

Plotinus on the Soul



DAMIAN CALUORI

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Plotinus on the Soul is a study of Plotinus' psychology, which is arguably the most sophisticated Platonist theory of the soul in antiquity. Plotinus offers a Platonist response to Aristotelian and Stoic conceptions of the soul that is at the same time an innovative interpretation of Plato's *Timaeus*. He considers the notion of the soul to be crucial for explaining the rational order of the world. To this end, he discusses not only different types of individual soul (such as the souls of the stars, and human and animal souls) but also an entity that he was the first to introduce into philosophy: the so-called hypostasis Soul. This is the first study to provide a detailed explanation of this entity, but it also discusses the other types of soul, with an emphasis on the human soul, and explains Plotinus' original views on rational thought and its relation to experience.

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To the memory of Michael Frede

*To the memory of my parents, Moritz and Agnes
Caluori-Caminada*

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Preface and acknowledgements

During the summer semester of 2000 I attended a *Blockseminar* on Plotinus' *Ennead* IV 8, taught by Michael Bordt and Michael Frede, at the Hochschule für Philosophie in Munich. The seminar left a deep impression on me and I am grateful to Michael Bordt for organising it. It was there that it first occurred to me to write my dissertation on Plotinus' theory of the soul. This book is the result of that idea; it is a revised version of my DPhil thesis, written under the supervision of Michael Frede at the University of Oxford. I greatly benefitted from Michael's acute discernment and from his expertise in so many areas of ancient philosophy and beyond. His influence on my understanding of Plotinus and of ancient philosophy more generally is profound. But I also learned from him a method – how to do the history of philosophy. He is sorely missed.

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This book is dedicated to the memory of Michael Frede, and to the memory of my parents, Agnes and Moritz Caluori-Caminada. I could not have written it without them.

Abbreviations

<i>Adv. Haer.</i>	<i>Adversus Haereses</i>
AT	Adam & Tannery
<i>Calc. In Ti.</i>	<i>Timaeus a Calcidio Translatus Commentarioque Instructus</i>
CMG	<i>Corpus Medicorum Graecorum</i>
cod.	codex
<i>Comm.not.</i>	<i>De Communibus Notitiis Adversus Stoicos</i>
DA	<i>De Anima</i>
<i>De An Procr.</i>	<i>De Animae Procreatione in Timaeo</i>
<i>De Foet Form.</i>	<i>De Foetuum Formatione</i>
<i>De Plant.</i>	<i>De Plantis</i>
<i>De Princ.</i>	<i>De Principiis</i>
<i>De Soll.</i>	<i>De Sollertia Animalium</i>
DG	<i>Doxographi Graeci</i>
<i>Didasc.</i>	<i>Didascalicus</i>
<i>Diss.</i>	<i>Dissertationes</i>
<i>Enn.</i>	<i>Enneads</i>
<i>Epiphan.</i>	<i>Epiphanius</i>
<i>Hex.</i>	<i>Hexaemeron</i>
<i>In Phys.</i>	<i>In Aristotelis Physica Commentaria</i>
<i>Irris.</i>	<i>Gentilium Philosophorum Irrisio</i>
<i>Mant.</i>	<i>Mantissa</i>
or.	oratio
<i>Ord.</i>	<i>Ordinatio</i>
<i>Phys.</i>	<i>Physics</i>
<i>Plac.</i>	<i>Placita</i>
<i>Prop. Plac.</i>	<i>De Propriis Placitis</i>
Q.	quaestio
<i>Quodl.</i>	<i>Quodlibeta</i>
<i>Rep.</i>	<i>Republic</i>

<i>s.v.</i>	<i>sub voce</i>
<i>Soph.</i>	<i>Sophist</i>
<i>SVF</i>	<i>Stoicorum Veterum Fragmenta</i>
<i>V.P.</i>	<i>Vita Plotini</i>

Abbreviations of Greek authors, texts and references to works not listed above follow the *Greek-English Lexicon* by Liddell, Scott & Jones, while abbreviations of Latin authors, texts and references to works not listed above follow the *Thesaurus Linguae Latinae*.

Introduction

A Platonist theory of the soul

While Stoic and Aristotelian psychology is now fairly familiar to us, comparatively little work has been done on Platonist psychology, by which I mean theories of the soul that philosophers in the ancient Platonist tradition developed and that are largely based on interpretations of Plato's dialogues. Plotinus' theory of the soul is perhaps the most sophisticated theory in this tradition. It is to a considerable extent an interpretation of Plato's *Timaeus*, even though other dialogues, in particular the *Phaedo*, play a significant role as well.

Plotinus lived in the third century CE, long after Aristotle and at a time when Stoicism, after a final flourishing in the second century, was withering away. He knew Aristotle's work extremely well, was familiar with such Aristotelians as Alexander of Aphrodisias and had absorbed a lot of Stoicism, in particular in ethics (see *V.P.* 14). Yet his theory of the soul is genuinely Platonist in its nature. It differs from Aristotelian psychology in that it is not based on any sort of hylemorphism. Rather, the soul, for Plotinus, is an entity distinct and separate from the body. And it differs from the Stoic theory of the soul in that this distinct and separate soul is incorporeal. These differences can perhaps be most easily understood against the broader metaphysical background that distinguishes Platonism from Stoic and Peripatetic philosophy. Platonism, after all, is the only ancient pagan school that postulates the existence of a transcendent realm, a realm beyond the world of our experience and independent of it.¹

¹ Aristotle's intellects are also immaterial substances but we do not find in Aristotle a transcendent realm.

The soul and the rational order of the world

Like Spinoza, Kant and many other great philosophers of the past, Plotinus was deeply impressed by the fact that there is a rational order to the world, an order that can in principle be explained by means of reason.² We find such an explanation already expounded in Plato's *Timaeus*, where the divine Craftsman, looking at the perfect order of an eternal model (the Platonic world of Forms), creates this world (our world) as an image thereof. Because he wants the image to be excellent, the Craftsman orders the world in a rational manner. The way he does so is by means of souls. Thus, the wish to create a world that is rationally ordered is the reason why, in the *Timaeus*, souls come into play in the first place. Yet if the Craftsman is supposed to ultimately explain the rational order of the world, then we also need to understand what the Craftsman is.

The view that the world is rationally ordered was widespread in late antiquity.³ Galen, for example, reports in *De usu partium* how, when dissecting an elephant for the first time, he admired the skill of Nature (whose work he considered to be the work of the *Timaeian* Craftsman).⁴ Galen's awe in view of the skill of the Craftsman increases when thinking about how the supreme intelligence of such ingenious men as Plato, Aristotle, Hipparchus or Archimedes comes into being down here, "in such slime – for what else could one call something composed of flesh, blood, phlegm, yellow bile and black bile?"⁵ And Galen's heart is filled with even more admiration and awe (just as Kant's would be many centuries later) when reflecting on the starry heavens (*UP* IV 359 K. = II 446 Helmreich)).

Plotinus shares Galen's admiration for the ingenuity that accounts for the presence of intelligence in bodies in heaven and on earth. This is perhaps most impressively expressed in the opening passage of *Ennead* V I, 2:

² The problem of explaining the intelligibility of the world has not gone away. The contemporary version of it concerns what Rescher (1987) 101 calls the "empirical applicability of mathematics". Einstein considered the fact that the laws of nature are written in the language of mathematics a miracle (Einstein (1987) 130f.). Few may be inclined to follow him in this. If it is no miracle, it needs an explanation.

³ Yet it was also under attack from various movements such as the Gnostics or the Manicheans. For this see in particular Plotinus' discussion of Gnostic views in *Ennead* II 9.

⁴ ἔτι καὶ μᾶλλον ἐθαύμασα τῆς φύσεως τὴν τέχνην *UP* IV 349 K. = II 439 Helmreich.

⁵ ἰδεῖν δ' ἔστι νοῦ φύσιν καὶ κατ' αὐτοὺς τοὺς ἀνθρώπους ἐννοήσαντα Πλάτωνα καὶ Ἀριστοτέλη καὶ Ἰππάρχον καὶ Ἀρχιμήδην καὶ πολλοὺς ἄλλους τοιούτους. ὅπῃ οὖν ἐν βορβόρῳ τοσούτῳ – τί γὰρ ἂν ἄλλο τις εἴποι τὸ συγκείμενον ἐκ σαρκῶν αἱματός τε καὶ φλέγματος καὶ χολῆς ξανθῆς καὶ μελαίνης κτλ. *UP* IV 359 K. = II 446f. Helmreich.

Now let every soul⁶ first consider this, that it made everything into a living being by breathing life into them, those that the earth feeds and those that the sea feeds, and those in the air and the divine stars in heaven, and it itself made the sun a living being and this great heaven, too, and itself has ordered it and causes it to revolve in orderly fashion, being a nature different from the things which it orders and moves and makes into living beings; and it must necessarily be more honourable than they.⁷

This passage shows the idea, prevalent among many thinkers of late antiquity, that the order of the world is an expression of supreme rationality.⁸

According to the *Timaeus*, the Craftsman accounts for rational souls, which, in turn, are also responsible for the rational order of the world. Thus, the Craftsman is the ultimate cause of the rational order of the world while souls may be called its proximate cause.⁹ This does not as such explain, however, what the Craftsman is and how he creates. One step towards a possible explanation of the relation between the Craftsman, rational souls and the rational order of the world consists in postulating that the divine Craftsman is or possesses a soul, and in claiming that the (other) rational souls and the rational order of the world are due to this soul. According to Plotinus there is indeed such a soul that we may call “the soul of the Craftsman”.¹⁰

What is meant by “the soul of the Craftsman”? This expression is ambiguous and could be used to indicate a number of ways a soul could be the soul of the Craftsman. It could mean that the Craftsman *has* a soul. This “having” in turn can be understood in different ways: for example, in the way in which I possess a car or, differently, in the way I have two legs. Yet it could also mean that the Craftsman crucially *is* his soul. People who believe that they are identical with their bodies, for example, can perfectly meaningfully use the expression “my body” to refer to themselves. If the Craftsman *possesses* (as opposed to *is*) a soul in one of the senses illustrated

⁶ Every soul? This seems riddling as the soul of Socrates, for example, does not seem to have made *everything* into a living being. I discuss this passage, and will suggest a solution to this riddle, in [Chapter 4](#).

⁷ ἐνθυμείσθω τοῖνυν πρῶτον ἐκεῖνο πᾶσα ψυχῇ, ὡς αὐτὴ μὲν ζῶα ἐποίησε πάντα ἐμπνεύσασα αὐτοῖς ζωὴν, ἃ τε γῇ τρέφει ἃ τε θάλασσα ἃ τε ἐν ἀέρι ἃ τε ἐν οὐρανῷ ἄστρα θεῖα, αὐτὴ δὲ ἥλιον, αὐτὴ δὲ τὸν μέγαν τοῦτον οὐρανόν, καὶ αὐτὴ ἐκόσμησεν, αὐτὴ δὲ ἐν τάξει περιάγει φύσις οὐσα ἑτέρα ὧν κοσμεῖ καὶ ὧν κινεῖ καὶ ἃ ζῆν ποιεῖ· καὶ τούτων ἀνάγκη εἶναι τιμιωτέραν κτλ.

⁸ See also *Enn.* III 8, II, 26–39.

⁹ This is not to say that the Craftsman in the *Timaeus* is not also immediately involved in the creation of bodies, of course.

¹⁰ See *Enn.* IV 4, 9, 1–6. Plotinus there refers to the soul of “Zeus who sets everything in order”. I take it that Zeus in this passage is the *Timaeus* Craftsman.

above, then we still may not know what the Craftsman is after having explained what his soul is. However, if the Craftsman crucially *is* his soul, we will, by understanding what his soul is, already at least partly understand what he is. I say “at least partly” because even if the Craftsman crucially is his soul, he could still also be something else. I am going to argue that the Craftsman indeed crucially (but not exclusively) is his soul according to Plotinus.¹¹ If so, the problem of the relation between the Craftsman and individual rational souls now becomes that of the relation between the soul of the Craftsman (in this sense) and individual rational souls. We will have to explore this relationship in some detail below, but I hope that this sketch already indicates that the rational order of the world is, crucially, due to the soul. Indeed, I am suggesting that this is Plotinus’ main motivation for developing the theory of the soul that is the subject of this book.

Plotinus’ three hypostases

In order to explain the way in which the Craftsman is his soul, we will need to introduce a further notion, namely that of a hypostasis. This notion, rarely used in modern and contemporary philosophy, is most familiar from discussions in ancient and medieval Christian thought, where it is used to indicate the threefold differentiation of the Trinity. (See the discussions of the Trinity in, for example, Gregory of Nyssa, Abelard, Aquinas or Ockham.) It is notoriously difficult to explain what a hypostasis is and I will only discuss it to the extent that I consider necessary for the purposes of this book.¹²

Kant, although using the notion of a hypostasis polemically, captures one of its crucial features. According to Kant we call something a hypostasis if we attribute real existence to it while, in his view, it exists only as a thought. In this case, we *hypostasise* mental content (*Critique of Pure Reason* A 384). Quine uses the word “hypostasis” in the same way when talking about the “hypostasis of abstract entities” (Quine (1950) 630). The crucial feature that I think Kant and Quine capture and which is useful for our

¹¹ The Craftsman is also his intellect as the passage from *Enn.* IV 4, 9, 1–6 shows, where Plotinus, with reference to *Phlb.* 30D, attributes to the Craftsman a royal soul and a royal intellect.

¹² Why did the Church Fathers use the notion of a hypostasis? The reason will at least partly be due to the Christian view that the inner complexity of God cannot be correctly explained in terms of substance and attributes or whole and part, or any other of the traditional ways in which philosophers used to describe a complex entity that is nevertheless unified in some relevant and strong way.

purposes is something like this: if we hypostasise something, we attribute real existence to it even though it appears only to be a concept. This is not supposed to serve as a full explanation, of course, but I hope it will help in what follows to illuminate the way in which Plotinus considers the soul of the Craftsman to be a hypostasis – a hypostasis that is called the hypostasis Soul.

Now it is clear that what is responsible for the rational order of the world must be, in one way or other, reason. According to Plotinus, the soul of the Craftsman, that is, the hypostasis Soul, is crucially responsible for the rational order of the world. Using the notion of a hypostasis, we may, based on this, call the hypostasis Soul, being the Craftsman in so far as he is responsible for the rational order of the world, reason hypostasised. It is the hypostasis of reason as such. I will explain in the first three chapters that this is not just the hypostatisation of an abstract concept. Moreover, Plotinus' notion of reason must be understood within its ancient context and we should not assume that the ancient notion or notions of reason are the same as our own.¹³ As we will see, the hypostasis Soul will turn out to be *active* reason – after all, it must be such as to be able to bring about the *existence* of the rational order of the world.

The Soul is not the only hypostasis in Plotinus. Instead, he postulates three: the One, the Intellect and the Soul. The three hypostases are hierarchically ordered and differ from one another by a continuing degree of differentiation. The first hypostasis, the One, is conceived of as completely simple, not allowing for any differentiation whatsoever. The second hypostasis is the first differentiation of the One. Perhaps the best way of getting an initial sense of the differentiation of the Intellect is this: Plotinus follows Aristotle's view that the thinking of a divine intellect, its contemplation, is constitutive of the intellect but also of its object; accordingly the hypostasis Intellect essentially contemplates itself. This implies a certain, at least minimal, complexity in that the Intellect possesses different functions, such as being a subject as well as an object of contemplation. For this reason, Plotinus considers the hypostasis Intellect as distinct from the hypostasis One in its being minimally differentiated or articulated. The hypostasis Soul, in turn, is different from the hypostasis Intellect by a further articulation or differentiation. I shall argue that the differentiation distinguishing the hypostasis Soul from the hypostasis Intellect is due to their different

¹³ For more about the difference between ancient and modern notions of reason see Frede & Striker (1996).

ways of thinking: while the thinking of the hypostasis Intellect is non-propositional (as I shall argue), the thinking of the hypostasis Soul (which is constitutive of it) is propositionally structured. Since propositional thought is, in a way to be discussed, more differentiated than non-propositional thought, the Soul is more differentiated than the Intellect. In roughly this way the Plotinian hypostases are distinct from one another through an increasing articulation from first hypostasis to third. Distinguishing between two kinds of thinking (propositional and non-propositional) allows for a clear-cut distinction between the two thinking hypostases: while the hypostasis Soul is propositional thought reified, the Intellect is non-propositional thought reified. I note that reason as a hypostasis is thus understood as specifically *one* of two kinds of hypostasised thinking, namely as thinking that is structured propositionally.¹⁴

The structure of the book

The first three chapters of this book are devoted to the hypostasis Soul and in particular to answering the following three questions: why did Plotinus introduce the hypostasis Soul? What is this hypostasis? How is it related to individual souls? In addition to what was said in the last section, these chapters cover the two major reasons, as I will argue, why Plotinus introduced the hypostasis Soul. The first reason is as follows. It is often thought that Plotinus disagrees with the Christian view of the relation of the transcendent realm to our world. It is said that while the Christian God is a creator, the world, according to Plotinus, emanates from his hypostases. Against this I shall argue that Plotinus follows Plato's *Timaeus* in claiming that there is a Craftsman and thus a creator. I think this is important to emphasise since the creation of a world, as I will argue, presupposes practical as well as theoretical thought. The Craftsman not only has to cognitively grasp the paradigm (i.e. the Platonic world of Forms) that he wants to create an image of but must also think about *how* to create a world such that it is an excellent image of the world of Forms. That this is Plotinus' view becomes particularly clear, it seems to me, from his discussion of providence (understood as that which cares for and excellently arranges the sensible world).

There is also a second reason for introducing the hypostasis Soul. In good Platonist fashion Plotinus believes that, since there are many

¹⁴ The three hypostases may also be called hypostases of God, i.e. ways in which God exists.

individual souls, there must be an entity that accounts for this manifold and gives unity to it. He identifies this entity as the hypostasis Soul. I discuss why an entity of a new type is necessary for providing unity to individual souls and explain why neither the divine Intellect, no Platonic Form nor any individual soul (including even the World Soul) can account for this unity. Plotinus compares the relation of the hypostasis Soul to individual souls with the relation of a genus to its species and characterises it as one of whole to parts. One remarkable feature of the whole–part relation is that the whole is considered ontologically prior to its parts in the following sense: while the parts are dependent for what they are on the whole, the whole is not dependent on the parts for what it is. This obviously calls for explanation. Given our intuitive understanding of the notions of part and whole, we would expect the priority to be the other way round: that the parts are ontologically prior to the whole – or at least that the parts and whole are ontologically co-dependent. In [Chapter 3](#) I trace the history in the background of Plotinus’ understanding of this whole–part relation and attempt to provide an explanation of how it works.

The discussion of the first three chapters is concerned with souls in the transcendent intelligible realm, most notably with the hypostasis Soul but also with individual souls (such as the World Soul or the soul of Socrates). Yet individual souls, as opposed to the hypostasis Soul, are also active in the sensible world, that is, in the world of our experience. In [Chapter 4](#) I shall argue that the activities of individual souls in the sensible world are a function of their lives in the intelligible world, or, in other words, a function of their essential thinking. In so far as souls are active in the sensible world, they contribute to the creation and maintenance of the sensible world (i.e. to its providential arrangement). The relation of the soul’s activity in the intelligible world to its activity in the sensible world can be understood in a number of ways and it may even seem unclear which of the two activities is prior to the other. Given that part of the thinking of the soul in the intelligible world is practical, it may seem natural to assume that its purpose lies in the practical activity in the sensible world. Against this, I will argue that the soul’s activities in the sensible world are not the purpose or aim of its thinking in the intelligible world but rather simply a consequence of it. As in Stoicism, the crucial thing is to think properly about what the right thing to do is. The right action, if not hindered, will then be a consequence of this proper thinking.

Different types of individual souls deal differently with their task in the sensible world.¹⁵ In [Chapter 5](#) I will consider divine souls (understood as the souls of the visible gods: the World Soul, the souls of the stars (fixed stars, planets, the sun and moon) and the soul of the earth) and explain how Plotinus' discussion of them depends on the *Timaeus*. In my view, this topic is important for at least three reasons. First, divine souls are crucially involved in the providential arrangement of the sensible world. I will try to clarify in what way this is so. Second, if we study Plotinus' theory of the soul with a particular interest in the human soul, divine souls can serve as a simplified model where decisive functions are more easily detectable. In this way, studying divine souls will help us to better understand how the human soul functions and what is essential to it. Third, if, from a Platonist point of view, we want to understand how we should live our lives, divine souls can serve as a paradigm. For while they are essentially the same sort of being that we are, they cope much better with their activity in the sensible world. This allows us to see how it is possible for a soul to be active in the sensible world without being involved in the struggles (moral and otherwise) typical for human beings. In this sense, Plotinus' divine souls have a role similar to that of the sage in Stoicism.

Plotinus' discussion of the destiny of human souls in the sensible world is heavily indebted to Plato's *Phaedo*, as we shall see in [Chapter 6](#). Platonists in late antiquity usually held that human souls, although ideally residing in the intelligible world, at times quite literally descend (through space) into the sublunary sphere in order to ensoul human bodies. For Plotinus, accepting the notion of descent leads to the following problem: if the soul is essentially engaged in its thinking in the intelligible world, how is it possible for it to descend? Its descent cannot mean that it is no longer active in the intelligible world. Yet if descent is not to be understood in this way, what does it mean for the soul to descend? I shall discuss how Plotinus solves this problem: he claims (and this, in addition to introducing the hypostasis Soul, is the second great innovation of Plotinus' theory of the soul) that the soul does not, strictly speaking, descend at all, but instead always remains in the intelligible world. Yet the human soul, like the divine soul, also has to care for a body (at least for some periods of time). However, as opposed to divine souls, human souls are greatly absorbed when caring for their bodies; indeed, so much so that they can at best rarely

¹⁵ I shall talk of "types of soul" throughout the book. The class of souls belonging to the same type share certain important features. Souls belonging to one type are, for example, *divine* souls. Although it is helpful, I think, to distinguish between different types of soul, it is crucial to be aware that the differences between different types are not essential (for reasons to be discussed in [Chapter 3](#)).

direct their attention to the intelligible objects they essentially contemplate. Plotinus thus, in contrast to Descartes and the modern tradition, separates our proper thinking from our consciousness or awareness in such a way that it is possible for us to think without being aware of it. He thus shows (which may well be true) that the notion of thought does not involve or imply that of consciousness (“consciousness” understood in the sense specified).¹⁶ Due to their deep engagement with bodies, human souls tend to get confused by their activity in the sensible world and lose sight of their own essential activity and thus also of what they really are. Our confusion is caused by our appropriation of our *embodied* lives: the soul believes that the desires, pains and sorrows of the body are its own. Plotinus not only diagnoses this misidentification (as he sees it) but also explains how it can be overcome. This discussion will cover one of two senses in which the human soul descends: what it means for the human soul to descend in this sense is to turn its attention to the body.¹⁷

In [Chapter 7](#) I will discuss Plotinus’ theory of how precisely the human soul is active in the sensible world. This will provide the second sense of descent. Plotinus borrows the notion of the soul-using-a-body from the *First Alcibiades* and distinguishes it from that of the soul *tout court*. The soul using a body is nothing other than the soul in so far as it is cognitively active in the sensible world. I will argue that it is active there in this way by means of a complex power that enables it to perceive, have emotions and desires and so on. I shall attempt to show that the power that enables the soul to do all these things is its faculty of presentation (*phantastikon*). This faculty is functionally comparable to the Stoic mind or ruling part. Plotinus rejects, however, the Stoic view that this power is the essence of the soul. One interesting result of this discussion will be that Plotinus considers reasoning (*logismos*) as belonging to the faculty of presentation. It is thus important to distinguish *reasoning* from the proper discursive or

¹⁶ Compare this to sense perception. One can perceive something without being aware of it. When you drive a long distance, it may happen that, for a while, you are no longer aware of your driving although you are still seeing the road and the other cars. So you perceive the road and the other cars without being aware of it. If you want to call the perception itself also a form of consciousness then this is a different form of consciousness from the one I am discussing here. In this sense you may as well also call thinking consciousness. However, this is not the same as being aware of one’s thinking (or of one’s perceiving). I only deny, on behalf of Plotinus, that thinking implies the awareness of one’s thinking (whether or not one also wants to call thinking itself a form of consciousness).

¹⁷ Although the soul plays, of course, an important role in Plotinus’ ethics, I will restrict my discussion of ethics to some considerations concerning purification in [Chapter 6](#). For Plotinus’ ethics see Schniewind (2003) and Song (2009a).

propositional *thinking* of the soul: while discursive thinking and reasoning *appear* to be the same because of their sharing a propositional structure, reasoning is a cognitive process in time based on presentations (*phantasiai*). It works in ways similar to those by which early modern empiricists such as Locke explain to us how reason works. The proper thinking of the soul in the intelligible world, by contrast, is not at all like this. It is neither based on presentations nor is it a process in time. Plotinus thus distinguishes, I argue, at least three ways of thinking that each has a specific role: discursive *reasoning*, the propositional thought of the soul in the intelligible world (that I shall call discursive *thinking*) and the non-propositional thought of the Intellect.

The [final chapter](#) is devoted to the relation of the soul to the body and in particular to the soul's activity in the body. Plotinus disagrees with the view held by virtually every other ancient psychologist that the soul literally is *in* the body; for him the soul, while acting on the body, remains completely independent of it. In this context, I will also discuss what Plotinus calls the trace of the soul, which is intimately related to a specific sort of soul that leaves the trace. Plotinus calls this sort of soul nature. The soul *active* in the body (without *being* in the body) will thus turn out to be nature. Finally, I will discuss the souls of animals and plants and in particular whether animals are rational or not – a topic that was hotly disputed in late antiquity.

It may be worthwhile to say something more here about how I distinguish, terminologically, between three different entities that all can be rightly called “soul”, each of which is important for us human beings. The first of these three sorts of individual soul (and the only one that is immortal) is that which is active in the intelligible world. I shall call this the *higher soul*. The second sort of soul is the faculty of presentation that I compared above to the Stoic ruling part or mind, and that I identified with the faculty of presentation. I shall call this the *lower soul*; it is the power by which our soul is active in the sensible world but is also the centre of our awareness (and in this sense consciousness). It is that soul that we, in our embodied lives, usually identify ourselves with (together with our living human body). When Plotinus discusses what *we* are, he often thinks that, in one sense of “we”, we are the lower soul (together with the body). Now it may seem that what I call the lower soul, since it is active in the sensible world, is also active in the body. According to Plotinus, however, the activity of the lower soul is purely cognitive; it deals exclusively with presentations that Plotinus considers immaterial, as I shall discuss in [Chapters 7](#) and [8](#). Now crucially, cognitive activity neither occurs in the

body nor is the body in any way constitutive of it. Accordingly, the lower soul is no more active in the body than the higher soul. Instead, the souls that are active in the body are of a third sort. Plotinus often calls this sort of soul vegetative or generative soul, or *nature*. Together, the three souls make up the following picture. A human being in the sensible world, as we commonly conceive of it, consists, according to Plotinus, of a living body whose life (in the biological sense) is due to nature. Our soul takes care of the living body by means of a specific power that I shall call the lower soul. The lower soul is nothing else but our faculty of presentation. It allows us to have sense perception, to reason and so on, and to take action in the sensible world. In this way our soul takes care of our body and thus contributes to the rational order of the sensible world. While all this is occurring in the sensible world, the higher soul – our true self – remains eternally absorbed in the contemplation of reality in the intelligible world.¹⁸

Systematic equivocity

In a number of different contexts I will note that Plotinus uses specific terms equivocally, so let me briefly discuss this here. There is a long tradition in ancient philosophy of using expressions in systematically equivocal ways (or of saying that things are related to one another in systematically equivocal ways).¹⁹ Plato often uses the same expression – for example, “human being” – for both particulars and Forms. Yet what it means for the Form Human Being to be thus is quite different from what it means for a particular to be a human being. Calling a particular (a) “human being” articulates the fact that it displays characteristics that it possesses because of its participation in the Form Human Being. Calling a Form “human being” is an entirely different matter. What the latter precisely means need not concern us here as long as it is clear that this use is distinct from that of calling a particular (a) “human being”. (The Form Human Being clearly cannot be the Form Human Being because of its participation in the Form

¹⁸ It may be worthwhile to mention a couple of things that are not discussed in the book. One is the question of whether the soul creates matter or not. Another is how bodies are created and what exact role *logoi spermatikoi* (productive formulae in matter) play. While these are important matters requiring detailed discussion, I think this would best be left to a study of Plotinus’ physics that develops his view on the sensible world. The focus of the current book, however, is on the metaphysics of the soul.

¹⁹ For our purposes it does not matter whether we understand equivocity as a linguistic or an ontological phenomenon. I will often use expressions such as “what it means for x to be z” and “what it means for y to be z” if z is used in a systematically equivocal way.

Human Being.) However, in spite of these radically different uses, it is not a random fact that Plato calls both the particular human being and the Form Human Being, “human being”. Rather, there is a systematic connection between the two uses that is grounded in a systematic relation between Forms and particulars of the same name, whatever the detailed explanation of this may be in Plato.

Ever since Owen’s classic paper,²⁰ Aristotle is famous for his postulation of a *pros-hen*-structure that explains one way in which a term can be used (or how things are related) equivocally in a systematic way. For example, what it means for an apple to be healthy is different from what it means for a person to be healthy. And yet there is a systematic relation between the two. According to Aristotle, there is a core or primary use of the term (or a thing that is in a primary way – for example, healthy) to which other terms (other things) are appropriately related. This is so because a living being is/is called “healthy” because it possesses health, while all other things that are/are called “healthy” are/are called that because they bear, respectively, some specific relation to the health of the living being (e.g. causing it or being a sign of it, etc.).

Now it is not my aim to discuss and compare the systematically equivocal use of terms in any detail. My point is simply to show that the fact that Plotinus, as I will argue below, uses terms in this way (or refers to things as standing in such relation to one another) was no innovation. He rather followed common practice in doing so.²¹ Let us consider some examples. Plotinus uses the term “one” to refer to the hypostasis One, to the Intellect, to a heap and to many other things. Yet what it means for the One to be one is quite different from what it means for the Intellect to be one, which in turn is quite different from what it means for a heap to be one. What it means for the Intellect to be one, for example, is, as we will see in [Chapter 3](#), to be, crucially, a specific kind of whole. The unity of the One, by contrast, is not grounded in any kind of whole as the One is conceived of as completely simple. And a heap is one in a different sense again since it is not even a whole in the way the Intellect is a whole – it is a mere sum of things.

Here is another example of a systematic equivocality that will be important for the discussions in this book. We will see that Plotinus follows the

²⁰ Owen (1960).

²¹ Lloyd (1990) calls this phenomenon “P-series” when discussing the case of genera (or what he calls “pseudo-genera”) that stand in prior-posterior relations to one another. He argues that P-series can be found not only in Plotinus but also in Platonists after him. While agreeing with him, I believe this phenomenon is not restricted to genera (or pseudo-genera).

Timaeus in calling the world of Forms “the Living Being”. However, there are also many other things called “living beings”, for example, the soul or all the living beings populating the sensible world. Yet what it means for the world of Forms to be (the) living being is quite different from what it means for a soul to be a living being or what it means for a plant to be a living being. They are not living beings in the same sense. At *Ennead* I 4, 18–21 Plotinus states something similar for life: “The word ‘life’ is said in many ways, distinguished according to first, second, etc. and talk of ‘life’ is equivocal, in one way of plants, in another of non-rational animals . . .”.²²

Similarly, I have claimed above that there are three sorts of individual soul. This, again, is a case of systematic equivocity: they are not souls in the same sense. While souls of the first sort are essentially eternally thinking entities in the intelligible world, souls of the second sort are a specific type of power (namely a faculty of presentation) while souls of the third sort are, as we will see in [Chapter 8](#), not cognitively active in any way: they are another kind of power, acting on bodies so as to make them living bodies. As a final example, it is crucial to distinguish between two senses or uses of the term *dianoia*, namely as discursive thinking and as discursive reasoning. When this word is used to refer to the activity of the soul in the intelligible world it will mean *discursive thinking*, and when it is used to refer to the reasoning activity of the faculty of presentation it will mean *discursive reasoning*.

