) refers to the One as “le sujet pur, absolu, solitaire, sans aucun rapport à des objets extérieurs”; O’Daly (1973, 91) calls it “an absolute Subject or Self.” See O’Daly (1973, 90–94) for references to the Enneads on this point.

249 As Tornau (2009, 340, note 2) rightly observes, some of the passages from the Enneads through which Ousager supports his view of the One as the only self are in fact about Intellect (e.g., V.8 [31] 11 and IV.7 [2] 10.42–45, treated respectively in Ousager 2004, 68–70 and 78). Of course, one could complain that if in union the soul is not annihilated, strictly we should not talk about union, but of a condition that resembles union. Although the dispute on this particular point is chiefly verbal, such an objection appropriates the terminology of union by implicitly suggesting that this jargon already indicates the annihilation of one of the two terms involved in the experience that takes place in the final stage of the Ascent (i.e., the annihilation of the individual soul). By contrast, I think that it is not even established that the terminology of union is Plotinus’ ordinary way to refer to what occurs at the end of the Ascent (let alone that it should be necessarily associated to the annihilation of the individual soul in union). Of the thirty-one times that Plotinus uses the words ἅπλως, ἅνος, and ἅνουν (cf. the relevant entries in SP), only once does he seem to employ one of these terms to name the actual experience taking place in the last stage of the Ascent (i.e., at VI.9 [9] 11.6: ἥνωμένον); to this we may add the noun ἅρπως and the related verb ἅρπω, on which see my remarks in Chapter Three note 206. In spite of this, based on traditional usage and on the passages from the Enneads that I have cited in these last few pages, I still think it is acceptable to refer to the last stage of the Ascent with such words as “union” and “simplification,” provided that we do not immediately associate these words with the annihilation of one of the two terms involved in the experience of union.
Does eros come to an end in union?

As I argued in the previous subsection, in intellification the individual soul comes to reintegrate or fully identify itself with its higher part in the intelligible realm. As a member of Intellect, the fundamental activity of the intellified soul is the actual cognition of all the Forms. This, however, is not its only activity; in fact, although intellection or non-discursive thought (νόησις) is the one activity by which Nous constitutes itself in its essence, such an activity depends on another factor, without which Nous itself would never emerge as a fully formed hypostasis. This factor is what in Subsection 3.4.1 I called “noetic eros,” that is, the erotic energy whereby Intellect constitutes itself, qua hypostasis, as a replica of the higher unity of the Principle while remaining erotically directed toward the One.\(^2\)

Now, if the fully intellified individual soul is to achieve an even higher degree of proximity to the One and be lifted into the final stage of the Ascent, according to Plotinus it ought to strip itself of the last feature that prevents it from being completely attuned to the universal desideratum, namely intellection. Therefore, the soul has to make its way to what in itself is most akin to the One (i.e., the center or highest point of the soul) and identify completely with it so as to be able to contemplate the One by that which is most like it—like by like: the Principle of Affinity (see Subsection 4.3.2).

The reason for the necessity of transcending intellection is that intellection is

\(^2\)As Plotinus points out at VI.7 [38] 35.19–25, we find a double direction in the activity of Nous: on the one hand, the power of thought (line 20: δύναμιν εἰς τὸ νοεῖν), whereby Intellect is directed toward its own contents; on the other, a certain intuition or reception (lines 21–22: ἐπιβολῇ τινι καὶ παραδοχῇ), whereby it remains erotically (line 24: νοῦς ἐρῶν) directed outwards, toward the One. Cf. also III.8 [30] 11.22–25, VI.5 [23] 4.16–20.
indeed a mode of relating to the Principle, but one which fails to relate to it as the
relatum itself requires. In other words, the activity of Nous is a self-enclosed activity by
which the second hypostasis emerges as the identity of the totality of the intelligibles and
that which intellects them. As such, noetic activity is a replica of the higher unity of the
One, but it is not itself of the One, for being unqualifiedly simple, the One escapes the
intrinsically dividing (and limiting) activity of thought, even the perfect thought of Nous.
By knowing itself as the identity of knower and object known, Intellect grasps the One
only indirectly, or as dividedly mirrored in a perfectly unified plurality, rather than in the
unqualified simplicity that is proper to the Principle. If the intellified soul is to ascend to
the One and achieve union, it must transcend intellection and meet the Principle on the
Principle’s own terms, that is, in its pure, unmediated simplicity. Intellection is thus the
last element that needs to be stripped away in the soul’s return to its Source.

But what is left after this final denudement has taken place? Put differently, to
what is the soul re-duced (in the etymological sense of the term) in union? As I
anticipated, it is reduced to eros: all that it is, simply and unswervingly, is love for the
One. For this reason, I believe that although Plotinus sometimes refers to the experience
of union as to a kind of vision, his favorite image to describe the final stage of the

251 Plotinus touches extensively on the idea that the One, abiding beyond intellection, cannot be grasped

252 The description of union given at VI.9 [9] 11.22–25 is poignant: “[22] But that other, perhaps, was not a
contemplation, but another kind [23] of seeing, a being out of oneself and simplifying and giving oneself
over [24] and pressing toward contact and rest and a sustained thought leading to [25] adaptation, if one
is going to contemplate what is in the sanctuary” (VI.9 [9] 11.22–25). The emphasis in the translation is mine.
Ascent is related to the sense of touch. Union is a kind of contact by which the soul is finally established in the greatest proximity of its desideratum. Generally speaking, the terminology of vision is used to name either the literal seeing of the sensible eye or the metaphorical seeing of the mind occurring in the cognitive relation between knower and object known. However, Plotinus frequently uses terms of vision also to express the relation between the soul and the One taking place in union. Therefore, it would

References to the *Enneads* can be arranged around the terminology of touch employed by Plotinus: ἀφή (VI.9 [9] 11.24), ἐπαφή (VI.7 [38] 36.4, 39.19; cf. also V.3 [49] 10.42), ἐφάπτειν (V.1 [10] 11.14, V.3 [49] 17.25–26, V.6 [24] 6.35, VI.5 [23] 10.27, 41, VI.7 [38] 30.3, VI.8 [39] 18.4, 8, 21.29, VI.9 [9] 4.27, 9.55), θητάναιν (VI.9 [9] 4.27, 7.4; cf. also V.3 [49] 10.44; see also θηνωσις at V.3 [49] 10.42). Plotinus also uses metaphors derived from the other senses to express the soul’s relation to the One, in particular the sense of sight (see note 256 below), but also hearing (cf. V.1 [10] 12.15–21, cited in note 170 above); the sense of smell is found apt to describe the second activity (i.e., the activity from the essence) of the One, as we saw in the previous chapter (Chapter Three notes 77, 88, 151); I am unaware of illustrations regarding the One related to the sense of taste in the *Enneads*, if there are any.

It will be opportune to remind ourselves that in Plotinus this relation of contact between the soul and the One is non-reciprocal, in accordance with the Principle of Participation (see Section 4.5 above). We might say that although it is through as strict a contact as we can envision that a relation with the One is established, the One is not itself in contact with anything but transcends all (cf. Chapter Three note 18). Cf. Beierwaltes (1991, 165–167). For this reason, the relation between the soul and the One is not the mutual affair that takes place between lovers, but rather the non-reciprocal rapport between a permanent lover and a permanent beloved: the One is a beloved that is never a lover. To this extent even the metaphor of human love fails to express what takes place in union, although it should be added that the One, unlike some human beloved, is a beloved that does not reject the soul’s love, once this is completely purified and directed to the One alone. An objection: Is it not of the essence of love to aim at reciprocation or mutuality, at least ideally? I may love someone disinterestedly, but to have my love reciprocated would seem to be something that I should desire in principle, even when lucidly aware that this will never happen. Is there no reciprocation whatsoever in the _unio mystica_? We can say that for the soul in union reciprocation may be understood precisely as the absence of all hindrance in its love of the One: fully purified, the soul’s _eros_ finally meets a beloved that will never leave it wanting. In union, reciprocation means simply that the One “allows” the soul to love it because the soul has transformed its _eros_ and finally has become capable of loving the Good correspondingly.

See most references in SP’s entries for the terms listed in the next note (to which we should add βλέψις, ὄρασις, and ὀφθαλμός), in particular ὅραν (a) and θέα (b).

For references in which union with the One is expressed in terms of vision, see SP, s.v. ὅραν (c) and θέα (c). Several other terms of vision are used to describe the soul’s (as well as Intellect’s and everything else’s) relation to the One, for instance: ἐπαφή (e.g., I.6 [1] 7.10, 1.7 [54] 1.14, III.9 [13] 9.7, V.1 [10] 9.15, V.5 [32] 10.10, V.6 [24] 5.17, VI.7 [38] 17.14, 34.20, VI.8 [39] 19.11), θεᾶσθαι (e.g., VI.9 [9] 4.17, 10.20, 11.20), θεᾶσθαι (e.g., V.3 [49] 17.35–37, VI.9 [9] 3.24, 27), θεατός (e.g., VI.9 [9] 4.30), ὅμοιο (e.g., VI.7 [38] 35.13, 36.20, VI.8 [39] 19.10), ὅραμα (e.g., VI.7 [38] 35.13, 36.21),
seem that the jargon of touch is used in contrast with that vision only in part. And yet, if Plotinus uses touch as a key illustration of the so-called *unio mystica* to supplement the metaphor of vision, I believe it is also because touch, more than vision, is the privileged sense of the erotic intercourse, which in turn is the broader metaphor of what the soul experiences in the final stage of the Ascent.

It thus seems to me that the question whether in union *eros* comes to an end should not only be answered negatively, but might also have to be reversed: How, in union, could *eros* come to an end, if what takes place in it is comparable to the contact between lover and beloved in the experience of love? As Pigler points out, the greatest resemblance to the One is not in the field of thought, but in that of love (see Chapter Three note 299); for if the beloved is itself love, and infinite love, in order to come in contact with it as what it truly is, not only will knowledge be insufficient and love necessary, but the soul will also have to sustain this contact in love, and love of an infinite kind, in keeping with the Principle of As-simulation (see Subsection 4.3.1).²⁵⁷

Three texts of the *Enneads*, one from each of the three major periods of Plotinus’ literary production (see Appendix A), should suffice to support and illustrate this point and bring

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²⁵⁷ Less than two centuries later, Augustine will write: “Nullumque bonum perfecte noscitur, quod non perfecte amaturus” (*Augustine, De diversis questionibus LXXXIII* 35.2). This idea applies to all goods, not only to God qua Good; thus for Augustine to know something perfectly means to love it in accordance with its “place” on the hierarchical order of reality. This applies to Plotinus’ universe as well. But since the Plotinian One is both ἔρως (see Section 3.3) and ὑπερνόησις (VI.8 [39] 16.32; see Pigler’s remark reported in Chapter Three note 299), there is no question of knowing it perfectly, but only of loving it. When what is at issue is the supremely lovable, Plotinus seems to say that knowledge will add nothing to love, but the pure presence of the beloved will free love of its merely appetitive aspect and will sustain the joy that the lover feels (or rather, *is*) at being lovingly in its presence. See also my remarks on the importance of qualifying the contrast between love and knowledge at pages 324–327.
the present subsection to a close.258 The first text is from the last treatise of the
Enneads in Porphyry’s order, On the Good or the One, VI.9 [9] 9.38–55. In this text
Plotinus speaks to the one who has never experienced union, and describes it in terms of
the more familiar experience of love.259

[38] And if anyone [39] does not know this experience,260 let him think of
it [40] in terms of our loves here below, and what it is like to attain what
one [41] is most in love with, and that these earthly loves are mortal and
[42] harmful, and loves only of images, and that they change because it
was not [43] what is really and truly loved nor our good nor what [44] we
seek.261 But there is our true love, with whom also [45] we can be united,
having a part in him262 and truly possessing him, not [46] embracing him
in the flesh from outside. But ‘whoever has seen knows [47] what I am
saying’263 that the soul has another life and draws near, [48] and has
already come near and has a part in him, and so [49] is in a state to
know that the giver of true [50] life is present and we need nothing more. But
quite otherwise we must put away [51] other things and take our stand
only in this, and become this [52] alone, cutting away all the other things
in which we are encased; so [53] we must be eager to go out of here and
be impatient at being bound to [54] other things, that we may embrace it

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258 Another important text in which union is described in erotic terms is I.6 [1] 7.12–39.

tῶν ἐνταῦθα ἐρώτων, οὕτως ἔστι τοιαύτης ἐρᾶ, καὶ ὅτι ταύτα μὲν τὰ ἐρώμενα θυητὰ καὶ
[42] βλαβερὰ καὶ εἰδώλων ἔρωτες καὶ μεταπίπτει, ὅτι οὐκ ἦν [43] τὸ ὄντως ἐρώμενον οὐδὲ τὸ ἄγαθον
ἡμῶν οὐδ’ ὃ [44] ζητοῦμεν. Ἐκεῖ δὲ τὸ ἀληθινὸν ἐρώμενον, ὃ ἐστι καὶ [45] συνεῖναι μεταλαβόντα αὐτοῦ
καὶ ὄντως ἔχοντα, οὐ [46] περιπτυσσόμενον σαρξίν ἐξωθεῖν. Ὅστις δὲ εἶδον, οἶδεν [47] ὅ λέγω, ὡς ἡ
ψυχὴ δὲ ἔστω ἐντεῦθεν ἐνθυμείσθη, καὶ ἤδη προσελθοῦσα καὶ μετασχοῦσα αὐτοῦ, ὥστε [49]
γνῶναι διατεθεῖσαν, ὅτι παρέστω τὸ χορηγός ἄλλην ἴσχει τότε καὶ προσιοῦσα
καὶ ἤδη προσελθοῦσα καὶ μετασχοῦσα αὐτοῦ, ὥστε [49]
γνῶναι διατεθεῖσαν, ὅτι παρέστω τὸ χορηγός ἄλλην ἴσχει τότε καὶ προσιοῦσα
καὶ ἤδη προσελθοῦσα καὶ μετασχοῦσα αὐτοῦ, ὥστε [49]
γνῶναι διατεθεῖσαν, ὅτι παρέστω τὸ χορηγός ἄλλην ἴσχει τότε καὶ προσιοῦσα
καὶ ἤδη προσελθοῦσα καὶ μετασχοῦσα αὐτοῦ, ὥστε [49]
γνῶναι διατεθεῖσαν, ὅτι παρέστω τὸ χορηγός ἄλλην ἴσχει τότε καὶ προσιοῦσα
καὶ ἤδη προσελθοῦσα καὶ μετασχοῦσα αὐτοῦ, ὥστε [49]
γνῶναι διατεθεῖσαν, ὅτι παρέστω τὸ χορηγός ἄλλην ἴσχει τότε καὶ προσιοῦσα
καὶ ἤδη προσελθοῦσα καὶ μετασχοῦσα αὐτοῦ, ὥστε [49]
γνῶναι διατεθεῖσαν, ὅτι παρέστω τὸ χορηγός ἄλλην ἴσχει τότε καὶ προσιοῦσα
καὶ ἤδη προσελθοῦσα καὶ μετασχοῦσα αὐτοῦ, ὥστε [49]
γνῶναι διατεθεῖσαν, ὅτι παρέστω τὸ χορηγός ἄλλην ἴσχει τότε καὶ προσιοῦσα
καὶ ἤδη προσελθοῦσα καὶ μετασχοῦσα αὐτοῦ, ὥστε [49]
γνῶναι διατεθεῖσαν, ὅτι παρέστω τὸ χορηγός ἄλλην ἴσχει τότε καὶ προσιοῦσα
καὶ ἤδη προσελθοῦσα καὶ μετασχοῦσα αὐτοῦ, ὥστε [49]
γνῶναι διατεθεῖσαν, ὅτι παρέστω τὸ χορηγός ἄλλην ἴσχει τότε καὶ προσιοῦσα
καὶ ἤδη προσελθοῦσα καὶ μετασχοῦσα αὐτοῦ, ὥστε [49]
γνωμενοις, ἵνα τὸ ὅλωσαν ἐντεῦθες αὐτοῦ καὶ μηδὲν [55] μέρος ἔχομεν, ὃ μὴ ἐφαπτόμεθα θεοῦ.