How are the different uses systematically related? In at least many (and perhaps most) cases, the items referred to by the same term belong to different levels of Plotinus’ layered ontology. A term is used in the primary sense to refer to an item on the highest level of the ontology where it is applied. Other uses then refer to items on lower levels with a view to the primary use. Items on different ontological levels are often considered by Plotinus to stand in the relation of original and image.²³ This need not be restricted to an original and *one* image (or *one* type of image). There may also be an image of an image and perhaps even further images on lower levels. When referring to items that stand in such original–image relations to one another, Plotinus often uses the same term for all of these items. Yet originals and their images, belonging to different ontological levels, do not

²² Πολλαχῶς τοίνυν τῆς ζωῆς λεγομένης καὶ τὴν διαφορὰν ἐχούσης κατὰ τὰ πρῶτα καὶ δευτέρα καὶ ἐφεξῆς καὶ ὁμωνύμως τοῦ ζῆν λεγομένου ἄλλως μὲν τοῦ φυτοῦ, ἄλλως δὲ τοῦ ἀλόγου κτλ. He continues by saying that the different uses are (at least in some contexts) due to the fact that the things called by the same name equivocally stand in original–image relations to one another. See the discussion below.

²³ See again *Enn.* I 4, 3, 18ff. mentioned above.

share a common genus. This is why I am talking of a systematic *equivocity*. Now, granted, simply describing the relation of, for example, the One to the Intellect (in so far as they both are one) as one between original and image is not very illuminating. Instead of trying to give a general account of such relations here, however, I think it will be more fruitful to study specific relations of this sort and explain in each specific instance how the item on the higher level and its image on the lower level are related and how this justifies the use of the same word. I will do that at a number of occasions throughout the book.

*Unity and creation: why Plotinus introduced
the hypostasis Soul*

In antiquity there was a broad consensus on the existence of individual souls. Despite disagreements concerning many aspects of their respective psychologies, Platonists, Peripatetics, Stoics and Epicureans agreed that living beings (such as Socrates) possess their own individual souls. What was the ground for this consensus? Perhaps it was just considered a brute fact, such that it was hard to avoid acknowledging it and making room for it in a complete description of the world. Beyond that, however, a school might also have felt the need to postulate the existence of individual souls because souls had some explanatory function in their respective theories. In Platonism this was certainly the case, as we can see from some crucial passages in Plato's *Timaeus* – a dialogue that was of extraordinary importance for Platonists in late antiquity and which – as I shall argue – provides the foundation for Plotinus' theory of the soul.

Famously, the *Timaeus* tells a long story about the creation of the sensible world. The divine Craftsman (the creator of the sensible world), we are told, not only creates the corporeal world containing many bodies but is also the maker of souls. Plato explains to his readers the Craftsman's reason for this: he wants to make the sensible world excellent and comes to the conclusion that things that are by nature visible (i.e. corporeal things) are better if they are endowed with reason than if they lack it. The creation of souls is necessary to this end because, without a soul, nothing in the sensible world can participate in reason (*Ti.* 30B). Thus, the *Timaeus* gives us a Platonist explanation for the existence of souls. They are necessary for endowing corporeal entities with reason and thus to make them better than they would be otherwise.

Two points are important for present purposes. Firstly, the souls that the divine Craftsman creates are rational souls in the sense of souls whose nature it is to think. Secondly, the divine Craftsman creates souls in order to create living beings. Every rational living being in the sensible world gets endowed with its own rational soul. According to the *Timaeus*, this is not

restricted to human beings. We are rather told that additionally the sensible world as a whole (*Ti.* 34Bf.) and the stars (*Ti.* 39Eff.) get their own rational souls. Later on we learn that even the earth benefits in this way (*Ti.* 40BC). Thus, there are (at least) four types of living beings for which rational souls have to be created.¹ This view, having its origin in Plato's *Timaeus*, became part of the teaching of Platonism in late antiquity.² We find it, for example, in Plutarch, in the *Didascalicus*,³ in Apuleius and, not least, in Plotinus. Like his predecessors, Plotinus claimed that there are individual souls giving life to different types of living beings, and he counted the sensible world as a whole, stars, the earth and human beings among them.

While accepting and adapting these traditional views, Plotinus goes beyond the tradition in postulating a further soul. This further soul, however, is not another *individual* soul. Instead, it is what tradition was to call the "hypostasis Soul". What the hypostasis Soul precisely is shall be discussed in [Chapters 2](#) and [3](#). For now it will suffice to characterise it in a preliminary way as the entity from which all individual souls somehow derive and whose parts they are.⁴ Moreover, it is an entity that plays a crucial role in Plotinus' account of the creation of the sensible world.

Plotinus' postulation of the existence of the hypostasis Soul is particularly remarkable because it cannot be found in Plato's *Timaeus* or in any other Platonic work, and it was unknown to the Platonist tradition at least until Numenius (in the second century CE). Even Numenius, although being the forerunner to Plotinus in this question, has presumably not fully developed what in Plotinus' work comes to be the hypostasis Soul (at least judging from the fragmentary state of our evidence). Thus, it is well worth asking why Plotinus introduced the hypostasis Soul. I shall suggest two reasons that are, as we shall see in the next two chapters, interestingly connected.⁵ I shall argue that Plotinus introduced the hypostasis Soul

¹ We are also told that some human beings in further incarnations get incarnated into bodies of animals. If so, (some or all) animals also get endowed with rational souls. I shall put this issue to the side for the moment and come back to it in [Chapter 8](#).

² For the reception of the *Timaeus* in antiquity see Baltes (1976–1978); Runia (1986); Reydam-Schils (2003); Sharples and Sheppard (2003).

³ According to the manuscript tradition, the author of the *Didascalicus* is one Alcinous. Freudenthal (1879), however, emended "Alcinous" to "Albinus" and ascribed the work to the famous Platonist of this name. Freudenthal's emendation was accepted for more than a century but in recent years scholars have rejected it and returned to the manuscript reading (in particular Whittaker in his edition (1990) and Dillon in his translation (1993)). I shall follow them.

⁴ The claim that individuals souls *derive* from the hypostasis Soul and, at the same time, are its *parts* calls for explanation. I will deliver this explanation in [Chapter 3](#).

⁵ I do not claim, however, that there are *only* two reasons.

firstly in order to account for the unity of all individual souls, and secondly because he believed that it was necessary in order to account for the creation and maintenance of the sensible world. In order to discuss his second reason, we will also have to consider the traditional Platonist view that does without the hypostasis Soul or anything comparable to it and Numenius, who (at least partially) anticipates Plotinus.

The unity of all souls

As can already be seen from the general outlook of his metaphysics, Plotinus was particularly interested in the question of unity. Famously, the first and highest principle of his metaphysics is the One, a principle conceived of as completely simple, possessing the highest degree of unity and not allowing for any kind of distinction whatsoever. However, also on lower levels of his layered ontology, the unity of a thing is crucial to its ontological status. This also applies to the soul. As early as his fourth treatise (*Enn.* IV 2), Plotinus discusses the unity of the soul and compares it to the unity of other kinds of things, such as bodies, qualities and intellect. He does so because, as he states at the beginning of the treatise, he wishes to establish the unity of the soul in order to become clearer about the soul's nature (*Enn.* IV 2, 1, 10 f.).⁶ While discussing the unity of the soul quite generally, he does not, in this treatise, consider the unity of a plurality of souls. Yet we find this consideration in another early treatise, namely in *Ennead* IV 9, a treatise exclusively devoted to the question of the unity of all souls.

If we want to understand why Plotinus thinks that in some way all souls are one, we need to take into account his Platonist background, one core element of which is most famously expressed in the so-called theory of Forms. Platonists use this theory (among other things) to account for the fact that many things in the world share certain crucial features with many other things in the world. In so far as many things share a certain feature they can be considered elements of the same class, namely of the class of things that share this feature. Thus, all human beings, for example, share the feature of being human and all just things share the feature of being just. Platonists famously think that in order to explain these facts they need to introduce – at least in the case of specific crucial features – a further kind of entity, namely so-called Forms. A Form is supposed to explain the feature which a class of things share. It is the paradigm of the things

⁶ For this treatise see Emilsson (1990).

whose Form it is and thus in some way ontologically prior to these things. Being a paradigm, a Form *X* is also the entity due to which the things that are *x* are *x*. Thus, the Form Human Being is the thing due to which all human beings are human beings. The Form Justice is the entity due to which all just things are just, and so on. In this way a Form *X* explains the beings that are *x* by explaining the feature *x* that the things that are *x* have in common.

Platonists did not wish to postulate a corresponding Form for every class of thing that share a certain feature.⁷ Mud and hair are already controversial in the *Parmenides* (*Prm.* 130 C). Moreover, few Platonists would share the view of Plotinus' pupil Amelius, who postulated a Form of Evil. A Platonist theory of Forms might wish to avoid such things and to draw a line between them and things for which Forms need to be postulated. How such a theory would be drawn up and what precisely the criteria for postulating a Form would include is not our present concern. In outline, however, it is clear that Platonists wished to restrict the postulation of Forms to classes of those things that they believed to be real. Natural kinds, for example, already in Aristotle a paradigm of things that really are, were usually considered real and, accordingly, corresponding Forms were postulated.⁸

Souls were clearly also considered real. If classes of such sensible things as tigers or dogs are given corresponding Forms, what about souls? No Platonist denied the existence of souls. Thus, one might be tempted to assume that all souls are souls in the same way in which all tigers are tigers. But if so, then we would expect that there is a Form Soul just as there is a Form Tiger, and that due to the Form Soul all souls are souls just as for all tigers their being a tiger is due to the Form Tiger.

Plotinus, as I claimed above, was of the view that all souls are in some way one. Let us call the entity that accounts for the unity of all souls "Soul" (with a capital "S"). If souls are souls due to the Soul in the same way in which tigers are tigers due to the Form Tiger, then the Soul is a Form. If the Soul is a Form, then Plotinus need not introduce an entity of a new kind, namely the *hypostasis* Soul. He would just have to add one member to the already existing ontological category of Forms.

There are a number of reasons why Plotinus would not consider such a solution acceptable. Firstly, the relation of a Form in the intelligible world to the corresponding individuals in the sensible world is a relation between a paradigm and its images. In considering the relation between a Form and

⁷ Nor, presumably, did Plato. See Smith (1917).

⁸ See, for example, Alcinous *Didasc.* ch. XII.

the corresponding sensible individuals in such a way, Plotinus, as other Platonists, follows Plato's middle dialogues as well as the *Timaeus*. Individual souls, however, are not images of the Soul in the sensible world but rather its parts (*Enn.* IV 8, 3, 6–13).⁹

Secondly, the unity of souls is stronger than the unity of those things in the sensible world that share a Form. I shall discuss this in more detail in [Chapter 3](#). For now a brief comparison must suffice. Each individual soul, Plotinus claims, contains in some way all other souls (*Enn.* IV 9, 5, 15 f.). Sensible tigers, on the other hand, do not contain any other sensible tigers. Each tiger is, in so far as its being a tiger is concerned, independent of each and every other sensible tiger. For its being a tiger, a tiger only depends on the Form Tiger. An individual soul, on the other hand, also depends, for its being a soul, on all other individual souls. How an individual soul depends for its being a soul on all other souls will occupy us later. For now suffice it to note that the interdependence of individual souls is a crucial difference to sensible things sharing a Form.¹⁰

An imaginary proponent of the view that the Soul is a Form might now modify his or her position as follows. Individual souls, they might claim, far from being images of the Form Soul, are themselves Forms in the intelligible world. Perhaps they would describe their relation as one between a genus and its species, taking the Soul to be a genus and individual souls to be its species.

In order to counter the modified position (according to which the Soul as well as individual souls are considered Forms) we shall have to use an argument that will only be presented in the second section of this chapter, for the rejection of the claim that the Soul is a Form will be a corollary of the second reason for introducing the hypostasis Soul. We will see that – for reasons independent of those considered in the first section – Plotinus introduces the hypostasis Soul because an entity such as the Soul cannot be found in the realm of Intellect and Forms. Since he considers the Soul nevertheless necessary for his explanation of the creation of a sensible world (as will occur in our discussion of the second reason), he introduces the Soul as an entity distinct from the Intellect and the world of Forms. Hence,

⁹ The claim that individual souls are *parts* of the hypostasis Soul – and in what sense – will be discussed in detail in [Chapter 3](#).

¹⁰ The principle behind this claim is this: a class of things that depend on one another for their being possesses more unity than a class of things that do not depend on one another for their being. Compare the two things to two wholes. One whole would be such that each part depends on each other part for its being whereas the other whole would be such that each part remains what it is no matter what happens to the other parts.

the argument of the second part of this chapter will exclude the possibility that the Soul is a Form.

Souls, rather than being members of the sensible world or members of the world of Forms, compose a realm of their own (though a realm, as we shall see, that is closely related to and dependent on the world of Forms). Accordingly, the relation of the Soul to souls is neither one of a Form to members of the sensible world nor one of a Form to other Forms.

Yet even if all souls (including the Soul) together compose a realm of their own, it does not immediately follow that a new entity (such as the hypostasis Soul) needs to be introduced. The following would seem to be an alternative. Instead of introducing a new entity we identify the Soul with one of the already accepted individual souls and claim that all other individual souls stem from this individual soul. Of the different individual souls that Platonists accept, the World Soul would seem to be the only candidate for the position of the Soul worth considering. This is because the World Soul, unlike all other individual souls, permeates the *whole* sensible world, including all its parts. All other souls only ensoul parts of the sensible world, but not the whole. The soul of the moon, for example, only ensouls the body of the moon and it would be difficult to explain how the soul of Socrates (or of any other non-lunar individual) could be part of the soul of the moon in the relevant sense.¹¹

A possible motivation for believing that all other individual souls are parts of the World Soul might be this: the World Soul cares for the whole sensible world, of which the bodies of all other living beings are parts. Just as the bodies of all other living beings are parts of the body of the sensible world, so, one might think, the souls of all other living beings are parts of the World Soul. My soul, for example, would be nothing other than the part of the World Soul which permeates my body and cares for it. And so on for all other living beings in the sensible world. Moreover, Plotinus would not have been the first one to hold the view that the World Soul is the Soul. Such a view seems at least to have been widely discussed in late antiquity. In particular, we find it attributed to the Stoics, and in certain Neo-Pythagorean texts. Furthermore, Numenius and Plotinus' pupil Amelius are said to have held it.¹²

¹¹ What it means for the World Soul to *permeate* the sensible world is a problem that will occupy us later. For now we may understand it in the sense that it cares for the sensible world as a whole and that it is, in some specific way, present throughout the sensible world. There is further discussion about the World Soul and its presence in the sensible world in [Chapter 5](#).

¹² A discussion of actual and possible proponents of this view can be found in Helleman-Elgersma (1980) 104–131.

Let us first look at the Stoics. Hermias reports that, according to Cleanthes, our souls are parts of the soul that permeates the whole world, that is, of the World Soul.¹³ Diogenes Laertius even attributes this view to the Stoics quite generally (D.L. VII 156 f.). Since the Stoics believed, following Plato's *Timaeus*, in a World Soul permeating the whole sensible world, it is easy to see how they might have been taken to hold such a view. However, the view that the World Soul permeates the whole sensible world with all its parts alone does not commit one to the view that all other individual souls are parts of the World Soul. The Stoic view might well have been more complicated.¹⁴ Whether the Stoics indeed held the view attributed to them need not be decided here. It is sufficient for our purposes to see that they were believed to hold it by some philosophers and thus that it was a view under discussion at the time of Plotinus.

Many Neo-Pythagoreans were, like the Stoics, heavily influenced by Plato's *Timaeus* and thus believed that there is a World Soul permeating every quarter of the sensible world. This can most easily be seen in Timaeus of Locri's *On the Nature of the World and the Soul* where we find, just as in Plato's *Timaeus*, an all-pervading World Soul.¹⁵ Cicero ascribes the same claim to Pythagoras himself. Moreover, Cicero claims that our souls, according to Pythagoras, are parts of the World Soul.¹⁶ Now, we might well doubt that the view Cicero reports is indeed Pythagoras' own view, but Cicero's ultimate source might have been some Neo-Pythagorean text. If so, this would indicate that such a view was indeed held by at least some Neo-Pythagoreans.¹⁷

I will discuss Numenius in the second section of this chapter in more detail, but I can say here that the result, as far as the present question is concerned, will not be unambiguous, although it seems plausible that he thought the World Soul to be the Soul. Amelius, together with Porphyry, Plotinus' most important pupil,¹⁸ was in many ways influenced by

¹³ SVF I 495=Hermias *Irris*. 14.

¹⁴ Epictetus assumes in at least one passage that our souls are parts of God (ἀλλ' αἱ ψυχαὶ . . . αὐτοῦ (sc. τοῦ θεοῦ) μόρια οὔσαι καὶ ἀποσπάσματα κτλ.; *Diss.* I 14, 6; but see also *Diss.* I 17, 27 and II 8, 11ff.). This view seems similar to the one we consider.

¹⁵ Ti. Locri. 95E. This text was attributed to a supposedly historical Pythagorean, namely Timaeus of Locri, and purported to be the source for Plato's *Timaeus* (Baltes (1972) 1–4). In fact it presumably is an excerpt of a Hellenistic adaptation of Plato's *Timaeus*. For similar views see Ps.Philolaus' *On the Soul* in Stob. 1.20.2 p. 172f. Wachsmuth=Thesleff 150.

¹⁶ Cic. *nat. deor.* I 27.

¹⁷ A further, perhaps related, group of people claiming this are, according to Nemesius, the Manicheans (Nemesius 110, 7ff. Matthaei).

¹⁸ For a detailed discussion of Amelius see Brisson (1987).

Numenius. He collected Numenius' work and knew most of it by heart (*V.P.* 3, 38ff.). He is said by Iamblichus to hold the view that the nature of the Soul is numerically one.¹⁹ The other souls seem to be parts of this one Soul, becoming parts through their incarnation. Helleman-Elgersma concludes from this that Amelius, perhaps influenced by Numenius, held the view under discussion.²⁰ This might be the case, but, as far as I can see, nowhere does Amelius identify this one Soul with the World Soul. Thus I consider other interpretations possible as well. The one Soul might, for example, be some transcendent Soul instead of the World Soul, perhaps a Soul similar to or even identical with Plotinus' hypostasis Soul. Thus, in Amelius' case it does not seem to me to be certain that he held the view under discussion.

Early scholars believed that Plotinus does not distinguish between Soul and World Soul, and thus, since all souls are parts of the Soul, they concluded that all souls are parts of the World Soul.²¹ Yet this view has long been refuted, most thoroughly by Helleman-Elgersma.²² Her work consists of a detailed examination of the first eight chapters of *Ennead* IV 3, which contain Plotinus' own refutation of the view under consideration. At *Ennead* IV 3, 1 Plotinus provides five arguments in favour of the view that our souls stem from the World Soul, only to refute them one by one in the following seven chapters. From this alone it is clear that Plotinus did not hold the view that our souls stem from the World Soul. However, his detailed discussion of the hypothesis that the World Soul is the Soul also shows us that he considered it a view important enough to be scrutinised in detail (and to be refuted).

What are Plotinus' reasons against this hypothesis? Instead of discussing *Ennead* IV 3, 1–8, I wish to consider an argument that we can find in one of his earliest treatises, namely at *Ennead* III 1, entitled by Porphyry *On Fate* (*Peri heimarmenēs*). In this treatise Plotinus discusses four theories of causation and considers none of them acceptable. They are not acceptable because they do away with actions that are caused by us, that is, by individual human beings – or, more precisely, by our souls. The third

¹⁹ Stob. I 49, 38 p. 376 Wachsmuth.

²⁰ Helleman-Elgersma (1980) 126–130. For a discussion of Iamblichus on Numenius and Amelius see Steel (1978) 29f.

²¹ For example, Zeller (1923) III 2, 592: "Was nämlich unmittelbar aus dem zweiten Princip hervorgeht, ist nur die allgemeine Seele, erst von dieser stammen die Einzelseelen. *Diese Weltseele* denkt sich Plotin ..." (italics are mine); see also Richter (1864) 21: "Die dritte Stufe in der Reihe der Wesen [i.e. of the hypostases] nimmt die Weltseele ein."

²² Helleman-Elgersma (1980). The claim that the World Soul must be distinguished from the hypostasis Soul can already be found in Pistorius (1952) 84–90 and in Deck (1967) 31–34.

theory (discussed at *Enn.* III 1, 4) reveals problems inherent in the view we are discussing.

According to this theory, Plotinus states, the World Soul permeates the whole universe and determines and accomplishes everything. All individual things in the sensible world are moved or changed as parts of the whole universe (*Enn.* III 1, 4, 1–3).²³ The cause of all these events and movements is the World Soul. Now if everything is moved and changed by the World Soul, then all actions of individual human beings in the sensible world, too, are actually actions of the World Soul. In the following lines Plotinus concludes: “Therefore [on this assumption], we are not ourselves, nor is there any action which is our own. We do not reason ourselves, but our decisions are the reasonings of another. Nor do we act, as little as our feet kick” (*Enn.* III 1, 4, 20–23).²⁴

Such a position, as Plotinus sees it, would reduce individual souls other than the World Soul to mere non-rational soul parts. Let us assume for the moment that in every part of a human body there is a part of the human soul which makes this part of the body move. In this picture the kicking of our feet would be caused by the part of the soul which is in the feet. Even if we accept this view, we do not attribute an individual soul to the feet, another one to the stomach and so on. Instead, the soul parts active in different parts of our bodies are only non-rational parts of our soul. According to the view Plotinus rejects, the same holds true of the sensible world as a whole. Each body in the world, being a part of the sensible world, is moved by that part of the World Soul which is in this body. Just as Socrates’ soul makes his arm rise by means of that part of his soul which is in the arm (according to this view), so does the World Soul move Socrates’ body by means of that of its parts which is in Socrates’ body.

If this view of the relation between World Soul and other individual souls were true, Plotinus claims, the World Soul would be the only proper rational agent in the sensible world. If the World Soul accomplishes everything, what is the role of souls other than the World Soul in the sensible world? Practical thinking would not be their own and decisions to act would not be taken by them.²⁵ Nothing would be left for other souls in

²³ ἀλλ’ ἄρα μία τις ψυχὴ διὰ παντὸς διήκουσα περαίνει τὰ πάντα ἐκάστου αὐτῆι κινουμένου ὡς μέρους, ἢ τὸ ὅλον ἄγει κτλ.

²⁴ ὥστε οὔτε ἡμεῖς ἡμεῖς οὔτε τι ἡμέτερον ἔργον· οὐδὲ λογιζόμεθα αὐτοί, ἀλλ’ ἑτέρου λογισμοὶ τὰ ἡμέτερα βουλευόμενα· οὐδὲ πράττομεν ἡμεῖς, ὥσπερ οὐδ’ οἱ πόδες λακτίζουσιν κτλ.

²⁵ But could not our souls be parts of the rational part of the World Soul? We shall see in [Chapter 3](#) that Plotinus denies that they could be (in the relevant sense) because the World Soul is an individual soul, i.e. a soul which has its own individual function and thought. Plotinus’ opponents believe that

the sensible world than behaving according to the wits and wishes of the World Soul – if, that is, there were room for other individual souls at all.²⁶

If, on the other hand, the World Soul does not accomplish everything in the sensible world, then there is room for actions of individual souls other than the World Soul. But if so, these other individual souls are not parts (in the relevant sense) of the World Soul. Instead, the World Soul is just one (albeit the most powerful one) of a number of individual souls, all being individually active in the sensible world. If this is the case, then the question of what accounts for the unity of all souls remains open because not even the World Soul can account for it.

Note the following two points. Firstly, the claim that the World Soul permeates everything in the sensible world is not decisive for the argument, for even if the World Soul permeates everything in the sensible world, it need not be the proper agent and cause of all actions in the sensible world.²⁷ Instead, the undesirable conclusion follows from the claim that individual souls other than the World Soul are not proper rational agents and causes of their actions. This claim, in turn, is a consequence of the claim that all other individual souls are (non-rational) parts of the World Soul; by accepting this claim, the proponents of the view under discussion also accept that the World Soul is the proper agent of all actions in the sensible world.

Secondly, the argument only does away with the *practical* rationality of all individual souls other than the World Soul, for it shows that, given the view under scrutiny, no other soul is a proper agent in the sensible world. Thus, the argument does not state anything about an individual soul's *theoretical* rationality, its contemplation, for example, of mathematical truths or of Platonic Forms. However, if one considers (with Plotinus as I shall argue) practical rationality as essential to rational souls, then the argument does away with rational individual souls (other than the World Soul) *tout court*. It seems preferable, though, to keep rational individual souls and give up the idea that our souls are parts of the World Soul (in this sense).

an individual rational soul can be part of another individual rational soul (in the relevant sense) – a view that Plotinus does not accept.

²⁶ Plotinus denies that there would be as, he claims, there is not one thing (i.e. the World Soul) which imparts the movement and another thing (i.e. other souls) which receives it and takes its impulse from it (*Enn.* III 1, 4, 9–20). However, even if we do not accept this argument (the reasons for accepting or rejecting *this* argument are independent of the main argument) we would at best end up with a plurality of souls that lack practical rationality.

²⁷ Thus, we should not infer from Atticus' claim, for example, that the World Soul permeates everything that he falls prey to Plotinus' arguments (Atticus fr. 8 Des Places).

Let us conclude this section as follows. Plotinus claims that all souls are one. The entity that grants the unity of all souls, the Soul, cannot be found in the world of Forms. Instead, it must be found in the realm of souls. However, for the reasons discussed, Plotinus opposes the identification of Soul and World Soul (and *a fortiori* with any other individual soul). Since the Soul cannot be identified with any of the beings tradition had handed down to Plotinus, he had to introduce a new entity, which is neither a Form nor the soul of an individual. This entity is none other than the hypostasis Soul.

The Craftsman and the creation of a sensible world

In his commentary on Plato's *Timaeus*, Proclus states: "Thus, after that, let us, following the light of scientific knowledge, consider this – what we say: what is this Craftsman and which is his rank in the order of being? For the philosophers of old had different views [on this question]" (*in Ti.* I 303, 24–27 Diehl).²⁸ This passage is followed by a fairly long discussion where Proclus renders the views of earlier Platonists and comments on them. The list reads like a who's who of later Platonism: Numenius, Harpocration, Atticus, Plotinus, Amelius, Porphyry, Iamblichus and Proclus' teacher Syrianus are discussed. We can learn at least two things from Proclus' discussion: that the question of what the divine Craftsman is was of great interest and that it was far from settled.

The great interest that Platonists took in this question is not surprising because the divine Craftsman, being the creator of the sensible world, is also one of its first principles (in Platonism, usually together with the world of Platonic Forms and with matter). The starting point for all Platonists discussing this issue is (again) a passage from Plato's *Timaeus*:

In the same way as the Intellect sees Forms in the Living Being that truly is (what they are like and how many there are), such and so many, he [the divine Craftsman] thought, also this world should have (*Ti.* 39E7–9).²⁹

²⁸ φέρε οὖν καὶ ἡμεῖς ἐπὶ τούτοις ἐπόμενοι τῷ φωτὶ τῆς ἐπιστήμης αὐτὸ τοῦτο, ὃ λέγομεν, θεασώμεθα, τίς ὁ δημιουργὸς οὗτος καὶ ἐν ποίᾳ τάξει τέτακται τῶν ὄντων· ἄλλοι γὰρ αὐτῶν πρεσβυτέρων ἐπ' ἄλλας δόξας ἠνέχθησαν.

²⁹ Ἦτις οὖν νοῦς ἐνούσας ἰδέας τῷ ὃ ἔστιν ζῶον, οἷα τε ἔνεισι καὶ ὅσαι, καθορᾷ, τοιαύτας καὶ τοσαύτας διανοήθη δεῖν καὶ τόδε σχεῖν. In rendering ὃ ἔστιν ζῶον as "the Living Being that truly is", I follow the translation of Cornford (1937) 117 (replacing though "Living Creature" by "Living Being") and Taylor's explanation in Taylor (1928) 222. Moreover, I follow many modern translators in assuming a change of subject in this sentence (i.e. taking an implicit ὁ δημιουργὸς as the subject of the second clause). Plotinus also understood this passage in this way (see his explicit addition of ὁ δημιουργὸς at *Enn.* III 9, 1, 2).

I do not wish to consider this very difficult sentence in all its details. However, some claims are perhaps clear enough. Firstly, the Intellect sees Forms. Already in the famous Simile of the Line of the *Republic*, the grasping of Platonic Forms is called intellection (*noēsis*: *Rep* 511D) and – in the framework of later Platonism – the proper subject of intellection is an entity called “intellect” (*nous*). Secondly, the Forms are in the Living Being that truly is. We are not told what the Living Being is and identifying it was one of the problems that ancient interpreters of the *Timaeus* had to face.³⁰ Yet given that the Forms are *in* the Living Being, identifying it with the world of Forms is perhaps a natural way of understanding it.³¹ Thirdly, the Craftsman, in view of what the Intellect sees, thought (*dienoēthē*) about which beings should populate the sensible world. Moreover, we know from another passage (*Ti.* 31AB) that the Craftsman wishes to make the sensible world as similar as possible to the *perfect* Living Being as it is called in that passage. If the perfect Living Being of *Timaeus* 31AB is identical with the Living Being of our passage, which it seems reasonable to assume, then the following picture emerges. In order to make a sensible world that is as similar as possible to the perfect Living Being, not only does the Craftsman make the sensible world as a whole an image of the Living Being, he also creates beings to populate the sensible world in such a way that they are as similar as possible to those that the Intellect sees in the perfect Living Being. Moreover, each Form that the Intellect sees must have at least one corresponding being in the sensible world so that each part of the Living Being is represented in the sensible world.³² These are, in broad outline, the main traits of the view on the creation of the sensible world as they emerge from *Timaeus* 39E.

It seems natural for us to understand the above passage in the sense that the Intellect mentioned in the passage is the intellect of the divine Craftsman. The Craftsman contemplates the world of Forms (using his intellect) and, having the Forms in mind, thinks about creating images thereof in order to make a sensible world as an excellent image of the world of Forms. This reading of the passage, however, natural as it might be,

³⁰ Instead of rendering Plato’s precise wording “the Living Being that truly is”, I shall simply speak of the “Living Being” (using a capital “L” and a capital “B”).

³¹ However, it is not the only way. Numenius, for example, identifies the Living Being with the Form of the Good. See fr. 22 *Des Places* (=Proclus, *in Ti.* III 103, 28–32 Diehl).

³² This does not imply that the number of individuals in the sensible world is the same as the number of Forms in the perfect Living Being. Perhaps, for example, at least for some Forms (e.g. natural kinds), there is more than one individual in the sensible world corresponding to one and the same Form in the perfect Living Being. Moreover, there might be things in the sensible world which have no counterpart in the world of Forms, i.e. things for which there are no Forms at all.

leaves the question of what the Craftsman is open. We can thus see that the passage from the *Timaeus* that Platonists considered crucial for their understanding of the Craftsman needs a stronger interpretation. Historically, it gave rise to a number of interpretations, three of which I shall consider now.

Firstly, there is what we might call the “traditional Platonist view”. I shall mean by this theories of the Craftsman according to which the work of the Craftsman is identical to the work of a divine Intellect. Secondly, there is Numenius, who splits the traditional Craftsman into two entities. Finally, there is Plotinus, who followed Numenius in claiming that the Craftsman’s work is the work of two agents rather than of one (as the traditional view would have it), but who crucially modified Numenius’ view as we shall see.

We can distinguish two groups adhering to the traditional Platonist view. The first one consists of Platonists before Numenius. They usually identified God with the Craftsman and the latter in turn with a divine intellect.³³ Such identification, which can already be found in Xenocrates, is ascribed to Plato by Diogenes Laertius (most likely on the basis of a no longer extant Platonist source); it can also be found in Apuleius, and in some Pseudo-Pythagorica.³⁴ Among Plotinus’ contemporaries, the pagan Origen is likely to have held this view.³⁵ Perhaps Ammonius, the teacher of Origen and Plotinus, adhered to it as well.³⁶

³³ See Dillon (1977) 7.

³⁴ Xenocrates: fr. 213 Isnardi-Parente=fr.15 Heinze=Aët. *Plac.* I 7, 30 (304 Diels); Plato: D.L. III 69 with a brief discussion in Gigon (1986) 137; Apuleius: *De Platone* II, 1 §220; Ps. Pythagoras 186, 18 Thesleff, Ps.Ekphantos 84.4f. Thesleff, and Ps.Onatas 139.5ff. Thesleff.

³⁵ Origen wrote a work entitled “That the King is the only Maker” (*V.P.* 3, 30ff.) which most likely is about these issues. The title suggests that the Craftsman is the only god. According to Proclus’ testimony Origen identifies the Craftsman with a divine intellect (Origen fr. 7 Weber=Procl. *Theol. Plat.* II 31, 8–22 Saffrey-Westerink). We still find a proponent of this view around 300 CE in Alexander of Lycopolis. See van der Horst and Mansfeld (1974) 6–19.

³⁶ Scholars disagree on what Ammonius’ view is on this topic (Schroeder (1987)). Schwyzer ((1978) c. 318) has shown that Hierocles (Phot. cod. 251, 461b6) cannot be used as a source to decide it (see also Zeller (1923) III.2, 503ff.). Proclus wonders why Origen deviates from Ammonius’ view and thus goes on the assumption that Ammonius did not hold it (Origen fr. 7 Weber=Procl. *Theol. Plat.* II 31, 8–22 Saffrey-Westerink). It is difficult to see, however, how Proclus would have come to know this given that Ammonius left no writings. He might have inferred it from Plotinus’ view, assuming that Plotinus did not deviate from Ammonius. Perhaps, however, the following fact indicates – *contra* Proclus – that Ammonius and Origen held the same view (and that Plotinus was the one to deviate). Ammonius’ pupils, we are told by Porphyry (*V.P.* 3, 24–28), had agreed to keep silent on Ammonius’ doctrines. Erennius was the first to break the agreement. Origen followed his lead. In this context Porphyry mentions Origen’s “That the King is the only Maker”. Given the context it is tempting to assume that, according to Porphyry, this work of Origen’s disclosed Ammonius’ doctrines. If so, Ammonius held the same view as Origen, namely that God is the Craftsman and a divine intellect.

Proponents of the second group claimed, perhaps influenced by Numenius, that there is a god beyond the divine Intellect, who was usually identified with Plato's Form of the Good of the *Republic* and the One of the *Parmenides*.³⁷ Yet these Platonists do not usually straightaway identify this god with the Craftsman.³⁸ Instead, we find two alternative versions of this view. According to one version there are two gods: the first god being beyond any creative activity concerning the sensible world (and, indeed, any other) and the second being creative. According to this theory, the second god is identified with the Craftsman and with the divine intellect. Numenius, for example, emphasises the existence of a first god beyond the divine Craftsman (the Craftsman being the second god). He devoted one of his works, namely *On the Good*, to this question in particular.³⁹ According to the second version there is only one God who, per se, is not the Craftsman but who, in using his intellect, is the Craftsman. A proponent of this view was presumably Longinus.⁴⁰ It can also be found in Calcidius' *Commentary on the Timaeus* (c. 176) and in Ps. Plutarch's *De Fato*.⁴¹ The second group of Platonists agree in both versions with the first group on the claim that the work of the Craftsman is the work of a divine Intellect.

We can easily understand one motivation for this identification. Clearly, in order to create a sensible world the Craftsman needs to know the paradigm of the creation. The paradigm, as we have seen, is the world of Forms. Thus, it is necessary for the Craftsman to know the world of Forms in order to create a sensible world as its image. Moreover, I have already earlier alluded to the Platonist claim that the proper subject for the contemplation of the world of Forms is the intellect. If so, the divine Craftsman needs to be, or at least to have, an intellect in order to fulfil this function. If nothing hinders attributing to the intellect any other function that might be needed for the creation, there is no reason to introduce more complexity, and the whole demiurgic activity can be attributed to the divine Intellect.

The divine Craftsman not only contemplates the world of Forms but also creates a sensible world according to this paradigm. We learn from the

³⁷ For early proponents of this view see Whittaker (1969).

³⁸ Atticus, however, according to Proclus' testimony, is the exception (Proclus, *in Ti.* 305, 6–16 Diehl=Atticus fr. 12 Des Places).

³⁹ We do have a number of fragments of, and testimonies concerning, this work (frs. 1–22 Des Places).

⁴⁰ Longinus was a pupil of Ammonius Saccas and of the pagan Origen (*V.P.* 20, 36–39). He claimed that the Forms are posterior to the Intellect (Procl. *in Ti.* I 322, 18–26 Diehl).

⁴¹ Ps.Plutarch does not tell us what he considers God to be. However, he considers the arrangement of the sensible world to be the work of God's intellect (*De Fato* 572F).

Timaeus that the Craftsman, since he was good, also wanted his work to be good (*Ti.* 29E-30A). In the next few lines it is stated that the sensible world becomes good through God's providence (*dia tēn tou theou . . . pronoian*) (*Ti.* 30BC). Alcinoüs, in interpreting these lines, states that the Craftsman, since he was good, created the sensible world in resemblance to the world of Forms according to the most admirable providence (*Didasc.* 167 Hermann). In other Platonist texts too providence plays a prominent role in the discussion of the creation of the world. In the penultimate chapter of *De Natura Hominis*, for example, Nemesius explains to us what providence is: "But providence is the care (*epimeleia*) that things experience from God" (Nem. 343 Matthaei).⁴² Moreover, the creator of things, he claims, must be provident (*ibid.*). Also, Calcidius calls divine providence "*sapiens tutela rerum omnium*" and ascribes it to the intellect of God (Calc. in *Ti.* ch. 176).

Hence, the divine Craftsman was widely considered provident and, in exercising his providence, he arranges the sensible world in such a way that it is excellent. Moreover, the providence that the Craftsman exercises gets identified with his care (*epimeleia*) for the sensible world: he cares for the sensible world in arranging it in an excellent way. Now given that according to the traditional Platonist view the work of the Craftsman is the work of the divine Intellect, the Intellect is thought not only to contemplate the world of Forms but also to exercise this second function, namely the providential arrangement of the sensible world. The crucial question for such a view is whether an intellect, qua intellect, is capable of doing so. Numenius seems to have been the first philosopher to doubt this.

Numenius, as we have seen, distinguished a first god (transcending any creational activity) from a second god whom he identified with the divine Craftsman. However, Numenius was no longer happy to count the second function that traditional Platonism ascribed to the divine Craftsman straightaway as a function of the divine Intellect. Instead, Numenius wished to distribute the two functions to two entities. He considered the divine Craftsman (his second god) as an entity that possesses such an internal complexity that it can be split into two gods. This split takes place precisely when the second god turns towards the task of creation. I shall now discuss how the Numenian split is also a split of the first and the second functions that traditional Platonism attributed to the Intellect.⁴³

⁴² πρόνοια τοίνυν ἐστὶν ἐκ θεοῦ εἰς τὰ ὄντα γινομένη ἐπιμέλεια.

⁴³ For the following see in particular Frede (1987), whose main lines of interpretation of Numenius I follow. See also Beutler (1940) (in particular c. 669f.) and Merlan (1967).

In fr. 11 Des Places, Numenius talks of a second-and-third god and claims that he is one.⁴⁴ Now the unity of the second-and-third god gets contrasted with the unity of the first god in that the first god is utterly simple and in no way divisible (*mē pote einai diairetos* fr. 11.13) whereas the second-and-third god is divisible and hence can get split into a second god and a third god. Numenius tells his readers that the god gets split by matter (fr. 11.14–16), which is a strange claim: how could matter split a god? However, if we understand this against the background of the *Timaeus*, where the Craftsman's task of creating a sensible world is described as giving order to an already existing chaotic matter – a description that Numenius takes quite literally – it seems easier to understand:⁴⁵ the second-and-third god, the divine Craftsman, gets split precisely when he turns to matter in order to give it order and thus to create a sensible world.⁴⁶

The split of the second-and-third god, it seems, is necessitated by God's creative activity. What are the reasons for this? Numenius thinks that the activity of the undivided second-and-third god is not sufficient for the creation of a sensible world. Creating rather involves a sort of activity that is distinct from the undivided activity of the whole second-and-third god before the split takes place. Thus we will first have to consider the undivided activity of the second-and-third god and then see what activity will be necessary in addition when he turns to matter.

Since the undivided second-and-third god is an intellect, his activity accordingly consists in intellectual contemplation. This can be seen from fr. 17 Des Places, where Numenius tells us that, beyond the Craftsman who is an intellect known to mankind, another god exists whom he calls “the first intellect”, a god more divine and older than the known one. Numenius emphasises in this fragment (from his *On the Good*) the main topic of this work, namely the existence of a first god who is beyond the Craftsman and whom he identifies with the Form of the Good (see also fr. 19 Des Places). However, of more interest to our present concern, fr. 17 also confirms that Numenius considers the Craftsman to be an intellect. For the second god, who is the Craftsman, is also said to be an intellect (albeit not the first intellect). We find further confirmation

⁴⁴ ὁ θεὸς μέντοι ὁ δεύτερος καὶ τρίτος ἐστὶν εἷς. Frede (1987) 1057 has shown that assuming that a second god and a third god are one would be a wrong understanding of the phrase. This has also been accepted by Dillon in the Afterword (1996) to Dillon (1977) 448.

⁴⁵ Matter is described in this passage of the *Timaeus* as πᾶν ὅσον ἦν ὁρατόν. We are told that God εἰς τάξιν αὐτὸ ἡγάγεν ἐκ τῆς ἀταξίας *Ti.* 30A.

⁴⁶ See fr. 16 Des Places and Frede (1987) 1057–1059.

for this in Proclus (*in Ti.* III 103, 28–32 Diehl= fr. 22 Des Places) who reports Numenius' theory of three gods and states that the second god is an intellect whose task is intellectual contemplation (*noein*). These fragments and testimonies are sufficient to establish that the second-and-third god is the divine Intellect. By means of this identification they also show us partly how Numenius understands *Timaeus* 39E, for he crucially emphasises the divisibility of this god because he thinks that, for the creation, he will need a third god who is not completely identical with a divine intellect. This is a new claim that we do not find in earlier Platonists.

Timaeus 39E reveals what Numenius had in mind when thinking about the third god's activity. In this passage we are told not only that the Intellect looks at Forms in the Living Being that truly is but also that the Craftsman *thought discursively* (*dienoëthē*) about the creation of the sensible world. This activity is crucially demiurgic and thus practical. With reference to the *dienoëthē* of this passage, Numenius claims that the third god's activity consists in discursive thinking (*dianoia*) (fr. 22 Des Places). Numenius thus thinks that, in order to explain the creation of a sensible world, it is not sufficient to presuppose a divine intellect intellectually contemplating the world of Forms. Instead, we also have to presuppose an entity that thinks discursively and thus an entity that thinks in a way different from the contemplation of the Intellect.⁴⁷

The reasons for this are complex, and we shall see in [Chapter 2](#) that they also concern Plotinus. For now I wish to point out only that Numenius holds that the creation of a sensible world is a matter not only of theoretical contemplation but also of practical thinking, which is not an intellectual activity, for it is, as we shall see, crucially exercised discursively. This is why presupposing discursive thinking is necessary in order to explain the creation of a sensible world. Since discursive thinking is not the task of an intellect, Numenius splits the second-and-third god, who is an intellect, into two, the second one remaining in intellectual contemplation of the world of Forms and the third one thinking discursively about the creation of a sensible world. For now I will attempt only to drive home the point that Numenius argues for at least two kinds of divine cognitive activity, theoretical contemplation and practical thinking. Yet why discursive thinking is necessary for practical thought and why it is distinct from intellectual contemplation will only be considered in the [next chapter](#).

Let us now see whether we can also identify the discursively thinking third god. To do so, it is first important to note that the practical thinking

⁴⁷ See Frede (1987) 1067f., who emphasises the importance of the Timean διανοήθη for Numenius.

about the creation of a sensible world is the thinking about its providential arrangement. God thinks about how to arrange a sensible world in such a way that it is an excellent image of the world of Forms. Accordingly, the third god not only *looks* at matter but also *cares* for it (*epimeleisthai*: fr. 11.18 Des Places). This care, as we have seen earlier in the quotation from Nemesius, is nothing other than providence. This is also mentioned in a testimony by Calcidius, who describes providence in his account of Numenius as the work and activity of god (*dei opus et officium*: fr. 52.95 f. Des Places). This in itself does not tell us which god is providentially active in the sensible world. However, Calcidius gives us a further piece of helpful information. He reports that according to Numenius the sensible world is composed of matter and god (fr. 52.74 f. Des Places). Providence is the work of the god who is constitutive, together with matter, of the sensible world. For this reason, it clearly can only be the third god because both the first and the second god transcend the sensible world. It is the third god who turns towards matter and cares for it, as we know from fr. 11 Des Places.

What, then, is the third god? According to the *Timaeus*, the sensible world is a living being composed of the World Soul and the body of the world (*Ti.* 30BC). Numenius has this passage in mind when he describes the world, according to Calcidius' testimony, as composed of god and matter. This can be seen from the following. The sentence we are discussing is the concluding remark of a paragraph considering Numenius' theory of two World Souls. Numenius claims that there exist a good and a bad World Soul, the latter being inherent in matter and responsible for its chaotic movements.⁴⁸ Since the paragraph concludes this discussion, it seems plausible that the good World Soul, according to Numenius, is identical to the god who is constitutive of the sensible world and thus, according to the argument above, to the third god. The third god cannot be the bad World Soul, which is described as an essential part of matter and even itself called "matter" (fr. 52.66/67 Des Places).⁴⁹ Furthermore, the good World Soul is described as most beneficent (*beneficentissima*: fr. 52.66 Des Places). This attribute corresponds, I would suggest, to the care and providence of the third god discussed earlier. If so, this also might be taken as an indication that the third god is identical with the good World Soul.

⁴⁸ The distinction between a good World Soul and a bad one can already be found in Plato's *Laws* (896E).

⁴⁹ Numenius calls the bad World Soul "matter", I assume, because it is the essence of matter. Compare the discussion below of the Platonist view that a human being is essentially their soul.

Finally, Proclus reports Numenius' theory of three gods. Here, the third god is identified with the sensible world (fr. 21 Des Places=Procl. *in Ti.* I 303, 27ff. Diehl). Now it is possible that this testimony refers to a theory of Numenius, not (yet?) accounting for his theory of three gods that we find in the fragments from *On the Good* for, clearly, the third god of *On the Good* is incorporeal and thus cannot be identical with a composite of body and soul. However, it is also possible – and I think more likely – to understand it another way. Platonists claim, following the Platonic *Alcibiades I* (130 C), that a human being is – in a wider sense – a composite of body and soul but also – in the strict sense – only the soul. They could argue the same in the case of the world given that both human beings and the world are living beings and composites of body and soul. Following this line they could argue that the world is – in a wider sense – a composite of body and World Soul but – strictly speaking – the (good) World Soul.⁵⁰ The (good) World Soul is, to put it differently, the essence of the living being that is the sensible world. If understood in this way, this testimony confirms that the third god is identical with the (good) World Soul.

On the basis of these testimonies we are perhaps entitled to conclude that the third god is nothing other than the good World Soul. If so, then the good World Soul thinks discursively about the providential arrangement of the sensible world and cares for it. This claim is new. It was not held, as far as we can tell, by any Platonist before Numenius.

Before turning to Plotinus, I wish to come back to a topic postponed in the first section of this chapter. In our discussion of the view that our souls are parts of the World Soul, we have seen that this view has also been ascribed to Numenius. If the World Soul is the third god, we can see that such an ascription would make good sense. Moreover, if Numenius indeed held this view, he would make a likely target of Plotinus' attack. We know from Porphyry that in some quarters Plotinus was held to plagiarise Numenius (*V.P.* 17, iff.). This shows that their views were considered to resemble one another closely. Plotinus' account of the hypostasis Soul is indeed much indebted to Numenius' account of the third god. However, given that Plotinus considers the difference between his view and that under discussion to be crucial, it might well have seemed to him important to dwell on a detailed refutation of the view that some people considered similar to, or even identical with, his.

⁵⁰ Baltes calls the third god "Kosmosgott" and points to the analogy of the World Soul in the *Timaeus* without, however, identifying the "Kosmosgott" with the Numenian good World Soul (Baltes (1975) 261).

Did Numenius hold the view attacked by Plotinus, namely that our souls stem from the World Soul? The best evidence is a passage that we find, once again, in Calcidius. The sentence before his claim that the sensible world is composed of matter and god (discussed above) states that the author of the rational part of the soul is reason and god (*ratio ac deus*).⁵¹ Most likely, *ratio* is the translation of “discursive thinking” (*dianoia*), which is, as we have seen earlier, the activity of the third god. If so, the *ac* presumably has to be understood as explicative: the author of the rational part of the soul is Reason, that is, the third god.

Moreover, if I am right in taking “god” in the immediately following sentence to refer to the good World Soul then it is reasonable to assume that the god who is the author of the rational part of the soul is also the good World Soul.⁵² If so, the good World Soul is the soul from which the other rational souls stem (or at least from where they receive their rationality). Yet according to other fragments, each individual soul is in its essence an intellect that descends into the sensible world, in this way becoming a soul (although remaining in its essence an intellect) (fr. 12.14–16 Des Places). This is strikingly similar to the destiny of the second-and-third god and suggests that the other individual souls, rather than deriving from the good World Soul, are split from their individual intellects just as the good World Soul is split from the Intellect, that is, the second-and-third god.

This would still leave open the following possibility: individual intellects might be parts of the second-and-third god. The split of the second-and-third god into a second god and the good World Soul would also take place in the second-and-third god’s *parts*. Thus, the second-and-third god would not only be split *as a whole*; instead, its parts would be split as well. This would allow for the possibility that the other individual souls would be split from their individual intellects and nevertheless be parts of the good World Soul (which is split from the Intellect whose parts the other intellects are). Unfortunately, there is no textual evidence to confirm this. Nowhere do we learn from the extant fragments and testimonies

⁵¹ “*sicut rationabilis animae pars auctore utitur ratione ac deo*” (fr. 52.73/74).

⁵² I shall ignore the problem that, in this testimony, Numenius is said to talk of a rational and non-rational *part* of the soul. According to other testimonies, Numenius does not talk of rational and non-rational *parts* of a soul. He rather seems to follow the Stoics in assuming two kinds of soul, a completely rational one and thoroughly non-rational one (the latter perhaps of the same type as the souls of animals) (Frede (1987) 1071ff.). He then states (leaving the Stoics behind) that human beings – just like the world as a whole – possess two souls, a rational and a non-rational one (fr. 44 Des Places). I will briefly come back to this in [Chapter 7](#).

that Numenius believed in individual intellects being parts of the second god. As such I have to leave this question open.

Let us turn to Plotinus, who agrees with Numenius that the creation of a sensible world is a work that goes beyond the proper activity of an intellect. He also follows Numenius in claiming that the proper demiurgic activity is discursive and hence cannot be the activity of an intellect. We can see this from *Ennead* III 9, another early treatise by Plotinus. It is a work heavily influenced by Numenius in various respects.⁵³ In the first chapter of *Ennead* III 9, Plotinus considers *Timaeus* 39E, the passage that was our leitmotiv above. Plotinus states: “We have discussed the two [i.e. the Living Being and the Intellect], but what is the third, the one which thought discursively about the things seen by the Intellect in the Living Being . . . ?” (*Enn.* III 9, I, 27–29).⁵⁴ In the following lines he identifies this third entity, the entity that thinks discursively, with the Soul. He explicitly says that discursive thinking is not the work of the Intellect but rather the work of the Soul (*Enn.* III 9, I, 34–37). Plotinus thus follows Numenius’ view that discursive thinking is on the one hand necessary for the creation of a sensible world but on the other hand not a work of the Intellect. The Numenian insight leads Plotinus to introduce the hypostasis Soul. It is his second reason for doing so.⁵⁵

The present consideration also helps us to fill a gap that I left in the first section. Plotinus’ view that discursive thinking, rather than being the work of the Intellect, is the work of the Soul makes it plain that the Soul cannot be a Platonic Form. Plotinus introduces the Soul because he believes himself to need an entity other than the Intellect for the thinking about the creation of a sensible world. He believes that neither the Intellect nor the world of Forms (let alone any of its members) can be the proper subject of discursive thinking. Hence it is clear from his second reason for introducing the hypostasis Soul that the Soul cannot be a Form.

As far as his second reason is concerned, nothing might seem to hinder him from following Numenius in identifying the Soul with the World Soul. In order to see whether this is indeed the case, we will have to discuss in more detail what the hypostasis Soul is and what discursive thinking (*dianoia*) consists in. However, given his first reason, it is clear that he needs to introduce an entity other than the World Soul. Thus, at least his

⁵³ See Holzhausen (1992).

⁵⁴ καὶ τὰ μὲν δύο εἴρηται, τὸ δὲ τρίτον τί, ὃ διανοήθη τὰ ὁρώμενα ὑπὸ τοῦ νοῦ ἐν τῷ ζῳῷ κείμενα . . . ;

⁵⁵ I will discuss this in more detail in [Chapter 2](#).

first reason is a reason against identifying the Soul with the World Soul and in favour of Plotinus' parting company with Numenius on this point.

So far the two reasons for introducing the hypostasis Soul appear to be quite independent of one another. However, as we shall see in the next two chapters, they are more closely connected than our discussion so far has revealed.

The hypostasis Soul

Plotinus saw the necessity to introduce a new entity, the hypostasis Soul, in order to account for the unity of all souls. Unlike most of his fellow Platonists, he did not believe that he could identify the entity necessary for this either with an already existing individual soul, such as the World Soul, or with the hypostasis Intellect, the world of Forms or any of its members. Two claims made in [Chapter 1](#) need further scrutiny: (1) the hypostasis Soul is necessary in order to account for discursive or rational thinking, which in turn is necessary for the creation of a sensible world; (2) discursive thinking cannot be the work of the hypostasis Intellect, the world of Forms or any of its members because discursive thinking is distinct from the intellectual activity of an intellect. In this chapter I shall compare the hypostasis Intellect (henceforth ‘Intellect’ with a capital ‘I’) and the hypostasis Soul (henceforth ‘Soul’ with a capital ‘S’). In the first section I will discuss how the thinking of the Intellect relates to its object. This will be necessary to understand the form of the thinking of the Intellect. In the second section I will argue that the ways of thinking of Intellect and Soul are different and thereby discuss the difference in the form of their thinking. The main aim will be to show what has only been claimed thus far, namely that the Soul, by contrast to the Intellect, thinks discursively. In the third section I shall discuss what the Soul thinks about. We will find that its thinking differs in part from that of the Intellect in that it not only thinks theoretically but also practically. One result will be that the Soul’s practical thinking about how to create a sensible world must be discursive. In the final section I will argue that Plotinus argues for the priority of contemplation (theoretical thinking) over practical thinking without, however, (as is sometimes thought) replacing the divine Craftsman and his practical thinking with a model of (non-demiurgic) emanation.

The hypostasis Intellect and the *Timaean* Living Being

Let us first look at the thinking of the Intellect and how it relates to its content. This will give us the necessary background for understanding the thinking of the Soul. In order to do so, it is worthwhile to spend some more time on *Ennead* III 9.1 and its discussion of *Timaeus* 39E.¹ Plotinus characterises the Living Being that truly is (as well as the Forms in it) as the object of the Intellect's activity. Accordingly, he calls the Living Being intelligible and even *the* Intelligible (*Enn.* III 9, 1, 7; 20; *Enn.* III 9, 1, 13 f.; 15 f.). We also know from a number of passages that Plotinus considers the Intelligible to be true reality (*ousia*). Thus, the Living Being, since it is the Intelligible, is also true reality. This claim fits well with the quotation from the *Timaeus* since the Intelligible seems – in our passage – to be the world of Forms, which is, for a Platonist, indeed the world of true reality. Thus, understood in this way, *Timaeus* 39E tells us, among other things, that the Intellect contemplates the Intelligible, which is true reality.

Even if the Intellect grasps true reality in contemplating the Intelligible, the relation between Intellect and Intelligible needs further elucidation. It still allows for a number of interpretations. Plotinus straightaway rules out the following. The Living Being and its content are not outside of the Intellect in such a way that the Intellect, in thinking about it, only grasps images of the Intelligible. Instead, the Intellect grasps the objects themselves (*ibid.*). Thus, the content of the Intellect's contemplation does not consist in mental objects of sorts that in some way or other only refer to, or represent, reality.

Given this, there still remain at least two possible ways of understanding the relation between Intellect and Living Being. The first option consists simply in the claim that the Living Being and the Intellect are identical. Accordingly, the Intellect, in contemplating the Living Being, contemplates itself. This is the option Plotinus defends. But there is a second possibility: the Living Being, although being the immediate object of the Intellect's contemplation, might still be considered ontologically prior to the Intellect and thus distinct from it. I understand ontological priority in the following way: 'x is ontologically prior to y' means that x is what it is

¹ The passage under scrutiny in *Enn.* III 9.1 is this: "In the same way as the Intellect sees Forms in the Living Being that truly is (what they are like and how many there are), such and so many, he [the divine Craftsman] thought, also this world should have" (ἥπερ οὖν νοῦς ἐνούσας ἰδέας τῶ ὄντιν ζῶον, οἷαί τε ἔνεισι καὶ ὅσαι, καθορᾶ, τοιαύτας καὶ τοσαύτας διανοήθη δεῖν καὶ τότε σχεῖν) (*Ti.* 39E7–9).

independently of *y*, whereas *y* – as far as its being what it is is concerned – is dependent on *x*.² If Intellect and Living Being are in a relation of ontological priority to one another such that the Living Being is ontologically prior to the Intellect, then they are not identical because the Living Being would be what it is quite independently of the Intellect. More generally, in this case they would stand in an asymmetrical relation to one another and thus could not be identical.

Plotinus discusses both options at *Ennead* III 9, 1. One interpretation makes an ontological distinction between Intelligible and Intellect and identifies the former with the Living Being. What makes things even more complicated is that Plotinus, in discussing this interpretation, calls the Living Being, as the intelligible object of the intellect's contemplation, also an intellect. He characterises this intellect, by contrast to the other one, as an intellect at rest, in unity and in quietness.³ Let us call this quiet intellect the 'first' intellect, and the intellect that contemplates the first one the 'second' intellect. Now the second intellect is not identical with the first intellect (the latter being identical with the Living Being). Hence, we have, in this interpretation, an intellect (the second intellect) contemplating the Living Being as a thing distinct (in the sense of it being not identical) from itself (*Enn.* III 9, 1, 16–20).

It is likely that in discussing this interpretation Plotinus had Numenius in mind.⁴ According to Proclus' testimony, Numenius identified the first god with the Living Being (Proclus in *Ti.* III 103, 28–32 Diehl = fr. 22 Des Places). Moreover, we know from Eusebius' quotation from Numenius' own work that Numenius distinguished two intellects, the first of which he identified with the first god (fr. 17 Des Places) and thought of as being in stasis (*hestōs*), while considering the second intellect as in movement (*kinoumenos*) (fr. 15 Des Places). It thus appears likely that Numenius considered the Living Being as the immediate object of the (second) intellect's contemplation, enjoying, however, ontological priority (in the sense specified) and thus being distinct from the (second) intellect. Let us therefore call the above interpretation 'the Numenian interpretation'.

According to the alternative interpretation of *Ti.* 39E (as discussed at *Enn.* III 9, 1) – the one favoured by Plotinus – both the Living Being and

² Ontological priority in Plotinus will be discussed in more detail in the [next chapter](#). For a discussion of a similar kind of priority in Aristotle (in particular *Metaph.* 1019a 1–14) see Peramatzis (2008).

³ νοῦν εἶναι ἐν στάσει καὶ ἐνότητι καὶ ἡσυχίᾳ κτλ. (*Enn.* III 9, 1, 16f.).

⁴ For a discussion of Numenius' first god see Frede (1987) 1062–1064. For Numenius and *Enn.* III 9, 1 see Holzhausen (1992). For later interpretations of *Enn.* III 9, 1 see Dillon (1969).

the Intellect are one (*Enn.* III 9, 1, 12–15) in the sense of identity; they are only conceptually distinct. Now considering that this entity is essentially involved in contemplation, it is easy to see why we need a conceptual distinction. There are two ways to look at it: as the subject of contemplation (as Intellect) and as its object (as Living Being). At least in later treatises it is clear that Plotinus prefers this interpretation to the one that presumably is due to Numenius. At *Ennead* VI 2, 21, 56ff., for example, he claims: “[the Intellect], having the beings in itself, is the perfect Living Being and the Living Being that truly is”,⁵ using the expressions from *Timaeus* 31B and 39E respectively and identifying the Intellect with the Living Being.

In order to discuss Plotinus’ reasons for rejecting the Numenian interpretation, we have to take seriously the view that the Living Being is a living being and thus *alive*. Indeed, it is the living being *par excellence* and hence its life must also be of a perfect kind. In order to identify the perfect life, Plotinus follows Aristotle’s claim that the highest form of life is intellectual activity (*noein*) and its subject, accordingly, is an intellect.⁶ Now if the Living Being’s life consists in intellectual activity then it will have to be an intellect. So far, so good, we may say. As far as Plotinus’ view is concerned, we may well follow Aristotle but this alone does not constitute a good reason for rejecting Numenius’ view. Moreover, since the Numenian interpretation also calls the Living Being an intellect (the first intellect), both interpretations appear to be on the same page thus far. In order to see why Plotinus rejects the Numenian interpretation, we need to dig deeper.

Numenius claims that the first intellect, in contrast to the second one, is *at rest*. What does that mean? Perhaps the first intellect is not active at all. Yet if this is so, it seems rather hard to understand why we should think of it as the paradigm case of living beings. Moreover, it would be hard to understand how the principle that brings about everything is itself inactive. Since this position is hardly tenable, we should rather assume that the Numenian Living Being is also alive. If so, however, we may wonder what its life consists in. If it also consists in contemplation, as does the life of Plotinus’ Living Being, then it is unclear in what way the first and the second intellects are distinct from one another and what it means for the first intellect to be at rest. Moreover, what is the object of the first intellect’s contemplation? All this remains rather unclear

⁵ καὶ ἔχων μὲν τὰ ὄντα ἐν αὐτῷ ζῶόν ἐστι παντελὲς καὶ ὁ ἐστι ζῶον κτλ.

⁶ Arist. *Metaph.* 1072b14–18; 27f.

(which may or may not be due to the fact that we possess so few fragments and testimonies of Numenius).

However, I think there is a stronger reason for being dissatisfied with Numenius' account and I suggest that Plotinus thought so too. Numenius introduces a complexity into his first principle that can hardly be reconciled with the utter simplicity of the Plotinian One. This is particularly true if Numenius thought that the Living Being is alive and that its life consists in contemplation, for this, just as every kind of thinking, implies complexity. Minimally, as we have already seen, it involves a subject and an object of contemplation and this must be grounded in the minimal complexity of at least two aspects: the contemplating and the contemplated side. However, as we shall shortly see, contemplation itself forces us to embrace yet more complexity.

I suggest that the fact that the object of contemplation is complex is Plotinus' reason for deviating from Numenius and claiming that the Living Being is not, as Numenius would have it, ontologically prior to the Intellect, but rather identical with it: the Intellect, Plotinus argues, contemplates itself and this activity is the life of the Intellect and of the Living Being. Moreover, intellectual contemplation is essential to the Intellect. This means that the Intellect is not a potentiality to contemplate but rather essentially the activity (or actuality) of contemplation itself, an idea that goes back, of course, to Aristotle. Accordingly, Plotinus claims that "all together will be one: Intellect, intellectual contemplation, and the Intelligible" (*Enn.* V 3, 5, 43 f.).⁷ Plotinus, going beyond Aristotle, combines the Aristotelian idea with the Platonist claim that the object of the Intellect's contemplation (and, in this sense, the Intelligible) is the Timaeon Living Being – a combination that fits rather nicely given that the life of the intellect is the highest form of life.

Properly understanding this identification helps us grasp somewhat better Plotinus' notion of the One and how the One is related to the Intellect. The identification of Intellect and Living Being frees Plotinus' first principle of the burden of being the immediate object of intellectual contemplation. This is a good thing, from a Platonist point of view, because objects of intellectual contemplation are also necessarily, at least minimally, complex. Complete simplicity is beyond any cognitive reach. Accordingly, the Plotinian One, by contrast to the Intellect, is unified in such a way that there are no distinctions within it whatsoever. It has no parts of any kind and thus there are *realiter* no distinctions within it.