260 The term πάθημα on line 39 refers to the joy (εὐπαθεί) just mentioned on the previous line (cf. VI.7 [38]
34.30, 38), which is in turn an echo of Plato, Phaedrus 247d4.


idea of participation in something that is unqualifiedly simple for the soul means to come to resemble the
One and to direct the whole of its activity toward it (cf. I.7 [54] 1.11–13, I.8 [51] 8.43). And once Nous
has been transcended, the soul’s activity can only be love, eros.

263 See note 72 above.
with the whole of ourselves and [55] have no part with which we do not touch God.

The second text, VI.7 [38] 34.8–28, describes the joy experienced by the soul in encountering its beloved, the One. Again, the experience is compared to the encounter between lovers (line 15), and the joy is so great that the soul would not exchange it for anything in the world. Here is the text of VI.7 [38] 34.8–28:

[8] But when the soul has good fortune with it [viz., with receiving the Good alone: cf. VI.7 [38] 34.7–8], and it comes to [9] it, or rather, being there already, appears, when the soul turns away from the [10] things that are there, and has prepared by making itself as beautiful as possible [11] and has come to likeness (the preparation and the adornments [12] are clearly understood, I think, by those who are preparing themselves) and it sees it in itself [13] suddenly appearing (for there is nothing between, nor are there still two but both are one; [14] nor could you still make a


267 VI.7 [38] 34.13: ἐξαίφνης; see also V.3 [49] 17.29, V.5 [32] 3.13, 7.34, VI.7 [38] 36.18; cf. Plato, Symposium 210e4, Letters VII.341c7–d1 (see pages 53–54 above). I do not think that the term ἐξαίφνης can be taken as an expression of personal love and care on the part of the One similar to Christian Grace (cf. Dodds 1960, 7). The giving of eros by the One is not such an expression (cf. V.5 [32] 12.41–49), but a consequence of the nature of a single principle of all reality that is essentially impersonal (cf. Armstrong 1977, 78). For a stimulating reflection on the issue of Plotinian love as a love directed toward an impersonal beloved, and on the even more fundamental difficulty of distinguishing between personal and impersonal love, see J.-L. Chrétien’s brilliant article, L’amour du Neutre (Chrétien 1990, 329–344); cf. Chapter One note 272 and Section 5.2 of the Epilogue. On the issue of Grace see Epilogue note 9.

268 VI.7 [38] 34.13–14: οὐδέ ἔτι δύο άλλῳ ἐν ἄμφῳ. ARMSTRONG (VII, 192–193 note 1) remarks: “ἐν ἄμφῳ is always used by Plotinus of a perfect union in which the two united retain their distinct natures” (cf. IV.4 [28] 2.27–28, V.8 [31] 7.13; see SP, s.v. ἄμφω (b)).
distinction while it is present: [15] lovers and their beloved here below imitate this in their will to be united), [16] it does not still perceive its body, that it is in it, [17] and does not speak of itself as anything else, not man, or living thing, or being, [18] or all (for the contemplation of these would be something disturbing), and it has no [19] time for them, but it has been seeking it, [20] and meets that when it is present, and looks at that instead of itself; but [21] it has not even time to see who the soul is that looks. There, truly, it [22] would not exchange this for anything in the world, not even if someone handed over the whole [23] universe to it, because there is nothing still better, and nothing that [24] is more a good; for it does not run up higher, and all the other things [25] are on its way down, even if they are in the realm above. So then it has the ability to judge rightly [26] and to know that this is what it desired, and to establish that [27] there is nothing better than it. For there is no deceit there; or [28] where could it find anything truer than the truth?

The third and final text brings together the theme of touch (which as I observed earlier is the privileged sense of the erotic encounter), the hyper-noetic character of the experience of union (which can be put into words only when it is not actually taking place), and that of light (a most familiar theme from Plato, often found in Plotinus and the Platonic tradition). The text is V.3 [49] 17.24–38:

[24] ...but how can one describe [25] the absolutely simple? But it is enough if one touches it intellectually; [26] but when it has done so, while the touching lasts, it is absolutely impossible, [27] nor has it time, to speak; but it is afterwards that it is able to [28] reason about it. One must believe one has seen, when the [29] soul suddenly takes light: for this is

267 On this see Beierwaltes (1957, especially 37–97). See also my tentative interpretation of the metaphor of light and vision in Plato at pages 68–71 above.


269 See note 265 above.
from [30] him and he is it; we must think that he is present when, [31] like another god whom someone called to his house, he comes [32] and brings light to us: for if he had not come, he would not have brought the light. So the unenlightened soul [33] does not see [god]; but when it is enlightened it has what it sought, [34] and this is the soul’s true end, to touch that light [35] and see it by itself, not by another light, but [36] see the light which is also the means of seeing. It must see that light by which [37] it is enlightened: for we do not see the sun by another light than his own. How then can [38] this happen? Take away everything!

Far from implying disdain for things seen, both literally and figuratively, the stripping away of everything that would hinder a face-to-face encounter with pure light is itself a way (in fact, the only way according to Plotinus) to come in contact with that which is beyond everything, the One that has nothing and gives what it does not have (cf. V.2 [11] 1.8 and VI.7 [38] 17.3–6). Once the soul has reached intellification, none of the things it sees in the light of the One—at this point a pleonasm—would contribute to a better vision, and that includes noetic activity. Thus, all that is left for the soul is to

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270 V.3 [49] 17.33: ἄθεος ἐκείνου. The term ἄθεος can mean both “without god” (as rendered by the majority of translators) and “without vision” (the translation preferred by MacKenna 1917–1930, and MacKenna and Page 1969; Bréhier 1924–1938: “quand’elle ne le contemple pas”; Cilento 1947–1949: “deserta della visione di Lui”). However, as Beierwaltes (1991, 248–249; cf. also Ham 2000, 95–96 note 230) points out, the only occurrence of the latter meaning indicated by LSJ (s.v.) is this line of Plotinus (from a conjecture by Volkmann 1883: ἄθε < αυτ > ος). In my translation I follow Beierwaltes (1991: “säh... [Gott] nicht”), who combines the two meanings.

271 See the opening lines of note 174 above for parallels of this formula in the Enneads; for an excellent commentary see Beierwaltes (1991, 165–172, 250–253), to whom I owe most of those parallels.

272 This is also true of things heard: cf. the text of V.1 [10] 12.15–21, cited at note 170 above.

273 For a similar conclusion, see Ham (2000, 278). Ham rightly points out that for Plotinus (V.3 [49] 17.1–5) the thought of clinging to life in Intellect is a kind of temptation for the soul (perhaps the common “temptation” of Aristotelians, a few Platonists, and some Christian theologians of Plotinus’ time; cf. ARMSTRONG V, 130–131 note 1). Thus, in order to experience union, the soul is called to leave behind not only its attachments to the sensible through an ethical ἀφαίρεσις, but also its best accomplishment yet, namely, the state of achieved intellification; for in still clinging to this state the soul will fail to meet the One on the One’s own terms, which is to say as the ἐρασμιώτατον that one cannot intellect directly, but only love.
renounce this last possession and, by abandoning itself (VI.9 [9] 11.23: ἐπίδοσις αὐτοῦ) to its Good, meet it in the only way it can be truly met, in love.²⁷⁴

4.7 Conclusive Remarks

As with the previous chapters of this study, I will reserve this short final section to gather the main conclusions of the present chapter in summary form.

(1) The central contention of this second part of what I have called “Plotinus’ metaphysics of love” is that eros proves to be a fundamental concept to understand not only the process of derivation of all reality from the One as the Principle of all things (the focus of Chapter Three), but also the inverse process of the return of the soul to it, otherwise referred to as the Ascent.

(2) What is capable of Ascent in Plotinus’ universe (i.e., the subject of the Ascent) is only the individual rational soul. In the journey of return to the Principle, eros can be understood and function as a method of ascent along the methods of music and dialectic, but more fundamentally it is, for the soul, the regulative force of all ascending movement.

(3) The goal of the Ascent is the Good understood as the highest desideratum or

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²⁷⁴ But see again my earlier remarks (pages 324–327) about the inopportunity of starkly contrasting love and intellection. I should add that a correct grasp of the concept of union in Plotinus is important also for recent philosophical debates in which Plotinian notions are brought to bear on the thought of contemporary philosophers. For instance, S. Allen repeatedly hints to the idea that, although one can find several analogies between the thought of Plotinus and that of Levinas (see on this the insightful work by Narbonne 2006a), what sharply separates the two thinkers is the individual’s relation to transcendence, or to the beyond being (S. Allen 2009, 23–24, 32–33, 49–50). Thus, according to Allen Plotinus describes this relation in terms of a mystical union or fusion of the soul with the One, which is precisely what Levinas wants to avoid through the concept of separation (see particularly Levinas 1969, 102–105, where Plotinus is explicitly mentioned in this connection). This reading remains highly debatable, however, if union in Plotinus does not mean total fusion or obliteration of individuality, but constant presence in love. (This reading of Plotinus, to be sure, is as much a problem for Allen as it is for Levinas, on whom Allen seems to rely for her understanding of Plotinus.) The chief difference between Plotinus and Levinas, I maintain, does not reside primarily in their respective understandings of the individual’s relation to transcendence, but in the fact that in Plotinus one does not find the conceptual tools to speak of the Levinasian Other in terms of transcendence.
ἐρασμιώτατον: this is nothing else than the One, which while from the perspective of
derivation was conceived of as the universal efficient cause (the Principle), now from the
perspective of return is understood as the universal final cause (the End). Principle and
End are conceptually distinct but actually identical. The main reason for this identity is
that if the final goal of all *eros* were not at the same time the primordial giver of all *eros*,
*eros* itself would remain without an explanation. I observed that this idea may be viewed
as a more or less implicit critique of the Aristotelian understanding of the First Mover,
which does indeed move by being loved, but which also leaves love’s origin
fundamentally unexplained insofar as it is not explicitly conceived of at the same time as
the efficient cause or the giver of this love.

(4) The actualization of the Ascent is subject to two major preconditions. The
first, which I called the Principle of As-simulation, is that the ascending soul ought to
attune itself to the goal of the Ascent so as to become able to love the infinitely lovable
with a love that is itself infinite. The second precondition is that the soul is capable of
ascending at all because of its inner similarity with higher realities to which it is
ascending (the Principle of Affinity). This similarity is found in the soul’s higher part or
intellect, by which reintegration in *Nous* is possible, and, within this higher part, in the
so-called center of the soul, whereby the soul is capable of achieving union with the One.

(5) There are four features that are common to all the stages of the Ascent. The
first feature is that the passage from a lower to a higher stage entails, not an addition, but
a subtraction of something that was present on the lower stage. Secondly, each stage
presupposes the one(s) prior to it, not in the sense that what is lower is still *actually*
present in what is higher, but in the sense that in order to be on a given stage the soul must have undergone the “subtraction” of the main feature characterizing the lower stage(s). Therefore, what is subtracted cannot be said to be simply absent for the soul that has established itself at a higher level; it is rather present precisely \textit{qua subtracted}. Third, just like each stage of the process of derivation implied a decrease of unity and of \textit{eros}, so in the contrary movement of return every stage entails an increase in unity and in the intensity of \textit{eros}. In this way, the subtraction of a lower feature is not a purely negative procedure, but the necessary condition for what counts as an ascending movement, namely the increase of unity and \textit{eros}. Finally, the particular feature, practice, or activity that assimilates the individual soul to a reality on a higher level is not found necessarily in that reality at that level (the Principle of Participation). This, I observed, is probably Plotinus’ response to one of the objections to participation raised in the first part of Plato’s \textit{Parmenides}.

(6) I followed a somewhat traditional scheme in limiting the main stages of the Ascent to three and in referring to them as purification (ascent to soul), intellification (ascent to \textit{Nous}), and union (ascent to the One). By means of purification the individual soul converts its attention from the sensible and toward immaterial reality; it does this first by bringing about a harmonization of its “parts” through lower (civic or political) virtue, and then by habituating itself to the newly discovered kinship with the intelligible through higher (purificatory) virtue. The practice of higher virtue in a sense already coincides with the introduction of the soul to the next stage of the Ascent, intellification. Achieved intellification is called \textit{eudaimonia} and amounts to the soul’s full reintegration
in its highest part, its individual intellect. This condition makes of the soul what it always already was: a member of the intelligible realm whose activity is the intellection of itself and all the other intelligibles within Nous. But although the essential activity of Intellect is intellection, Intellect is what it is by permanently being directed erotically toward the One, whose unqualified unity it replicates in accordance with its own essence, that is, noetically. If the soul is to achieve union with the Good, it ought to strip itself of the last element that separates it from its beloved. This element is noetic activity itself, whereby the One is grasped only reflectively in the unified totality of the intelligibles. In union this reflective distance is overcome and the individual soul comes into contact with its beloved directly by becoming fully assimilated to that which in it is most similar to the One: the center of the soul. I argued that I find little evidence in the Enneads to support the view that in union the soul is completely annihilated. Rather, in its contact with the One the soul has taken away all that was alien to its nature and has been transformed in one simple reality: love for the One—eros.
Table 6. Summary of the Principles of Plotinian Metaphysics Introduced in This Study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Principle of...</th>
<th>Basic formulation of the principle</th>
<th>Reference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Affinity</td>
<td>Assimilation of a lower term to a higher one is possible on the basis of a prior affinity between the two terms.</td>
<td>page 334</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As-similtion</td>
<td>Assimilation of a lower term to a higher one is possible on the basis of a prior attunement of the former to the latter.</td>
<td>page 320</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Double Activity</td>
<td>Each thing possesses a double activity: internal (or of the essence) and external (or from the essence).</td>
<td>page 178</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Henologic Giving</td>
<td>The One gives what it does not have.</td>
<td>page 215</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Likeness of Cause and Effect</td>
<td>A cause communicates something of itself to its effects.</td>
<td>page 219</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
<td>That in which a thing participates is other than that because of which it participates in it.</td>
<td>page 385</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prior Actuality</td>
<td>The proper actuality of any given potentiality is prior to that potentiality.</td>
<td>page 195</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prior Simplicity</td>
<td>Whatever is composite ultimately derives from something simple.</td>
<td>page 163</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reversion</td>
<td>Every hypostasis constitutes itself as that particular hypostasis by erotically reverting upon itself and toward its generator.</td>
<td>page 205</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Superabundance</td>
<td>Whatever has reached perfection in its own kind overflows and produces something other than itself.</td>
<td>page 208</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Superiority of Cause to Effect</td>
<td>A cause is superior to its effects.</td>
<td>page 216</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notice