⁷ ἐν ᾧ πάντα ἔσται, νοῦς, νόησις, τὸ νοητόν.

Yet the One does not even allow for *conceptual* distinctions,⁸ for the latter are only possible where there is a certain complexity as a *fundamentum in re* for them.⁹

The above considerations also contribute to understanding Plotinus' stance on the disagreement among Platonists on whether the Form of Being also is to be identified with the Form of the Good or not. While Numenius considers his first god as Being itself (*autoon*) (fr. 17 Des Places), Plotinus relegates it to the realm of the second hypostasis, where it is one of the highest Forms.¹⁰ This is due to at least two reasons. First, Being is the primary object of cognition and the Plotinian One is beyond the grasp of any sort of cognition. Second, Plotinus believes that reality (*ousia*) belongs to the second hypostasis and that Being is *constitutive* of reality. The first hypostasis, however, is not part of the second and thus cannot be constitutive of it.

Being is only one of the things that together account for the complexity of the second hypostasis, a complexity that is grounded in the Intellect's essential activity. Plotinus' insight that cognitive activity is necessarily complex is highly interesting. Plotinus uses the five highest genera of Plato's *Sophist* to explain what must be involved in every thinking activity. Unfortunately, some points in his discussion remain somewhat unclear. Why does Plotinus believe that there are only these five highest genera (apart from the fact, of course, that this view is expressed in the *Sophist*)? How precisely are species derived from them? These are mystifying points in Plotinus' account of the genera and of their constituting the Intellect. I shall not pursue these questions. Instead, I wish to briefly say something about each of the genera and shall in this way attempt to clarify why Plotinus thought that each of them must be both a crucial part of reality and a part of reality in which everything real must participate. The discussion will focus on *Ennead* VI 2, 7 f.¹¹

As we have seen, Plotinus identifies Intellect and Living Being.¹² Already in Aristotle living beings are regarded as paradigm cases of being. *A fortiori*,

⁸ Interestingly, this implies that even the *notion* of the One and the *notion* of the Good are one and the same and do not have different content (if applied to the first hypostasis).

⁹ The claim that the first principle is the Form of the Good (which is beyond reality) goes back, of course, to Plato, *Rep.* 509B. On the origin of Plotinus' primary hypostasis and how Platonists came to identify the Good and the One, see Dodds (1928).

¹⁰ For other Platonists who, like Numenius, believe that the Form of the Good is also Being itself, see the discussion in Burnyeat (2005a) 152–155.

¹¹ See also *Enn.* V 1, 4.

¹² For a discussion of the relation between life and complexity see Emilsson (1988) 10–15 and Kalligas (2000) 27–29.

if the Living Being is the living being *par excellence*, it crucially must *be*. Accordingly, the Form of Being must somehow be constitutive of the Living Being.¹³ Moreover, since everything else that forms part of reality *is*, everything else must also participate in the Form of Being. The Form of Being, therefore, cannot be a species but rather must be one of the highest genera.

The Living Being is also crucially *alive*.¹⁴ The life of the Living Being is accounted for by the Form of Motion. At *Ennead* VI 2, 7, 3–5 we learn: “Life is also in the Intellect – if we bring in Intellect and its life then we shall posit as common to all life one single genus, Motion.”¹⁵ Thus the Form of Motion accounts for the fact that the Living Being is alive. The view that at least the most perfect Being must be alive can already be found in Plato’s *Sophist*, where the following (rhetorical) question is asked: shall we easily be convinced that “[the most perfect Being] is neither alive nor thinking but stands still, solemn and holy, unmoved and without having understanding?” (*Soph.* 248E–249A).¹⁶ Plotinus’ answer is no. Now Plotinus not only believes that the Living Being as a whole is alive but also that its parts are alive. Every Form, he claims, is a living being. Accordingly, everything that really *is* is alive, and the Form of Motion accounts for the life of these living beings as well. Motion thus must be one of the highest genera.

Although there is activity in the intelligible world, there is no change. Thus, Motion must not be identified with change (see the discussion in *Enn.* III 7, 6). Intellectual contemplation is an eternally unchanging activity. It is an active state of grasping true reality. Now the Form of Motion does not in itself guarantee that the activity of the intelligible world is unchanging and this is why Stasis as a further Form is introduced. The activity of the Living Being is unchanging and the Form of Stasis accounts for this fact. Moreover, nothing that participates in the Form of Stasis changes. So every part of the Living Being participates not only in the Form of Motion but also in that of Stasis.¹⁷

¹³ I shall come back to the relation of the Forms in the Living Being to the Living Being in the [next chapter](#). There I shall try to clarify what I mean by “somehow constitutive”.

¹⁴ Plotinus’ view of the life of the Intellect is discussed in Armstrong (1971). See also Armstrong (1967) 245–249.

¹⁵ ζῶν δὲ καὶ ἐν νῶ – ἐπεισαγαγόντες καὶ τὸν νοῦν καὶ τὴν τοῦτου ζώην, κοινὸν τὸ ἐπὶ πάσῃ ζῳῇ τὴν κίνησιν ἐν τῷ γένος θησόμεθα.

¹⁶ μηδὲ ζῆν αὐτὸ [τὸ παντελῶς ὄν] μηδὲ φρονεῖν, ἀλλὰ σεμνὸν καὶ ἄγιον, νοῦν οὐκ ἔχον, ἀκίνητον ἐστὸς εἶναι;

¹⁷ On the basis of the *Sophist* one may wonder why Plotinus thinks that the same thing can be both moved and at rest. However, Plotinus considers the Intellect also as the object of the second hypothesis of the *Parmenides*. This object is both moved and at rest. See *Parm.* 145E6ff.

Given these claims it is already clear that the Living Being is a complex entity because at least three Forms must be constitutive parts of it. The complexity itself gives rise to two further Forms. For these three Forms are distinct from one another but each is also the same as itself. But we are unable (on Platonist terms) to account for this complexity without postulating the existence of the Forms of Sameness and Otherness. Hence, these two Forms must be introduced as well. Plotinus stops at this point and explains why no more than five *highest* genera are necessary to explain the Living Being (*Enn.* VI 2, 8ff.). All other Forms, thus, seem in some way to be derivative of them. As I said above, I shall not pursue this any further. However, I will consider the relation of the Intellect to individual intellects (which are, as we shall see, Forms) in the [next chapter](#).

Propositional and non-propositional thought

Our discussion started with Plotinus' interpretation of *Timaeus* 39E and I now wish to look again at this passage. In the first section we considered Plotinus' interpretation of the relation between Living Being and Intellect and saw that it is one of identity. Now in the same passage Plato uses the expression 'discursive thinking' (*dianoieisthai*) and it is not quite clear what the subject of discursive thinking is. In the first few lines of *Ennead* III 9, 1, Plotinus assumes the divine Craftsman to be the subject. But later on, at line 27 f., he states: "We have discussed the two [i.e. the Living Being and the Intellect], but what is the third, which thought discursively about the things seen by the Intellect in the Living Being?"¹⁸ In the final lines of the chapter he answers this question as follows. Discursive thinking is not the work of the Intellect but that of the Soul (*Enn.* III 9, 1, 34–37).¹⁹ Unlike the activity of the Intellect, he claims, the activity of the Soul is a "divided activity" (*meristē energeia*) (*ibid.*). The fact that the activity of the Soul is somehow divided marks a crucial difference between the activity of the Soul and the activity of the Intellect. The next task will thus be to clarify the nature of this divided activity.

¹⁸ καὶ τὰ μὲν δύο εἴρηται, τὸ δὲ τρίτον τί, ὃ διανοήθη τὰ ὁρώμενα ὑπὸ τοῦ νοῦ ἐν τῷ ζῳῳ κείμενα κτλ. *Enn.* III 9, 1, 27–29

¹⁹ This does not imply that the Craftsman is completely identical with the Soul. The Craftsman rather is both the Intellect and the Soul. He intellectually contemplates the Living Being in so far as he is the Intellect and he thinks discursively in so far as he is the Soul. See *Enn.* IV 4, 9, 1–3. Remember the discussion of Numenius, who splits the Craftsman, in [Chapter 1](#).

There has been a long debate among Plotinus scholars on the question of whether the thought of the Intellect is propositional or not.²⁰ I do not wish to address all the arguments of this debate. Instead, I will do two things: firstly, I shall quote a passage that – to my mind – shows that the thought of the Intellect, according to Plotinus, is not propositional. Secondly, I shall try to show that propositional thought has its place in the Soul and that the propositionality of the thinking of the Soul (and what comes with it) distinguishes it from the thinking of the Intellect. The Soul thinks by means of concepts and thus propositionally. This, I propose, is its divided activity.

In a preliminary way I wish to remark that the view that the world of Forms consists of propositions would be a highly unusual view for a Platonist to hold. Forms are such things as the Form of Justice, the Form of Sameness and the Form of Elephant. As far as Plotinus is concerned, nowhere do we find a passage where he claims that the world of Forms is populated by entities other than Forms and he never claims that Forms are propositionally structured. Yet since the thinking of the Intellect is identical with its object, it must also have the same structure. Hence, if the object of intellectual contemplation is non-propositional, the thinking about it (which is identical with it) must also be non-propositional.

A proponent of the view that the Intellect thinks propositionally might argue against this thus: let it be granted that the world of Forms consists of Forms (i.e. it does not consist of propositions). Nevertheless, the whole world of Forms might be propositionally structured. Hence, even if it is shown that the world of Forms consists of Forms (and not ultimately of propositions), it has not been shown that the world of Forms is not propositionally structured. If so, the presumed fact that the world of Forms consists of Forms is compatible with the claim that the thought of the Intellect is propositional. For the world of Forms, consisting of Forms (and not ultimately of propositions), is propositionally structured and identical with the Intellect and with its thought. Since the world of Forms is propositionally structured, so is the Intellect's thought.

I do not think that this argument is persuasive. Granted, if the world of Forms was indeed propositionally structured and identical with the Intellect's thought, the Intellect's thought would be propositionally structured too. But we have to take into account Plotinus' view that there exists

²⁰ Lloyd (1969–70 and 1986) argues that the thought of the Intellect is non-propositional. Sorabji (1982) and (1983) ch. 10 argues – against Lloyd – that it is propositional. Sorabji, in turn, is criticised by Alfino (1988). See the thorough discussion in Emilsson (2007) 176–213.

not only the Intellect, which is identical with the world of Forms, but also individual intellects (as parts of the Intellect), which are identical with Forms (as parts of the world of Forms) (e.g. *Enn.* V 9, 8, 4). Moreover, not only the Intellect but also each individual intellect is identical with its activity. Hence, each intellect is not only identical with a Form but also with its own intellectual activity. Let us now assume for the sake of argument that intellects think propositionally. Let us grant, moreover, that intellects are identical with their thoughts and with their Forms. It follows that if an intellect's thought is propositionally structured, so is the intellect and so is the Form with which it is identical. But if this is the case, then Forms are propositionally structured; that is, they are propositions. However, Forms are no propositions. Hence, intellects do not think propositionally.

So far we have shown that, if Forms are not propositionally structured, intellectual contemplation is not propositionally structured. But we still have to show that Plotinus thought that Forms as intelligible entities are not propositionally structured. In order to do so we will have to consider in more detail what the relation is between propositions and Forms according to Plotinus. To this end, let us consider a passage where Plotinus explicitly deals with these issues. He says: "For they [the intelligible entities] are certainly not propositions or axiomata or sayables: for [if so] also they would already speak about other things and would not be the beings themselves, such as, for example, 'the Just is fine' which is different from the Just and from the Fine" (*Enn.* V 5, 1, 38–41).²¹ Propositions, axiomata and sayables share the feature of being propositional. They all are complex items that involve predication (as exemplified by "the Just is fine"). Plotinus claims in this passage that intelligible entities (i.e. the objects of intellectual contemplation) are not of that sort for, he argues, if they were they would not be the beings themselves. At first sight this passage seems immediately to support the case for non-propositionality. However, if we look at the context we see that things are more complicated.

In the context of the passage quoted the question is considered whether the Intelligible is outside of the Intellect.²² Our earlier discussion has shown that Plotinus denies this. In this passage Plotinus formulates the following disjunction: either the Intelligible is itself intelligent (as Plotinus himself believes) or it is not (*Enn.* V 5, 1, 32–38). Let us hypothetically

²¹ οὐ γὰρ δὴ προτάσεις οὐδὲ ἀξιώματα οὐδὲ λεκτά· ἤδη γὰρ ἂν καὶ αὐτὰ περὶ ἐτέρων λέγοι, καὶ οὐκ αὐτὰ τὰ ὄντα εἶη, οἷον τὸ δίκαιον καλόν, ἄλλου τοῦ δικαίου καὶ τοῦ καλοῦ ὄντος.

²² For the historical background of this view see Armstrong (1960).

assume that intelligible entities are not themselves intelligent. Instead, they are lifeless objects outside of the Intellect. Let us further assume that these objects are prior to the Intellect. Given these assumptions, Plotinus asks: what kind of being would they be (*ti onta*; *Enn.* V 5, 1, 38)? After this question, the above quotation follows. Thus, the claim that intelligible objects are propositions is negated on the basis of a hypothetical assumption (that the intelligibles are outside of the Intellect), which Plotinus rejects. Before I attempt to show that we can nevertheless extract Plotinus' view from this passage (namely that intelligible entities are not propositions), let us look at how he proceeds: "if they are going to say that the Just and the Fine are simple items which are separate from one another then first of all the Intelligible will be neither one nor in one but each [intelligible entity] will be disconnected [from the others]" (*Enn.* V 5, 1, 41–43).²³

The proponent of the view that the Intelligible is outside of the Intellect is made to concede two things. Firstly, that the Just and the Fine are prior to the propositional items they constitute and, secondly, that they are entities distinct and separate from one another. Plotinus considers the second step as a *reductio ad absurdum*. The world of Forms is not a class of disconnected items. It rather is a unified whole. It can only be the unified whole it is if it is not without life.²⁴ At first glance this appears to be a strong claim indeed. Perhaps it becomes somewhat more plausible if we think of living beings quite generally. According to Aristotle too, a living being, after death, is no more than a heap. It lacks the unity that characterises living beings – a unity whose principle Aristotle identifies as the soul.²⁵ Life seems to play a crucial role in unifying the different parts of a living being. This intuition, certainly present in Aristotle, also seems to be at work in Plotinus. The crucial point of Plotinus' argument against the view that the Intelligible is not itself intelligent is precisely this: if they were right, the Intelligible would be a class of disconnected items. The disputed view cannot account for the unity of the Intelligible because, in order to account for it, the Intelligible must be alive.

Let us now return to our problem. What does the passage teach us about the question of whether, according to Plotinus' own view, intelligible

²³ εἰ δ' ἀπλᾶ φήσουσι, δίκαιον χωρίς καὶ καλόν, πρῶτον μὲν οὐχ ἓν τι οὐδ' ἐν ἐνὶ τῷ νοητῶν ἔσται, ἀλλὰ διεσπασμένον ἕκαστον.

²⁴ As Kalligas (2000) 28 states: "And its designation as 'Life' is meant to bring out, on the one hand its organic aspect, according to which each part can only be understood in terms of its place and its function within the whole where it belongs."

²⁵ See Perler (1996).

entities are propositions? It seems to me that Plotinus holds on to the following point made in the above discussion. Propositional items presuppose the items from which they are constituted.²⁶ The proposition ‘the Just is fine’, for example, presupposes at least two items, namely the Just and the Fine. This is what Plotinus claims in the passage quoted. Plotinus holds on to this, I would suggest, for the reason given there: were intelligible entities propositions, they would speak about other things, namely about things prior to them.

The claim that Forms are not propositionally structured does not imply that they are disconnected items. In order to prevent them from being so, we have to concede that they are alive because, and this is Plotinus’ main point, their life is crucial for their unity. The Intelligible possesses, I would suggest, more unity than the propositions in which intelligible items may occur. In this sense, the proposition “the Just is fine”, for example, unfolds (at least partly) how the Just and the Fine are related. Predication, however, does not glue together the Just and the Fine as two separate and disconnected items. Instead, the two items are, prior to predication, united in such a way as to allow for a true predication in which one is predicated of the other.

What kind of unity the world of Forms possesses before getting unfolded into propositions is a difficult question. I shall postpone discussion of this until the [next chapter](#). However, a metaphor that Plotinus often uses might help. He often claims that in the Intellect everything is together (*homou panta*). In using this Anaxagorean phrase he wishes to point out that, in the Intellect, every part somehow is in every other part. In this way the Intellect is a minimal manifold. What is more important for our present concern, however, is the following. The minimal manifold of the world of Forms allows itself to be spelled out in propositions, as can be seen from the proposition “the Just is fine”. This will provide us with a greater manifold than that of the Intellect, for by using propositions we are in a position to spell out all relations between the various Forms. Let us take the five highest genera as an example.²⁷ In the Intellect, there are (at least) these five items: Being, Motion, Stasis, Sameness and Otherness. If we spell out the relations between these five items, we get:

²⁶ Thus, on this point I agree with Emilsson (2007) 189–191 though I do not think that the propositionally structured items presupposing Forms need to be linguistic items.

²⁷ For weaving together Forms in this way see Pl. *Soph.* 255ff.

“Being is.”
 “Being is in Motion.”
 “Being is in Stasis.”
 “Being is the same as Being.”
 “Being is other than Motion.”
 And so on.

These propositions, in turn, are not insulated but stand in various relations to one another. All true propositions about the world of Forms are parts of a unified whole (in analogy to the Forms which are parts of the world of Forms). This unified whole is not, however, *identical* with the world of Forms (and thus with the Intelligible) but rather its *image* – an image that is not constituted by Forms but rather by propositions or, more generally, by *logoi*.²⁸ In what follows I shall suggest that the Soul (and not the Intellect) thinks about the world of Forms by means of *logoi* and thus that it is the thinking of the Soul (as opposed to that of the Intellect) that is propositional.

Crucially, the Soul understands reality also by understanding how the objects that it grasps are related to one another. This can be seen from Plotinus’ discussion of dialectics (understood as the science by means of which we study reality). Plotinus describes how we have to come to understand the various relations between intelligible objects. He states that dialectic says “by way of reason (*logōi*) about everything what it is and how it differs from other things and what they have in common; in which and where each of these is and whether it is what it is and how many beings there are, and again how many non-beings, being different from beings” (*Enn.* I 3, 4, 2–6).²⁹ Similarly, he explains at *Ennead* I 3, 5, 1–4 that the soul of the dialectician proceeds by way of interweaving and distinguishing (*sumplekein kai diairein*) till it arrives at perfect understanding. Thus, souls (as opposed to intellects) think *rationally* or *discursively* about the world of Forms. Rational thinking (*dianoia*), as opposed to

²⁸ I do not suggest that everything that Plotinus calls a *logos* is a proposition or constituted out of propositions. There are also, for example, *logoi spermatikoi*, formulae in matter of some kind, which presumably are not structured propositionally. However, the *logoi* in the present context are *logoi* that are constitutive of or at least the object of discursive thinking (and thus the sort of thing that rationality is concerned with), as I will argue. Since this sort of thinking must be distinct from the non-propositional thought of the Intellect, it is reasonable to assume, I believe, that its structure is propositional and that *logoi* in this context are propositions or entities constituted out of propositions.

²⁹ λόγῳ περὶ ἑκάστου . . . τί τε ἑκάστον καὶ τί ἄλλων διαφέρει καὶ τίς ἡ κοινότης· ἐν οἷς ἔστι καὶ ποῦ τούτων ἑκάστον καὶ εἰ ἔστιν ὃ ἔστι καὶ τὰ ὄντα ὅποσα καὶ τὰ μὴ ὄντα αὐτῶν, ἕτερα δὲ ὄντων.

intellectual contemplation, is structured in terms of *logoi*. The propositions that I introduced above are examples of such *logoi*.

Now dialectic, as Plotinus understands it in the above quotation, is the way to arrive at the understanding of the world of Forms. It terminates, as he puts it, in perfect understanding (*eis teleon noun*; *Enn.* I 3, 5, 4). One might think that this perfect understanding of the soul is a way of thinking distinct from the way in which a soul interweaves and distinguishes things. While I agree that there are important differences between these two kinds of cognitive activity, I would suggest that the perfect understanding of the soul is still discursive. I see no reason to postulate a sudden change in the form or structure of the thinking involved. If this is right, then the soul not only *arrives* at an understanding of the world of Forms by means of discursive reasoning but also *understands* the world of Forms discursively. Still, it is important in this context to already note the crucial difference between discursive *thinking* and discursive *reasoning* (see *Enn.* IV 4, 18). Only discursive reasoning is a mental process, taking place in time. I shall discuss this distinction in [Chapters 4](#) and [7](#). For now only note that discursive thinking is not, according to Plotinus, a process of reasoning. If so, an active mental state of complete understanding can still be discursive (and thus be propositionally structured).

Although the discussion about dialectic concerned the individual soul, the result of this discussion also applies to the hypostasis Soul. The hypostasis Soul, like the individual soul, thinks discursively about the world of Forms. In his discussion of how the hypostasis Soul is generated by the hypostasis Intellect (after the latter's generation by the hypostasis One), Plotinus states in highly metaphorical language:

for the Intellect, being a perfect intellect, generates the Soul. And because it was perfect it had to generate, and, being such a great power, it could not be without offspring. But it was not possible for the offspring to be better than it (this is so even here below) but it had to be a lesser image of it . . . The offspring of the Intellect is a *logos* and a hypostasis, that which thinks discursively. (*Enn.* V 1, 7, 36–42)³⁰

I do not wish to discuss why the Intellect's perfection necessitates it to generate nor how this generation is supposed to occur.³¹ What is interesting

³⁰ ψυχὴν γὰρ γεννᾷ νοῦς, νοῦς ὧν τέλειος. καὶ γὰρ τέλειον ὄντα γεννᾷ ἔδει, καὶ μὴ δύναμιν οὖσαν τοσαύτην ἄγονον εἶναι. κρείττον δὲ οὐχ οἶόν τε ἦν εἶναι οὐδ' ἐνθαῦτα τὸ γεννώμενον, ἀλλ' ἔλαττον ὃν εἶδωλον εἶναι αὐτοῦ, . . . νοῦ δὲ γέννημα λόγος τις καὶ ὑπόστασις, τὸ διανοούμενον· κτλ. For the generation of the Soul see Lloyd (1987) 158f. See also the Ps.Galenic *Ad Gaurum* (usually attributed to Porphyry), VI 2: οὕτω γὰρ διάνοια γέννημα οὖσα νοῦ κτλ.

³¹ For generation in the intelligible realm see Emilsson (2007) ch. 2.

for our discussion is rather the fact that the Soul is characterised as a hypostasis, as *logos*, and as that which thinks discursively.³² From this passage we can thus learn that Plotinus characterises discursive thinking as thinking in terms of *logoi*. Thus, in so far as the Soul thinks discursively or rationally about the world of Forms, it contemplates the world of Forms in terms of *logoi*.³³

Although the relation between hypostasis Soul and individual souls will only be discussed in detail in the [next chapter](#), the following point might be worth mentioning here. I claimed in the [first chapter](#) that our souls are essentially rational souls. The hypostasis Soul, being the principle of our souls, must also be rational. What is more, the hypostasis Soul is Reason (i.e. *logos* in this sense) itself and we owe our rationality to it. The Soul, we might say, is Reason hypostasized.³⁴

Theoretical and practical thought

After having considered the *form* of the Soul's thinking, I now wish to turn to what the Soul thinks about. At *Ennead* V 1, 3, 16 Plotinus states that the Soul *looks* towards the Intellect. At *Ennead* V 9, 7, 4–6 we learn that the Soul receives true scientific knowledge (*ontōs epistēmāi*) from the Intellect when it thinks about intelligible objects. Given that the Intellect is true reality, this means that the Soul thinks about reality, which is, indeed, not only in Plotinus but already in Aristotle, the proper object of true scientific knowledge. From a Platonist perspective, contemplating reality is also a way of contemplating the Good. It is true, of course, that Plotinus thinks of the Good in itself as beyond any cognitive grasp. Yet since reality, being the second hypostasis, is the most perfect image of the Good, the Good can be contemplated by contemplating reality (even if only through its image). In this sense, Plotinus claims in *Ennead* IV 4, 4, 1 that the Soul sees the Good through the Intellect. Thus, the life of the Soul consists in the contemplation of reality, a life that is eternally directed towards the Good. Surely,

³² See also Atkinson: "The λόγος, the ὑπόστασις and the διανοούμενον are one and the same." (Atkinson (1983) 182).

³³ See Witt (1931) 106 and Emilsson (1988) 136. See also *Enn.* III 5, 9, 17–23.

³⁴ Schwyzer claims that the Soul in the intelligible world is not distinct from the Intellect (Schwyzer (1951) c. 563). Armstrong believes the distinction between Soul and Intellect to be "a little blurred" (Armstrong (1967) 250). According to Blumenthal "when Soul is most truly soul it is Nous" (Blumenthal (1974) 216). See also Armstrong (1991). The present account, by contrast, attempts to provide us with a distinction between these two hypostases that is not blurred: the Soul is Reason and Reason is distinct from Intellect in that it is propositionally structured.

from a Platonist point of view, this is the best possible life for the Soul, a life of bliss and happiness. Hence, in this way an entity below the Good and the Intellect, namely the Soul, can and does participate in the goodness of the Good. Indeed, the contemplation of the world of Forms is one of the essential activities of the Soul, an activity that makes it the divine being it is. This may already be seen as a sufficient reason, on the principle of plenitude, for postulating the existence of the Soul,³⁵ as it already explains why there is, apart from the Good and the Intellect, also the Soul.³⁶

However, there is a further reason for its existence: the Soul possesses two crucial functions in the creation of a sensible world: firstly, it looks at reality not only as something worthy of contemplation but also as a paradigm for the creation of a sensible world. Accordingly, in thinking theoretically about the world of Forms, the Soul sees the latter as a paradigm for the creation of an image (namely for the creation of a sensible world) and wishes there to be an excellent image of this paradigm. Secondly, it thinks practically about how to create a sensible world on the basis of this paradigm so that the sensible world to be created will be an excellent image of the world of Forms. It now has to be shown that these two functions essentially involve discursive (i.e. propositional) thinking and that intellectual contemplation would not be sufficient for it.³⁷

Before discussing this, however, note that the hypostasis Soul thinks about the creation of *a* sensible world. I emphasize this because the particular sensible world we live in is only the result of the Soul's thinking about the creation of a sensible world and not the thing the Soul thinks about. This is important because the thinking of the Soul must be free of any *a posteriori* elements.³⁸

Let us start with the role of the Soul's theoretical thinking, or contemplation, in Plotinus' account of the creation of a sensible world. We noted earlier in this chapter that discursive thinking differs crucially from intellectual contemplation by being structured in *logoi*. Minimal propositions (of the form "a is F") are minimal *logoi*. They are structured predicationally. This structure is already crucial for the way in which Aristotle explains his ontology in the *Categories* (if we take the view that

³⁵ On the basis of the principle that as many things as possible should enjoy the goodness of the Good.

³⁶ Whether it is in itself a sufficient reason for the existence of the *hypostasis Soul* specifically is another question. Perhaps it would seem to be sufficient for there to be souls (but not necessarily for there also to be their hypostasis). However, as our discussion in [Chapter 1](#) has shown, if there are souls there must also be their hypostasis.

³⁷ For the following see also Caluori (2005).

³⁸ See *Enn.* V 9, 5, 19–23. For more on this subject see [Chapter 4](#).

the *Categories* are a metaphysical work at all, which at least is how Plotinus understands it).³⁹ Plotinus' view of the sensible world is in this respect quite similar to that proposed in the *Categories*. As we learn from *Ennead* VI 3 (Plotinus' work about the genera of the sensible world), there are five categories, the first being the category of sensible substance. Entities of the other four genera are predicated of these sensible substances (some of them being only predicated of substances, others also inhering in them (*Enn.* VI 3, 3, 3–6)). Structuring the sensible world in this way presupposes predication. Thus, it is necessary for the world of Forms to be represented in *logoi* in order to serve as a paradigm of a sensible world. Now as we have seen, the thought of the Intellect is non-propositional. Accordingly, we do not find predication in the Intellect and accordingly the Intellect by itself does not provide us with the paradigm in the way we need it. Or to put it differently: the Intellect does not provide us with the paradigm *in the right form*. The Soul, by contrast, does so because, unlike the Intellect, it thinks by way of *logoi*, that is, discursively (or by way of propositions).⁴⁰

The first reason why Plotinus needs the Soul to account for the creation of a sensible world thus concerns its theoretical thinking. Discursive thinking about the world of Forms is metaphysical and thus theoretical. For the reasons given above, theoretical discursive thinking needs to be presupposed if we want to explain the metaphysical constitution of the sensible world. And since this is the activity of the Soul (and not that of the Intellect), we need to postulate the existence of the Soul to explain the creation of our sensible world. For predication is the foundation of the logical structure of the (and possibly any) sensible world (to adapt Carnap's phrase).

Note that the Soul's theoretical thinking is not restricted to metaphysical thought. Mathematics is a further theoretical discipline that is necessary for the creation of a sensible world. Unlike thinking about Forms, mathematical thought is exclusively discursive. Just like metaphysics, mathematics is structured in terms of *logoi*. This fits well with the function of the Soul in an account of the creation of the sensible world as we can again see from the *Timaeus*, where the creation of the sensible world presupposes mathematics. For example, we learn there that astronomy is needed in order to prescribe the ways of the heavenly

³⁹ See Plotinus' critique of Aristotle's *Categories* in *Enn.* VI 1.

⁴⁰ As I said above, I do not mean to say that every *logos* is a proposition or consists of propositions. My claim here is restricted to the rational thought of the Soul.

bodies and that at least sublunary bodies are made of the four elements, each of which is one of the five Platonic solids. Moreover, each of these elementary bodies is constructed out of minimal triangles. Thus mathematics, like metaphysics, must be crucial in any Platonist account of the creation of the sensible world and the corresponding theoretical thinking must be propositional.

At *Ennead* IV 8, 3, 25–27 Plotinus claims: “But when it [i.e. the Soul] looks to what comes before it, it contemplates theoretically; when it looks to itself, it sets in order what comes after it, and providentially arranges it, and rules it.”⁴¹ When discussing what is said in the first part of this quotation, namely the thinking of the Soul about the world of Forms, we concluded that it is twofold: the Soul contemplates the world of Forms because contemplating reality is the most blissful activity there is. However, in contemplating the world of Forms, the Soul also sees a paradigm for the creation of a sensible world. Moreover, it sees it structured in such a way that it can serve as a paradigm for creation.

Let us now turn to the second part of the quotation. What does the Soul see when it looks at itself? Theoretical thinking, I will argue, is not sufficient for creation. Instead, the Soul has to think about *how* to organise a sensible world in such a way that the latter is an excellent image of the world of Forms. I shall call this thinking the *practical* thinking of the Soul. It is this practical thinking that allows the Soul to set in order, providentially arrange and rule what comes after it. Practical thinking is often pictured as a kind of reasoning, a mental process that aims at the right (or at least a good) decision as to what to do. This decision, if we are to act rightly, may involve *knowing* what to do (depending on one’s ethical views). In any case, it is easy to see why we think that practical thinking is a process. Human beings, due to their imperfection, cannot help but think in this way. However, there is no necessity to assume that practical thinking per se is a *process*. I do not see any reason why being a process should be considered essential to or constitutive of practical thinking. As far as Plotinus is concerned, the Soul’s practical thinking is as little an activity in order to *acquire* knowledge as its theoretical thinking. On the contrary, just as in the case of the Soul’s contemplation of the world of Forms, the knowledge involved in the practical thinking of the Soul is a constitutive part of the thinking itself. Thus, the Soul, because of its thinking about this, *knows* how a sensible world has to be arranged so as

⁴¹ βλέπουσα δὲ πρὸς μὲν τὸ πρὸ ἑαυτῆς νοεῖ, εἰς δὲ ἑαυτὴν τὸ μετ’ αὐτὴν [ὁ] κοσμεῖ τε καὶ διοικεῖ καὶ ἄρχει αὐτοῦ· κτλ.

to be an excellent image of true reality. And since being an excellent image of the world of Forms is, for a sensible world, to be excellently arranged, the Soul knows what this excellent possible arrangement of a sensible world is to be. Of course, on the other hand, even if we agree that the Soul's thinking does not involve acquisition of knowledge but rather already involves all the knowledge its thinking is concerned with, this does not imply that the thinking of the Soul is not a process in time. I will discuss this in [Chapter 4](#). For now, I only wish to quote a passage that confirms this claim: "What discursive reasoning (*logismos*) or what counting or what memory can there be when practical wisdom (*phronēsis*) is always present, active, ruling and providentially arranging things (*dioikein*) in the same way?" (*Enn.* IV 4, 11, 11–13).⁴² It is clear from the context that Plotinus thinks that, in this case (the case of the providential arrangement of the sensible world), no discursive *reasoning* is necessary.