- The principles in the left column are listed alphabetically.
- References in the right column are to the page of this study where each principle is first introduced formally; there one will find also references to other loci of this study where the principles are treated as well as to the Enneads.
- These principles are general guidelines rather than rigid formulas. Every time each principle is stated, it needs to be qualified on the basis of the hypostatic levels on which it is operative (with the exception of the Principle of Henologic Giving, which taken strictly refers exclusively to the One, as the title I assigned to it clearly suggests: cf. Chapter Three notes 185 and 187).
EPILOGUE

nec amisit, quod erat, sed coepit esse, quod non erat.
—Formula “Fides Damasi”

Comment éviter que l’immanence se réduise à une feinte ou à un détour de
la transcendance—du sujet transcendental fini ou d’un infini plus ou
moins “théologisé”?
—D. Janicaud

me tamen urit amor; quis enim modus adsit amori?
—Virgil

5.1 The Purpose of This Epilogue

As differently stated in the Preface, the goal of this study was to provide a
reconstruction of the notion of eros in Plotinus and its systematic significance for his
metaphysics: what we might call his erotics (see Preface note 3). I first offered an
interpretation of Socrates’ speech in the Symposium and other texts that I considered
closely related to it in which I highlighted some of the themes that would become central
in the later tradition of Platonism and particularly in Plotinian erotics (Chapter One). This
was followed by a relatively close reading of Enneads III.5 [50] On eros, which is
Plotinus’ own interpretation of Plato’s views on eros, with particular focus on the myth
of Eros’ birth in Socrates’ Symposium speech (Chapter Two). Finally, the explicit

1 Formula “Fides Damasi” (Denzinger and Schönmetzer 1967, § 72): “[The Son] did not lose what he was,
but began to be what he was not” (my translation). Janicaud (1998, 117), translated in Janicaud (2005,
80): “How can we prevent immanence from becoming reduced to a mere pretext or a detour of
transcendence, of the finite transcendental subject, of a more or less ‘theological’ infinite?” Virgil,
Eclogae II.68: “Yet love still burns me; for what bound can be set to love?” (H. R. Fairclough’s
translation, slightly modified).
reconstruction of Plotinus’ *erotics* took place through an analysis of the importance of *eros* for Plotinian metaphysics in two steps: first in the process of derivation of all reality from the One understood as the Principle of all things or universal efficient cause (Chapter Three), and then in the process of ascent or return of the soul to the One understood as the Good or universal final cause (Chapter Four).

The purpose of the present epilogue is neither to provide a summation of the ground covered in these pages (something which I hope to have already accomplished prospectively, if partially, in the second section of the Preface) nor synoptically to restate some of the main conclusions of this study (something which was done at regular intervals in the closing section of each chapter). Nor is my goal here to voice and defend the plausibility of the major claims I made in my reconstruction or to provide a detailed critique of Plotinus’ position. Whether my claims are plausible is for the competent reader to ponder with a less partial eye than that which is normally reserved to the fruits of one’s own labor.\(^2\) As for a detailed critique of Plotinus’ understanding of *eros*, even hoping that my reconstruction of his *erotics* might have achieved a sufficient level of accuracy, such a thorough critical survey would require much more space than is available in an epilogue.

Nevertheless, I believe it is important to touch briefly on at least some of the aspects of Plotinus’ thought on *eros* that may be or merely appear problematic. In so

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\(^2\) One thing I can say. Thinking back critically to what has been accomplished, I believe that if I were to rewrite this study, I would like to incorporate three (sub-) sections: the first in Chapter One, in which I would give a more extensive reading of Socrates’ second speech in the *Phaedrus*; the second, either between Subsection 3.4.1 and 3.4.2 or perhaps toward the beginning of Chapter Four, in which I would attempt to provide a much needed overview of Plotinus’ anthropology, including the issue of the descent of soul into body; and the third, probably as a division of Section 4.2, in which I would try to clarify more sharply the difference between the Good and Beauty as goals of the Ascent.
doing, I will also try to indicate in what sense I think Plotinus’ philosophy may still be relevant for the present. For the sake of order and brevity, these problematic aspects can safely be gathered around two basic and in many respects opposing criticisms. The first criticism (Section 2) is that Plotinus’ conceptualization of the One, both as the Principle and as the Good, falls short of what is truly good. In other words, something is missing in the notion of the Plotinian One that would make it the first origin and final desideratum, truly ἔρασμιώτατον and truly ἀρχή. The second criticism (Section 3) points in the opposite direction: not only is there nothing missing in Plotinus’ conceptualization of the One qua Good; there is in fact too much. That is, the One as conceived by Plotinus, particularly its transcendent character, may certainly be found lovable, but it is either a downright illusion, or else it remains inaccessible to human consciousness.

5.2 Loving the Impersonal

Historically, the major tradition voicing the first criticism is that of Christianity. Christian writers of the fourth and fifth century and beyond certainly appreciate the philosophy of Plotinus (or, more broadly, the tradition of pagan Platonism) and put it to use for their own purposes. At the same time, they find it insufficient to explain at least two fundamental tenets of Christian doctrine: the personality of God and divine Grace.

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3 The example of Augustine of Hippo is probably the most frequently studied in this connection, at least among the Latin Church Fathers. Major Greek Fathers heavily influenced by Platonism include the fourth century Cappadocians, Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nazianzus and Gregory of Nyssa, and the enigmatic but extremely influential figure of Dionysius the Areopagite. Typically, Plato and the Platonic tradition have been regarded positively within Christianity (as well as within Judaism and Islam). For an insightful study of the topic with which I am in fundamental agreement (against the extremism well expressed by Tertullian’s “Quid ergo Athenis et Hierosolymis?” in his De praescriptionibus adversus hereticos VII = PL 2, 20b), see Beierwaltes (2000); see also Rist (1999). For a short account of the influence of Platonism in the Middle Ages and beyond, see Wallis (1995, 160–178); cf. also Corrigan (2005, 233–239).
(including the issue of the Incarnation), or, perhaps, personality as the very condition of possibility of Grace. A similar criticism is implicit in the broad tradition of modernity, in which the emphasis on the unconditional worth of the individual person already puts into question a mode of thought that gives priority to an impersonal or supra-personal Good.

I believe that this critique is fair but easy to misinterpret. If by person we mean either the collection of relatively random traits, both physical and psychological, which make up the embodied individual human being, or the unnamable *quid* in which these traits seem to inhere, I do not see how such a view of personality could ever apply to the Plotinian Good. But this reply, it will be argued, is beside the point, for the criticism was that the One is impersonal, or lacks personality, in principle, and it is precisely this that makes it less than superlatively lovable, not truly ἐρασμότατον. The point of my preliminary reply, however, is not that the One is supremely lovable qua impersonal, but that if love of the person amounts either to love of a particular set of accidents with which we identify the person or to love of an undetermined *quid* regardless of any accidents that might be attached to it,\(^4\) then I seriously doubt that love of what is called a person could constitute an improvement upon the love for the impersonal One. In the former case, one may very well wonder whether what we are talking about is, not love for a person as something unconditionally worth loving, but a kind of habitual (and in some cases even pathological) attachment to a completely arbitrary combination of accidental traits. As for

\[^4\] One can hear echoes of this understanding of love in certain seemingly paradoxical declarations between lovers: “I love you, with and because of all your defects and imperfections”; “I love you because you are you and I am I, and we complete each other”; “I don’t know and I don’t care about your past or where you come from, but only that I love you.”
the latter case, I cannot help wondering how and why the (alleged) personal character of the *quid* devoid of all accidents should be more lovable than the neutral impersonality of the One (cf. Subsection 1.5.5 for a summary discussion of the problem in relation to Plato).

Let me make clear that it is not a question of denying that personality might have to be part—perhaps even the most important aspect—of our understanding of the Good, but rather of noticing that if the criticism of Plotinus on this point is to be meaningful, we need a conception of personality different than the ones outlined in the previous paragraph. In fact, I would argue that, if personality is conceived of in those ways, not only is it very hard to see why a personal entity *should* be more lovable than the impersonal Plotinian Good, but probably Plotinus’ view of the Good is already a remarkable improvement on those conceptions of personality.

I believe that the text of an article by Jean-Louis Chrétien, *L’amour du neutre*, cited in the last note of Chapter One points us in the direction of the doubts I just voiced. The author writes that the deadlock of the alternative between the love of something beyond the person (such as Plotinus’ One) and “an egocentric idolatry of accidents” (egocentric, I take it, mainly because I alone am the judge of precisely which accidents should be the object of idolatry) can be broken only if that “beyond” is itself infinitely personal, or if love is itself a person.\(^5\) From the perspective of Christianity, it is because

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\(^5\) Chrétien (1990, 344); cf. Chapter One note 272. It follows that expressions such as “I love you no matter what, despite or even because of all your shortcomings” (cf. previous note) capture an attitude that takes us beyond the love of the impersonal One, but, as Chrétien remarks on the same page, also beyond love altogether; and if love is the only proper attitude in which a person can be encountered as a person, such an attitude will take us beyond the person as well. The question then becomes: Which of the two kinds of impersonal love—i.e., love for the One and love for a given set of accidents (or for the impalpable *quid* in which these accidents are said to inhere)—is better justified?
love is a person that God, this very love, can reach out to humans from its transcendence and become flesh. For this reason, in another article to which I already referred, *Le Bien donne ce qu’il n’a pas*, Chrétien sketches the difference between the Plotinian and the Christian paradigm of donation as the abyss between what I called the Plotinian Principle of Henologic Giving (i.e., “The One gives what it does not have”) and the Christian doctrine of the Incarnation, in which God, while remaining God, assumes a condition originally foreign to the divine, that of the flesh. These are two different modes of transcendence; as Chrétien puts it, “if the Good is and remains transcendent with respect to what it gives, God transcends by giving himself this very transcendence.”

Or again, “God gives by taking, by taking humanity in himself, by assuming the form of a slave. But in humbling himself, he lifts up what he takes.”

But this, I surmise, is already Grace, and one cannot help but wonder whether and how Plotinus’ system could reasonably accommodate such a view.

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6 See the text from the *Formula “Fides Damasi”* cited on page 440; for further references see Chrétien (1990, 269 notes 22–23 and 25–27).

7 Chrétien (1990, 274): “Si le Bien est et reste transcendant à ses dones, Dieu transcende en se donnant cette transcendance même.”

8 Chrétien (1990, 270): “Dieu donne en prenant, en prenant l’homme à soi, en assumant la forme d’esclave. Mais s’abissant pour prendre il élève ce qu’il prend.” There is a double echo, scriptural and liturgical, in this text. The scriptural echo is from the Christological hymn of Paul’s letter to the *Philippians*: ἀλλὰ ἑαυτὸν ἐκένωσεν μορφὴν δούλου λαβών, ἐν ὁμοιώματι ἀνθρώπων γενόμενος (*Philippians* 2:7). The liturgical echo is from Antiphon I, *O admirabile commercium*, of the Vespers of the Octave of Christmas in the *Breviarium Romanum* (1966, I, 169 and passim): “largitus est nobis suam deitatem” (cited by Chrétien 1990, 269); similarly in the *Missale Romanum* (1962, 221, § 1031) we read: “da nobis, per huius aquae et vini mysterium, eius divinitatis esse consortes, qui humanitatis nostrae fieri dignatus est particeps, Iesus Christus.”

9 For a critical overview of Plotinus’ relation to Christianity, with focus on the treatise against the Gnostics, see Catapano (1996). Modern scholars have noticed that the Plotinian Good, for all its goodness, does not provide the kind of assistance and proximity that is expressed in the notion of Grace in the soul’s journey of return to the One. Arnou (1967, 229) writes: “rien n’est plus opposé à la pensée de Plotin que la notion
5.3 Loving an Illusion?

The second criticism to Plotinus takes us in a completely different direction: the transcendence of the One does not need to be supplemented but rejected, for it is either an alienating illusion or something that is bound to remain inaccessible to consciousness.

The gist of this criticism is well expressed in the opening lines of Bertolt Brecht’s song, *Gegen Verführung*: “Don’t let them seduce you! | There is no return.”

There is no return because there is no One to return to. Thus, to be seduced means to be duped into

de grâce prévenante.” Commenting on Arnou (1967), Andolfo (1999, 634–635) emphasizes the same idea. Rist’s formulation is uncompromising: “the return of the soul is dependent on nothing but itself” (Rist 1967, 163). And Armstrong, in a footnote to VP 23, writes: “Note that Porphyry attributes his master’s achievement predominantly to divine inspiration and guidance. This has little support from the *Enneads*. Plotinus normally thinks that the philosopher can attain to the divine level without this sort of special assistance” (ARMSTRONG I, 71 note1). On this point see further references in Wallis (1995, 71–72); cf. also Beierwaltes (1981, 69–70).

Three factors may be indicated in the *Enneads* as possible analogues or loose substitutes of the broad notion of Christian Grace: (i) the so-called generosity of the One, well captured by the later *dictum, bonum diffusivum sui* (see Chapter Three note 178), and precisely expressed in the Principle of Superabundance (Subsection 3.3.1); (ii) the Principle of Henologic Giving, or the idea that what the One gives to what derives from it is an *eros* always already directed toward the One qua Good and qua other (Subsection 3.3.2); (iii) the idea of an undescended part of the soul permanently in contact with higher realities (Subsection 4.3.2). Hadot (1993, 50) claims that what causes the soul to love a beautiful object is not the object as such, but an unjustified surplus: “grace, or life in its deepest mystery,” which for Plotinus is the very trace of the Good, its gratuitousness or its self-diffusiveness (cf. also Chapter Three note 213 and Chapter Four note 167). In light of this remark, the One, far from being a distant and uninvolved source, is precisely what is most intimate to the soul (see Plotinus VI.9 [9] 7; VI.6 [34] 14), so that it would seem unreasonable to ask of it a greater involvement in the soul’s journey of return.

The main question, however, is whether the three factors I just mentioned, while clear indexes of the self-diffusiveness of goodness displaying itself in the hypostatic unfolding of reality, are sufficient auxiliaries in the opposite movement, that which through purification and assimilation to *Nous* leads the soul to union. From a Christian perspective, it is obvious that, due to the pervasiveness of sin, they cannot be. For Plotinus probably they are, but at the same time he is well aware that not all souls are capable of making their way back to the One (see 1.8 [51] 5.29–30; cf. Chapter Four note 157); he is also aware that it is the very desire for good that “often involves the fall into evil” (see III.5 [50] 1.64–65; cf. Chapter Two note 68). Thus, one may wonder whether Plotinus is excessively optimistic about the human condition, and whether more than merely human effort is required in order to achieve union; one may also see why immediately after Plotinus, the major representatives of Neoplatonism (e.g., Porphyry, and later Iamblichus and Proclus), while still devoted to cultivate the theoretical side of philosophy, turned resolutely to theurgical practice as the privileged means to union or salvation (cf. Wallis 1995, 105–110, 120–123, 153–155).

believing that there is a One (or into trusting the arguments suggesting such a conclusion). This criticism is compelling mainly for two reasons: first, because the One such as Plotinus describes it remains unavailable to ordinary experience, while those who (claim to) have experienced it can offer only very imperfect descriptions of it, and wittingly so; second, because more often than not what we call the One or the Good is only a projection of something that is not the One, most notably human consciousness.  

Obviously a critique of this sort will be in vain unless it also accounts for the desire of the One in the soul. What then is the desire for the Good? From the perspective of this criticism, it must be the very bait of the seduction, that which makes the seduction possible. Once we get rid of this desire, we will see clearly that what we call the One or the Good is something of our own making, an alter ego that we project outside of ourselves to objectify our conatus and thus bring it into view. In the process of objectification, we literally alienate ourselves: directing our desire to something other than ourselves, we make that desideratum, instead of ourselves, our ultimate aim.

If the sketch of this criticism of Plotinus is itself to be made the object of criticism, it should not be through a dismissal of what in it is worth considering, namely, the notion that in my conceptualization of a universal final cause, which is at the same time the origin of my love for it, there is much of myself which does not strictly belong to

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11 I believe that Feuerbach’s reduction of theology and religion to anthropology, poignantly expressed in his 1841 work, The Essence of Christianity, can be applied to Plotinus’ view of the One’s transcendence, even if for Feuerbach God is “thy highest power of thought [Dein höchstes Denkvermögen],” “the unity of the understanding [Die Einheit des Verstandes],” and understanding as “infinite being [das unendliche Wesen]” and “necessary being [das Nothwendige Wesen]” (Feuerbach 1957, 38, 41, and 42 = Feuerbach 1903–1922, VI, 47, 50, 51, and 52), while for Plotinus the One is altogether beyond thinking, including the thinking of Nous, in which thinking is identical with Being.
that cause.\textsuperscript{12}

But to reduce that cause to myself: is it completely fair? Does this reduction do justice to the nature of desire, of Platonic eros? To claim that what Plotinus is really doing, when he says that we connaturally desire the infinite One, is simply to project (and desire) as transcendent an infinite which is ultimately immanent: would this still be desire of the Good? Does the desire of the Good not already include in its concept the awareness—at least the distant presentment—that the Good transcends me and my conceptualizations of it,\textsuperscript{13} the suspicion that there may be much in me which is lovable in many respects but nothing which is, strictly, most lovable? Would I not already misread the nature of this desire, my connatural eros, if I failed to see that I can indeed “love” myself as if I were most lovable, but that this love is not love for what is most lovable, universally ἐρασμώτατον? Can it be that what should be reversed is not so much the process by which I envision something immanent as if it were transcendent (projection), but the procedure by which I represent something transcendent as if it were immanent (introjection)? Can it be that the error lies not so much in alienation (thinking of the One as other than myself) as in identification (thinking of the One as the same as myself), a reduction of transcendence to immanence?

Or is this crude reversal of the initial criticism already a way to betray immanence and a pretext to avoid the objection?

\textsuperscript{12} Emilsson (1999, 288) puts it sharply: “So if you have something that you know you think may be the One, be sure that it isn’t!”

\textsuperscript{13} This is true also of a “monistic” view of union, in which the soul is annihilated in the One as something that transcends the soul (see Subsection 4.6.3).
An answer to these questions is possible only through an adequate analysis of desire—of *eros*. For if it is through desire that the Good is said to have left an immemorable trace of itself in the soul while remaining itself transcendent, it will be only through a radical questioning of this very desire that the seduction might be revealed and the ruse exposed.

Thus, it may very well be that what I call desire of the Good is in most cases a desire for surrogates of the Good. It may very well be that frequently, by displacing in transcendence something that is primarily immanent, we not only create an illusion, but in doing so we also fail to grasp the very nature of immanence. But does this have to be the case always and necessarily, methodologically even? Can we not admit of a desire that longs for more than mere combinations of immanent goods, that is, a desire whose *desideratum* is more than a projection of consciousness originating in consciousness? In other words, can I envisage an *eros* which is found in consciousness, in the soul, but whose origin is other than consciousness, irreducible to an operation of consciousness, or initiated by consciousness?\(^\text{14}\)

We may convince ourselves that we are content with what we have, that all our desires are just needs to be satisfied cyclically; but by doing this, are we not already

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\(^{14}\) Cf. Levinas (1981, 101): “not everything in consciousness would be posited by consciousness.” What Levinas has in mind in this passage is not the One, but the other human being (*Autrui*). At the risk of oversimplifying the matter, I believe that the entire issue of the possibility of finding something in consciousness whose origin transcends consciousness boils down to a fundamental and perhaps incurable disagreement about the nature of the desire of the Good in us, a disagreement that is not exhausted in Platonism but is carried over into the history of (Western) philosophy, for instance in the controversy over Anselm’s ontological argument, in the discussion about the origin of the Cartesian idea of an infinite substance (“idea substantiae infinitae”) in the third of the *Meditations of First Philosophy* (cf. also the second of Malebranche’s *Dialogues on Metaphysics*: Malebranche 1958–1976, XII, 49–62), in the critical reception of Feuerbach’s claim that God is a projection of human consciousness (see note 10 above), or in the relatively recent debate over the legitimacy of a “theological turn” in French phenomenology (Janicaud et. al. 2000; Janicaud 2005).
failing to notice that we in fact desire more than the satisfaction of needs and that once life will have made its course, we will still want more (and better)? To deny that we desire something like the Good: is this not already to settle for less? And settling for less: is this not already to recognize that we desire more? Can we envision a desire whose desideratum shatters the intentionality of need? How will this desideratum awaken consciousness to its absence (that is, to its presence precisely qua desideratum)? And how could the soul respond to this awakening?

If wondering about these questions is already a way to foster the predicament of a Good that is an illusion or remains at best inaccessible, then Plotinus’ thought, heavily laden with the philosophical jargon of late antiquity, is but a relic of the past that will have little or no relevance for the present. But if asking these questions may legitimately be considered more than a rhetorical exercise, could it be that Plotinus’ reflection on eros still nests something of universal significance, an indication and an invitation still relevant for our time?

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15 Brecht does not fail to see this in the second stanza of his Gegen Verführung (Brecht 1967, VIII, 260), the continuation of the text I cited at page 446: “Laßt euch nicht betrügen! | Das Leben wenig ist. | Schlürft es in vollen Zügen! | Es wird euch nicht genügen | Wenn ihr es lassen mußt!”

16 In Terence’s words (Andria 305–306), often quoted by Augustine, an author in whom the theme of desire figures prominently: “Quoniam non potest id fieri, quod vis, | id velis, quod possit” ("Since what you will cannot happen, you will what can [happen]” — my translation). Augustine always writes possis rather than possit (cf. Augustine, De beata vita 4.25, De Trinitate XIII.10, De civitate Dei XIV.25; see Hagendahl 1967, 628); thus: “Since what you will cannot happen, you will what you can.”
APPENDIX A:
ORDERS AND DATES OF THE TREATISES OF THE ENNEADS
### Orders and Dates of the Treatises of the Enneads

**Porphyry’s order and thematic division (VP 24–26)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ennead I: Ethics</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I.1 [53]</td>
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<td>I.2 [19]</td>
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<td>I.3 [20]</td>
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<td>I.4 [46]</td>
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<td>I.5 [36]</td>
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<td>I.6 [1]</td>
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<td>I.7 [54]</td>
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### Dates of the treatises **

1–21 from 254 (when Plotinus was about fifty, ten years after he had settled in Rome) to 263 (the year Porphyry joined Plotinus’ circle in Rome)
22–45 from 263 to 268 (the year Porphyry left Rome for Sicily, encouraged by Plotinus to do so)
46–50 from 268 to 269 (the year Plotinus left Rome for Campania due to illness)
51–54 269 (the year Plotinus retired to Campania, where he died in 270)

* Translation of titles of individual treatises: ARMSTRONG.

** Sources: Porphyry, VP 4–6; Igal (1972, especially 124–126); Brisson (1992).
APPENDIX B:

THE NECESSITY OF THE ONE

AS BOTH THE PRINCIPLE AND THE END OF ALL REALITY

AS PRIMARILY AN EXPLANATORY KIND OF NECESSITY
Plotinus repeats often that what in Chapter Three I have described as the process of derivation of reality from one single source, the One, occurs of necessity, and therefore that the One itself is necessary. There is no doubt that Plotinus was convinced of the existence of the One, certainly owing also to his personal experience, whatever one might think of this. But as I pointed out in Subsection 4.6.3, even if this experience occurred at all, to claim that it did is already problematic in at least two respects. First, given the non-discursive nature of this experience (which in Subsection 4.6.3 I have described minimally as an experience of union or unification),we try to communicate this experience to others, most notably those who did not have it, are bound to betray its nature in one way or another.

Secondly, but along the same lines, since this experience takes place at an extra-ordinary level, its occurrence cannot be made widely available in the manner of a publicly verifiable ordinary fact. Why, then, speak of necessity at all in reference to the process of derivation and, ultimately, with regard to the One? What does Plotinus mean by

1 I limit my references to the passages on the Principle of Double Activity cited in Chapter Three note 87; in parenthesis I provide the terms used by Plotinus to indicate necessity, whether expressly (e.g., as with ἔδει) or otherwise (e.g., as with πάντα and ἐκαστὸν—terms indicating universality, from which I assume that necessity may be easily inferred): II.9 [33] 8.22–26 (line 22: Ἐδει; cf. also Ἀναγκαῖον at line 20, and ἀνάγκη at line 27), III.2 [47] 4.13–16 (line 13: Ἐδει), III.5 [50] 3.3–5 (cf. line 2: οὐ προσήκει), IV.3 [27] 10.31–41 (lines 34–35: κοινὸν δὴ τὸ ὄντα παντὶ τῷ ὄντι), IV.5 [29] 6.23–31 (line 30: τί ἂν κοιλοῦ), 7.13–20 (line 17: ἐκαστὸν τῶν ὄντων), IV.8 [6] 6.6–15 (line 6: ἔδει; lines 7–8: ἐκάστη φόρτι θείο πνεύμων; line 12: οὐκ ἔδει; line 14: τὰ πάντα, πάντα), V.1 [10] 6.25–39 (line 25: Διὰ οὖν; lines 30–31: πάντα τὰ ὄντα, ἀναγκαῖον; line 38: πάντα; cf. also οὖν χρὴ at line 39, πάν at line 50, and ἐξ ἀνάγκης at line 52), V.2 [11] 1 (the whole passage, much like V.1 [10] 6, seems to be cast in the form of an argument, whose unfolding is marked by terms indicating consequentiality: e.g., διὰ, διὰ τούτῳ, and ἦν at lines 5–6; γὰρ at lines 7 and 17; οὖν at lines 12 and 14; διὰ at line 22), V.3 [49] 7.19–25 (line 21: Ἐδει γὰρ), V.4 [7] 2.26–37 (lines 28–29: ἐκαστὸν οὐκ ἐκαστὸν; line 29: ἐξ ἀνάγκης; line 33: πολύ), VI.8 [39] 18.46–52 (in this passage, the One itself is described as what it is and what it ought to be—δέον—wishing what ought to be).

2 The same is true of Aristotle in regard to the Unmoved Mover of Metaphysics XII and, I surmise, of Plato with respect to the Good (see next note).
“necessity” in this context?

I believe that the kind of necessity Plotinus has in mind here can be understood as an explanatory one,\(^3\) that is, a necessity required by (human) reason understood in the narrow Kantian sense of a regulative aspiration to form a (complete) system of principles, and hence ideally aiming at grasping the unconditioned ground of all conditions.\(^4\) What I mean by this is that if we wish, not to take (or, for that matter, dismiss) at face value, but to explain or justify the relative unity which we ordinarily experience in reality (e.g., *one* rock, *one* tree, *one* fish, *one* human being, *one* table, etc.), on the basis of the Principle of Prior Simplicity (see page 163) eventually we will have to postulate a primordial level of unqualified unity (or several subordinate levels of increasing unity, until such level is reached) which will account for the plurality of qualified unities we ordinarily experience.\(^5\)

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\(^3\) I take this to be the case also of Forms or Ideas in Plato (see the opening pages of Subsection 1.5.2), although the respective roles of Platonic Ideas and of the Plotinian One as explanatory entities differ (not so, *arguably*, in the case of that highest Idea which is Plato’s Idea of the Good: see Chapter Three note 12). I also maintain that what I here called “unconditioned” may be linked to what Plato calls “unhypothetical” (*ἀνυπόθετον*: *Republic* VI.510b7, 511b6; cf. pages 61–62 above): unhypothetical not in the sense that from our limited perspective it is no longer a hypothesis (i.e., a hypothesis for us), but in the sense that conceptually it does not itself depend on any further hypothesis. Precisely qua unconditioned, the unconditioned cannot be a part or element of the totality of the conditions which it conditions, much like a true ἀρχή is other than that of which it is the ἀρχή (see Chapter Three note 134; cf. Gerson 1990, 5–14, 15).

\(^4\) See in particular Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* A298/B355–A302–B359. Kant writes: “the proper principle of reason in general (in its logical use) is to find the unconditioned for conditioned cognitions of the understanding, with which its unity will be completed (*Critique of Pure Reason* A307/B364: “der eigentümliche Grundsatz der Vernunft überhaupt (im logischen Gebrauche) sei: zu dem bedingte Erkenntnisse des verstanddes das Unbedingte zu finden, womit die Einheit desselben vollendet wird.” Cf. also Bxxiv, A642/B670–A668/B696; cf. *Prolegomena IV*, 331–332). In a more general sense, for Kant “reason is the faculty that provides the principles of cognition *a priori*” (*Critique of Pure reason* A11/B24: “ist Vernunft das Vermögen, welchen die Prinzipien der Erkenntnis a priori an die Hand gibt”). Translations from the first *Critique* are by P. Guyer and A. W. Wood (in Kant 1999).

\(^5\) It may be worth restating that I have no doubts concerning Plotinus’ firm conviction about the existence of the One; his personal experience testified to that for him. One can still wonder whether the
This is not to say that this level of unqualified unity (or even some of the intermediary levels) should itself become an object of ordinary experience, not merely because what reason requires is a system of principles (rather than of objects of ordinary experience), but more fundamentally because ordinary experience is always an experience of unity in multiplicity, not of unqualified unity. Thus, for Plotinus it is quite the opposite: in order to come in contact with this primordial level of itself (i.e., alone, or, as the author of the *Enneads* would put it, μόνος πρὸς μόνον: cf. VI.9 [9] 11.51), ordinary experience ought to be transcended, if possible, or else redescribed (although a merely explanatory character of the necessity of the Principle contributed to form his conviction and was conducive to his experience. The fact remains that reason itself demands an explanation (to give up all desire for explanation is, in a sense, to give up reason); Plotinus’ solution can be read as such an explanation. Whether Plotinus’ explanatory solution (i.e., the One as the level of unqualified unity) is the correct one or it should be improved upon or replaced by an alternative explanation (e.g., the Aristotelian Unmoved Mover, the *ipsum esse subsistens* of Christian natural theology, Spinoza’s *substantia*, Hegel’s *Geist*, Heidegger’s *Ereignis*, the Buddhist *pratītyasamutpāda*, etc.) are questions which, for obvious reasons, I will not be able to address here. In any event, if any of these alternative explanations is to function as an improvement upon, or a replacement of what I believe is Plotinus’ solution, the first step is to attempt to clarify that which they are employed to improve upon or replace, which is part of the purpose of this study.