This active knowledge (or know-how), that is, divine practical thinking, has traditionally been called divine providence. Accordingly, the practical thinking of the Soul is divine Providence, that is, the active knowledge of how to construct a sensible world in such a way that it is an excellent image of the world of Forms. However, we still need to know why the Intellect cannot providentially arrange the sensible world.⁴³ Why does Plotinus believe to need the Soul to do this? In other words: why can't practical thinking be intellectual? The answer I suggest is similar to the one given in the case of the theoretical thinking of the Soul: discursivity is necessary for practical thinking.

The paradigm that the Soul possesses allows itself to be realised in different ways, some of which exclude others. To see this, we may turn to the *Timaeus* and the example of the construction of human beings in the sensible world.⁴⁴ We start with a metaphysical notion of *human being*, that is, the definition of human being that the Soul gets from contemplating the corresponding intelligible Form. But beings exemplifying the content of this definition could in principle be constructed in different ways, all satisfying the definition. One Platonist constraint is that all sensible substances (and thus also the human beings to be constructed) are bodies. So the content of the definition must be realized in the form of bodies.

⁴² τίς οὖν ὁ λογισμὸς ἢ τίς ἀριθμησις ἢ τίς ἡ μνήμη παρούσης αἰὲ φρονήσεως καὶ ἐνεργούσης καὶ κρατούσης καὶ κατὰ τὰ αὐτὰ διοικούσης; Note that the term *dioikein* is already in Stoicism used in a technical way to describe the providential arrangement of the world. For this passage see Caluori (forthcoming).

⁴³ For the following, see my earlier discussion in Caluori (2005).

⁴⁴ For the importance of practical thinking in the *Timaeus*, see Burnyeat (2005b). I am suggesting that Plotinus was well aware of – and took seriously – this crucial feature of the *Timaeus*.

Given that human beings, unlike oysters, are rational, a sophisticated brain will be useful for human beings but presumably not for oysters. In order to protect the brain, it will be helpful to place it into a head that is hard enough to prevent it from being damaged, as we learn from the *Timaeus*. In order to function as a corporeal human being, however, more than a brain in a head is necessary: it is an excellent idea to connect the head to a suitable trunk to which arms and legs are attached, and so on.

It is easy to see from this example how each decision influences further decisions. For example, the decision to create a brain makes it an attractive option to create a head while brainless oysters may only need shells. In an earlier paper I compared this aspect to playing chess.⁴⁵ In chess, there are a number of possible opening moves. Some of them are standard moves, which are all intrinsically equally good opening moves.⁴⁶ As soon as you have opened the game, however, things change: some further moves, even though still legal, are no longer reasonable to make, while others are good moves. The difference between the goodness and badness of these moves depends at least in part on the opening move one has chosen. Choosing further moves will have consequences for the evaluation of yet further moves, and so on. The crucial element about practical thinking in this sense is that the value of each move (except for the first) depends on what moves have been made prior to it. Applying this to the Soul's thinking about the creation of a sensible world, it is easy to see that the latter could have been arranged in a number of ways, some of them (and not only one) making it an excellent image of the world of Forms. Thus, the paradigm alone cannot completely determine in which way the sensible world has to be arranged – it could have been determined in a number of excellent ways (excellent ways that exclude one another). Yet providence, the practical thinking of the Soul, has determined the way in which the actual sensible world is to be arranged. And, in analogy to the chess example, the value of each particular event in the sensible world depends on the whole chain of events constituting the history of the sensible world.⁴⁷

An intellect would not be capable of thinking in this way; intellectual contemplation is the immediate grasp of reality. Everything that the Intellect grasps is necessarily the way it is. Moreover, the object of intellectual contemplation is constitutive of intellectual contemplation itself.

⁴⁵ Caluori (2005) 86.

⁴⁶ For a contemporary discussion of various potential excellent creations see Adams (1972).

⁴⁷ Again, this does not imply that the practical thinking of the Soul is a process in time. I shall come back to this in [Chapters 4 and 7](#).

The strong unity that the Intellect possesses leaves no room for other possible arrangements of its parts. The place of each entity in the realm of Forms is necessarily the place of the entity whose place it is. The Intellect, in other words, could not think in a way other than the way it does and, accordingly, the truths about the world of Forms are necessary truths.

Discursive thinking, by contrast, has as its object not only necessary truths. It is possible to think discursively also about contingent truths.⁴⁸ In this case, something might or might not, for example, be predicated of something else. Discursive thinking is thus much more flexible than intellectual contemplation and allows for many variations (for many possible worlds if you will). Different highly complex *logoi* can be constructed that all may serve for the construction of a sensible world. Accordingly, the Soul, because it thinks discursively, can also think about contingent truths, whereas the Intellect, due to its intellectual contemplation, cannot. This is the reason why the account of the creation of a sensible world presupposes discursive thinking from a practical point of view.⁴⁹

Now one might argue that the example from the *Timaeus* given above (the construction of corporeal human beings) is not a sign of divine providence because the human body, in all its details, is already there in the Form Human Being. At *Ennead* VI 7, 10 we learn, for example, that also horns and such things are there in the intelligible realm. As a consequence (one's argument may continue) there is no need for divine practical thinking in Plotinus: the Soul, rather than thinking about arranging a sensible world providentially, only contemplatively unfolds what is there in the Intellect from which contemplation corresponding individuals in the sensible world come into existence.

In answer to this I first wish to note that not everything in the intelligible world is a Form in the Intellect. The Soul, as I have argued, is there, too. Therefore when Plotinus claims that there are horns in the intelligible realm, this does not imply that the Form Alpine Ibex, or any other Form,

⁴⁸ By 'contingent' I mean 'not logically (or metaphysically) necessary'. I do not mean random or undetermined. In this sense it is consistent to say of an event or a fact in the sensible world that it is both contingent and necessary if by 'necessary' one means 'determined'. I do not deny that the sensible world is determined according to Plotinus.

⁴⁹ Note that this argument aims to support the claim that the thinking of the Soul, as opposed to that of the Intellect, must be discursive. It does not as such show that the Soul thinks practically. For a consideration of possible creations see *Enn.* VI 7, 7, 1–17, where Plotinus compares the soul to craftsmen who know many forms but just make one of the many possible things – the one they are ordered to make or which their material requires.

contains or partly consists of horns. It is hard to explain theoretically why and how things whose nature clearly consists in their practical function in a sensible world (like horns or hands) should be contained in the Intellect and thus exist in the intelligible realm. Note that it would have to be explained *without* a view to the creation of a sensible world. Instead I suggest that the essence of the horns of an ibex is the function they possess in the ibex's life in a sensible world: the reason for their existence is practical.

But let us concede, for the sake of argument, that the Form Alpine Ibex, for example, contains horns. More generally, let us grant that each species of living being in the sensible world in all its detail is already there in the Intellect as a single Form respectively (e.g. that the Form Human Being includes a human head, two hands, hair and all other details of the human body).⁵⁰ Even if this is the case, there are reasons to believe that the sensible world is providentially arranged according to Plotinus. When discussing the historical background in [Chapter 1](#), I referred to *Timaeus* 30BC where Plato, in the context of the discussion of the divine Craftsman, states that the sensible world becomes good through God's providence. At *Ennead* IV 4, 9, 1–6 also Plotinus attributes providence to God (in this passage called "Zeus") "who sets everything in order" (*panta kosmōn*). Moreover, there are a number of passages where he discusses God's administration and rule of the sensible world, thereby using the term *dioikēsis*, which the Stoics already used in a technical sense to describe the providential arrangement of the world.⁵¹ Indeed, in many of these passages Plotinus attributes the administration of the world not simply to God but specifically to the soul.

It should also be mentioned that in addition to the early treatise *On Fate* (*Enn.* III 1) already discussed in [Chapter 1](#), Plotinus wrote a long treatise called *On Providence* (*Enn.* III 2 f.; no. 47 f. in Porphyry's chronological order), in which he argues in quite some detail that the sensible world is providentially arranged so as to be an excellent image of the world of Forms.⁵²

Moreover, at *Ennead* II 9, 15 Plotinus chides Epicurus as well as some Gnostics for not believing in the providential arrangement of the sensible world. He argues that a consequence of denying divine providence is the

⁵⁰ We may even grant for the sake of argument that there is an individual Form Socrates that contains all features of Socrates' body (the colour of his beard, etc.).

⁵¹ For example at *Enn.* II 1, 4, 30–32; *Enn.* II 3, 6, 14–20; *Enn.* II 3, 13, 3–8; *Enn.* II 9, 6–9 *passim*; *Enn.* IV 3, 7, 12–15; *Enn.* IV 3, 13, 12–17; *Enn.* IV 4, 11, 1–11 etc.

⁵² See Song (2009a) 95–119 and Song (2009b).

rejection of virtue and mentions in particular his opponents' doing away with practical wisdom (*phronēsis*) and justice (*dikaiosunē*). As Song has shown, Plotinus thus understands divine providence not only as the *factual* order of the sensible world but also as its *normative* order.⁵³ Now I do not wish to discuss *why* he thinks that there being providence is a necessary condition for virtue,⁵⁴ yet on the basis of such passages it seems to me hard to see how one can deny that the sensible world is providentially arranged according to Plotinus.

Does the providential arrangement of the sensible world presuppose practical thinking? Firstly, note that Plotinus, in the context of discussing the providential arrangement of the sensible world, often claims that this arrangement is due to divine practical wisdom (*phronēsis*).⁵⁵ The reason for this can ultimately be found in the fact that the sensible world is crucially structured differently from the world of Forms. Because the world of Forms, at least as seen by the soul, is structured in terms of genera and species, the soul's theoretical contemplation will consist in understanding genera, species and their interrelation.⁵⁶ The sensible world, by contrast, is structured in space and time. Plotinus emphasises this difference in *Ennead* III 7 by claiming that in the sensible world, in contrast to the intelligible world, one thing occurs after another (e.g. *Enn.* III 7, II, 35–40). In other words, the sensible world is crucially structured by events that occur in a temporal order – an order that is alien to the intelligible world.⁵⁷ The organisation of this spatio-temporal order is due not simply to the contemplation of genera and species but also to practical thinking as, I think, the two following passages show.

At *Ennead* III 3, 2, 6–11 Plotinus states:

The all [i.e. the sensible world] is ordered by a general-like providence (*stratēgikē pronoia*) which sees the actions and experiences and what must be ready, food and drink and not least all the weapons and war engines; everything that occurs as a consequence of their being interwoven is foreseen, so that the result possesses room to be well ordered; and everything comes in a well-planned way from the general.⁵⁸

⁵³ Song (2009a) 113f.

⁵⁴ Roughly the idea will be that acting virtuously is crucially contributing to the providential arrangement of the sensible world.

⁵⁵ *Enn.* IV 2, 2, 42–48; *Enn.* IV 4, 10, 9–13; *Enn.* IV 4, 11–12 etc.

⁵⁶ If there are Forms of individuals (such as the Form of Socrates), understanding their place within their species will be crucial to understanding them.

⁵⁷ For a more detailed discussion see Caluori (forthcoming).

⁵⁸ Ἐτάχθη δὲ τὸ πᾶν προνοίᾳ στρατηγικῇ ὁρώσῃ καὶ τὰς πράξεις καὶ τὰ πάθη καὶ ἃ δεῖ παρῆναι, σιτία καὶ ποτὰ καὶ δὴ καὶ ὅπλα πάντα καὶ μηχανήματα, καὶ ὅσα ἐξ αὐτῶν συμπλεκόμενων προεώραται, ἵνα τὸ ἐκ τούτων συμβαῖνον ἔχῃ χώραν τοῦ τεθῆναι εὖ, καὶ ἐλήλυθε πάντα τρόπον τινὰ εὐμήχανον παρὰ τοῦ στρατηγοῦ κτλ.

This passage confirms that the providential arrangement of the sensible world is teleological and that it reaches down to the smallest details. Moreover, it is emphasised that the art of the (ideal) general with which providence is compared is based on practical reason: everything is organised “in a well-planned way” (*tropon tina eumēchanon*).

At *Ennead* IV 4, 39, 11–17 Plotinus compares the rationality (*logos*) that governs the world to the rationality that governs a state:

But perhaps the rationality of the world is better compared to the rationality that establishes the order and law of a state – a rationality that already includes the knowledge of what the citizens are going to do and by account of what they are going to do it; with a view to all of this, it legislates and weaves together by means of laws everything they experience and do and the honours and dishonours of their actions in such a manner that everything [in the state] happens as if it had been brought into harmony spontaneously.⁵⁹

Just as in a (well-governed) state, the events occurring in the sensible world are well-ordered by (practical) rationality and everything that the citizens of the world are going to do is already anticipated by and taken into account in the *logos* that governs the world.

Interestingly, this passage suggests that the arrangement of the sensible world is achieved by means of laws. This idea goes back (at least) to later Stoics, such as Seneca, who also believe that the government of the sensible world is accomplished by a law that they call the law of nature. It is important to note that this law of nature accounts not only for the factual order of the world but also, normatively, for its goodness: due to Fate the factual and the normative order coincide (Seneca, *Prov.* 5.6 f.).⁶⁰ This does not imply, either in Stoicism or in Plotinus, that Providence does not care for everything down to the smallest detail. In any case, as his comparison with the state shows, Plotinus does not believe in such an implication.⁶¹

⁵⁹ Ἀλλὰ μάλλον ἂν εἰκοίη ὁ λόγος τοῦ παντός κατὰ λόγον τιθέντα κόσμον πόλεως καὶ νόμον, ἥδη εἰδὸτα ἃ πράξουσιν οἱ πολῖται καὶ δι' ἃ πράξουσιν, καὶ πρὸς ταῦτα πάντα νομοθετοῦντος καὶ συνυφαίνοντος τοῖς νόμοις τὰ πάθη πάντα αὐτῶν καὶ τὰ ἔργα καὶ τὰς ἐπὶ τοῖς ἔργοις τιμὰς καὶ ἀτιμίας, πάντων ὁδῶ ὅσον αὐτομάτῃ εἰς συμφωνίαν χωρῶντων.

⁶⁰ See Inwood (2005) 231.

⁶¹ Perhaps the following analogy will help to make this point: assume that some version of rule utilitarianism is true and that, furthermore, a state (or the world) is factually organised in such a way that all actions and events in it maximise goodness precisely as demanded by the sort of rule utilitarianism in question. In such a state or world, every single event and action optimally contributes to the best arrangement of the sensible world – exactly as it ought to.

Plotinus' comparison of the arrangement of the sensible world with the arrangement of a state shows that the knowledge in question is knowledge of what people are going to do, and is thus practical knowledge. Accordingly, providence is identical with or at least presupposes, practical rationality. The smooth and harmonious flow of the sensible world does not happen spontaneously – it is brought about by (practical) reason.

Creation, contemplation and the Craftsman

I argued in the last section that the Soul contemplates the Living Being (the world of Forms) for two reasons. Firstly, a life of contemplation is the best possible life for a soul and thus also for the Soul. Secondly, the Soul sees the Living Being as a paradigm for the creation of a sensible world. In addition to its theoretical activity, the Soul thinks practically about how to create a sensible world as an excellent image of the Living Being. I identified the Soul's practical thinking with divine providence.

It is clear that the Soul's contemplation is *prior* to its practical thinking in at least two ways. Firstly, the activity of contemplation is prior to practical thinking in that, being the single most valuable activity for a soul, it is more valuable than practical thinking. Secondly, making an image presupposes familiarity with the original. You need to know what Mona Lisa looks like before you can think about how to paint her so as to best capture what she looks like. I do not mean this in a temporal sense; rather, you cannot do the latter without the former but you can do the former without the latter; you can look at Mona Lisa and decide not to paint her.⁶²

Now one might think that Plotinus in some treatises makes a stronger claim. According to this claim contemplation is not only prior to practical thinking but actually sufficient for the production of a sensible world. If so, we would have a model of non-demiurgic production exclusively based on contemplation. The sensible world would immediately emanate or flow out of divine contemplation in such a way that there would be no need for a divine Craftsman. It is sometimes argued that such a view can be found in the so-called *Großschrift*.⁶³ The *Großschrift* is a long treatise that Porphyry cut into the four treatises now known as *Enneads* III 8, V 8, V 5

⁶² This is compatible with the view that the Soul, in its very nature, is such that it will create a sensible world.

⁶³ See Bréhier's *notice* to *Enn.* III 8. O'Meara (1980) 370 sees in the *Großschrift* "a non-demiurgic, contemplative mode of production" at work. See also Wildberg (2009) 133.

and II 9.⁶⁴ Plotinus presumably (at least partly) wrote it in order to steer some of his friends away from the Gnosticism they had absorbed before joining his circle (*Enn.* II 9, 10, 3–5).⁶⁵ The focus of *Ennead* III 8 is clearly on contemplation and Plotinus discusses contemplation in such a way that it appears to pervade everything from the Intellect down to trees and other plants. In what follows I wish to discuss what Plotinus means when referring to contemplation in *Ennead* III 8. I will also attempt to show that, against the stronger claim presented above, the divine Craftsman is present in the *Großschrift* and therefore that in this work Plotinus does not reject divine practical thinking.

Before doing so, however, it may be worthwhile to remind ourselves of two (related) reasons why Plotinus needs to introduce divine practical thinking that I have already discussed and to briefly look at a couple of further reasons. I have argued that the sensible world is providentially arranged and that it is an excellent image of the world of Forms – not any image will do. Relatedly, I also considered in [Chapter 1](#) Plotinus' rejection of the view that all events in the sensible world are caused by the World Soul. He rejects this view precisely because he wants to make room for other rational agents as well, that is, for other practically thinking beings in the sensible world (such as ourselves). We will see in [Chapter 5](#) that, for the same reason, Plotinus rejects astral determinism.

Quite generally, it should be noted that there are only three hypostases in Plotinus – and the sensible world is not one of them. Hence we should expect that there is a crucial distinction between how a lower hypostasis is related to (or proceeds from) its immediately preceding hypostasis (e.g. how the Soul is an image of the Intellect) and how the sensible world is related to (or proceeds from) the Soul.⁶⁶ If the sensible world were to proceed from the Soul in the same way as the Soul does from the Intellect, it would be a fourth hypostasis – a further differentiation or articulation of God. However, this is not the case. Thus, regardless of the way we construct the procedure or emanation of one hypostasis from another, the sensible world must come into existence in a different way. Creation, I suggest, solves this problem. And creation is a practical affair, as we know from the *Timaeus*.

Here is a further reason that we shall discuss in more detail in the [next chapter](#). While every Form is realised in the sensible world, it is not the case

⁶⁴ Harder (1936) was the first to argue that these four treatises form one work. An argument that they belong closely together can already be found in Wundt (1919) 18–21.

⁶⁵ See Wundt (1919) 19 and O'Meara (1980) 376f.

⁶⁶ For the emanation of one hypostasis from another, see Emilsson (2007) chapter 1f.

that there is a soul for every Form. Let us grant for the sake of argument that there are Forms of individuals (such as that of Socrates) and that there is an individual Form for every individual (such as Socrates) respectively. Even if we grant this, why, theoretically, are there souls that only correspond to Forms of such individuals as Socrates? Why not also of species and genera? More generally, there is a soul neither of Justice nor of any other Form that is realised in the sensible world in ways other than as an individual living being. It is hard to see how we can account for these facts on the level of theoretical thinking alone. How can theoretical reason determine for which Forms there are corresponding souls and for which Forms there are not? And how can there be a World Soul that does not correspond to any particular Form (and is distinct from the hypostasis Soul)?⁶⁷ Practical thinking, by contrast, does not only explain why there are individual souls of the types there are and of no other type but also does so in agreement with the *Timaeus*. For, as we have seen, in the *Timaeus* souls are made to endow living beings in the sensible world with reason.

Plotinus discusses in many of his treatises the divine Craftsman but nowhere does he reject his existence.⁶⁸ A craftsman is essentially (whether or not exclusively) a practical thinker: if there is a craftsman, there is practical thinking. Now while I argue that Plotinus holds on to the *Timaean* idea of a divine Craftsman, he rejects what seems to have been a quite influential (presumably Gnostic) interpretation of the Craftsman in his time. Plotinus sees at least three problems in the (presumably Gnostic) interpretation he rejects: (1) the Craftsman may seem to be independent of the paradigm (i.e. of the world of Forms); (2) the aim of the Craftsman's thinking may appear to be the thing the Craftsman produces; and (3) practical thinking may appear to be a process in time, a *logismos*. Plotinus rejects all three assumptions. We have already discussed the solution to problem (1) but I will briefly come back to it below. I will show in [Chapter 4](#) how Plotinus solves problem (2). And I have already pointed to the distinction between discursive thinking (not a process in time) and discursive reasoning (*logismos* – a process in time), to which I shall also return in [Chapter 4](#). By attributing only the former (but not the latter) to the divine Craftsman, problem (3) gets solved. The rejection of these three claims is compatible with the view that there is a divine, practically

⁶⁷ I discussed this in [Chapter 1](#). Moreover, the discussion of the World Soul in [Chapter 5](#) will further clarify this issue.

⁶⁸ At *Enn.* III 2, 3, 20 f. this is confirmed even by the sensible world itself! The sensible world says: "God made me" (ἐμὲ πεποίηκε θεὸς κτλ.).

thinking Craftsman as my explanation of how divine practical thinking works aims to show.

Let me now turn to the Großschrift. *Ennead* III 8, its first part, begins with the startling idea that all things aim at contemplation – not only rational beings but also non-rational living beings and even plants. Plotinus explicitly states that he *toys* (*paizein*) with this idea. The reason for this qualification consists, I think, in his awareness of how utterly unfamiliar this thought is and how absurd it appears at first sight. It also indicates that we should not expect a fully worked out theory. However, it neither shows that we should not take it seriously nor reveals that it will still appear absurd after careful consideration.

At *Ennead* III 8, 1, 19 f. trees and other plants are said not only to aim at contemplation but also to be contemplating. The claim that they *aim at* contemplation is perplexing enough but how can he possibly claim that plants do actually contemplate? Plotinus immediately rejects the idea that they contemplate by means of any of the cognitive capacities that intellects and souls in the intelligible realm possess. So the contemplation of plants can neither be the intellectual, non-discursive thinking of the Intellect nor the discursive thinking of the Soul; indeed, it does not even involve any process of discursive reasoning or presentations (*phantasiai*). So what does it mean for plants to contemplate?

The solution is already outlined at *Ennead* III 8, 1, 6 f. There are two ways, we are told, to achieve contemplation: some beings truly attain it whereas others attain it by means of imitation and by receiving an image of what they imitate.⁶⁹ While the divine Intellect, for example, attains true contemplation by being identical with the Living Being, the contemplation of plants, given their lack of cognitive capacities, must be of the second kind. Plants thus contemplate by imitation.

Before examining this further, note that the attribution of distinct but related meanings to the same word ‘contemplation’ is an instance of the larger phenomenon of the systematic equivocity discussed in the Introduction. From the above distinction it is clear that Plotinus uses the term ‘contemplation’ in at least two distinct senses, and thus equivocally. Looking closer at what it means for plants to contemplate will reveal that it is a *systematic* equivocity of the relevant sort (in the sense discussed in the Introduction).

⁶⁹ ἄλλα δὲ ἄλλως καὶ θεωρεῖν καὶ τυγχάνειν καὶ τὰ μὲν ἀληθῶς, τὰ δὲ μίμησιν καὶ εἰκόνα τούτου λαμβάνοντα κτλ.

Plotinus calls the power that is active in plants nature. Nature's activity in plants is productive in the sense that it consists in absorbing nutrients and water, in growing, dispersing seeds, and so on. This is the life of the plant.⁷⁰ At *Ennead* III 8, 3, 20 f. Plotinus states that this production, that is, the activity of nature in plants, is contemplation. Why is the productive activity of plants called 'contemplation'? By producing, nature contributes to the creation and maintenance of the sensible world as an excellent image of the Living Being (an image that reveals rationality); therefore, its production is its imitative contribution to the making of an excellent image. Now one may object that producing a plant is different from being a plant and that the production of the plant is a process ending with a plant. Yet if we think about plants in this way, we do so based on the model of the production of artefacts. The production of plants, however, is quite different. In a crucial sense, the production of a plant is the plant. For the plant is a living being and its life is what makes it what it is. This life precisely consists in the productive activity of nature in this plant. This explains why Plotinus thinks that plants both *aim at* contemplation and *are contemplating*. By keeping its plant alive, nature aims at contributing to the image of the Living Being but is also already contributing to it. What plants aim for in their activity is, at the same time, the achievement of this aim, namely their productive activity, their life.

In the following chapter Plotinus refines this picture by adding an inner contemplation to nature, thereby resuming a distinction between external activity and internal contemplation that he already mentioned at *Ennead* III 8, 1, 18–24.⁷¹ He identifies nature as a soul which “quietly possesses contemplation in itself, neither directed upwards nor downwards, remaining stationary in what it is”.⁷² It is clear that also this contemplation must be non-rational. Wildberg proposes a helpful analogy to understand what sort of inner contemplation nature may possess: “To use a modern analogy, we could say that it amounts to no more and no less than enzymes ‘reading’ a cell’s genetic code and determining the cell’s functioning accordingly” (Wildberg (2009) 134). Whatever the physiological details in Plotinus may be, it is reasonably clear that nature must possess all the information necessary for the production of plants. Yet in addition it may also, as *Ennead* III 8 suggests, possess an inner activity of reading or activating

⁷⁰ I discuss plants and nature in more detail in Chapter 8.

⁷¹ For this passage see in particular Wildberg (2009) 129–132.

⁷² Ὡς ἡ μὲν λεγομένη φύσις ψυχὴ οὐσα . . . ἡσυχῇ ἐν ἑαυτῇ θεωρίαν ἔχουσα οὐ πρὸς τὸ ἄνω οὐδ’ αὐτὴ πρὸς τὸ κάτω, στάσα δὲ ἐν ᾧ ἔστιν κτλ.

this information in order to produce plants. What nature possesses and contemplates in this sense is, of course, also a reflection or an image of a part of the Living Being, so that nature's inner contemplation is also imitation. Only if this is so will it be able to produce living bodies that are images of Forms.

We can find further senses of 'contemplation' on other ontological levels but for our purposes it will not be necessary to consider them. On all levels, contemplation is grounded in an attempt to come as close as possible to true reality in the way appropriate to the corresponding ontological level: the Intellect is identical with the Living Being, the Soul contemplates it by thinking discursively about it and so on. On the lowest level contemplation is productive imitation in the sensible world. Yet the fact that there are different layers of contemplation (in different senses) and that lower layers depend on and are images of higher levels does not imply that practical thinking is unnecessary for the creation of a sensible world. Indeed, as I will now try to show, the existence of the divine Craftsman (and thus of divine practical thinking) is not denied in the *Großschrift* but rather confirmed.

At *Ennead* V 8, 7 Plotinus argues that the creator (*poiētēs*: *Enn.* V 8, 7, 2) creates a sensible world with a view to the world of Forms. Because he possesses the paradigm, and is even identical with it, his demiurgic activity (*dēmiourgia*: *Enn.* V 8, 7, 25) is without toil: he does not have to go through a process of reasoning and need not plan out or invent what he wants to create. At *Ennead* V 8, 8, 9 Plotinus explicitly refers to the Craftsman and explains why Plato depicts him as being delighted with his work (*Ti.* 37CD): that the Craftsman is delighted with his excellent work indicates, we are told, that its paradigm must be even more excellent. Plotinus adds that those who blame the visible world do not do so rightly except perhaps in comparison to the intelligible world (*Enn.* V 8, 8, 17–23). Yet he does not chide them for believing in the *existence* of a Craftsman.

The emphasis on contemplation in *Ennead* III 8 and on intelligible beauty in *Ennead* V 8 can be explained with a view to what presumably was the purpose of the *Großschrift*. Plotinus wanted to convince his friends with (presumably) Gnostic inclinations that this world is excellent and that it is an image of the intelligible world, which is even more excellent. This world was created as an image of the world of Forms rather than being the invention of an incompetent Craftsman. This is perfectly consistent with the view that there is a competent Craftsman who creates the image with a view to the world of Forms.

This becomes particularly clear in the final section of the *Großschrift*, *Ennead* II 9, entitled by Porphyry *Against the Gnostics*. At *Ennead* II 9, 5, 24 Plotinus reproaches his (presumably Gnostic) opponents for not honouring this creation (*dēmiourgia*). In [chapter 4](#) of the same treatise he disagrees with those who believe that this world is created when the Soul, turning away from the Intelligible, no longer remembers it. Only the Craftsman's forgetfulness would make it necessary for him to reason discursively. It would mean that the Soul's creative activity does not arise out of its nature. The opponents' problem thus consists in misunderstanding what the Craftsman is and how he creates; it is neither the view that he exists, nor that he thinks practically.

Perhaps the most important passage for our purposes is *Ennead* II 9, 6, where Plotinus rejects the Gnostic understanding of *Timaeus* 39E. This is the core passage from the *Timaeus* that we discussed in quite some detail above. One major misunderstanding consists in the Gnostic conviction that Plato in this passage distinguishes between three distinct and separate beings: the Living Being, the Craftsman and the being that thinks discursively. Their understanding it in this way explains how they can think that the Soul turns away from the Intellect and from the Living Being, forgetting them when it creates the sensible world. Plotinus, by contrast, thinks, as we have seen, that the Intellect and the Living Being are identical and that the Intellect and the Soul are two hypostases of the same being, namely of God. Note that, once more, Plotinus does not blame his opponents for postulating the existence of the Craftsman (or for believing that he thinks practically) but again for misunderstanding what he is.

In the same context, still discussing the core passage from the *Timaeus*, Plotinus defends Plato's account of creation: "And in general they speak falsely of his [sc. Plato's] account of the way of creation (*dēmiourgia*), and many other things, and drag down the man's teachings as if they had understood the intelligible nature but he and the other blessed men had not" (*Enn.* II 9, 6, 24–28).⁷³ Once more Plotinus defends the *Timaeus* view of the Craftsman. Further confirmation for this can be found at *Ennead* II 9, 8, 1 f.: "To ask why it [sc. the soul] made the universe is like asking why there is a soul and why the Craftsman made."⁷⁴ Plotinus here crucially

⁷³ καὶ ὅλως τὸν τρόπον τῆς δημιουργίας καὶ ἄλλα πολλὰ καταψεύδονται αὐτοῦ καὶ πρὸς τὸ χεῖρον ἔλκουσι τὰς δόξας τοῦ ἀνδρός ὡς αὐτοὶ μὲν τὴν νοητὴν φύσιν κατανενοηκότες, ἐκείνου δὲ καὶ τῶν ἄλλων τῶν μακαρίων ἀνδρῶν μή.

⁷⁴ τὸ δὲ διὰ τί ἐποίησε κόσμον ταῦτόν τῳ διὰ τί ἔστι ψυχὴ καὶ διὰ τί ὁ δημιουργὸς ἐποίησεν. See also *Enn.* II 9, 17, 32–38, where we learn that there is such beauty in things perceived by the senses that one cannot help but admire their maker.

states that the Soul is essentially involved in the creation of this universe (in the sense discussed above) and considers its work as that of the Craftsman. He neither says that there is no Craftsman nor states that he did not make. The *Großschrift* thus confirms that contemplation is prior to practical thinking but does not reject the view that there is a divine Craftsman or that there is practical thinking. What Plotinus does reject is rather a misunderstanding of the Craftsman's practical thinking. It consists neither in any process of discursive reasoning nor in inventing what is to be created, but rather in the Soul's essential discursive practical thought that is ultimately informed by the Intellect's contemplation.