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6 What this “transcendence” of experience implies is partly accounted for in my description of the last step of the Ascent, namely union (see Subsection 4.5.3). One might be tempted to revert to Kant and call this transcendence “intellectual, pure, or original intuition” (*intellektuelle, reine, or ursprünglich Anschauung; intuitus originarius*), as opposed to “sensible, empirical, or derivative intuition” (*sinnliche or empirische Anschauung; intuitus derivativus*), which is the only kind of intuition available to human beings and which occurs in accordance with the *a priori* forms of sensibility (i.e., space and time) and the categories of the understanding (cf. *Critique of Pure Reason* B71–72, A230/B283, B307–309, A286/B342–A287/B343). I see three main difficulties with an identification of mystical union and Kantian intellectual intuition. First, intellectual intuition for Kant refers to *noumena* in general, and not to that particular kind of *noumena* which are the ideas (let alone to the sole theological idea); for Plotinus, instead, union is union with the One and only with the One. Second, even if the union with the One, understood as the absolutely unconditioned ground of all conditions (see notes 4 and 11 of this appendix), could be called intellectual intuition, for Kant this kind of intuition is simply not available to sensible rational beings such as humans are; Plotinus, by contrast, is said to have “experienced” union with the Principle some four times during his lifetime (cf. VP 23.17–19; cf. also Chapter Four notes 118 and 175), that is, while he was an embodied (sensible) being (although it will be argued that sensation had no part in this experience). Lastly, and most importantly, Kant ascribes intellectual intuition of *noumena* to God conceived of as the absolutely unconditioned; in the *Enneads*, instead, the One is said to have a kind wakefulness or introspection, and this is not directed to things themselves but is limited to the One itself (and even so, it is likely meant primarily as a way to deny that the One is inert and unintelligent in the way a stone is; see Chapter Three note 164).
redescriptive exercise sometimes may turn into a vapid quibble about terms). In the
event that this transcending step were not possible (or, alternately, while it has not yet
been taken), if we are to provide reasons for the possibility of the qualified unities that we
come in contact with in ordinary experience, the positing of a level of unqualified unity is
explanatorily necessary, even while never becoming of itself an object of ordinary
experience.

The same reasoning applies to the identification of the One qua Principle of all
with the One qua End of all or universal final cause which I introduced in Section 4.2. Or
rather, the same reasoning applies to the very phenomenon of desire. First, if desire is not
to be considered pointless, it must aim at something which is not desired in view of
something else, but purely for its own sake: the Aristotelian ἀνάγκη στῆναι, endorsed by
Plotinus. Secondly, and perhaps more importantly for the present argument, the Plotinian
addition to Aristotle’s point: if desire is not to be left unexplained, its aim, though
conceptually distinct from its origin, is of necessity identical with it. However, the kind of
necessity at work both in this identification and in the necessity to find a truly final
desideratum can be understood, once again, as primarily explanatory; that is, the final
desideratum and its identification with the Principle of all things never become objects of
ordinary experience, but are postulated of necessity for explanatory reasons. Thus, in the
remainder of this appendix I will try to clarify the concept of explanatory necessity as it
applies to the One qua Principle of all, but on the basis of my brief remarks in the present
paragraph I trust that it should not be excessively difficult to clarify that the same kind of
necessity equally applies to the One qua End of all.
As I already have suggested in the opening paragraph and in some of the notes of this appendix, the perspective from which I approach the question of the necessity of one single source of all reality (which in Plotinus’ system, likewise necessarily, coincides with the universal final cause) does not differ altogether from Kant’s. More precisely, what I have in mind is Kant’s treatment of the (cosmological) antinomies of pure reason, particularly the fourth (the dynamical antinomy of modality), concerning the idea of a necessary being either within the world or transcending the world as its cause. This necessary being is identical with God, the third or theological idea, the Ideal of pure reason. Kant points out that within the antinomies the position he calls the thesis (i.e., in the fourth antinomy, that there is such a necessary being) has the advantage of popularity. Whether this is still the case today, in philosophy popularity (or lack of popularity) is of no consequence to what the truth of the matter might be. Kant knows this, and yet he explicitly recognizes what I called the explanatory necessity of the unqualified level of unity (in Kantian jargon, the absolutely unconditioned), both in principle and for pragmatic reasons. In principle: “if the conditioned is given, then the

7 Obviously, neither Plotinus’ (see Chapter Three note 18) nor Kant’s view (Critique of Pure Reason A617/B645).

8 See Kant, Critique of Pure Reason A452/B480–A461/B489, A559/B587–A565/B593 (cf. also Prolegomena IV, 438–439, 447). The fourth antinomy as given at A452/B480, A453/B481 of the first Critique reads: “Thesis: To the world there belongs something that, either as a part of it or as its cause, is an absolutely necessary being [ein schlechthin notwendiges Wesen]. [...] Antithesis: There is no absolutely necessary being existing anywhere, either in the world or outside the world as its cause.” Obviously Kant would reject the view of someone dogmatically espousing either the thesis or the antithesis (i.e., according to Kant, respectively Plato and Epicurus: see Critique of Pure Reason A471/B499–500), since these are never available theoretically to rational sensible beings.

9 See Kant, Critique of Pure Reason A571/B599–A583/B611; cf. Prolegomena IV, 348.

10 Kant, Critique of Pure Reason A467/B495.
whole sum of conditions, and hence the absolutely unconditioned, is also given.”

Pragmatically: “The presupposition of a supreme intelligence, as the sole cause of the world-whole, but of course merely in the idea, can therefore always be useful to reason and never harmful to it.”

Are there viable alternatives to recognizing this explanatory kind of necessity, which is naturally invoked by reason in dealing with the qualified unities encountered in ordinary experience (or, in Kantian language, with the conditional character of phenomena)? So far as I can tell, there are two alternatives, neither of which, however, I find viable: positive dogmatism, of which fideism is a militant form, and dogmatic skepticism, whose extreme practical form is universal relativism (these labels are mine, not Kant’s nor Plotinus’). Positive dogmatism, instead of recognizing the explanatory character of the necessity at work in the ordinary experience of unity, speaks apodictically of necessity **tout-court**, though unable to provide indubitable justification for its claim. Dogmatic skepticism, by contrast, apodictically assumes that all “experience” ought to be ordinary, thus leaving the qualified kind of unities encountered in ordinary experience unexplained, and thereby discrediting, also without indubitable justification, the very idea of an explanatory kind of necessity (and thus of reason itself).

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11 Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* A409/B436: “wenn das Bedingte gegeben ist, so ist aus die ganze Summe der Bedingungen, mithin das schlechthin Unbedingte gegeben.” Surely enough, the modes of givenness of the conditioned and of the unconditioned differ, as Kant himself had just stated on the same page (cf. also A670/B698): the former is “phenomenal,” or given in experience (*Erfahrung*) according to space, time, and the categories; the latter, by contrast, is a merely regulative idea of reason, and as such is never met within experience.

12 Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* A687/B715: “Die Voraussetzung einer obersten Intelligenz, als der alleinigen Ursache des Weltganzen, aber freilich bloß in der Idee, kann also jederzeit der Vernunft nutzen und dabei doch niemals schaden” (cf. also A697/B625–A698/B626).
It should be evident that to the extent that Plotinus accepts to discuss rationally the “entities” which he finds explanatorily necessary, he does not belong to the first branch of the alternative (positive dogmatism). Moreover, Plotinus maintains that in order to experience unification with the Principle one must have gone through a considerable process of purification, without which this experience is not possible (cf. the entire Chapter Four, particularly Section 4.6). In this perspective, the very explanatory necessity of the One may become truly evident only to those who have completed this process. In this sense, too, Plotinus does not fall under the heading of positive dogmatism.

As for the second alternative (dogmatic skepticism), there is no necessity that the one single source of all reality should “appear,” that is, display itself phenomenally. As I already mentioned in this appendix, for Plotinus the necessity is rather reversed, since what appears, or what we experience ordinarily, is always a relative unity (i.e., a unity in multiplicity), while the unity pertaining to the One is absolute, and as such never given in ordinary experience. Moreover, the Kantian object of sensible experience, the phenomenon, is subject to spatio-temporal conditions. If the One were to display itself by itself phenomenally, it could not be the (remote) origin of time (see Appendix D).

\[13\] It will be objected that Kant’s and Plotinus’ respective views of time are not the same: Kantian time is an a priori condition of sensibility, while Plotinian time is the replica of the intelligible at the sensible level. My point is simply that the One as such—in itself by itself—never becomes available in time regardless of the view of time one espouses.
APPENDIX C:

A NOTE ON PLOTINUS’ USE OF THE TERM ΙΧΝΟΣ
It was suggested that I turned what was originally a lengthy footnote (Chapter Three note 212) on Plotinus’ usage of the term ἴχνος (trace) into a short separate appendix due to the relevance that the topic might have for the interpretations of the concept of trace found in secondary literature on such authors as Levinas and Derrida. I maintain that moving this material from the context in which I first introduced it will not detract from the argument in the main text.

Hadot writes apropos of the term ἴχνος that it “means precisely the trace of a step, but in Plotinus’ language it designates the image of itself that a superior reality throws on an inferior reality.”¹ We might add that the term is never quite used explicitly in this sense by Plato. Pigler interprets ἴχνος precisely as the self-love of the One systematically surfacing at each hypostatic level, and shows how this love constitutes the very structure of the intelligible world.² Plotinus’ use of the term ἴχνος can be organized around the following five clusters of references.

(1) The trace of the One:
   (b) on all derived reality: III.3 [48] 3.34, V.5 [32] 10.1, VI.7 [38] 18.3, 23.2.

(2) The trace of Nous:
   (a) on soul (or soul as a trace of Nous): I.2 [19] 2.20, I.8 [51] 11.17, II.3 [52]

¹ Hadot (125 note 194): the term ἴχνος “signifie précisément la trace d’un pas, mais, dans le langage plotinien, il sert à désigner l’image d’elle-même qu’une réalité supérieure projette dans une réalité inférieure” (cf. also Hadot 209–210). In this general sense the notion of trace is closely linked to that of λόγος (see Chapter Three notes 275, 281, and 290).

² Pigler (21, 267–276).
(b) on things ontologically posterior to Nous: VI.6 [34] 18.48, VI.7 [38] 18.2–8.

(c) Concerning other intelligible traces: I.6 [1] 2.9, III.6 [26] 18.4, VI.7 [38] 7.13–14, 11.7.

(3) The trace of soul on the sensible (or rather, on matter, which by receiving a trace of soul emerges as a sensible cosmos and living body): II.3 [52] 9.22, 33, III.5 [5] 6.25 (daimons as traces; cf. VI.7 [38] 6.28, where the term used is μίμημα), IV.4 [28] 20.16, 27.3, 11, 28.8–19, 52–59, 66, 74, 29.50, 36.7, VI.4 [22] 15.15.

(4) The term ἃρος is also used to indicate a lower or derived kind of reality as contrasted with its archetype or source (IV.4 [28] 18.30, 44.26, V.3 [49] 9.27, VI.7 [38] 15.8, 22.28). In this sense, the notion of trace is closely associated with the concepts of image (εἴδωλον: e.g., V.5 [32] 2.7; εἰκών: e.g., I.6 [1] 8.7–8, II.6 [17] 3.18, V.3 [49] 7.30–34, 13.28–31; ἰνδαλμα: e.g., I.4 [46] 3.35, IV.4 [28] 13.2–7), likeness or similarity (ὁμοιότης: e.g., V.1 [10] 7.3, V.3 [49] 8.56; ὁμοίωμα: e.g., IV.5 [29] 7.18, V.3 [49] 8.48, V.6 [24] 5.13, VI.9 [9] 11.43), shadow (σκιά: e.g., I.6 [1] 8.7–8, II.6 [17] 3.18), impression (τύπος: e.g., IV.4 [28] 13.2–7, VI.7 [38] 18.2–5), copy or imitation (μίμημα: e.g., II.4 [12] 4.8, V.3 [49] 16.40, VI.7 [38] 6.28), and appearance (φάντασμα: e.g., V.8 [31] 12.14; cf. also φαντασία used in this sense at V.6 [24] 5.15). See VI.2 [43] 22.33–46, where several of these terms are used almost synonymously; cf. Chapter Four notes 62
and 85 for related references in Plotinus. See Chapter One note 207 for references to an analogous use of these terms in Plato.

APPENDIX D:

SOME REMARKS ON THE NOTIONS OF TIME, ETERNITY, AND
THE DISCURSIVENESS OF SOUL IN PLOTINUS

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Pigler writes that “in temporalizing itself, the lower Soul makes itself similar to the superior Soul, which however is not temporal; by imitating eternity, the lower Soul produces something different, a way to think of the model.”¹ This means that the proper realm of the higher soul is not time, but eternity (αἰών) minimally understood as “that which is always,” according to Plotinus’ etymology at III.7 [45] 4.42–43: αἰών γὰρ ἀπὸ τοῦ ἀεὶ ὄντος.² This etymology of αἰών is already found in Aristotle,³ but as Beierwaltes remarks, its philosophical sense is different in Plotinus, for it does not mean infinite time as in Aristotle, but, more in tune with Plato’s novel use of the term (cf. Timaeus 37d3–7), a complete simultaneity.⁴ The eternal is a completeness of life in which there is neither past nor future since in it everything is already beheld or possessed toto simul (ὁμοῦ τὸ ὅλον: Plotinus III.7 [45] 2.18) and as if always in the present (ὄντος δ’ ἐν τῷ παρόντι ἀεί: Plotinus III.7 [45] 3.21–22).⁵ Beierwaltes also shows that “always” (ἀεί) means both always already and always again: not in the extensive sense of an infinity of time, but in the a-temporal or detemporalized intensive (Platonic) sense of being truly or authentically

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¹ Pigler (159): “En se temporalisant, l’Âme inférieure se rend semblable a l’Âme supérieure, qui n’est pourtant pas temporelle ; en imitant l’éternité, elle produit quelque chose de différent, un moyen de penser au modèle” (my emphasis). At III.7 [45] 11.29–30 Plotinus explicitly writes that in the first place soul temporalizes itself (πρῶτον μὲν ἐκεῖς ἐγκρόνωσεν).

² In the context of Plotinus III.7 [45], the meaning of αἰών does not seem to differ from that of ἀιδίος and ἀιδιότης (see Beierwaltes 1995, 164–166).

³ Aristotle, On the Heavens I.279a25–28; see also Crysippus in SVF II, 163 (= Varro, De lingua Latina VI.11); John of Scythopolis, Scholia to the Corpus Areopagitica II.10 and V.4 (= PG 4, 229a and 313c).

⁴ Beierwaltes (1995a, 155, 193).

Eternity is thus not *Nous* tout-court, but the proper way of being of *Nous* manifested through *Nous* and, one might add, *strictly only* through *Nous*, hence the ease with which some thinkers (e.g., the Pythagoreans) identified the two, but also the similarity of the descriptions of the two in Plotinus himself. The eternity of Intellect is the actuality of an unchangeable condition that is not mere immobility or rest (**στάσις**; see Plotinus III.7 [45] 2.21–36)—otherwise eternity would be simply identical with rest, one of the five great genera of Plato’s *Sophist* 254b–255e—but a life in which the difference of thought and the multiplicity of reciprocally interpenetrating intelligibles dynamically sustains itself in an inseparable, immanent identity.

Now, it would appear that to claim that the higher soul (as well as the purified individual soul) resides among eternal realities should entail a rejection of its dianoetic nature, for discursiveness implies succession. But Plotinus does not think so (see Plotinus IV.4 [28] 1.14 *ad fin.*). In fact, he states explicitly that not only the Soul-Hypostasis, but also the World-Soul and, strictly, even individual souls (Plotinus IV.4 [28] 15; cf. V.1 [10] 11.1–4) are not in time. What *is* in time are only the affections and actions of embodied souls. The reason for this is that time is ontologically posterior to the World-

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8 E.g., eternity as **ὁμοῖο** τὸ ὅλον at Plotinus III.7 [45] 2.18; *Nous* as **ὁμοῖο**... **πᾶς** at VI.4 [22] 4.26, and as **ὁμοῖο** ἐν ἑνὶ πάντα at VI.6 [34] 7.4. Cf. Parmenides, DK 28.B8.5 (= Simplicius, *Commentary on Aristotle’s Physics* 145.5): **ὁμοῖο** πᾶν.
9 See Plotinus III.7 [45] 3.15–23. For a classic treatment of the problem see Beierwaltes (1995a, 59–72); cf. also Subsection 3.4.1. For a concise treatment of Plotinus’ views of time and eternity see A. Smith (1999a).
Soul, which generates it. The proper realm of all soul, therefore, is not time but eternity. But then, if equivocation is to be avoided, two distinctions ought to be maintained.

(1) The first distinction is between intelligible-noetic eternity and psychic-dianoetic eternity. While Nous always is and thinks the intelligibles all at once without interval (ἀδιάστατος),10 soul in its pure state can think all of them (and in fact it does so for Plotinus), but (a) only as other than itself (see Chapter Three note 273) and (b) only successively and separately.11 As for the One, we may venture to call it eternal or to speak of a henologic eternity, but as usual this is to be understood not as meaning that the One is eternally (i.e., is in the way that Nous is), but that it is the cause or foundation of eternity (see Plotinus III.7 [45] 2.35, 6.1–4; cf. Plato, *Timaeus* 37d6; see Chapter Three note 74). Strictly, therefore, eternity applies only to Nous, although it can be predicated loosely of soul as the pre-temporal generator of time and, perhaps, to the One as the cause of eternity. Similarly, temporal coordinates (e.g., before and after) are predicated of the discursiveness of soul in its pure form, although what they mean is not temporal succession but rather separation (τὸ χωρίς) or an intensified otherness (ἐτερότης) with

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respect to the simultaneousness of Nous.\textsuperscript{12}

(2) The second distinction, closely related to the first, is that between the kinds of discursiveness (διάνοια) that belong to the various levels of soul. For the sake of clarity, we may agree to introduce some “tags” that are not found in Plotinus (though the conceptual classifications are) and call (a) \textit{temporal discursiveness} the discursiveness of the operations of embodied individual souls. Instead, I will call (b) \textit{eternal discursiveness} the discursiveness of the undescended (part of the) soul, of the World-Soul, and of the Soul-Hypostasis (while mindful of what I just said above in (1) about predicating eternity of soul). Eternal discursiveness is further subdivided in (i) \textit{primary discursiveness} (i.e., the discursiveness of the Soul-Hypostasis) and (ii) \textit{derivative discursiveness} (i.e., the discursiveness of the undescended soul and of the World-Soul).

The basic difference between (a) and (b), temporal and eternal discursiveness, is that temporal discursiveness occurs through reasoning (λογισμός, λογίζεσθαι),\textsuperscript{13} inference (συλλογισμός),\textsuperscript{14} and deliberation (βουλευσί, βουλεύεσθαι),\textsuperscript{15} and often is expressed in language through debate (διαλέγεσθαι, διαλογίζεσθαι, διαλογισμός);\textsuperscript{16} cf. in particular Plotinus V.8 [31] 6–7, VI.2 [42] 21.28–38, VI.7 [38] 1–3. Eternal discursiveness, by


contrast, is free of all these. Thus, the contents of Nous, while not completely present at once to the Soul-Hypostasis, the World-Soul, and the undescended soul, are wholly and effortlessly (ἀπόνως) available to them without any need of deliberation and inferential reasoning; they are available successively, however, and succession here is the key feature that characterizes all discursiveness and the very life of the soul (Plotinus III.7 [45] 11.20 ad fin., IV.4 [28] 1.14 ad fin.). This is not the case for the temporal discursiveness, which, besides being successive, requires the extra effort of inferential reasoning and deliberation in order to access the contents of Intellect.

As for the difference between (b.i) and (b.ii), primary and derivative discursiveness, as the names I assigned to the two distinct phenomena might indicate, it consists of the fact that the former is dependent upon the latter (e.g., Plotinus III.5 [50] 3.38; see pages 244–245), while the latter, primary discursiveness, is the very activity through which soul constitutes itself as the third hypostasis by erotically reverting toward its generator and thus dianoetically replicating the noetic unity of Nous.

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17 See Plotinus IV.4 [28] 11–17, V.8 [31] 7–8; cf. also II.3 [52] 17.11.


19 For a helpful treatment of this distinction see Emilsson (2007, 181–185).
APPENDIX E:

COMPLEMENTARY BIBLIOGRAPHICAL ANNOTATIONS
This appendix comprises seven short sections or “annotations,” each dealing broadly with the main thesis of a book or a part of a book. These annotations were originally footnotes (all but one from Chapter One) whose proper place is indicated in each of their headings. With the exception of Annotation 4, in general their tone is critical, if to varying degrees. I decided to bring them together in an appendix mainly due to their size, which is conventionally considered excessive for a footnote. As with Appendix C, I trust that removing them from what was their original setting should ease rather than impede the flow of the argumentation in the main text. References within each annotation are to the work cited in the heading of that annotation and are given in the text by a simple indication of the page number(s) in parentheses. References to other sources are provided typically in the footnotes.

Annotation 1 (Chapter One note 28 (2)):

J. A. Corlett (2005), Interpreting Plato’s Dialogues

Corlett defends a radically aporetic approach to Plato which he calls “Socratic interpretation” or “Anti-Mouthpiece interpretation” (the “Mouthpiece interpretation” being the one in which the dialogues communicate the actual views of their author, Plato: in other words, the doctrinal or dogmatic approach in its various forms). Two major features of this interpretation need to be highlighted to understand in what sense this approach is radically aporetic and, in my view, radically questionable: first, the denial that “Plato’s theories, doctrines, and/or beliefs are able to be deciphered from Plato’s works as we have them” (11); second, the claim that the dialogues “serve as examples of philosophical dialectic from which readers are to learn to emulate and continue further
Corlett also tells us what he takes the Socratic method to look like: analytic philosophy. In his own words, “I assume that the basic analytic method of doing philosophy is in line, generally speaking, with the way in which Socrates is portrayed by Plato as doing philosophy” (12 note 29).

The interplay of these two features raises a twofold problem. In the first place, Corlett does not doubt his own ability to grasp at least the idea that the dialogues are written to draw us into the activity of philosophy (as he himself admits on page 11 immediately after the first citation I reported in the previous paragraph). The second aspect of the problem is more fundamental and can be formulated interrogatively: If it is true that Plato’s dialogues are “examples of philosophical dialectic” aimed at the readers’ growth “down the road of critical inquiry,” is it not likewise true that one already understands, albeit imperfectly, not only what “philosophical dialectic” means, but also that what takes place in the dialogues is good (i.e., beneficial to the readers’ critical growth) philosophical dialectic? If this is not the case, one is obviously in no position to argue further. If, on the contrary, this is (at least partially) the case, Plato—even Corlett’s Plato—might actually have more “theories, doctrines, and/or beliefs” than Corlett concedes or realizes. It remains to be determined whether these theories, doctrines and/or beliefs are Plato’s or Corlett’s; that is, it remains to be established whether what Corlett understands by “philosophical dialectic,” “critical inquiry,” and “Socratic method” is what Plato would understand by these or like expressions. This, however, cannot be

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1 This second feature should suffice to prove the general point I stated at pages 12–13—that dogmatic and aporetic readings of the dialogues share the view that Plato wrote in order to draw his readers to philosophy in the conviction that this would benefit their lives.
derived from the dialogues, unless Corlett were to admit that something in the dialogues can in fact emerge as Plato’s own doctrine, which is precisely what he strenuously denies. What we are left with, therefore, is Corlett’s own understanding of these expressions and the assumption that this understanding mirrors Plato’s views on them, views which Plato intentionally staged in the dialogues for the sake of his readers’ critical growth. Whether I agree with the content of this assumption and take it to be, not an assumption, but a matter of fact is irrelevant for the assessment of Corlett’s position; it is precisely on the basis of the hermeneutic parameters established by Corlett (which is what is in question here) that the assumption is an assumption.²

In fairness to Corlett, he candidly admits that his position makes no claim to be unfalsifiable, mentioning the possibility that some new archeological evidence may one day solve the riddle of Plato’s intentions (13). But precisely this admission reveals the instability of the ground on which he founds his approach, to which he refers as “the only interpretive approach to Plato that can render the meaning of the dialogues’ content accurately by not committing fundamental attribution errors concerning Plato” (96). One need only try the following thought experiment: if the archeological evidence of which Corlett speaks were one day to become available (say, a non-spurious Letter XIV) and if

² Let me notice that if all that Corlett is claiming is that what he understands by “philosophical dialectic,” “critical inquiry,” and “Socratic method” can be derived safely from the dialogues without having to be attributed directly to Plato (i.e., without our having to maintain that Plato positively endorsed such an understanding), it seems to me that Corlett is pointing out the obvious (perhaps not without good reasons), since his claim can easily be applied to every piece of writing whatsoever and, for that matter, to spoken words and actions as well. The reason for this is that, to my mind, the intention of the writer/speaker/performer never lends itself to view beyond all possible doubt. Thus, for example (and again, if all that Corlett is claiming is...), from Corlett’s book, Interpreting Plato’s Dialogues, I can safely derive the view that the dialogues are essentially aporetic without my having to maintain that Corlett himself positively endorses such a view (i.e., the view that the dialogues are essentially aporetic). I seriously doubt, however, that Corlett would assent to this.
what this evidence revealed were that Plato wrote dialogues in order to deceive his readers by ingenious discussions containing fallacious arguments, Corlett’s claim that the dialogues are examples of philosophical dialectic to be emulated would immediately dissolve and prove to be (again, according to his parameters) an assumption. It matters little if this scenario is completely fictitious and its realization highly improbable; in fact, it matters little if this scenario is completely reversed (i.e., if our imaginary Letter XIV told us that Plato’s mind perfectly matches Corlett’s reading). The mere fact that many such scenarios are possible shows that Corlett’s overall position is based on a multifaceted and tightly knit assumption, namely, that Plato’s mind is utterly shrouded in mystery and yet Corlett knows (i) that the Socratic method is fundamentally in agreement with analytic philosophy, (ii) that Plato, who was fond of this method, wrote dialogues as exercises of philosophical dialectic to be imitated by readers eager to grow as philosophers on the road of critical inquiry, and, I surmise, (iii) that Plato himself intended our critical growth to be in line with the agreement assumed in (i).

I felt it was important to state my case concerning Corlett’s approach, for if I did not misunderstand him, I found it emblematic of readings in which one is told that the veil shrouding Plato’s mind is impenetrable (not in principle, but at least presently and perhaps for merely accidental reasons), only to find out that those who assured us of this were (allegedly, if not admittedly) able to peek behind that veil.

I fear that by now my tone will have been perceived as eristic, which was not my intention and, in addition, would be unfair to Corlett, who presents his ideas without polemical overtones and while mastering a wealth of information.
Annotation 2 (Chapter One note 29 (2)):

J. A. Arieti (1991), *Interpreting Plato: The Dialogues as Drama*

Arieti approaches the issue of Platonic interpretation from what we may call a radical version of the dramatic setting theory (see page 5 above), namely by turning (one might say “reducing”) Plato into a comic dramatist who writes in prose, whose interest in arguments is only secondary, and who makes whatever point he needs to make dramatically rather than discursively. As Arieti clearly states, “I think [...] that the dialogues are dramas and that, as in plays generally, the philosophical arguments in them are subordinated to the drama” (5).

I will only hint at the question of the (alleged) subordination of arguments to drama and then move on to my main criticism of Arieti’s views. What does it mean that Plato makes his point “dramatically, not discursively” (5)? Is it that the arguments in the dialogues are not meant to be taken seriously as arguments, so that the dialogue as a comic drama will be hopelessly misinterpreted if arguments in it are read seriously (i.e., they are read as genuine arguments)? Does this mean that the Platonic dialogue, conceived of as comic drama, can be understood only if one disavows the arguments of the dialogue precisely qua arguments? Why should it be implausible to take the arguments of the dialogues seriously qua arguments and at the same time be able to appreciate Plato’s comic talent? More importantly, what kind of philosophical argument is the one which, in order to be grasped, ought to be dismissed precisely qua argument and be “subordinated” to the dramatic dimension in which it is set? Would it still be an argument at all?
What fails to convince me in a view such as Arieti’s is precisely its radical or
subversive character, which I find rather unreasonable when applied to Plato. That the
dialogues are also dramas, comic or otherwise, is beyond doubt; but are they *primarily*
dramas? One is not altogether immune to the pleasure of subverting a well-established
hermeneutic tradition, but I wonder whether subversion is called for in this case. Plato
himself, I take it, was subversive in his own way, but I seriously doubt that to read him as
*primarily* a writer of comic dramas who did not intend his arguments to be taken
seriously qua arguments does him any justice. I believe Arieti is correct to emphasize that
there is “much to be learned about philosophical issues in literature” (5), but I find it hard
to admit that this can be the case of Plato’s dialogues only if one basically dismisses the
philosophical arguments in them as irrelevant precisely as arguments. It is not so much
that Arieti openly denies that the dialogues have a philosophical dimension (although at
page 248 he does state that they “aim at an emotional reaction and not at discursive
learning,” which I take to be an essential aspect of philosophy), as that he never tells us
how this dimension, if present, interacts with their dramatic aspect.3

Moreover, from the point of view of form, which is the basis of his interpretive
comparison of Platonic dialogue and Aristophanic comedy, Arieti is well aware that
Plato’s dialogue is a new breed of comic drama, most notably because it is not a comedy
to be performed on the stage.4 But then one may ask whether the Platonic dialogue is a
comic drama at all. I am unprepared to insist further on this point, but I wonder whether

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3 For a similar criticism see Gonzalez (1998, 278 note 15).

4 Arieti and Barrus (2010, 10).
excising from a dramatic piece the intention of its author to have it performed on
stage does not already essentially infringe on the nature of the drama.\(^5\) The same
objection could be raised about other important features of the dialogues that do not
match those of the old comedy (e.g., the language of poetry in comedy vs. the language
of prose in the dialogues).

However, these reasons for finding Arieti’s views problematic are relatively
marginal. The most questionable aspect of his approach, I believe, is that he offers no
evidence that his views were even vaguely familiar within the Academy, and wittingly
so, as he calls his approach “new” (9). Instead, he minimizes evidence to the contrary, as
in his refusal to credit Aristotle’s testimony for a more traditional (i.e., doctrinal and
argumentative) reading of the dialogues on the premise that “[u]nfamiliar with the ironic
youthful Plato, he would have taken literally Plato’s playfulness.” Moreover, the age
difference between Plato and Aristotle (reportedly, Aristotle joined the Academy in 367,
when he was 17 and Plato was 61) “would in all likelihood have made their relationship a
very formal one” (10). Now, that Aristotle might have misinterpreted Plato on some
issues, even important ones, is not in principle unthinkable,\(^6\) but in this specific context
regrettably Arieti fails to mention that Aristotle left the Academy some 20 years later (in
347 or 348, the year of Plato’s death), when he was no longer a teenager but a 37 year-old
man. Is it really so unreasonable to think that perhaps in all these years Aristotle did

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\(^5\) Thesleff (1982, 56–67, 83–88) actually argues that some of the dialogues were written to be performed,
but Arieti (1991, 16 note 23) declares himself unconvinced by Thesleff’s arguments.