There are other treatises where Plotinus focuses on the fact that the sensible world is completely determined by the intelligible world without explaining in any detail *how* this is brought about. Indeed, in some treatises he does not even mention the Craftsman or the soul in the intelligible world at all (e.g. *Ennead* VI 7). Yet it does not follow from this that Plotinus, when writing these treatises, denied the existence of the divine Craftsman. Rather, the problems he deals with in these treatises do not make it necessary for him (or so he thought) to discuss the Craftsman (or the soul in the intelligible world). Perhaps this is so because practical thinking does not add anything to *what* gets created or made but is only concerned with *how* to create.

To conclude this chapter, I have argued that discursive or propositional thinking is the essential activity of the Soul. By means of discursive thinking, the Soul thinks both theoretically and practically. In its theoretical thinking, it blissfully contemplates the world of Forms, and thus true reality, but it also sees it as a paradigm. The latter presupposes discursive thinking; for, as we have seen, only discursive thinking can give the sensible world its fundamental metaphysical structure. The Soul also thinks about the excellent arrangement of a sensible world and thus about *how* a sensible world ought to be structured so as to be excellently arranged. I identified this as the Soul's practical thinking and as divine providence and argued that it has to be discursive (or propositional), too. As claimed in [Chapter 1](#), this is one of Plotinus' major reasons for introducing the hypostasis Soul in particular: he needs it to explain the creation of a sensible world. We are now ready to study the precise way the hypostasis Soul accounts for the unity of all souls (the second reason mentioned in [Chapter 1](#) for introducing the hypostasis Soul) and how individual souls get individuated. I shall discuss this against the background of the individuation of individual intellects.

*The hypostasis Soul and its relation
to individual souls*

As far as souls are concerned we have only considered the *hypostasis* Soul so far. However, there are also individual souls, just as there are individual intellects.¹ In the present chapter I wish to consider the relation of the hypostasis Soul to individual souls. This relation is, as we shall see, rather complicated. Before starting to discuss it, however, let me make three preliminary remarks. Firstly, in this chapter when I speak of ‘individual souls’ I am referring only to individual *rational* souls, that is, souls whose nature it is to think. Non-rational souls will be dealt with in [Chapter 8](#). Secondly, we know that according to Plotinus there are different types of individual rational soul. There are divine souls, such as the World Soul, the souls of the stars and the soul of the earth, and there are human souls. The differences between different types of individual rational soul do not play any role in the problem discussed in this chapter. Thus, the expression ‘individual soul’ does not refer to members of any type of individual rational soul in particular but applies to all individual rational souls equally. Thirdly, individual rational souls also possess functions that are not covered by what I am going to discuss in this chapter. I shall deal with these functions in later chapters.

This chapter consists of three sections. In the first section the relation of the hypostasis Soul to individual souls will be considered in a rather formal way. I shall discuss this in the context of a class of elements that share a formal feature with the Soul, namely the feature that they are one and many (the expression ‘one and many’ shall be understood here in a specific sense). Furthermore, I shall compare the Soul with two other members of

¹ Note that an individual intellect is not necessarily an intellect of an individual (an intellect of an individual being, for example, the intellect of Socrates). While the existence of individual intellects is generally accepted, the existence of intellects of individuals is disputed. See Rist (1963), Blumenthal (1966), Blumenthal (1971a) ch. 9, Armstrong (1977), Rist (1970), Gerson (1994) 72–78, Kalligas (1997) and O’Meara (1999a). For our purposes only individual intellects (but not in particular intellects of individuals) need to be considered.

this class, namely with the Intellect and with genera. We shall see that Intellect and Soul are wholes of the same type. In the second section I shall give content to the formal discussion of the first part with a view to the Intellect and its relation to individual intellects. This discussion will also explain how individual intellects get individuated. In the final section I shall do the same with the Soul and consider the relation of the Soul to individual souls and how the latter get individuated. This discussion will be based on that of section two.

Being one and many

We find in various passages in the *Enneads* the claim that the Soul is both one and many.² The Soul is not the only thing that Plotinus considers to be one and many; there is a class of such things. At first sight it is clear that things that are one and many must be distinguished from two other types of thing. On the one hand things belonging to this class are not *simpliciter* one. According to Plotinus only the first and highest hypostasis, the One, is *simpliciter* one. On the other hand, neither are they pure multiplicities; they possess more unity than a mere collection of things, such as a heap. Clearly, between the two extreme cases of the One and a heap, one can think of many things with various degrees of unity, and one might think that all these things might be called one and many in some sense. In order to explain the sense which Plotinus has in mind by calling the Soul (just as a number of other things) one and many it is helpful, I think, to introduce another pair of notions, namely the notions of whole and part. The introduction of this pair of notions to characterise the relation of Soul to individual souls is justified because Plotinus explicitly calls the Soul a whole and the individual souls its parts.³ Intellect and genus are also called wholes, whose parts are individual intellects and species respectively.⁴ As we shall see, all three (Intellect, Soul and genus) are wholes *of the same type*.⁵

There are at least two types of whole one might wish to distinguish, as we can learn from a passage in Plato's *Theaetetus*.⁶ In their discussion of the

² *Enn.* IV 2, 2, 40; IV 2, 2, 53; IV 3, 3, 10; VI 2, 4, 31f.; VI 2, 5, 14. *Enn.* IV 9 is devoted to the question of how the soul can be one and many.

³ At *Enn.* IV 8, 3, 6ff. This passage will be discussed below.

⁴ Also at *Enn.* IV 8, 3, 6ff., to be discussed below.

⁵ Merlan has seen that the unity of the Soul must be of the same type as the unity of the Intellect. He claims, however, that the Soul, like the Intellect, is – in itself – not many but only one (Merlan (1963) 54f.). Against this I shall argue that both the Intellect and the Soul are – in themselves – one and many.

⁶ For a study of whole and part in Plato see Harte (2002).

relation of letters (e.g. the letters ‘S’ and ‘O’) to a syllable (e.g. the syllable ‘SO’) Socrates and Theaetetus consider the following possibility: “For perhaps one must take a syllable to be, not the letters, but some one thing which has come into being out of the letters, possessing itself one form of itself and being different from the letters” (*Tht.* 203E).⁷ Accordingly, Socrates suggests distinguishing two kinds of whole, namely wholes that are like the syllable as considered in the above example and wholes that are no more than the sum of their parts.⁸ In an interesting passage in the *Parmenides*, which bears many verbal correspondences to the passage in the *Theaetetus*, Plato has Parmenides claim: “But the whole must be one out of many, and the parts will be parts of this; for each part will not be the part of the many but of the whole” (*Prm.* 157C).⁹ And “Hence the part is not part of the many or of the sum but of one form and of one thing which we call whole, which has come into being from the sum as a perfect one” (*Prm.* 157DE).¹⁰ Also in this passage, Plato distinguishes a whole that is not just the sum of its parts from a whole that just is the sum of its parts.¹¹ It seems even to be implied in this passage that only the former whole is a whole, strictly speaking. For the latter, the sum, does not – strictly speaking – have parts. Although Plato in neither passage explicitly says so, it can easily be seen that the whole of the first type might be called a whole that is one and many; it is neither *simpliciter* one, as Plato makes clear in the *Parmenides* passage, nor is it only many, which, if it were, would make it the other type of whole, the sum. Thus, the type of whole which Plato seems to consider the true whole might be seen to be not only a one that is *constituted* by many but also a one that is not only one, but one and many.¹²

One might wonder whether there are wholes of this type and one might have the view that all wholes are no more than the sums of their parts. Whether there are wholes of this type had already been discussed in the Old Academy. While the prevalent view seems to have been that there are such wholes, Xenocrates disagreed. A consideration of Xenocrates’ position

⁷ χρῆν γὰρ ἴσως τὴν συλλαβὴν τίθεσθαι μὴ τὰ στοιχεῖα ἀλλ’ ἐξ ἐκείνων ἓν τι γεγονός, ἰδέαν μίαν αὐτὸ αὐτοῦ ἔχον, ἕτερον δὲ τῶν στοιχείων.

⁸ Socrates also goes on to distinguish terminologically between these two types of whole, in calling the former ὅλον and the latter πᾶν (*Tht.* 204AB). Plotinus follows Plato’s ontological distinction without making this terminological distinction.

⁹ ἀλλὰ μὴν τό γε ὅλον ἓν ἐκ πολλῶν ἀνάγκη εἶναι, οὐ ἔσται μόρια τὰ μόρια· ἕκαστον γὰρ τῶν μορίων οὐ πολλῶν μόριον χρῆ εἶναι, ἀλλὰ ὅλου.

¹⁰ οὐκ ἄρα τῶν πολλῶν οὐδὲ πάντων τὸ μόριον μόριον, ἀλλὰ μᾶς τινὸς ἰδέας καὶ ἑνὸς τινος ὃ καλοῦμεν ὅλον, ἐξ ἀπάντων ἓν τέλειον γεγονός κτλ.

¹¹ For a comparison of the quoted passages from the *Tht.* and from the *Prm.* see McDowell (1973) 243ff.

¹² At *Phlb.* 15 BC the question whether there are units (μονάδες) which are one and many is considered. In this passage it is *not* presupposed that such a unit is *constituted* by many.

is helpful for our discussion, I believe, not only because it shows us what was seen to be implied by the view that there are things that are one and many. It is also helpful because it shows how the notions of ‘one’ and ‘many’, ‘whole’ and ‘part’ and – as we will shortly see – also of ‘genus’ and ‘species’ are related.

Xenocrates seems to have been worried by the claim that there are things that are one and many because he thought that this would mean predicating contradictory predicates (namely ‘one’ and ‘many’) of the same thing, thus violating the law of non-contradiction.¹³ Xenocrates’ view is nicely summarised in a fragment of Alexander of Aphrodisias (preserved by Simplicius) that runs as follows:

Xenocrates of Chalcedon gave this argument concerning bisection, holding that the divisible sum (*to pan to diaireton*) is many (for the part is different from the whole) and that the same cannot, at the same time, be one and many because contradictory items cannot be true together . . . For in this way he believed to find the nature of the one and to avoid contradiction, namely because the divisible is not one but many. (Simp. *in Phys.* 138, 10ff. Diels)¹⁴

According to this fragment, Xenocrates wished to do away with wholes, which according to Plato are true wholes, that is, wholes that are distinct from the sum of their parts. For Xenocrates, however, wholes are not one but only many; that is, they are only sums. Moreover, he believed, according to this fragment, that what is divisible is not one. Only indivisible things are one, divisible things being merely the sum of a certain number of things that are either themselves sums or indivisible things. Only these indivisible things are ones. Xenocrates uses the expression *atomos* that I render as ‘indivisible’, and we might thus call Xenocrates’ view a version of atomism, claiming that the primary and basic entities are indivisible and that everything else is in some way or other a combination of these basic atomic entities. On the basis of this principle Xenocrates claims, for example, that there are even indivisible lines (*atomoi grammai*) which are the principles of all lines in the sense that all divisible lines are constituted by indivisible lines. He also seems to have defended the view

¹³ For a discussion of Xenocrates’ position see Pines (1961).

¹⁴ τοῦτω δὲ τῷ λόγῳ, φησί, τῷ περὶ τῆς διχοτομίας ἐνδοῦναι Ξενοκράτη τὸν Καλχηδόνιον δεξάμενον μὲν τὸ πᾶν τὸ διαίρετόν πολλαῖ εἶναι (τὸ γὰρ μέρος ἕτερον εἶναι τοῦ ὅλου) καὶ τὸ μὴ δύνασθαι ταῦτόν ἐν τε ἅμα καὶ πολλὰ εἶναι διὰ τὸ μὴ συναληθεύεσθαι τὴν ἀντίφασιν, . . . οὕτως γὰρ ᾤετο τὴν τοῦ ἐνὸς εὐρίσκειν φύσιν καὶ φεύγειν τὴν ἀντίφασιν διὰ τοῦ μήτε τὸ διαίρετόν ἐν εἶναι ἀλλὰ πολλὰ, κτλ. (fr. 138 Isnardi Parente=fr. 44 Heinze).

that there are indivisible planes and indivisible geometrical solids.¹⁵ Xenocrates' idea of postulating basic geometrical entities might have been due to Plato's *Timaeus*, where minimal triangles are postulated as basic entities for the constitution of the sensible world (*Ti.* 53 C–55 C).¹⁶

One context in which Xenocrates' view was of prime importance is that of a theory of genera and species – a topic hotly debated in the Old Academy. Xenocrates believed (thereby presumably opposing the dominant strand in the Old Academy) that species are ontologically prior to genera. He compared genera to wholes and species to parts and claimed that genera are nothing but the sums of their species, giving ontological priority to species. There is a fragment, preserved only in Arabic, which claims precisely this.¹⁷ Here is the fragment in full:

Alexander says: Xenocrates says: If the relation between a species and a genus is like the relation between a part and a whole, and if a part is anterior and prior to the whole in virtue of natural priority (for if a part is sublated the whole is sublated, this in view of the fact that no whole will remain if one of its parts is lacking), whereas a part will not be [necessarily] sublated if [its] whole is sublated, it being possible that certain parts of a whole be annulled whereas others remain), a species is likewise indubitably prior to the genus.¹⁸

We find the discussion of whether genera or species are prior also in Aristotle. The two opposite views together form an *aporia* discussed in *Metaphysics* B 3 (the seventh *aporia*). In the sixth *aporia* Aristotle asks whether the elements of something are its principles (as the Presocratics claimed) or rather the genera ('genus' taken in a wide sense: including species) of it. In the seventh *aporia* he goes on the assumption that genera (in a broad sense) are the principles of things. He then asks whether the highest genera or the lowest genera (i.e. the lowest species) are most properly principles: "for this is controversial" (*Metaph.* 999b16 f.). He refers to the controversy between Xenocrates and the dominant Platonist view in the Old Academy.

What is the view that Xenocrates opposes? Clearly, it is the view that the genus is ontologically prior to its species and not – as Xenocrates would have it – only the sum of its species. Using a Platonist reason to support this

¹⁵ See in particular Ps.Aristotle's *De Lineis Insecabilibus* but also fr. 123–147 Isnardi Parente= fr. 43–49 Heinze. For a discussion see Pines (1961), in particular 14–21; Isnardi Parente (1982) 357–367; Dillon (2003) 111–118. See also Furley (1967) 104–110 for the discussion of indivisible lines in the Academy.

¹⁶ Aristotle attributes the view that there are indivisible lines to Plato (*Metaph.* 992a20ff.).

¹⁷ Pines was the first to bring this very important fragment to scholarly attention (Pines (1961)).

¹⁸ Fr. 121 Isnardi Parente. The translation, including the additions in square brackets, is Pines'.

view, Aristotle mentions the claim that the more general (*katholou*) is more a principle (than that which is less general). If this claim holds true, Aristotle states, the highest genera are the highest principles.¹⁹ The prevalent view in the Old Academy, as referred to by Aristotle, goes beyond what we have found in Plato's *Theaetetus* and *Parmenides*. For, according to both passages from Plato's dialogues considered above, the true whole, although being something new and distinct from the sum of its parts, is *constituted* by its parts. The prevalent Platonist view, however (the view that Xenocrates opposes), goes beyond this in stating that the whole is the *principle* of its parts.

Why a Platonist might be inclined to hold this view can perhaps be seen from two basic Platonist assumptions. The first finds expression in the Platonist view of the relation of Forms to individuals. Platonists famously believed that there are Forms, such as the Form Human Being, and that the things that are human beings in the sensible world are only so by virtue of their participation in the Form Human Being. In this sense the Form Human Being is the principle of human beings, and thus the thing that is more general (e.g. the Form Human Being) is the principle of the less general (e.g. of individual human beings). Now a Platonist might either think that this relation only holds true between Forms and individuals participating in these Forms or he might go beyond this to claim in addition that similar relations exist between Forms. Thus, he might think that some Forms are more general than others and that more general Forms are principles of less general Forms. The reason why he might think this is due to the second basic Platonist assumption, which is connected with Plato's discovery of diaeresis, as exemplified in detail at the beginning of the *Sophist*.

In terms of genera and species diaeresis can be described as follows. Take a genus and divide it "at its joints" (*kat'arthra*, *Phdr.* 265E) into subgenera.²⁰ Continue until you reach the lowest genera (i.e. species).²¹ These lowest genera or species are indivisible (*atomoi*).²² Suppose we possess a genus and we have correctly divided it into species. As a result we possess a hierarchically ordered tree of genera and species. The

¹⁹ Aristotle himself, of course, argues that neither genera nor species are principles. Thus, he would deny that this principle holds true.

²⁰ For this aspect of *diaeresis* in Plato see Stenzel (1924), in particular 120. For Platonic diaeresis see also Moravcsik (1973) and Ackrill (1997).

²¹ You can, of course, also go from a species upwards, as it were, to its genus.

²² Note the importance of this for Xenocrates' position.

method of diaeresis in itself does not imply any ontological commitment,²³ but it can be understood ontologically. Platonists (who believe that genera and species are real entities) might well understand diaeresis ontologically and not only as a conceptual division. Understood in this way it gives rise to the question asked in Aristotle's seventh aporia: are the genera or the species ontologically prior? If you think that the genera are ontologically prior then the following question arises: how is it possible to deduce a species from a genus? Before providing the sketch of an answer to this question, note that the contrary claim, the claim that a species is not already in some way present in the genus, leaves it open as to how the species can be a species of a genus (if we ask the question not logically but ontologically). Thus, the proponent of the opposing view also needs to provide an explanation.

Let us now see how a defender of the view that gives priority to the genus might answer this question. He might say that the species is in some way already present in the genus. Indeed, the metaphor of the *Phaedrus* which compares diaeresis with a cutting at the joints suggests such a solution. But if so, we need an explanation for how the species is thought to already be in the genus. Such an explanation can be found, I suggest, when we look at an analogue in Sextus' discussion of the fourth interpretation of the conditional. At *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* II 112 Sextus refers to those who judge by *emphasis*.²⁴ These unknown interpreters claimed that a true conditional is one whose consequent is potentially included in the antecedent.²⁵ In this way they wished to explain how it is possible for a consequent to follow from an antecedent. Hence, according to their view, the claim 'if p , q ' is true if, and only if, q is potentially included in p . If we understand '*emphasis*' as 'indication', then the proponents of this view perhaps meant that what is expressed by ' q ' in the conditional 'if p , q ' must be part of the meaning of ' p '. The claim that q is *potentially* included in p suggests that q , although being implicitly included in p , is not explicitly expressed in ' p '. We can now see how this idea can be applied to the relation of genus and species as described above. I submit that we can use it even though our discussion is about the relation of genus and species rather than about a relation between propositions or statements. What I mean can be illustrated by the

²³ This has been pointed out by Cherniss (1944) 46. He calls diaereses "instruments of analysis".

²⁴ The translation of 'ἐμφασίς' is disputed. Long & Sedley have 'entailment' (Long & Sedley (1987) vol. 1, 35B). The Suda (s.v.) explains 'ἐμφασίς' by 'ἐνδείξις'. For a discussion of this passage in Sextus see Frede (1974) 90–93 and White (1986).

²⁵ Their interpretation of the conditional is thus not that of material implication.

following example: Human being is a species of animal if and only if what is designated by 'human being' is potentially included in what is designated by 'animal'. The term 'potentially' is being understood in the way suggested above. Accordingly, what is expressed by 'human being' is implicitly part of what is expressed by 'animal'. Moreover, the meanings of the terms 'animal' and 'human being' must be reified.

The view that the genus is the principle of the species, and not Xenocrates' view, carried the day among Platonists.²⁶ We can find this in later Platonism, not least in Plotinus.²⁷ At *Ennead* III 7, 4, 9–11 he claims: "That which is truly a whole has not been gathered together out of its parts, but it has generated its parts itself, so that it also in this way truly is a whole."²⁸ This passage shows that Plotinus follows what I have called the prevalent Platonist view in the Academy by claiming that the whole is prior to its parts and that it is the principle of its parts. Plotinus also holds this view in relation to genus and species, claiming that the genus produces its species (*Enn.* VI 2, 19). Thus, he also considers the genus to be the principle of the species and not the other way round.

These considerations have paved the way for our discussion of the relation between the hypostasis Soul to individual souls and the hypostasis Intellect to individual intellects. Plotinus uses the traditional view of the relation of genus to species and extends it to these further entities, which can clearly be seen from the following passage. At *Ennead* IV 8, 3, 6–16 Plotinus states:

Now since the whole Intellect exists in the intelligible realm, being a whole and all, which we call the intelligible universe, and since there are also the intellectual powers contained in it and the individual intellects – for the Intellect is not only one, but one and many – there had also to be many souls and one Soul, and the many different souls stemming from the one Soul, *like the species from one genus*, some better, others worse, some more intelligent, others actually less so. For there in the Intellect, there is on the one hand the Intellect potentially containing the others like a great living

²⁶ Thus A. C. Lloyd states quite generally: "The genus was for them [i.e. for Platonists] a whole which was prior to its parts" (Lloyd (1990) 77).

²⁷ See, e.g., S.E. *MX*, 269 and Arist. *Top.* VI 4, 141b29. Incidentally, both passages use the form of the argument provided by Xenocrates in the second passage quoted above but use it in opposing ways. While Xenocrates claims that the whole is sublated if a part is sublated, it is argued in these two passages that the genus must exist (ὑπάρχειν) before the species classed under it exist because if the genus is sublated, the species are sublated, but if the species are sublated, the genus is not sublated. This suggests that this form of argument is not terribly helpful.

²⁸ ... τὸ ἀληθῶς τοῦτο πᾶν οὐκ ἐκ τῶν μερῶν ἡθροισμένον, ἀλλὰ τὰ μέρη γεννήσαν αὐτό, ἵνα καὶ ταύτη ὡς ἀληθῶς πᾶν ᾖ.

being, and on the other the individual intellects, each being actually what the Intellect contains potentially.²⁹

Plotinus clearly takes for granted the understanding of the relation of genus and species we have discussed and explains, on this basis, the relation of the Intellect to individual intellects and of the Soul to individual souls: just as the genus is one and many, so are the Intellect and the Soul. This explains, according to this passage, why they are wholes. Moreover, like the genus, they are wholes that are prior to their parts. They are even the principles of their parts: individual souls stem from the Soul just like species stem from their genus.³⁰ Although Plotinus does not explicitly say so in this passage, it is fair to assume that – by analogy – individual intellects are thought to stem from the Intellect. Thus, we find the traditional Platonist view at work, here extended, however, to the Soul and to the Intellect.

These considerations allow us now to rule out two misconceptions of the relationship of Soul and Intellect to their respective parts that can sometimes be found in the secondary literature: the hypostases are not sums of their parts. Neither the Soul nor the Intellect are just the sum of all individual souls or intellects respectively.³¹ Moreover, neither the hypostasis Intellect nor the hypostasis Soul is an abstraction from their respective individuals.³² Quite the contrary: both Intellect and Soul are beings which possess more reality than their corresponding parts, as both hypostases are the principles of their parts. The fact that the hypostases are the principles of their parts implies that the parts are ontologically dependent on them

²⁹ ὁντος τοίνυν παντός νοῦ ἐν τῷ τῆς νοήσεως τόπῳ ὅλου τε καὶ παντός, ὃν δὴ κόσμον νοητὸν τιθέμεθα, ὄντων δὲ καὶ τῶν ἐν τούτῳ περιεχομένων νοερῶν δυνάμεων καὶ νόων τῶν κατέκαστα – οὐ γὰρ εἷς μόνος, ἀλλ' εἷς καὶ πολλοί – πολλὰς ἔδει καὶ ψυχὰς καὶ μίαν εἶναι, καὶ ἐκ τῆς μιᾶς τὰς πολλὰς διαφόρους, ὥσπερ ἐκ γένους ἐνὸς εἶδη τὰ μὲν ἀμείνω, τὰ δὲ χεῖρω, νοερώτερα, τὰ δ' ἥττον ἐνεργεῖα τοιαῦτα. καὶ γὰρ ἐκεῖ ἐν τῷ νῷ τὸ μὲν νοῦς περιέχων δυνάμει τὰλλα οἷον ζῶον μέγα, τὰ δὲ ἐνεργεῖα ἕκαστον, ἃ δυνάμει περιεῖχε θάτερον· κτλ.

³⁰ Bréhier, rightly to my mind, claims: “Il ne faut donc pas parler chez Plotin d’une âme une qui se fragmente en âmes multiples . . . Il y a, au plus haut degré de cette vie pour les âmes un état d’union . . . qui est hypostasié en une âme unique, qui précède toutes les autres” (Bréhier (1968) 62).

³¹ As claimed by Gerson. See Gerson (1994) 57: “It seems reasonable to conclude that universal intellect is just what these Forms have in common. It is, in a sense . . . the composite of them.” This disregards the priority of the hypostasis Intellect to individual intellects (individual intellects being “these Forms”).

³² Matter (1964) seems to understand the hypostasis Soul in this way. He entitles his first chapter “Die Hypostase der Seele” without, however, discussing the *hypostasis* Soul at all in this chapter (nor, indeed, in any other chapter). Instead, he only considers the soul quite generally. Blumenthal (1971b) considers the existence of a hypostasis Soul (as distinct from the World Soul). Yet the questions of what the hypostasis Soul is and how it precisely relates to individual souls are not addressed (although, on p. 57, he hints at this by calling the hypostasis the “parent” of individual souls). As far as the Intellect is concerned Blumenthal claims that the Intellect is the sum of individual intellects (Blumenthal (1996) 93).

while they are not ontologically dependent on their parts. These claims become clearer, I hope, as soon as we turn to giving content to them and begin to see how individual souls and how individual intellects are parts of their respective hypostasis. We will also see that the relation of whole and part is more complicated than the discussion so far has revealed. So far we have not even discussed all aspects of the relation of whole and part that Plotinus postulates in the passage quoted above, for in this passage Plotinus claims that the parts are potentially contained in the whole and that each part is actually what the whole potentially contains. We will also have to consider the further claim (not expressed in the passage above) that the whole is as a whole in each of its parts.³³

The hypostasis Intellect, individual intellects and their individuation

In this section I wish to consider the relation of the hypostasis Intellect to its individuals, and I shall try to account for all the claims made above. The relation of hypostasis Soul to individual souls, as we will see in the next section, works in the same way. The discussion in the next section will thus presuppose what is argued in this section. However, let us first discuss a simile that Plotinus uses to explain the whole–part relation of both the Intellect to individual intellects (*Enn.* VI 2, 20) and the Soul to individual souls (*Enn.* IV 9, 5, 15ff.). Plotinus uses a science as an example,³⁴ claiming at *Ennead* IV 9, 5, 15ff.:

And perhaps the whole [science] and the part is said in this way: there [in the whole science] all parts are in a way actually all together; each part that you wish to choose is ready to hand. But in the part is what is ready to hand, given signification by approaching in some way the whole. For one must not think that it is isolated from the other theorems . . . If it is scientific then it possesses potentially also all others.³⁵

Intuitively, it is perhaps clear that a science is a whole, in some way consisting of parts because the content of a science is spelt out in terms of many theorems that are logically connected with one another. Thus it

³³ See *Enn.* VI 2, 20, 10–16.

³⁴ See also *Enn.* III 9, 2; IV 3, 2, 50–54, and *Enn.* VI 4, 16, 24–32. For an alternative interpretation of this simile see Tornau (1998). Plotinus has in mind axiomatic sciences, perhaps understood along the lines of Aristotle's *Posterior Analytics*. The most thoroughly developed example of an axiomatic science in antiquity is Euclid's geometry.

³⁵ καὶ ἴσως ταύτη ἡ ὅλη λέγεται, τὸ δὲ μέρος ἐκεῖ μὲν οἷον ἐνεργεῖα ἅμα πάντα ἔτοιμον οὖν ἕκαστον, ὃ προχειρίσασθαι θέλεις· ἐν δὲ τῷ μέρει τὸ ἔτοιμον, ἐνδυναμοῦται δὲ οἷον πλησιάσαν τῷ ὅλῳ. ἔρημον δὲ τῶν ἄλλων θεωρημάτων οὐ δεῖ νομίζειν . . . εἰ οὖν ἐπιστημονικόν, ἔχει δυνάμει καὶ τὰ πάντα.

would make sense to understand a science as a whole and its theorems as its parts. Importantly, however, a science is not only a set of theorems. Were it only a set of theorems, the science would be a whole that was posterior to its parts. It would be nothing other than the sum of its parts and thus of the type that Plato in the *Theaetetus* distinguished from the whole that is distinct from its parts. Thus, according to Plotinus, the relation of science as a whole to its theorems must be more complicated.

Let us first consider a part of a science, namely a theorem. Each theorem is essentially a theorem of the science whose part it is. Take any theorem of geometry. It can only be understood as a part of geometry. We can only understand it if we understand how it relates to the theorems it is deduced from. In this way the theorems it is deduced from are essential to it. But not only are the theorems it is deduced from essential to each theorem. There are also theorems that, in turn, get deduced from this theorem; they also are essential to the theorem. For if a theorem q , which can be deduced from or by means of a theorem p , were different, p itself would also be a different theorem. Recall the fourth interpretation of the conditional in Sextus. According to this interpretation, ‘if p , q ’ is true if, and only if, p potentially contains q . In this sense a theorem that gets deduced from another theorem (or set of theorems) is already in some way part of the theorem (theorems) it gets deduced from. Note, however, that it is also only the theorem it is by being deduced from the theorems that contain it. A scientific theorem is only what it is by virtue of these other theorems of the same science.

However, a theorem not only hinges upon the theorems that it is deduced from and that get deduced from it. Since these other theorems are again essentially connected with further theorems, it also hinges upon them. In fact, since all theorems of a science are – directly or indirectly – essentially related to all other theorems, each theorem is what it is by virtue of making up the science together with all other theorems. In this sense all other theorems (of the same science) are essential to each theorem. This is expressed by Plotinus’ claim in the quotation above that a theorem contains all other theorems (of the same science) potentially. A theorem cannot be isolated from any other theorem of the same science.

So much for the part. An even more puzzling claim of the above quotation concerns the whole. Plotinus states that all parts are actually together (*hama panta*) in the whole. Moreover, each part is “ready to hand” in the whole. In order to understand this we have to remind ourselves of the claim that the whole is prior to its parts and that it is the principle of its parts. In our discussion of genus and species in the context of Platonic *diaeresis* I claimed that in some way the species must already exist in the

genus if the genus is ontologically prior to the species in the relevant sense. By analogy, each theorem must exist already in the whole science. Each that you wish to choose is there “ready to hand”, as Plotinus puts it.

What all theorems together actually are (as opposed to potentially) does not differ in content from what the whole science is. The difference between a theorem and its science consists in the fact that each theorem is not actually the whole science but only a part. The theorem, unlike the science, contains the rest of the science only potentially. This means that each theorem is dependent on the whole science for its being what it is. This claim, I think, seems plausible for deductive sciences. But if we wish to establish a relation of ontological priority between the science and its theorems, the science as a whole must also be independent in some way of the theorems as far as its being what it is is concerned. Moreover, Plotinus makes the strong claim that the science, unlike the theorem, *actually* contains all theorems. But if this is the case, how can the science be ontologically prior to its theorems? In order to be entitled to postulate ontological priority here, we will have to distinguish the theorems as being contained in the whole science from the theorems as being (posterior) parts of the whole science.

So far I have only been talking about theorems constituting a science as if a science only consisted of theorems. Yet we know that ancient axiomatic sciences also consisted of axioms (and perhaps definitions and postulates).³⁶ I suggest that Plotinus considered the whole science prior to its parts as identical with the axioms of the science.³⁷ This allows us to claim that all theorems of a science are indeed both in the whole science and posterior to the whole science. They are in the whole science without being articulated. Thus each theorem is already present in the axioms from which it is ultimately deduced. The whole sum of (appropriately logically related) theorems of a science is the articulation of the whole science without adding anything new to the science. Thus the content of the whole science is actually already there in the axioms – it is just the case that no theorem is already articulated as such in the whole science that is prior to the theorems.

We can conclude therefore that the science as a whole actually contains all its parts and, at the same time, is prior to its parts. This can be explained by saying that all theorems are in the whole science (i.e. in the axioms) but

³⁶ Whether we take into account only axioms or also postulates and definitions does not matter for present purposes.

³⁷ I am grateful to Eyjólfur Emilsson for giving me the idea, in conversation, of identifying the science as a whole with its axioms, definitions and postulates.

not as articulated theorems. The science as a whole is in each of its parts and each part (i.e. each theorem) can be deduced from it. The particular deduction of a theorem makes each theorem the individual theorem it is. Moreover, each theorem potentially contains (i.e. is essentially dependent on) all other theorems of the same science.