\(^6\) Plato’s much talked about lecture on the Good could be one of these issues (see Chapter One note 17). On
the question whether Aristotle misinterpreted Plato see the still useful Watson (1909) and Reale (2004,
IV, 19–34) for a moderate view; for a positive answer to the question see Cherniss (1945; 1962).
understand something of substance about what was playful in Plato and what was not
(if not directly from Plato, at least from someone close to him, able to bridge the
generational gap separating the two)?

**Annotation 3 (Chapter One note 48):**

**R. Robinson (1953), *Plato’s Earlier Dialectic***

In a handful of lucid pages, Robinson (1–6) outlines five common types of
misinterpretation one may come across in the reading of a text, particularly a dialogue by
Plato. The first type is what he calls (i) *mosaic interpretation*, or the tendency to isolate a
single text, whether a few words, a sentence, or a longer passage, and assign it an
importance (or lack thereof) that is not granted by the broader context in which the text
occurs. The second type is (ii) *misinterpretation by abstraction*, which consists of taking
something an author says—‘x’—as what I think is a case of ‘y’, only to infer, wrongfully,
that since I abstracted ‘y’ from ‘x’, my author must have done so too. The third type is
(iii) *misinterpretation by inference*, namely: since an author says ‘p’ and ‘p’ implies ‘q’,
that author said ‘q’; it is clear, instead, that this conclusion does not follow of necessity.
Fourth comes (iv) *misinterpretation for the sake of insinuating the future*, namely the
practice of reading into an author something that was made explicit only later. Lastly, we
have (v) the *misinterpretation of going beyond a thinker’s last word*, which consists of
attributing to an author a step further than he or she took on a given subject.

Now, all these types of interpretation are what Robinson says they are, that is,
*misinterpretations*; the serious reader must be constantly aware of them as such.
Moreover, if Plato meant to be read in accordance with the “unusual severity” prescribed
by Robinson (5), Plotinus is hardly innocent of any of these misinterpretations.—And

there’s the rub. For when we admit that, although Plato never explicitly spoke for himself
in the dialogues (excluding the likely genuine Letters), something of his intention can
nevertheless be derived safely from them, (ad ii) does it strictly follow that since Plato
never formally stated that ‘x’ is a case of ‘y’, he was not aware that ‘x’ is in fact a case of
‘y’, as Robinson seems to suggest? Similarly, (ad iii) should we infer without doubt that
Plato did not mean to say or to have his readers infer ‘q’ simply because he did not
explicitly say that ‘p’ implies ‘q’? And (ad iv) is it in principle unthinkable that, if some
distinction explicitly elaborated only later in the history of thought (e.g., arguably, that of
essence and existence, on which see pages 19–22 above) proves fruitful to shed
significant light on more than one Platonic text, can it be not so much that the (mis-)
interpreter is necessarily insinuating such a distinction, as that perhaps Plato was distantly
adumbrating it? Finally, (ad v) even if one were able to determine Plato’s last word on a
given issue, are we so sure that he did not take a further step in the text, not because he
did not take it absolutely, but because he might have wished his readers to take it for
themselves instead of him taking it for them? That is, isn’t the purpose of the dialogues
also to lead us to take (justifiable) steps for ourselves which by ourselves we would not
ordinarily take? I have no reply proper to (i), other than noting that in many cases
disagreement occurs precisely on what constitutes “isolation.”

I believe that the main problem with Robinson’s view is that he is already
operating (coherently, we must admit) in accordance with his ‘evolutionist’ assumption,
“that each element of our thought has come into existence at some period of our history,
so that at some previous period none of our ancestors possessed it” (page vi). But by.

simply assuming this, isn’t Robinson falling prey to a rather strange form of
misinterpretation (which one might want to add to his list), that is, the misinterpretation
of consciously reading Plato through a presupposition that clearly was not Plato’s own,
nor, more importantly, is it evidently applicable to Plato?

A final disclaimer, at the risk of repeating myself: my objections to Robinson’s
five types of misinterpretation are more a matter of emphasis than, I hope, a
misrecognition of these misinterpretations as misinterpretations. Moreover, where
Robinson seems to take explicitness as the sole criterion for judging what Plato had in
mind (with all the problems that this presupposition implies for writings like the
dialogues), I emphasize implicitness as at least a serious possibility. As I write in the
opening lines of this annotation, it is the task of the historian of philosophy to try to
determine whether later developments in the history of thought are legitimate
explications of a given doctrine or fanciful, if speculatively creative, constructions (in the
awareness that to determine this beyond doubt is very hard and oftentimes probably
impossible).

**Annotation 4 (Chapter One note 56):**


The two studies by Denis O’Brien collected in this 1995 volume focus on the
notion of non-being (τὸ μὴ ὄν) in Parmenides, Plato’s *Sophist*, and Plotinus. O’Brien

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7 Cf. also O’Brien (1999a).
shows that the concept of non-being, which for Parmenides\(^8\) meant *total non-being* (Sophist 237b7–8: τὸ μηδαμῶς ὄν; 238c9: τὸ μὴ ὄν αὐτὸ καθ’ αὑτό), or absolute nothingness (which throws mortals into contradiction as soon as they try to say that this non-being *is*), is not so much refuted as problematized further by Plato (Sophist 256e5–259d8). Plato introduces a new distinction which was absent in Parmenides, to wit, the distinction between non-being as contrary to being (i.e., Parmenidean non-being, or total non-being) and *non-being as other than being* (i.e., the non-being of motion and rest, which by participating both in being and in otherness are, not being tout-court, but other than being without thereby being total non-being). Plotinus (I.8 [51] 3, II.5 [25] 5, III.6 [26] 7) goes a step further and on the basis of the language of the Sophist (258d6, e3, 263d4) introduces a third kind of non-being, that is, *the form of non-being*, or the non-being which truly is not or which is truly false (see Chapter Three note 324 for precise references; cf. also note 335 in the same chapter). Plotinus identifies this third kind of non-being with (lower) matter, which in its utter lack of definition, or in its complete otherness, is opposed both to total non-being (Parmenides) and to what is other than being (Plato). What should be noted is that these oppositions are operative, not between the conclusions of Parmenides, Plato, and Plotinus, but only between notions whose (clear) distinction took about eight centuries to be formulated explicitly (and almost another eighteen centuries to be rediscovered, if no one before O’Brien ever noticed it). The fact is that on the basis of a problem and a distinction inherited from Parmenides, Plato was able to ask new questions and to formulate a new distinction; in turn, Plotinus,

reflecting on Plato’s distinction (and mindful of Aristotle’s speculation on matter),
introduced yet another distinction, thus taking the reflection on non-being a step further.
Therefore, to ask if Plato refuted Parmenides (and Plotinus Plato) is legitimate but
possibly misleading if one does not take into account that Plato was not necessarily out to
get Parmenides by refuting him or correcting him; he was rather offering fresh insight
into a problem which he had inherited from his predecessors (or, said otherwise, he was
lending his voice to a relatively metaphorical conversation which started before him and
would continue well after him). To see the connection between ideas across the centuries
is a difficult task which, as O’Brien (3) remarks, neither one who is only a historian nor
one who is only a philosopher can accomplish, but for which a historian of philosophy is
needed.

Even so, in approaching a philosophical text, the historian genuinely ought to ask
whether the author of that text would have recognized a distinction that is either absent or
not fully explicit in the text but which is plausibly related to it and may help us to clarify
at least some important aspects of it. Failing to ask this question and seriously consider
whether the answer to it could be positive may result in a reductive understanding or,
worse, in a misunderstanding of the philosophical significance of the text.

**Annotation 5 (Chapter One note 63):**

**F. J. Gonzalez (1998), *Dialectic and Dialogue.***

**Plato’s Practice of Philosophical Inquiry**

In contrast with both developmental and esoteric views, Gonzalez (1–16) argues
that we should not understand Plato’s philosophy as a more or less hidden and developed
system of doctrines whose method, dialectic, is not essential to the essence of his thought, but as both non-doctrinal and non-systematic. Gonzalez writes that “what reveals the truth, though without ever arriving at a ‘final result,’ is the process of dialectic itself, the discursive activity of ‘rubbing together’ our defective means of inquiry with the goal of sparking an insight that barely transcends them” (273). Thus, dialectic is not a method at all, but rather “the exchange of question and answer” (2), and a Platonic dialogue is “simply a dramatic portrayal of dialectic at work” (2), or a re-creation of “that dialectical process which alone can reveal the truth” (274). In his reading of Plato’s Seventh Letter Gonzalez concludes that “the goal of dialectic is nonpropositional insight,” and yet “the only means of attaining (and I would add, sustaining) this insight is a form of discursive reasoning” (272, emphasis in the text).

I believe that Gonzalez’s suggestion has the great merit of drawing attention to the fact that philosophy in Plato cannot be reduced to logic (as against Robinson 1953, whose main thesis is discussed in Annotation 3 above and to which Gonzalez 1998 is partly a response), and that discursive reasoning seems to be a necessary and yet ultimately insufficient means to truth or insight. Moreover, Gonzalez refuses to espouse a purely skeptical reading of Plato (274). Yet, I cannot fully agree with him.

Now, that the dialogues depict discursive reasoning as necessary for insight but also as ultimately non-identical with insight, I find highly probable; that they appear to fulfill a protreptic function is seldom doubted; and that they do not explicitly present a system more geometrico hardly needs to be restated. While granting this, however, I wonder if Gonzalez goes a little too far in assuming a non-systematic intention in Plato
on the premise that this would preclude a harmonization of form (dialogue) and content (system) in Plato’s philosophy (4). A system for Gonzalez is possible on the basis of two assumptions, which he submit to criticism: first, “that the knowledge which philosophy strives to obtain is a knowledge of propositions” (7), and second, “that philosophical method is subordinate to, and terminates in some final result” (9). We may note that Gonzalez himself is not completely immune to the second of these assumptions, since dialectic (which in this context I believe he takes to be coextensive with philosophy), although not aiming at establishing a system of propositional knowledge, does in fact lead to something other than itself, namely insight.\footnote{9} As for Gonzalez’s critique of the first assumption, I believe it is stronger than that of the second, but also rather partial when applied indiscriminately to all the representatives of the esoteric and developmental approaches. For example, I think a “second-generation” champion of the “esoteric” thesis like Szlezák would find the claim that philosophy strives for a propositional kind of knowledge as all too partial (although he does argue that there is nothing in principle that makes a thing like, say, virtue ineffable).\footnote{10} For Szlezák Platonic philosophy is also a condition of the soul, so that in order to grasp Plato one needs to become attuned to what the dialogues are trying to communicate.\footnote{11} This process of attunement obviously includes more than knowledge of propositions. Thus, to make propositionally explicit the presuppositions of one’s lifestyle (in some exceptional cases

\footnote{9} The fact that dialectic is necessary for “sustaining” insight does not seem completely to erase its status of a means to an end. Alternately, I am not sure what the distinction between “means” and “goal” with reference to dialectic and nonpropositional insight respectively is meant to signify.


\footnote{11} See Szlezák (1993, 4–11).
perhaps even to the point of claiming to have systematized them) is part of the activity of philosophy; but this does not mean that it is the whole of it (cf. Chapter One notes 31 and 64) nor even that it is its highest end. For this reason, although I am not prepared to espouse the esoteric thesis in its entirety, I believe that to claim, against the supporters of this thesis, that Plato is neither systematic nor doctrinal is to presuppose too much if by this one means that Plato positively avoided even aiming at having a system of doctrines (which is what I think Gonzalez is arguing). Put generally, the fact that Plato wrote dialogues instead of poems (like his predecessors) or treatises (like his successors) is not, of itself, sufficient to exclude his intention to be systematic and doctrinal. Of course, this fact is not sufficient to include such an intention either, but unlike Gonzalez, who thinks that “[w]e can accept Aristotle as an authority for what Plato said while at the same time suspecting his ability and willingness to remain faithful to the spirit and context in which Plato said it” (283 note 47), I think that Aristotle’s testimony provides enough evidence for reading Plato as at least aiming at constructing a system, and as very likely doctrinal.

Gonzalez asks: “Can there be any form of writing less suited to presenting a systematic philosophy than Plato’s dramatic dialogues?” (4). Despite its rhetorical ring, this question might not have to be answered with a straightforward “no.” In fact, it may be countered by another question, whose tone, in its turn, I wish to be as little rhetorical as possible: “Can there be any form of writing more suited to introducing us to the difficulty of both constructing and defending a system than Plato’s dramatic dialogues?”

Annotation 6 (Chapter One note 269):


Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy

I think that Nussbaum’s position about the Symposium in general and the figure of Alcibiades in particular is worth considering here, if nothing else for the popularity that her book enjoyed since it was first published in 1986 (fifteen reprints plus the substantially unaltered 2001 edition with a new preface). In chapter 6, one of the three chapters dedicated to Plato in her book, Nussbaum argues that in the Symposium there is a basic tension between two different notions of value, or two fundamentally antithetic objects of love, namely the universal Forms and the individual body, respectively supported by Diotima-Socrates and Alcibiades. Nussbaum writes:

We see two kinds of value, two kinds of knowledge; and we see that we must choose. One sort of understanding blocks out the other. The pure light of the eternal form eclipses, or is eclipsed by, the flickering lightning of the opened and unstably moving body. You think, says Plato, that you can have this love and goodness too, the knowledge of and by flesh and good-knowledge too. Well, says Plato, you can’t. You have to blind yourself to something, give up some beauty. ‘The sight of reason begins to see clearly when the sight of the eyes begins to grow dim’—whether from

(as well as Aristotle’s) is not systematic in the modern sense that it constructs a knowledge demonstrated more geometrico, but rather in the restricted sense that it is “directed and supported by a quite definite inner jointure and ordering of questions [geleitet und getragen von enier ganz bestimmten inneren Fügung und Ordnung des Fragens]” (Heidegger 1985, 27 = Gesamtausgabe 42, 47). This is correct, but in the first source cited by Gonzalez (i.e., Heidegger’s 1938 essay Die Zeit des Weltbildes from the 1950 collection Holzwege = Gesamtausgabe 5, 73–113), Heidegger also points out that it was Plato’s understanding of “the beingness of beings [die Seiendheit des Seinenden] as εἶδος” that “predestined the world’s having to become picture [Bild]” (Heidegger 2002, 69 = Gesamtausgabe 5, 91), which in the context of Heidegger’s essay means: the world as the entirety of beings is grasped representationally by a representing subject (Subjekt: θυρακειμενον as “that which lies before [das Vor-Liegende]”), and as such “it stands together with what belongs to and stands together with it as a system” (Heidegger 2002, 66 and 67 = Gesamtausgabe 5, 88 and 89; my emphasis). What is at issue here is not whether Heidegger’s claim about Plato is correct, but, given Gonzalez’s appeal to Heidegger, whether such a claim would make a difference for Gonzalez’s denial of any trace of a system (including the intention of building a system) in Plato’s philosophy.
age or because you are learning to be good. (198)

Leaving aside whether the terms “kinds,” “values,” and “knowledge” are entirely appropriate in this context, one need not deny that the tension between these “two kinds of values” and “knowledge” is perceived as real in order to disagree with Nussbaum’s analysis of the *Symposium*. (In fact, one need not even disagree with what in her reading of the dialogue will eventually emerge as *her* views in order to disagree that the words she loosely attributes to Plato do not coincide with Plato’s views.) If I read her correctly (and, of course, if my interpretive notes on the *Symposium* in Chapter One are not completely off the mark), I think that Nussbaum’s claim is based on a misreading of the speech by Alcibiades, which is there to show us, not an alternative to Socrates’ views on *eros*, but a (fairly obvious?) failure to live out these views. This misreading, in turn, is grounded in what I take to be three more fundamental misconceptions on Nussbaum’s part.