Let us turn to the Intellect as a whole and to the individual intellects as its parts. First, however, a preliminary remark: in [Chapter 2](#) we have seen that the Intellect primarily consists of the five highest genera of Plato's *Sophist*. For the following discussion I shall consider only these five genera as parts of the Intellect, even though there are more individual intellects that are parts of the Intellect than the five genera alone; to make things easier, however, I shall ignore them in the present context. We can safely do this because what applies to the five genera will also apply to the other individual intellects.

Let us first consider the hypostasis Intellect, which, as I argued in [Chapter 2](#), is nothing other than the hypostasis of intellectual contemplation (*noein*) contemplating the world of Forms. When saying that the Intellect contemplates the world of Forms, I mean this in the sense that the world of Forms constitutes the content of the Intellect's contemplation. In contemplating the world of Forms, the Intellect contemplates it as a whole. This means that it does not focus on any part of it, on any Form, in particular. The Intellect does not think, for example, about Sameness in particular. We also know from the [last chapter](#) that the Intellect is identical not only with its activity but also with what it contemplates, namely with the world of Forms, which means that the Intellect, in contemplating the world of Forms, contemplates itself. The fact that the Intellect does not focus on any Form in particular helps to explain the claim made in the [last chapter](#) that the Intellect is nothing but intellectual thinking – thinking, taken in itself, does not focus on anything in particular. Note that the claim that the Intellect does not think about anything in particular does not imply that the thinking of the Intellect has no content. The latter claim is certainly false on Plotinian terms for, crucially, the Intellect contemplates reality (*ousia*) and is identical with it.

The Intellect as a hypostasis is distinct from any individual intellect, and we are now in a position to see how individual intellects are different from their hypostasis but also how they get individuated. While the hypostasis Intellect does not focus on anything in particular, individual intellects do. Each individual intellect thinks about something or other in particular and this is precisely what makes an individual intellect an individual. Now all individual intellects, of course, think about the world of Forms, but it is

important to note that each individual intellect focuses on one particular aspect of the world of Forms, of true reality – and this makes it the individual it is. If we now look at the relation of an individual intellect to the world of Forms from the perspective of the world of Forms, that is from the side of the object, then we can say that, for every part of the world of Forms (i.e. for every Form), there is an individual intellect particularly interested in it. There is, for instance, an individual intellect thinking about Sameness in particular, and this individual intellect's thinking about Sameness in particular makes this intellect the individual it is; in other words, it individuates it. Now Plotinus claims that each Form is also an intellect (*Enn.* V 9, 8, 1–4), and, given our considerations so far, we are now in a position to explain the relation between the individual intellect that contemplates Sameness in particular and the Form Sameness: they are identical. Accordingly, in this way each Form, being an individual intellect, contemplates itself.

This example might give the impression that individual intellects share the following feature with the hypostasis Intellect. Just as the hypostasis Intellect contemplates itself, so does every individual intellect contemplate itself. The individual intellect Sameness, for example, might be thought to think about Sameness just as the hypostasis Intellect thinks about the world of Forms. This impression, however, would be mistaken. To see this, we have to further scrutinise the contemplative activity of an individual intellect, such as Sameness.

We know that the hypostasis Intellect is identical with intellectual contemplation (or intellection). But if this is the case, then the Intellect is essentially involved in the contemplative activity of each individual intellect, as every individual intellect essentially thinks intellectually. After all, this is what makes it an intellect. Hence it would be wrong to think that the whole Intellect is *potentially* in every individual intellect, if we understand potentiality as an unrealised possibility, for the Intellect as a whole is actively involved in the essential *activity* of each individual intellect: the Intellect itself is, as we have seen, an activity (namely intellectual contemplation). Suppose for the sake of argument that the Intellect were only potentially (in the sense given) in every individual intellect. If so, individual intellects would not think intellectually and – since their actual thinking is essential to them – they would not even exist. Hence the contemplation of the individual intellect Sameness, for example, necessarily involves, since it is intellectual thinking, the Intellect as a whole, that is the intellectual activity as a whole, and Sameness alone would not be sufficient. Here we can see that there is a crucial difference between the

whole Intellect's contemplation and the contemplation of any of its parts and we can see why the above impression is misleading.

The whole Intellect just contemplates itself as a whole. Its contemplation is self-sufficient in that it does not need anything apart from itself to contemplate itself. Each part, however, although also contemplating itself, essentially actively needs the whole Intellect to contemplate itself. For what it contemplates, for example, Sameness, can only be understood as a part of the whole world of Forms. I will add further details to the consideration of the contemplation of an individual intellect in a moment. For now it is important to note that the active essential involvement of the Intellect in the essential activity of each individual intellect provides the explanation for the Plotinian claim that the whole Intellect is as a whole in each of its parts.

Given this explanation, one might wonder how individual intellects differ from one another if in each case the Intellect as a whole is involved. Are there indeed many individual intellects? Why is there not only one Intellect? The answer, I believe, is as follows. It is a crucial characteristic of thinking that it possesses the capacity to focus on something or other.³⁸ We saw in the [last chapter](#) that the world of Forms is a complex thing. Intellectual thinking can, but need not, focus on any of the aspects of this complex thing. It can focus on the Sameness of true reality, for example, or on its Being. According to Plotinus each part of the Intellect focuses on that aspect of the world of Forms with which it is identical. Sameness, for example, focuses on Sameness, Being focuses on Being and so on. Although each intellect must contain, as we have seen, the whole Intellect because the whole Intellect is nothing other than the activity of intellectual thinking, the focus of each individual intellect is different from the focus of every other individual intellect.

The fact that the hypostasis Intellect, by contrast to individual intellects, does not focus on anything in particular is crucial for understanding its ontological priority, that is, for understanding Plotinus' claim that the Intellect as a whole is a whole that is prior to its parts. The Intellect is intellectual thinking which does not, in itself, focus on anything in particular. Rather, its contemplation involves the world of Forms quite generally (and thereby everything that is in the Intellect) in that the world of Forms is constitutive of its thinking. Now each individual intellect is intellectually active, too. In so far as it is intellectually active, each individual intellect is identical with the Intellect. Since the whole intellectual

³⁸ By 'focusing on x' I mean being directed in particular towards or having as one's specific object x.

contemplation (i.e. the Intellect) is constitutive of the intellectual contemplation of each individual intellect, the whole Intellect is as a whole in each of its parts. Unlike the Intellect's intellectual activity, each individual intellect's intellectual activity is focused on precisely one aspect of the world of Forms, namely on one or other particular Form. This individuates each individual intellect and thus makes each individual intellect the individual intellect it is. This is also what makes it a part that is posterior to the whole, because it is already focused. The focusing presupposes the whole Intellect because the Intellect provides individual intellects both with the particular object of their contemplation and with their activity. The focusing thus not only explains how individual intellects get individuated but also how the whole Intellect is, as a whole, *actually* in each of its parts.

Another riddling Plotinian claim we met was that all parts are already there in the whole. This is riddling in particular since we know that Plotinus thinks that parts are posterior to the whole. How can they be both posterior to the whole and parts in the whole? In the case of the Intellect we are now in a position to solve this puzzle. Intellectual thinking involves the five highest genera and is thus complex. So it is clear that the parts must already somehow be in the whole. The crucial move to get clear about this, however, is the claim that the parts are not in the whole *as parts*. This move is made possible by the claim that what makes them parts is their focusing on that aspect of the world of Forms that they are particularly interested in. The whole Intellect, however, is the intellectual contemplation before its turning to particular aspects of itself. Accordingly, the parts are in the whole Intellect prior to individuation but they are so not as parts. In other words: all individual intellects are in the whole intellect *prior to* individuation and hence *not as individuals*.

One might object to the claim that the Intellect as a whole is ontologically prior to its parts in the following way. If the parts, as was argued above, are in the Intellect without being individuated, then they are in the Intellect. This implies that they exist (prior to their individuation). In fact, the latter claim is true according to Plotinus: the Intellect consists of its non-individuated parts and it can obviously only do so if its parts exist. But this means, the argument concludes, that the Intellect is not ontologically prior to its parts, for if this were the case, the Intellect could exist independently of whether or not its parts exist. But, as has been shown, this is not the case. Hence, the Intellect is not ontologically prior to its parts. Instead, the Intellect and its parts depend on one another for their existence.

This would be a good objection if I understood 'ontological priority' in an existential sense; however, this is not the case. Instead, I understand ontological priority in an essential sense, by which I mean: x is ontologically prior to y precisely if x is what it is independently of what y is, while y is dependent for what it is on what x is.

Now one might wonder whether the same problem recurs in this understanding of ontological priority. If the Intellect is ontologically prior to its parts in this sense, then the following is true: the Intellect is what it is independently of the essence of its parts while the parts are (for their being what they are) dependent on what the Intellect is as a whole. Given this, one might object that the Intellect according to Plotinus consists of its (non-individuated) parts and hence depends on them for what it is. Hence, it seems, the Intellect cannot be ontologically prior to its parts.

I agree that the Intellect consists of its parts. Still, as an objection, this argument misses its target, for although the Intellect consists of its parts, the parts that together make up the Intellect as a whole are there prior to their individuation. I do not claim that the Intellect is ontologically prior to its parts *qua* non-individuated but rather only *qua* individuated. In other words, my claim is that the Intellect is ontologically prior (in the essential sense) to individual intellects *as individuals*. And indeed, each individual intellect *as an individual* depends for what it is on the Intellect as a whole. The reason for this is that each of them only becomes individuated through focusing. It is the focusing that constitutes each individual intellect as the individual intellect it is. The Intellect as a whole, by contrast, is essentially independent of any focusing and thus of any individual intellect *qua* individual. Even if there were no individual intellects as individuals, the Intellect would still be what it is.

I think there is an even deeper Platonist point to this. Whenever we refer to a part or other, we have thereby already individuated it. Indeed, we have already distinguished this part from other parts and from the whole. Accordingly, if we want to consider the whole as a whole, listing all its parts (even if we declare what each part is), will not tell us what the whole is. Think of the analogy of the genus *animal*, whose definition does not explicitly contain *human being* or any other of its species. The definition of animal is independent of that of human being but not vice versa. Hence, there is ontological priority in this sense of the whole to its parts.

The sometimes bewildering claims about parts and wholes that we have now discussed can all be found in *Ennead* VI 2, 20. There we read that the Intellect as a whole is prior to its parts; that it contains all its parts (i.e. all individual intellects); that individual intellects are the

parts of the hypostasis Intellect; and that the whole intellect is as a whole in each of its parts.

The hypostasis Soul, individual souls and their individuation

Let us now turn to the Soul. Since the Soul is the same kind of whole as the Intellect we will not be surprised to find that analogous claims must apply to the Soul.³⁹ That being the case, we will have to consider the following claims: the hypostasis Soul is as a whole prior to its parts. It contains all its parts. Individual souls are the parts of the hypostasis Soul. The whole Soul is as a whole in each of its parts, that is, in each individual soul.⁴⁰

It was argued that the hypostasis Soul thinks in a way different from the hypostasis Intellect, namely discursively. Both Soul and Intellect think in their own ways about the world of Forms, but the Soul, in contrast to the Intellect, essentially also possesses a demiurgic function. Like the divine Craftsman of the *Timaeus* it wants to create a sensible world in such a way that it is a most excellent image of the world of Forms. In order to be able to do so, the Soul has to think about how to create a sensible world. This thinking is essential to the Soul, too. In [Chapter 2](#) I identified it with its practical thinking, that is, with divine providence. Thus, the Soul essentially thinks discursively about, among other things, how to create a sensible world. Furthermore, we saw in [Chapter 1](#) that divine Providence, according to Platonists, not only cares for the arrangement of the general rules of creation (it does not, for example, only arrange the heavens without taking care of the sublunary world). Instead, it arranges everything down to its smallest detail. Thus, the Soul's providential thinking must involve thinking about all of the parts of creation, all of the bodies that have to be created to make up a sensible world.⁴¹

³⁹ According to Blumenthal, Plotinus' claim that all souls are one but differ nevertheless from one another is inconsistent and this inconsistency "must be evident to all students of Plotinus" (Blumenthal (1971b) 55). His worry concerning the Soul seems the same as that of Xenocrates concerning wholes. In what follows I shall try to show that Plotinus offers a consistent (if complicated) explanation for the relation of Soul to individual souls.

⁴⁰ See *Enn.* IV 9, 5.

⁴¹ Rist also identifies the Soul's second function with providence. However, he believes that providence is the activity of the Soul *in the sensible world* (Rist (1967a) 89f.). In contrast to this I identified in [Chapter 2](#) providence with *thinking* about the creation of a sensible world. Against Rist's identification it will be argued in [Chapter 4](#) that Providence itself does not act in the sensible world at all; only individual souls do. His identification of the Soul with Providence in the way he understands it explains why he identifies the Soul and the World Soul.

To start with, let us consider an important fact about individual souls, namely that they care (*epimeleisthai*) for individual bodies.⁴² Socrates' soul, for example, is particularly interested in the well-being of Socrates' body and will care for Socrates' body in a way that is distinct from its care for any other body. Similarly, the soul of the sun is particularly interested in the body of the sun and will take great care to make sure that the sun moves in the right way. At *Ennead* IV 3, 2, 5–10 Plotinus also considers the hypostasis Soul and compares it to individual souls. The hypostasis Soul, unlike individual souls, he claims, does not care for any individual body in particular. Thus, there is no body that the hypostasis Soul is *particularly* interested in.⁴³ The Soul thinks about the *whole* providence of a sensible world and all its individual bodies *as a whole* without focusing on any aspect of this in particular. In this sense, the Soul can be compared to the hypostasis Intellect, which also takes no particular interest in any of its aspects.

A further comparison is in order here. The hypostasis Soul, we claimed, is identical with its essential activity and thus with discursive thinking. Since the content of this thinking is constitutive of the thinking and since the content of this thinking involves the whole divine providence, we can see in what way the Soul is discursive thinking as a hypostasis: divine providence is nothing other than the thinking about the excellent organisation of a sensible world as a whole with all its parts. This being so, the Soul is analogous in this respect to the Intellect, which is identical with its intellectual contemplation.

This does not imply that the Soul *exclusively* consists of providence. It also crucially contemplates the world of Forms and thus it also consists of theoretical thinking or contemplation, as we discussed in [Chapter 2](#). I will currently focus on providence because I believe that we can explain how individual souls get individuated by means of this aspect of the Soul's thinking. But if the Soul's practical understanding cannot be divorced from its contemplation, then, if the Soul as Providence is in each individual soul, as I am going to argue it is, the Soul as contemplation will also be in each individual soul.

The fact that the hypostasis Soul does not care for any individual body *in particular* does not imply that the Soul does not care for any body *at all*.

⁴² *Enn.* III 2, 7, 23–25; IV 3, 2, 8–10; IV 3, 4, 14ff.; IV 8, 2, 24–26; VI 7, 26, 7–12. See Song (2009a) 95–106.

⁴³ This provides a further argument against the identification of Soul with World Soul, since the World Soul cares in particular for a specific body, namely for the body of the sensible world. See [Chapter 5](#) for a more detailed discussion on this point.

Divine providence, as we saw, includes everything down to the smallest detail. Accordingly, all bodies are involved in the Soul's plan for a sensible world. Even the body of Socrates and the body of the sun, for example, are involved. In the sense in which the Soul is divine Providence (as described above), the Soul is prior to its parts. This becomes clearer, I hope, if we turn to individual souls.

Individual souls, like individual intellects, are focused on one or other particular aspect of the whole Soul. Each individual soul is focused on one or other particular aspect of *divine Providence*. It is the aspect of the body that it has to care for. To come back to our examples of Socrates and the sun, the soul of Socrates is particularly interested in the body of Socrates and the soul of the sun in the body of the sun. If we now consider the care for these bodies as part of divine Providence we can qualify the claim that the soul of Socrates, for example, cares for its body in particular.⁴⁴

Each body has a particular role to play in the whole of the providential arrangement of the sensible world. Each soul, in thinking about the role that its body has to play, thereby focuses on one particular aspect of the whole providential arrangement. When the soul of the sun, for example, thinks about how to move its body, then it does so because the body of the sun has a certain function to fulfil in the whole providential arrangement of the sensible world. The soul of the sun is particularly interested in this function. It is not, however, particularly interested in the function that the body of Socrates has to fulfil; nor, for that matter, in the function of any body other than its own. Thus, each individual soul thinks in particular about its role and the role of its body in the whole providential arrangement of the sensible world. Focusing on a particular aspect of providence makes an individual soul an individual and this focused thinking makes an individual soul a *part* of the Soul.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Armstrong claims: "It [i.e. the individual soul] is distinguished from the universal soul by its concern for the particular body with which it is bound up, by its absorption in its specialized individual task" (Armstrong (1940) 90). I agree; however, I disagree with Armstrong's identification of the task. Armstrong takes it to be the individual soul's *activity* in the sensible world whereas I take it to be the *thinking* about its role in the providential arrangement (see the quotation in the next footnote).

⁴⁵ Armstrong states: "It [i.e. the individual soul] remains in part always in the higher realm of universality and, as we have seen, if it realizes its true nature can take upon itself its natural, eternal universality and 'become the All' even in the body" (Armstrong (1940) 91). If the individual soul in the intelligible world were only there in its "universality", as Armstrong claims, it would lose its individuality there. This is also the view of Capone Braga (1932) 116–118. This is incompatible with Plotinus' claim of the existence of individual souls (as individuals) in the intelligible world (see, for example, *Enn.* IV 1, 2; *Enn.* IV 3, 5, 1–5).

Each individual soul essentially thinks discursively, as does the hypostasis Soul. What is more, each individual soul focuses its thinking on the role that its body has to play in divine providence. In so far as each individual soul thinks, it does not differ from the hypostasis Soul. For the hypostasis Soul essentially (but not exclusively) is providential thinking. The individual soul differs from the hypostasis, however, in that it thinks about something in particular, in that it focuses on and is particularly interested in one aspect of providence. Since the whole providential thinking is constitutive of the thinking of each individual soul, and since the hypostasis Soul is this providential thinking, the Soul as a whole is in each individual soul, that is, in each of its parts.

The hypostasis Soul, however, although being before its parts, also includes all parts in the following sense. The content of the thinking of each individual soul does not differ from the content of the thinking of the Soul. Each soul thinks about the providential arrangement of the sensible world. The providential thinking (which is part of the hypostasis Soul) includes everything that individual souls focus on, since what every individual soul thinks about is already there in the Soul. This includes in particular what each individual soul focuses on. However, in the hypostasis Soul as a whole (i.e. prior to its parts) all these particular aspects are not focused on. For example, the providential thinking of the Soul includes thinking about Socrates' body (along with all other bodies). In this sense, the soul of Socrates, being the part of the Soul which is thinking about Socrates' body, is also already there in the Soul. However, it is there prior to being individuated, since the aspect of the Soul which concerns Socrates' body is not yet focused on. In this way all individual souls, that is all parts, are already in the whole Soul. Yet the thinking as it is in the whole Soul is not focused on anything in particular and thus the individual soul – in so far as it is in the whole Soul – is not individuated: it is in the whole soul but not as individuated. This discussion shows how I would suggest that we understand the claims made at the beginning of our discussion of the Soul: we have discussed how the hypostasis Soul is as a whole prior to its parts; how it contains all its parts; how individual souls are the parts of the hypostasis Soul and how they get individuated; and how the whole Soul is as a whole in each of its parts, that is, in each individual soul. The fact that thinking possesses the remarkable capacity to focus and thereby involves the whole in the specific way discussed is crucial for an understanding of these relations.

By contrast to the hypostasis Soul, individual souls are also active in the sensible world. In the [next chapter](#) I shall further defend the interpretation developed so far by arguing against views according to which the soul's primary or even sole activity occurs in the sensible world. I shall also attempt to explain in detail in what way the individual soul's activity in the intelligible world is prior to that in the sensible world and how it relates to it.

*The individual soul in the intelligible
and in the sensible world*

As we have seen in the Introduction, the activity of the soul in the sensible world is beautifully described in the first few lines of *Ennead* V 1, 2, 1–6:

Now let every soul first consider this, that it made everything into a living being by breathing life into them, those that the earth feeds and those that the sea feeds, and those in the air and the divine stars in heaven, and it itself made the sun a living being and this great heaven, too, and itself has ordered it and causes it to revolve in orderly fashion, being a nature different from the things which it orders and moves and makes into living beings.¹

Thus Plotinus urges individual souls to contemplate their being the principle of life and the fact that they created the heavenly bodies – a claim that can be extended to the sublunary sphere: the soul made the sensible world and all the creatures in it.

At first sight it may seem surprising to see Plotinus claim that *every* soul must consider that *it* made all things living beings. But on the basis of the results achieved in [Chapter 3](#), this claim can be explained as follows. It should not be understood in such a way that the individual soul *qua* individual is the principle of living beings quite generally but rather that it is thus *qua* soul. Hence, Plotinus' claim does not imply that, for example, Socrates' soul *as an individual* made sun and heaven.

Plotinus' exhortation shows how deeply he thought the soul was involved in the creation and maintenance of the sensible world, in forming bodies and in giving life to them. This has led some interpreters to the view that this sort of activity is actually the soul's primary function. In this chapter I shall argue against such interpretations and thus further defend the position developed in the first three chapters. In the first section I shall

¹ ἐνθυμείσθω τοίνυν πρῶτον ἐκεῖνο πᾶσα ψυχὴ, ὡς αὐτὴ μὲν ζῶα ἐποίησε πάντα ἐμπνεύσασα αὐτοῖς ζωὴν, ἃ τε γῇ τρέφει ἃ τε θάλασσά ἃ τε ἐν ἀέρι ἃ τε ἐν οὐρανῷ ἄστρα θεῖα, αὐτὴ δὲ ἥλιον, αὐτὴ δὲ τὸν μέγαν τοῦτον οὐρανόν, καὶ αὐτὴ ἐκόσμησεν, αὐτὴ δὲ ἐν τάξει περιάγει φύσις οὕσα ἐτέρα ὧν κοσμεῖ καὶ ὧν κινεῖ καὶ ἃ ζῆν ποιεῖ κτλ.

argue against the view that the soul is *exclusively* active in the sensible world, while in the second section I will challenge the weaker claim that the soul is *primarily* (but not exclusively) active in the sensible world. In this context, I shall also try to show how precisely the individual soul's activity in the intelligible world relates to that in the sensible world.

The two lives of the individual soul

At least until Descartes, the notions of soul and life had always been closely related to one another. It was generally agreed that the soul is the principle of life and thus that all living beings in the sensible world possess in some way or other a soul due to which they are the living beings they are.² The most famous proponent of such a view is perhaps Aristotle. In his *De anima* he primarily explains a living being with reference to the various capacities that a living being of a certain kind must possess in order to behave in the ways in which individuals of this kind behave. In the simplest case, plants get explained by their capacities to nourish themselves, grow and reproduce. According to Aristotle, because a living being possesses such capacities, it is able to behave in the ways it does; and, crucially, a living being possesses such capacities in virtue of having a soul. Thus, the soul makes a living being the living being it is and, more generally, it makes it a living being at all in that it provides living beings with capacities that enable them to behave in ways in which living beings – as opposed to non-living beings – behave. This is the sense in which the soul is the principle of life according to Aristotle.

There are of course many differences between Plato's and Aristotle's notions of the soul and even concerning the way in which the soul is the principle of life; but they share the view *that* the soul is the principle of life.³ In the *Phaedo*, for example, we are told that the soul brings life to whatever it takes possession of (*Phd.* 105C). A corporeal living being (a being composed of body and soul) is thought to be alive as long as a soul is present to it. When the soul leaves the body, the composite living being dies. We find a similar view in the *Phaedrus*. At *Phaedrus* 245Cff. the soul is called the source and principle of motion for all the other things that are in

² Descartes also seems to have been aware of the close connection of the notions of soul and life, for he not only abandoned the view that the soul is the principle of life but he also replaced the notion of the soul with that of the mind. For a comparison of Cartesian and Plotinian dualism see O'Meara (1985).

³ For present purposes such differences do not matter. For a discussion of how Aristotle's and Plato's way of seeing the soul as a principle of life and how this relates to Plotinus see [Chapter 6](#) and Caluori (2005).

motion (i.e. for bodies). Two kinds of body are distinguished: those that are moved from within and those that are only moved from without. Only bodies of the former class are living bodies – and this precisely because they possess their own source of life and motion, which is nothing other than their soul.

Plotinus refers to passages like that when considering the soul the principle of life in the sensible world. At *Ennead* IV 7, 9, 2–8, for example, he states:

Everything else will pass away, and could not come into being afterwards if the thing had perished which preserves all things and especially this universe, which is preserved and given order by the soul. For it [sc. the soul] is the principle of motion and provides other things with motion and it is moved by itself and gives life to the ensouled body.⁴

This passage not only uses the Platonic expression ‘principle of motion’ (that we have found in the *Phaedrus*) to describe the soul but it is also, more generally, written in the spirit of the Platonic texts referred to above. The soul is, for both Plato and Plotinus, the principle of life in the sensible world. It is due to the soul that beings in the sensible world are living beings, and without the soul the order and beauty of the sensible world would perish.

On the basis of these considerations, one might be tempted to conclude that, for Plotinus, the activity of the soul in the sensible world is the soul’s primary activity, and that cognitive activity in the intelligible world is the domain of the intellect, not the soul. Thus, Gerson, for example, states: “The primary activity of Soul is that of a βίος or way of life. As we shall see, this means basically life that is temporal (as opposed to eternal) and such that there is a ‘gap’ between desire and achievement of goals.”⁵ Accordingly, he sees the soul’s primary activity as that of a principle of motion: “Soul is the ἀρχή of motion in embodied, living things.”⁶ The soul, according to his interpretation, is crucially the principle of life in the sensible world while the intellect is primarily the principle of cognitive activity. Accordingly he states: “Thus, the organic activities of things with soul – all that living things do in so far as they are living – are referred first

⁴ ἢ τὰ ἄλλα πάντα οἰχήσεται, καὶ οὐκ ἂν ὕστερον γένοιτο τούτου ἀπολωλότης, ὃ παρέχει αὐτοῖς σωτηρίαν, τοῖς τε ἄλλοις καὶ τῷδε τῷ παντὶ διὰ ψυχῆς σωζομένων καὶ κεκοσμημένων. ἀρχὴ γὰρ κινήσεως ἦδε χορηγοῦσα τοῖς ἄλλοις κίνησιν, αὐτὴ δὲ ἐξ ἑαυτῆς κινουμένη, καὶ ζῶν τῷ ἐμψύχῳ σώματι διδοῦσα κτλ.

⁵ Gerson (1994) 59. ⁶ Gerson (1994) 61.

to Soul as the ἀρχή of these activities, then to Intellect as the ἀρχή of their cognitive activities.”⁷

The claim that the soul is primarily active in the sensible world can be understood in at least two ways. Given the contrast of soul and intellect displayed in these quotations, it might mean that the soul is exclusively active in the sensible world. Yet it might also mean that it is *only primarily* active in the sensible world but also, secondarily, in the intelligible world. While I agree with Gerson’s claim that the soul is the principle of life in the sensible world, it seems to me that the soul, although being active in the sensible world, is not *primarily* active there in either of these two senses.

Because my focus in earlier chapters was on the hypostasis Soul rather than on individual souls, it may appear that the discussion so far has left open the possibility that one distinction between individual souls and hypostasis Soul is precisely that the former, by contrast to the latter, are exclusively active in the sensible world. It is true that the focus so far has been on the hypostasis Soul. However, the fact that individual souls must also be essentially actively thinking in the intelligible world follows from two claims argued for in earlier chapters: firstly, the hypostasis Soul is essentially actively thinking in the intelligible world and, secondly, the hypostasis Soul is as a whole in each individual soul (in the way explained in [Chapter 3](#) and thus also essentially). Actively thinking in the intelligible world is thus essential to each and every individual rational soul. This argument depends on the results of earlier chapters and in particular on the view developed there on the hypostasis Soul. In what follows I shall try to show that the same results can be achieved on the basis of another set of considerations, and independently of whether or not one is convinced by what I have said about the hypostasis Soul and its relation to individual souls.

Plotinus explicitly claims that the soul possesses its own life (i.e. its own activity), which is prior to its activity in the sensible world. Let us look at how the passage quoted above continues. We have seen that “the soul is the principle of motion and provides other things with motion and it is moved by itself and gives life to the ensouled body, *but has it of itself, and never loses it because it has it of itself*. For certainly all things cannot have a borrowed life; or it will go on to infinity” (*Enn.* IV 7, 9, 6–10)⁸ Thus, the soul not only *gives* life to bodies but also *has* a life of its own. Hence, the soul’s giving

⁷ Gerson (1994) 59.

⁸ ἀρχὴ γὰρ κινήσεως ἥδε χορηγοῦσα τοῖς ἄλλοις κίνησιν, αὐτὴ δὲ ἐξ ἑαυτῆς κινουμένη, καὶ ζωὴν τῷ ἐμψύχῳ σώματι διδοῦσα, αὐτὴ δὲ παρ’ ἑαυτῆς ἔχουσα, ἣν οὐποτε ἀπώλλουσιν, ἅτε παρ’ ἑαυτῆς ἔχουσα. οὐ γὰρ δὴ πάντα ἐπακτῶ ζωὴ χρηταὶ ἢ εἰς ἄπειρον εἰσιν· κτλ.

life to bodies cannot be the soul's exclusive activity. For the soul's own life is itself an activity – an activity that is prior to the life that the soul gives to bodies.

Having established that the soul has a life of its own, we are now in a position to say something more about the way in which it is the principle of life. Plotinus claims that the soul is a principle of life *in virtue of its own life*. Consider the following passage:

And the activity of the soul in itself, as well as that which goes out to something else, is something awake. Thus the soul makes alive all the things which do not live by themselves, and [makes them live] a life similar to that by which it lives itself . . . for what it gives to the body is an image of life. (*Enn.* IV 3, 10, 35–40)⁹

The life that the soul gives to bodies is an image of the soul's own life. It is thus clear once more that the life that the soul has of its own is prior to the life it gives to bodies and that the latter cannot be the soul's primary activity. Indeed, the life that the soul gives to bodies *presupposes* the life that it has on its own.

The next step is to understand in what way the life that the soul gives to bodies is an *image* of the soul's own life. I suggest that the account of the soul's activity in the intelligible world proposed earlier provides the necessary explanation. In the intelligible world, the soul thinks discursively about the arrangement of the sensible world, knows the paradigm of the sensible world and knows how to actualise it. Accordingly, the soul's thinking becomes the model of the life in the sensible world, or to put it differently: the rational order of the sensible world is due to the rational thinking of the soul.

However, one may think that the following is an alternative interpretation that equally well explains what Plotinus says: we may concede that the soul – in addition to its giving life to bodies – possesses a life of its own and that this life is the paradigm for the life the soul gives to bodies, but at the same time we may deny that the soul's own life belongs to the intelligible world. Instead, we may argue, it belongs to the sensible world just as the life it gives to bodies. It thus still seems possible that the soul wholly belongs to the sensible world while the intelligible world remains the exclusive domain of the intellect. According to this alternative account the soul's own life may still be considered as consisting in thinking, but, in contrast

⁹ ψυχῆς δὲ ἔργον καὶ τὸ ἐν αὐτῇ ἐργηγορός τι καὶ τὸ εἰς ἄλλο ὡσαύτως. ζῆν οὖν καὶ τὰ ἄλλα ποιεῖ, ὅσα μὴ ζῆ παρ' αὐτῶν, καὶ τοιαύτην ζώην, καθ' ἣν αὐτὴ ζῆ . . . καὶ γὰρ καὶ εἰδωλον ζωῆς, ὅσον διδωσι τῷ σώματι.

to my claim, the soul's type of thinking would be considered a process taking place in time and thus a type of thinking that, unlike that of the intellect, takes place in the sensible world. Let us, as discussed above, call this kind of thinking discursive *reasoning* (*logismos*) and distinguish it from discursive *thinking* (*dianoia*).¹⁰ Discursive reasoning is different from discursive thinking in a number of ways, but one crucial difference is its taking place in time. I shall have more to say about discursive reasoning and its place in Plotinus' theory of the soul later;¹¹ for now, I only wish to make this conceptual distinction to clarify the difference between my account and the alternative account. We can now explicate how the two accounts differ by saying that the alternative account rejects the notion of discursive *thinking* (as timeless discursive thought) for the soul and identifies the soul's inner activity with discursive *reasoning*.