The first misconception, of a narrower scope than the other two, is that in order to love Beauty one must become aloof and cold-hearted and give up love for lower beauties; as Nussbaum writes of Socrates:

> He might also have had a sexual relationship with Alcibiades while remaining inwardly aloof. But Socrates refuses in every way to be affected. He is stone; and he also turns others to stone. Alcibiades is to his sight just one more of the beautifuls, a piece of the form, a pure thing like a jewel. (195)

That this is not the case seems clear to me from the fact that Socrates, far from turning others to stone, makes them fall in love with him; in fact, it is obvious that Alcibiades is *still* in love with Socrates at the time of his speech, or so it seems to the
other guests at Agathon’s gathering (Symposium 222c1–3). Moreover, what
Alcibiades loves is not Socrates’ individual body, but his wisdom, which he assumes will
become available to him if he will throw himself into Socrates’ arms. Socrates firmly
declines the offer, but his rejection need not be read as aloofness, or a refusal to be
affected; it is rather a genuine concern for the health of Alcibiades’ soul (cf. Chapter One
note 271), a concern which, again, is all but comparable to a stone-like condition.

The second misconception is broader in scope than the first and emerges in
connection with Nussbaum’s comments on what I earlier referred to as the first rung(s) of
the ladder of love, that is, the beauty of body (Symposium 210a4–b6: steps 1.a and 1.b at
page 49 above). Nussbaum claims that “Socrates’ argument depends on a strong hidden
assumption: that all beauty, *qua* beauty, is uniform, the same in kind” (179). She adds on
the same page:

All manifestations of the *kalon* must be sufficiently like one another that if
you lack one kind it is natural to conclude that you lack them all. The
beauty of Alcibiades must be distinct from the beauty of Socrates not
qualitatively, but only in terms of contingent spatio-temporal location (and
perhaps in *quantity* as well).

This “natural” conclusion, I suspect, is not so natural after all. In fact, it is itself an
assumption, and misses the point about the possibility of qualitative differentiation in
kind within beauty, which in turn is precisely what makes the notion of an ascent to
Beauty possible in the first place (and which I take to be Socrates’, or Plato’s, genuine
views in the Symposium). So, for instance, to claim that all shapes, in order to be shapes,
must belong to the same genus is different than claiming that if a given shape lacks one
manifestation of the genus “shape,” it must lack all such manifestations. Nussbaum seems
to confuse the two claims. Thus, in the case of beauty, Alcibiades’ physical beauty is not different from Socrates’ “interior” beauty (e.g., Symposium 216c4–217a2) “only in terms of contingent spatio-temporal location” (and probably also not “in quantity,” since the kind of beauty proper to Socrates, in order to be quantifiable, should possess either the measurability and potential divisibility of magnitude into non-continuous parts or the numerability and potential divisibility of a plurality in discrete parts; but it is not clear how this could be the case, unless one takes “quantity” metaphorically). Rather, the two kinds of beauty, Alcibiades’ and Socrates’, are qualitatively different kinds of beauty, that is, they belong to different rungs of the same ladder of love.

The third misconception is what I take to be a more pervasive assumption concerning one of the central theses of Nussbaum’s book, of which her opposition between Socrates and Alcibiades is a major illustration, namely that often the pursuits of rational beings conflict with desires that are not rational. (The other theses, which we find outlined in the first chapter of Nussbaum’s book, are that often such pursuits are in conflict with each other and/or are overwhelmed by factors that we do not control). What I take to be an assumption is not the obvious fact that all such conflicts are real, but Nussbaums’s notion that on this point philosophy is in agreement with tragedy in

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13 On quantity (ποσός) and its two basic kinds, magnitude (μέγεθος) and plurality (πλῆθος), see Aristotle, Categories 4b20–6b35, Metaphysics V.1020a7–32. See also these entries in Peters (1967).

14 Thus, Nussbaum (unwittingly?) reads Socrates’ position on beauty in the Symposium as analogous to Protarchus’ initial claim about pleasure at the beginning of the Philebus (12c–13c). For Protarchus pleasure is a homogeneous phenomenon resisting all qualitative differentiation. By contrast, in the same passage of the Philebus Socrates argues for a qualitative differentiation of pleasures (e.g., based on the difference of their motives and consequences, as in Aristotle’s Nicomachean Ethics X.5) and mentions color and shape as exemplary instances of such a differentiation (cf. Frede 1993, xviii–xix). It is not implausible that Socrates implies a similar kind of differentiation for beauty in the Symposium. Cf. also Chapter One note 158.
portraying these conflicts as being beyond resolution. A quotation from an early
critical review of Nussbaum’s book from which I took a cue for both this and the
previous criticism (a review with which I am generally in agreement) should suffice to
justify my claim in the context of this annotation:

the tragedians seem not to think there is any question about whether the
conflicts happen; they assume that all the conflicts happen, and display
how they happen. Greek philosophers, however, think there is a serious
question about whether the conflicts actually arise once we straighten out
our moral principles, and about whether they arise in just the ways
assumed in tragedy. In claiming that philosophy is continuous with
tragedy, Nussbaum overlooks this apparently important discontinuity.\[15\]

Thus, Plato, as a philosopher, does not portray Alcibiades as the embodiment of a
set of values irreparably opposed to those of Socrates (to which Plato gives preference,
according to Nussbaum), but rather as the epitome of the wealthy, handsome, and
intelligent Athenian who, despite his good qualities, failed to join Socrates on the path of
philosophy (cf. Chapter One note 37). In doing so, Plato is not telling us that, whether we
opt for Alcibiades’ stance or for Socrates’, we have “to blind” ourselves to something or
“to give up some beauty” (198, cited in the first paragraph of this annotation), but rather
that by choosing Alcibiades’ stance we will inevitably get stuck at a lower level of beauty
and blind ourselves to Beauty itself and to the reason(s) for which lower or qualified
beauties are beautiful (and desirable). Thus, to choose Alcibiades’ stance means to treat,
whether deliberately (if possible at all) or against one’s best judgment (i.e., out of one’s
inability to overpower one’s habitual tendency toward the worse: ἀκρασία), a
qualitatively inferior kind of beauty as if it were ultimate, thereby missing out on Beauty

\[15\] Irwin (1988, 382–383).
itself (see my previous criticism). It is such a choice, not an alleged contrast between "two kinds of values" or objects of love, that causes tension. In fact, for Socrates there is one and only one proper object of love, that is, Beauty or the Good, and this is the case even when one fails to realize that if beautiful things are beautiful, it is because they participate in Beauty. Thus, tension occurs, not because we love beautiful things which are merely quantitatively different (i.e., “the pure light of the eternal form” vs. “the flickering lightning of the opened and unstably moving body”: 198), but because something which, by participating in Beauty, is qualitatively different from Beauty, is loved (wrongfully, for the Socrates of the Symposium) as if it were lovable ultimately, or as if it were Beauty itself.

**Annotation 7 (Chapter Four note 66):**

**P. Moser (2010), The Evidence for God: Religious Knowledge Reexamined**

In the context of my discussion of Plotinus’ Principle of As-simulation, I pointed out that in an earlier publication Moser suggests that in order to see the plausibility of the evidence of the Judeo-Christian God, one ought to be receptive or properly attuned to this evidence. The suggestion is compelling and deserves careful consideration. What I find problematic in Moser’s approach, however, is the critical reading of the tradition of natural theology, for instance of Thomas Aquinas (142–184, especially 153–165), which we find in this later book.

Moser contends that the arguments of natural theology are unable to account for the God acknowledged by Jews and Christians, a God who is personally interactive,

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morally perfect, deserving of worship, and cognitively elusive. It is not difficult to see how a criticism of this kind could easily be applied to Plotinus, if not with respect to God’s cognitive elusiveness, at least for what concerns God’s personality (cf. Section 5.2 in the Epilogue) and the fact that God deserves worship, although Plotinus would hardly be bothered by such a criticism. In fact, if this is all that Moser’s critique amounts to, it is certainly true of every argument of what may broadly be understood as belonging to the tradition of natural theology, Jewish, Christian, Muslim or otherwise. But Moser goes a step further when he writes about the arguments of natural theology (152):

Characterized generally, these arguments seek to establish, or at least confirm, God’s existence on the basis of natural sources of human knowledge, without an appeal to any revelation from God. [...] In effect, the history of natural theology has been the history of attempting to secure knowledge of God’s reality without acknowledging evidence of God’s authoritative call to humans.

My contention is that these claims by Moser are at least problematic because when the arguments of natural theology are understood for what they are meant to accomplish by their authors, they are not pieces of evidence that precede faith (i.e., what here I take to be, if not simply identical with what Moser calls “acknowledging evidence of God’s authoritative call to humans,” at least an essential element of such an acknowledgment), but natural aids for a faith that ought to be already in place in order for these arguments to fulfill their purpose. It is not hard to see that if faith is not already present, no matter how weakly and tentatively, these arguments will hardly aid anyone.18

17 It is God’s cognitive elusiveness, I surmise, which makes for the necessity of attunement, of which faith (or what Moser more often refers to as trust in God) is a fundamental element.

18 This is not to say that the arguments of natural theology have no appeal whatsoever for a habitually reflective person. However, I have yet to find someone who has assured me of having turned from
The fact that all the major representatives of the tradition of natural theology often preface their arguments with prayer is no mere formality. I maintain that what prayer accomplishes in this context is the very acknowledgment, in faith, of God’s authoritative call, that is, a fundamental attunement which is prior to argumentation. But when the scope and purpose of these arguments is either passed under silence or misrepresented, their very nature radically changes and is bound to be misunderstood. Therefore, the so-called proofs of God’s existence are expressions of the (Anselmian) fides quaerens intellectum, not substitutes for faith nor the proclamation of an intellectus sine fide. If unbelief to faith on the mere basis of one or more of these arguments.

19 See for instance Augustine, Soliloquia I.1–6; Anselm, Proslogion 1; Bonaventure, Itinerarium mentis in Deum, Prologue 1. Thomas Aquinas, on his part, is known to have been in the habit of preparing himself with prayer for the activity of study and teaching (cf. Torrell 2005, 321); a particular expression of this was Thomas’ habitual recitation of the prayer, Creator ineffabilis, by which he would ask for God’s assistance in his intellectual work (the text of this prayer can be found in Alarcón 2011). Augustine (De doctrina Christiana IV.32) recommends prayer also before preaching, an activity in which persuasion is often aimed less at reason by means of arguments than at emotion by means of rhetoric. And although the context is that of attempting to understand a strictly revealed Christian doctrine such as that of the Trinity, Augustine (De Trinitate XIV.49) insists that given our present sinful condition, understanding of the mystery will become possible only if preceded by faith, prayer, and a sound (i.e., morally sound) life conduct.

Although the milieu is not that of Christianity, it is significant that invocation to the divinity before undertaking a study or investigation is a practice endorsed already by Plato (Timaeus 27c1–d4, 48d1–e1, Laws X.893b1–4; cf. also Philebus 25b8–12, 61b11–c2; for a prayer after a discussion, see Phaedrus 279b8–c3) and through the Neoplatonic tradition—e.g., in Plotinus (V.1 [10] 6.8–11, V.8 [31] 9.13–14), and most prominently in Iamblichus (On the Pythagorean Way of Life 1.1–2; for a prayer after an investigation, see On the Mysteries X.8.293.16–294.6) and Proclus (Commentary on Plato’s Parmenides I.617.1–618.20, Commentary on Plato’s Timaeus II, 207.21–214.12). For an account of Plotinus’ attitude toward prayer and overall religiosity, see Rist (1967, 199–212); for further references and an exposition of Iamblichus’ theory of prayer in relation to the respective views of Porphyry and Proclus, see Dillon (1973, 405–411); for an introduction to the understanding and practice of prayer in the Platonic tradition, see Dillon (2002); on the broader issue of piety and prayer in late antiquity, see Saffrey (1986).

20 Anselm, Proslogion, Preface. Anselm also writes in his Letter on the Incarnation of the Word 1 (my translation): “the one who does not believe will not understand. For the one who does not believe will not have the experience; and the one who has not had the experience will not know” (“qui non crediderit, non experietur; et qui expertus non fuerit, non cognoscet”). This text is an echo of a Biblical text from the prophet Isaiah, often quoted by Augustine (e.g., De fide et Symbolo 1, De Trinitate VII.12, XV.2, De doctrina Christiana I.17; cf. also Thomas Aquinas, Scriptum super Sententias III.d23.q2.a2.qe1.ad2): καὶ ἐὰν μὴ πιστεύσητε, οὐδὲ μὴ συνήτε (Isaiah 7:9, Septuaginta).
this very important point is kept in mind and if I did not miss something of substance in Moser’s interpretation, I think that his critique of natural theology loses most of its force.

I think Moser is correct, however, when his critique is directed, not to the major authors or systematizers of the arguments themselves, but to their *popular reception*, in which often these arguments have been conceived of precisely as he describes them. Yet again, I believe that the critique remains unwarranted when applied to the major medieval representatives of so-called natural theology such as Anselm, Aquinas, and Bonaventure.

As I hinted above, the case is different with Plotinus. Even if we might consider ourselves justified in detecting elements, in the *Enneads*, of what in later centuries will develop as the tradition of natural theology,\(^{21}\) he would hardly have been worried by Moser’s critique for one simple reason: because in line with the tradition of Greek intellectualism, his starting point was not faith, but reason.\(^ {22}\) Whether and to what extent he was justified in his attitude is an issue that transcends the limits of this study.

\(^{21}\) See for example Gerson’s inclusion of Plotinus in his study on the history of natural theology (Gerson 1990).

\(^{22}\) For a range of opinions about Plotinus’ rationalism or intellectualism see Dodds (1928, 142; 1965, 26), Randall (1969), Moreau (1970, 13–16), Schiller (1978); for a concise account of Plotinus’ attitude toward religion see Armstrong (1967, 203–210).
Notice

Following is a list of the bibliographical references cited in this study divided in four sections: Plato; Plotinus; Pre-modern Authors; Works Cited. The first three sections contain short references to all the critical editions and translations from which I benefited. The same references are listed in full, under the name of the editor and/or translator, in the last section along with all other sources cited. In the section titled “Plotinus,” translations of the titles of Plotinus’ treatises follow ARMSTRONG (a full list of the orders of the treatises, their titles, and dates is found in Appendix A). The section titled “Pre-modern Authors” does not include the individual names of authors whose works survive only in fragmentary form and are cited from collections of several authors (e.g., Empedocles in DK, Chrysippus in SVF, Sappho in D. A. Campbell 1982–1993, I, etc.), nor the titles of individual works of one author surviving in fragmentary form and gathered in a single collection (e.g., Aristotle’s On Ideas in W. D. Ross 1955, Iamblichus’ Commentary on Plato’s Timaeus in Dillon 1973, etc.); in both these cases, the names of the authors and, occasionally, the titles of their works are indicated in the relevant footnotes.
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