Let us now assume for the sake of argument that the soul's inner activity consists in discursive reasoning (and not in discursive thinking). If so, then both this discursive activity and (since discursive reasoning is on this view the essence of the soul)¹² the soul itself is, just as everything else in the sensible world, subject to time. The soul is in a constant and uninterrupted process of reasoning and, as an image of this process, the sensible world develops, each temporary state of the world corresponding to a temporary state of the soul's reasoning. In this way the position under discussion would seem to be able to account for the claim that the soul has a life of its own as well as for the claim that the life given to bodies is an image of the soul's own life. Moreover, it would seem to allow for the claim that the intelligible world is the exclusive domain of the intellect.

I wish to take issue with the alternative account in two steps. I shall first discuss a couple of passages that explicitly contradict it. I shall then turn to the main text that might be seen to support it, namely to *Ennead* III 7, 11f. and attempt to show that this passage is actually at odds with it and supports the interpretation I defend.

The first reason for rejecting the alternative interpretation is Plotinus' explicit claim that there are souls in the intelligible world.¹³ At *Ennead* IV 1, 1f. he states: "in the intelligible world is true reality; intellect is the best part

¹⁰ Plotinus sometimes uses the term *dianoia* for reasoning. When he does so, he exploits the systematic ambiguity of terms explained in the Introduction.

¹¹ See [Chapter 7](#).

¹² We may or may not add the non-cognitive activities of the soul in the sensible world to its essence. This does not matter for the following discussion. To represent the alternative account, we need only to exclude that there is anything of the soul remaining in the intelligible world.

¹³ I shall discuss this in [Chapter 6](#).

of it; but souls are there, too.”¹⁴ At *Ennead* IV 8, 8, 1–3 he claims: “And, if one ought to dare to express one’s view more clearly, against the opinion of others, not every soul descended, and in particular our soul did not, but there is always something of it in the intelligible.”¹⁵ Now since even our soul (and thus clearly the individual soul) remains in the intelligible world, it cannot wholly belong to the sensible world. Moreover, since, as we shall shortly see, time is posterior to the intelligible world, at least some of the individual soul’s activity cannot be a process in time but must be a cognitive activity in the intelligible world.¹⁶

A second reason for rejecting the alternative account is the following. In his discussion of practical thinking in *Ennead* IV 4, 10–14¹⁷ Plotinus distinguishes between discursive reasoning and practical wisdom (*phronēsis*) – the latter being the practical thinking of the soul.¹⁸ Practical wisdom, we are told at *Ennead* IV 4, 11, 26, is unchanging. Plotinus emphasises that this distinguishes it from discursive reasoning. Precisely because the World Soul (which is an individual soul) possesses practical wisdom, it has no need for discursive reasoning: “What discursive reasoning (*logismos*) or what counting or what memory can there be when practical wisdom (*phronēsis*) is always present, active, ruling and providentially arranging things (*dioikein*) in the same way?” (*Enn.* IV 4, 11, 11–13).¹⁹ Discursive reasoning is only necessary for someone who is looking for the corresponding knowledge because he or she aims at the attainment of knowledge. The successful end of this process consists in the sought knowledge. We are then in a state in which we know (in the case of *practical* thought) how to act.²⁰ The World Soul is always in this state (i.e. it always actively knows how to act) and so are all other divine souls.²¹ As we shall see later (when discussing *Enn.* IV 8, 8 quoted above), however, Plotinus makes the much stronger claim that *all* rational individual souls

¹⁴ ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ τῷ νοητῷ ἢ ἀληθινῇ οὐσίᾳ νοῦς τὸ ἄριστον αὐτοῦ· ψυχὰι δὲ κάκει· κτλ.

¹⁵ καὶ εἰ χρὴ παρὰ δόξαν τῶν ἄλλων τοιμῆσαι τὸ φαινόμενον λέγειν σαφέστερον, οὐ πᾶσα οὐδ’ ἡ ἡμετέρα ψυχὴ ἔδου, ἀλλ’ ἔστι τι αὐτῆς ἐν τῷ νοητῷ αἰεὶ· κτλ. See also *Enn.* II 9, 2, 4–6.

¹⁶ This holds if we grant, as I think we should, that the soul in the intelligible world is active and that the activity in the intelligible world is cognitive. I shall come back to this below.

¹⁷ I discuss this passage in more detail in Caluori (forthcoming).

¹⁸ But isn’t practical wisdom a mere disposition and thus not an activity? Not according to Plotinus, as he explains in the passage to be quoted a few lines below: practical wisdom is active and ruling.

¹⁹ τίς οὖν ὁ λογισμὸς ἢ τίς ἀρίθμησις ἢ τίς ἡ μνήμη παρουσίας αἰ φρονήσεως καὶ ἐνεργοῦσης καὶ κρατούσης καὶ κατὰ τὰ αὐτὰ διοικήσεως; See also the discussion in *Enn.* IV 4, 12.

²⁰ Practical wisdom is, as we can see from the quotation of *Enn.* IV 4, 11, 11ff., an *active* state. We might just as well call it a static activity, i.e. an activity that, just like the Intellect’s activity, is not subject to change.

²¹ See the [next chapter](#). For the souls of the stars see in particular *Enn.* IV 8, 2, 38–42.

are like that. In the case of human beings this might look like a strange claim indeed. For human beings – far from making the impression of possessing practical wisdom – seem to be deeply puzzled about how to act and are obviously involved in discursive reasoning. In [Chapter 6](#) I shall address these issues. For present purposes, however, there is no need for the reader to be convinced that all human souls also possess practical wisdom. For our discussion has shown that at least some individual souls (and, among them, the most powerful individual soul, namely the World Soul) think in the intelligible world. If so, at least the thinking of some individual souls is not a process in time. Therefore, the individual soul's own life cannot be identical with discursive reasoning and even the weaker claim that discursive reasoning is essential to the soul has been shown to be false.²²

I now wish to turn to *Ennead* III 7, a text that might seem to provide the main evidence for the view that the soul's main cognitive activity consists in discursive reasoning. In this treatise the following dichotomy appears to be established. The intellect's activity, on the one hand, is exclusively eternal, not subject to time and thus not a process. The soul, on the other hand, seems exclusively to reason discursively and thus to be, in all its activity, subject to time.²³ Igal, for example, puts it as follows: “El tiempo, vida del Alma, es imagen de la Eternidad, vida de la Inteligencia.”²⁴

At *Ennead* III 7, 11, 15–20 Plotinus states:

But since there was a restless nature which wanted to rule by itself and be on its own, and chose to seek for more than its present state, it was moved, and time was also moved; and so, always moving towards the later and the next, and towards what is not the same, but always different, we made a long stretch of our journey and constructed time as an image of eternity.²⁵

²² This still leaves open the possibility that human souls are essentially different from divine souls. But then see *Enn.* IV 8, 8 quoted above.

²³ In his discussion of time Plotinus makes the rather enigmatic claim that time itself is a movement of the soul. This movement or life of the soul is thus not – strictly speaking – *in* time but rather identical with time. For present purposes I will ignore this distinction; my argument will be independent of it because I presently only want to establish the claim that the soul's essential activity is prior to time.

²⁴ Igal (1985) 191. Beierwaltes (1967) 68 states: “die Seele aber denkt immerfort Anderes und bleibt deshalb im Vollzug ihres Wirkens nie sich selbst gleich.” But the activity of the soul does not seem to be, according to his interpretation, part of its essence: “Jedoch ist dadurch ebensowenig . . . gesagt, daß das Wesen der Seele selbst Zeit sei. Vielmehr bleibt . . . ihr Sein oder Wesen . . . selbst ewig” (268).

²⁵ φύσεως δὲ πολυπράγμονος καὶ ἄρχειν αὐτῆς βουλομένης καὶ εἶναι αὐτῆς καὶ τὸ πλέον τοῦ παρόντος ζητεῖν ἐλομένης ἐκινήθη μὲν αὐτῇ, ἐκινήθη δὲ καὶ αὐτός, καὶ εἰς τὸ ἔπειτα αἰεὶ καὶ τὸ ὑστερον καὶ οὐ ταῦτόν, ἀλλ’ ἕτερον εἶθ’ ἕτερον κινούμενοι, μήκός τι τῆς πορείας ποιησάμενοι αἰῶνος εἰκόνα τὸν χρόνον εἰργάσμεθα.

What is this restless nature? In order to make the sharp distinction between intellect and soul needed by proponents of the view that the soul only lives in the sensible world, it must be identical with the soul (or perhaps be a nature prior to the soul).

However, this is not what Plotinus claims. Indeed, he goes on to state: “For since soul *possessed* an unquiet power, which wanted to keep on transferring what it saw there to something else” (*Enn.* III 7, II, 20 f.).²⁶ Thus, Plotinus does not claim that the soul *is* a restless nature. Instead, he states that it only *possesses* a restless power that is responsible for the activity considered earlier. This does not warrant the claim that the soul is *exclusively* active in the sensible world and that the life of the soul in the sensible world is the only life of the soul. Rather than claiming that the activity described in these passages is the only activity of the soul, Plotinus states that it is the activity of *a power* of the soul.

Let us now look at how he compares eternity to time. Does he attribute eternity exclusively to the intellect and time exclusively to the soul? Plotinus explains his position in the following way:

So if someone said that time is the life (*zōē*) of *the soul in movement*, changing from one life (*bios*) to another, would he talk sense? Yes, for if eternity is life at rest, remaining in the same and in the same way and already infinite, and if time must exist as an image of eternity (in the same relation as that in which this All stands to that [sc. the intelligible All]), then we must put, instead of the life there, another life, namely that of the power of the soul, which has, as it were, the same name, and instead of the intelligible motion, [we must put] a motion of a part of the soul. (*Enn.* III 7, II, 43–51)²⁷

These passages attribute to the soul a life that is in motion. But it does not follow that this life is the only life of the soul. Plotinus first asks whether time is the life of *the soul in movement* (as opposed to the life of the soul *tout court*). Moreover, he carefully attributes this life to *a power* of the soul and to *a part* of the soul. He does not simply claim that time is the life of the soul.²⁸ This is thus in keeping with my claim that timeless discursive thinking in the intelligible world is the essential activity of the soul.

²⁶ ἐπεὶ γὰρ ψυχῆς ἦν τις δύναμις οὐχ ἡσυχος τὸ δ' ἐκεῖ ὁρώμενον αἰετὶ μεταφέρειν εἰς ἄλλο βουλομένης κτλ.

²⁷ εἰ οὖν χρόνον τις λέγοι ψυχῆς ἐν κινήσει μεταβατικῇ ἐξ ἄλλου εἰς ἄλλον βίον ζωὴν εἶναι, ἄρ' ἂν δοκοῖ τι λέγειν; εἰ γὰρ αἰὼν ἐστὶ ζωὴ ἐν στάσει καὶ τῷ αὐτῷ καὶ ὡσαύτως καὶ ἀπειρος ἡδὴ, εἰκόνα δὲ δεῖ τοῦ αἰῶνος τὸν χρόνον εἶναι, ὥσπερ καὶ τόδε τὸ πᾶν ἔχει πρὸς ἐκεῖνο, ἀντὶ μὲν ζωῆς τῆς ἐκεῖ ἄλλην δεῖ ζωὴν τὴν τῆσδε τῆς δυνάμεως τῆς ψυχῆς ὥσπερ ὁμόνυμον λέγειν εἶναι καὶ ἀντὶ κινήσεως νοεράς ψυχῆς τινος μέρους κίνησιν, κτλ.

²⁸ The power of the soul which is active in the sensible world will be discussed in the [next chapter](#). It will also play a crucial role in my interpretation of the human soul.

There is more evidence in favour of the view that this is indeed what Plotinus thinks. At *Ennead* III 7, 12, 22f. he claims that the soul generated time together with the sensible world. Thus, because the soul generates time it is the principle of time. Since the soul is its principle, it must be prior to time. But even being prior to time, the soul must be alive because life is essential to the soul. The soul is, after all, essentially self-moving (remember *Enn.* IV 7, 9 quoted above).²⁹ Moreover, its self-movement is the cause of the life that the soul gives to other things. Were the soul, prior to time, lifeless, it could not be the principle of life.³⁰ Hence, since the soul exists prior to time and since it cannot exist without being active, it must possess a life prior to time and thus, because the sensible world as a whole is subject to time, must be active in the intelligible world. Therefore, the view according to which the soul's life is exclusively a process in time – far from finding support in *Ennead* III 7 – is actually at odds with it.³¹

We are now in a position to conclude that the activity of the soul in the sensible world cannot be the only life of the soul, since this life belongs to the sensible world and is subject to time. Secondly, because discursive reasoning, although being a *cognitive* activity, does not belong to the intelligible world while the soul must be active in the intelligible world, the soul's essential life can *at least* not exclusively consist in discursive reasoning.³² However, an even stronger claim is in order: discursive reasoning cannot be essential to the soul *at all* because there are souls that never reason discursively as we will see in the next chapter. Thirdly, discursive reasoning is crucially a process in time that, since only the sensible world is subject to time, belongs to the sensible rather than to the intelligible world.

Therefore, the following picture emerges. The soul is active in the sensible world by means of one of its powers. Only this activity is subject to time and we might call it, following *Ennead* III 7, the life of the soul in the sensible world. In addition and prior to it, however, the soul is also active in the intelligible world. This – essential – activity of the soul is eternal and unchanging and must therefore be distinct from discursive reasoning. We have seen in earlier chapters that the cognitive activity of the soul in the intelligible world is also distinct from that of the intellect. Combining these

²⁹ A self-moving being is simply a being that is active by itself. Whether this activity is a process or not is not determined by the term 'self-movement'. I argue that self-movement should not be understood as a process in time.

³⁰ The view that something lifeless can be the cause of life is considered by Plotinus to be an absurdity. See *Enn.* IV 7, 2, 16f.

³¹ See also *Enn.* IV 4, 16–18: "Nor are souls in time . . . For souls are eternal and time is posterior to them." οὐδ' αἱ ψυχαὶ ἐν χρόνῳ . . . αἰδίοι γὰρ αἱ ψυχαὶ καὶ ὁ χρόνος ὕστερος κτλ.

³² For this claim see also *Enn.* VI 7, 3, 6: οὐ γὰρ ἐνὶ λογίζεσθαι ἐν τῷ αἰεὶ κτλ.

two claims, we can see that we must make room for a third kind of cognitive activity, namely for the kind that I call *discursive thinking*, which is distinct from *discursive reasoning*. We shall see in the following chapters that each individual soul possesses an “unquiet” power (as it is called in *Enn.* III 7), that is, a power by means of which it is active in the sensible world.

The priority of the life in the intelligible world

On the basis of the arguments provided in the first section, we should give up, I think, the idea that the soul is *exclusively* active in the sensible world. But this still allows for the claim that the soul is *primarily*, but not exclusively, active there. On the basis of the discussion in the first section it is clear that this cannot be true in one sense of ‘primacy’, for we saw that Plotinus calls the soul’s activity in the sensible world an *image* of the soul’s own life. The soul’s own life, which has been shown to belong to the intelligible world, must thus be prior in this sense to its life in the sensible world.

However, even if we grant that the soul possesses, in addition to its life in the sensible world, a life in the intelligible world, and that the life in the sensible world is an image of the life in the intelligible world, we might still wonder whether the soul desires – most of all – to be active in the sensible world and considers its activity there as its proper aim and function. Thus, we might cling to the idea that the soul’s proper activity is actually its activity in the sensible world. If so, its activity in the intelligible world is purely instrumental. On this view, it is conceded that the soul has to think about the world of Forms in the intelligible world and about how to create an image of it that resembles that world as well as possible. But the soul only does so, we might think, *in order to* create the sensible world as an excellent image of that other world. Accordingly, the soul contemplates the world of Forms in order to know the paradigm and thinks about how to create an image in order to create the image. In this way, primacy would be given to the soul’s activity in the sensible world. Its activity in the intelligible world would only be a tool that enabled the soul to live in the sensible world.

In what follows I shall argue that, also in this sense of primacy, the soul’s activity in the sensible world is not primary. Before doing so, however, I wish to mention that in the present context I shall only discuss the ideal case of a soul that we might call ‘wise’. A wise soul is a soul whose actions in the sensible world are always and consistently motivated by the soul’s intelligible insight. A wise soul, that is, will always base its action on its understanding of the providential arrangement of the world that it has acquired in the intelligible world. As already indicated in the first section,

human souls, as we know well, are puzzled more often than not about how to act and their actions are often not based on their providential knowledge. I postpone discussion of such complications to [Chapter 6](#).

For the moment we have to ask: is it the wise soul's aim and desire to live in the sensible world? Does it only think discursively in order to know how to live in the sensible world? Discussion of such questions can be found at *Ennead* VI 8, 5, where Plotinus compares the soul to a physician.³³ Physicians are necessary because sometimes people are ill or injured. If everyone is in perfect shape and no one is ill or injured, there is no need for the physician's skill. However, in this hypothetical situation, Plotinus reasons, it would be absurd for a physician to wish that someone gets injured or falls ill in order to give him the opportunity to exercise his skills. If a physician did so, she would reveal that she had not understood the purpose of her activity. For the exercise of her skill is not the primary aim of the physician. Rather, physicians bring about health and thus contribute to a state where (ideally) no one is in need of a physician. The aim of the physician is not the exercise of her art but rather health, that is, a state where the exercise of the physician's art is not necessary. Thus, the aim of the physician is, in this sense, to become superfluous as a physician.

The same holds true, Plotinus claims, of virtuous actions in the sensible world. If one is involved in a war, for example, one has to act bravely; this is the behaviour appropriate to warfare. It would be absurd, however, to *hope* for a war in order to get the opportunity to act bravely. If one acts in a virtuous way, then one only acts bravely because there is a need to do so. Thus, acting bravely, for a truly brave person, is not in itself an aim.

Accordingly, Plotinus states:

For if someone gave virtue itself the choice whether it would like – so that it can be active – that there be wars so that it can be brave and that there be injustice so that it can determine just things and set things in order, and poverty, so that it can display its liberality, or to stay quiet because everything was well, it would choose to be at rest from its practical activities because nothing was in need of its service, just as a physician, such as Hippocrates, would choose that nobody needed his art. (*Enn.* VI 8, 5, 13–20)³⁴

³³ Plotinus' discussion at *Enn.* VI 8, 5 can be read as a commentary on Arist. *EN* X 8. There will be more on this in [Chapter 6](#). See also Caluori (2011).

³⁴ καὶ γὰρ εἴ τις ἀρεσιν αὐτῇ δοίη τῇ ἀρετῇ, πότερα βούλεται, ἵν' ἔχοι ἐνεργεῖν, εἶναι πολέμους, ἵνα ἀνδρίζοιτο, καὶ εἶναι ἀδικίαν, ἵνα τὰ δίκαια ὀρίζη καὶ κατακοσμήῃ, καὶ πενίαν, ἵνα τὸ ἐλευθέριον ἐνδεικνύοιτο, ἢ πάντων εὖ ἐχόντων ἡσυχίαν ἄγειν, ἔλοιτο ἂν τὴν ἡσυχίαν τῶν πράξεων οὐδενὸς θεραπείας δεομένου τῆς παρ' αὐτῆς, ὥσπερ ἂν εἴ τις ἰατρός, οἷον Ἱπποκράτης, μηδένα δεῖσθαι τῆς παρ' αὐτοῦ τέχνης.

In analogy to the physician, therefore, it is not the soul's aim to act in the sensible world and to care for its body. The soul only acts in the sensible world because the sensible world is in need of care. Bodies, unable to care for themselves, need the soul to care for them.

A similar view can already be found in Plato's *Republic*, namely in his simile of the Cave and the ensuing discussion about the elite of the ideal state there considered.³⁵ In the final passage of the simile of the Cave, the person ascending, after having left the Cave, sees the whole of reality and, finally, even the sun, which stands for the principle of everything else (namely the Good itself). Just like this person, Socrates explains, the philosophers too, the future rulers of his state, have to ascend. But after having spent some time contemplating true reality, they have to return to practical affairs, to return to the Cave. The philosophers, we are told, will not refuse to go back. "For we will demand of just people something just. Above all, each of them goes to rule *as to something necessary*" (*Rep.* 520E).³⁶ The claim that this demand is just is explained in the following terms: "Consider now, I said, dear Glauco, that we shall not be unjust towards those that become our philosophers but we will tell them what is just when we compel them to care for the others and to guard them" (*Rep.* 520A).³⁷ Thus, the philosophers have to care for the state's subjects because there is a need to do so. It is not the philosophers' aim and highest desire to deal with practical matters. Instead, there is a necessity to do so and the philosophers take the burden upon themselves to rule the state-to-be.³⁸

In analogy to the philosophers in Plato's *Republic*, Plotinian souls do not act in the sensible world because they are motivated by an ultimate desire that only finds fulfilment in its actions in the sensible world. Instead, they act in the sensible world because they understand that it is necessary. Just as the philosophers of the *Republic* have to care for the subjects of their state as well as for their state, so too do Plotinian souls have to care for their bodies as well as for the sensible world. However, philosopher kings and queens, as well as Plotinian souls, prefer to be in the intelligible world where

³⁵ For Platonist interpretations of this passage see O'Meara (1999b).

³⁶ δίκαια γὰρ δὴ δίκαιοις ἐπιτάξομεν. παντὸς μὴν μᾶλλον ὡς ἀναγκαῖον αὐτῶν ἕκαστος εἰσι τὸ ἄρχειν, κτλ.

³⁷ σκέψαι τοίνυν, εἶπον, ὦ Γλαύκων, ὅτι οὐδ' ἀδικήσομεν τοὺς παρ' ἡμῖν φιλοσόφους γιγνομένους, ἀλλὰ δίκαια πρὸς αὐτοὺς ἐροῦμεν, προσαναγκάζοντες τῶν ἄλλων ἐπιμελεῖσθαι τε καὶ φυλάττειν.

³⁸ The interpretation of this passage is controversial. For a more detailed defense of the interpretation sketched here see Caluori (2011).

they contemplate true reality, an activity that fills them with bliss and joy.³⁹

Even though souls prefer to lead a contemplative life, they, given their practical rationality, also want there to be a sensible world and a sensible world that is as excellent. Practical thinking, for Plotinus and many other ancient philosophers, also possesses a voluntative aspect.⁴⁰ If there is to be a sensible world, the thinking of the souls in the intelligible world, though necessary, is not sufficient. Instead, souls also have to create and maintain the sensible world. Their doing so is a consequence of their wish that there be a sensible world. It is a means to actualise what they know to be an excellent image of the world of Forms. Just as Hippocrates is rationally motivated to cure by his wish that people be healthy, so are souls rationally motivated to act in the sensible world by their wish that there be an excellent image of the world of Forms.

If a soul selfishly were of the view that it actually preferred solely to remain in the intelligible world and not to care for any body, it would not only damage the body it is supposed to care for. It would also, and more importantly, damage itself. For the selfish soul would reveal a lack of understanding and thus it would show that it is not in full command of its thinking. In this way, it would act against its rationality, which is its very nature. It would, so to speak, fall from the intelligible world in which it so much desired to reside. A wise soul would never do such a thing because it is exclusively motivated by reason.⁴¹

This leads us to the next problem. If the soul is practically motivated to act so that there be a sensible world (and a sensible world which is always in an excellent state), then its practical thinking (in the intelligible world) may still seem to have its aim in the sensible world. Thus even though their activity in the sensible world is instrumental, the *result* of this activity (i.e. the existence of the sensible world) seems to be the aim of the soul's rational desire (just as health is the aim of Hippocrates' rational desire). This is a

³⁹ Passages where Plotinus discusses reincarnation and claims that human souls make their choices based on memory or based on a sort of desire for a body to which they are attracted do not contradict this. For such attractions and memories belong to the lower soul and thus to the human soul that has already turned its attention to the sensible world. The background of such explanations will be provided in [Chapters 6 and 7](#).

⁴⁰ See e.g. *Enn.* IV 4, 12, 45f., where Plotinus identifies practical wisdom and will. For general discussion of the voluntative aspect of rationality in antiquity see Frede, introduction to Frede & Striker (1996) and Frede (2011).

⁴¹ This relates to a recent debate about Plotinus' ethics, where I find myself in general agreement with Smith (1999), Schniewind (2003) and Remes (2006), who all emphasise (in opposition to Plass (1982) and Dillon (1996)) that Plotinian ethics does not recommend self-centred otherworldliness.

problem if Plotinus gives priority (in the relevant sense) to the life of the soul in the intelligible world.

In order to solve this problem, Plotinus uses a solution that he found in Stoic ethics.⁴² As is well known, the Stoics claim that there is, strictly speaking, only one good, and that this good is virtue. A person leads a good life by possessing virtue and virtue is sufficient for the goodness of a good life. This Stoic view is directed against the ordinary view (a version of which we also find in Aristotle) according to which virtue alone is not sufficient for a good life, a life of complete fulfilment. Instead, you also need external goods (e.g. wealth, reputation) as well as bodily goods (e.g. health, strength) in order to lead a good and happy life. The Stoics not only deny that external and bodily goods are constitutive of a good life, but they even challenge the weaker claim that they are necessary for it. Instead, these so-called goods were put into a class of things called *indifferent* (*adiaphora*).⁴³ Some of the indifferent things are called *according to nature* and the old external and bodily goods (such things as health, life, strength, wealth and reputation (D.L. VII 102)) belong to this subclass. Things according to nature, even though not being good, possess value (*axia*). Those valuable things play a crucial role in the Stoic's view of the goal of life and this will be important for the solution of our problem.

The Stoics know a number of formulae in which they express the goal of life. A formula often used (going back to Zeno) states that the goal is living in agreement with nature.⁴⁴ For our purposes, however, a later formula is of more interest. According to this later formula, the second *telos* formula of Antipater, the goal of life consists in "doing everything in one's power, constantly and unwaveringly, to obtain the things that are preferred according to nature".⁴⁵ The things that are preferred according to nature are precisely those possessing value.⁴⁶

Opponents of the Stoics considered this formula as paradoxical or absurd. Alexander of Aphrodisias (if he is the author of the *Mantissa*), for

⁴² For the following see in particular Reiner (1969) and Striker (1996); but see also Inwood (1985) and Brennan (2003). I shall only sketch the Stoic position in so far as it is relevant for our present concern with Plotinus. See also Caluori (2005), where I already discussed this solution.

⁴³ It is important to note that these things are called 'indifferent', not because they are considered to be without any function in human life at all, but rather because they are indifferent to a good life. See Pohlenz (1948) 119–123, Kidd (1971), Inwood (1985) 197–201.

⁴⁴ ὁμολογουμένως τῇ φύσει ζῆν. It is ascribed to the first three heads of the Stoa, e.g. in D.L. VII 87f.

⁴⁵ Ἀντίπατρος δὲ ζῆν ἐκλεγόμενους μὲν τὰ κατὰ φύσιν, ἀπεκλεγόμενους δὲ τὰ παρὰ φύσιν. πολλάκις δὲ καὶ οὕτως ἀπεδίδου πᾶν τὸ καθ' αὐτὸν ποιεῖν διηλεκῶς καὶ ἀπαραβάτως πρὸς τὸ τυγχάνειν τῶν προηγουμένων κατὰ φύσιν. SVF III Antipater 57.

⁴⁶ According to Striker, following Hirzel, the word 'προηγούμενος' could as well be omitted (Striker (1996) 300 n. 3; Hirzel (1882) 805–828).

example, wrote: "It is surely absurd to say that virtue applies only to selecting. For if getting the things selected is indifferent and does not contribute to the end, the selection would be pointless and vain" (Alex. Aphr. (?), *Mantissa* 164, 6–9).⁴⁷ Plutarch's criticism is of a similar vein. He also claims that the selection is only rational if it is made with reference to a goal which itself contributes to a good life. Thus, according to him, Antipater's second *telos* formula only makes sense if the things selected contribute to happiness. "For otherwise . . . thinking well is annulled since it does everything for the sake of obtaining what is neither solemn nor blissful to obtain" (Plu., *Comm. Not.* 1071E).⁴⁸

Against this criticism, the Stoics argue that on the one hand, indeed, the obtainment of those valuable things that people in their lives should aim to obtain is not in the least bit important for the happiness and bliss of their lives, while on the other hand, their doing everything in their power to obtain those valuable things is of the greatest importance.

In order to show that this is not absurd or paradoxical, the Stoics introduced the famous example of the archer.⁴⁹ According to them, the archer does everything in her power to hit the mark. However, she does not do so in order to hit the mark: that is, she does *not* do everything in her power to hit the mark *in order to hit the mark*. Instead, she does everything in her power to hit the mark *in order to do everything in her power to hit the mark*.

Now this claim allows for a weaker and a stronger interpretation. According to both, it is the aim of the Stoic sage to do everything in her power to hit the mark. Moreover, both interpretations agree that it does not matter to her whether she achieves her aim *as far as her happiness is concerned*, for acquiring and possessing things which have value is neither part of her happiness nor necessary for it. Yet, according to the weaker interpretation, the sage is nevertheless concerned about acquiring and possessing valuable things. Failing to acquire something valuable, for example, matters to her even though it does not concern the goodness of her life.

According to the stronger interpretation, however, acquiring and possessing valuable things does not matter to the sage in the least. The example of the archer is taken to show that the archer's aim is to exercise his art

⁴⁷ πῶς οὐκ ἄτοπον τὸ τὴν ἀρετὴν ἐπὶ τοῦτο λέγειν εἶναι μόνον, ἐπὶ τὸ ἐκλέγεσθαι; εἰ γὰρ ἀδιάφορος ἡ κτήσις τῶν ἐκλεγόμενων καὶ μὴ συντείνουσα πρὸς τὸ τέλος, κενὴ ἂν εἴη καὶ ματαία ἡ ἐκλογή.

⁴⁸ εἰ δὲ μή, τὸ εὐλόγιστον αὐτῆς ἀφαιρεῖται, πάντα ποιούσης ἕνεκα τοῦ τυχεῖν, οὐ τυχεῖν οὐ σεμνὸν οὐδὲ μακάριόν ἐστι.

⁴⁹ Cic. *Fin.* III 22; Plutarch *Comm. Not.* 1071BC.

skilfully. If he has exercised his art in such a way that he has done everything in his power so that – as far as what is in his power is concerned – the hitting of the mark follows, he is satisfied. Whether, however, in actual fact he hits the mark does not matter to him in the least. It does not concern him, for example, when an unexpected gust of wind blows the skilfully shot arrow off course. Understood in this way, archery has its aim in itself. As we shall see, Plotinus' view corresponds to this stronger interpretation (no matter whether this is the correct interpretation of the Stoic view).

A Stoic sage, if understood in this way, does everything in his power to obtain valuable things without, however, being worried about whether he does or does not obtain them. The crucial thing for the Stoic sage consists, according to this reading, in his virtue and in his wisdom and not at all in the obtainment of valuable things. Accordingly, it is only important to him to think about things in the right way. His thinking about how to live and about how to act in the world also provides him with the motivation to act accordingly. The action itself, however, only follows (if it is not hindered) from his correct way of thinking about things, just as the hitting of the mark follows (if not hindered) from the correct exercise of archery. But just like the archer's unexpected gust of wind, there might be something in the world preventing the sage from acting in the way he considered right to act. However, again in analogy to the archer, the sage does not care about this in the least if the hindrance is something beyond his power.

I have dwelt on the stronger interpretation because, if this interpretation is the correct one, it corresponds in remarkable detail to Plotinus' view. If, however, the weaker interpretation of the Stoic view is correct, Plotinus' position is more radical than the Stoic one. The Plotinian soul thinks practically, as we have seen, about the ordering of a sensible world. Nevertheless, the goal of the soul does not consist in the proper arrangement of the sensible world but rather in the thinking in the right way about the order of a sensible world and in thinking in the right way about the soul's own individual function in this arrangement. The actual ordering of the sensible world (or, on an individual scale, the action of an individual soul and even its whole life in the sensible world) only follows from the soul's thinking without being the goal of this thinking.

Perhaps this becomes clearer if we look at a soul in the sublunary world. To simplify things, I will assume that the soul is completely rational and not influenced by any non-rational soul parts it may or may not have. A soul in the sublunary world often has to act in specific situations. A physician on her way for lunch, for example, might come across someone who has just had an accident and is in desperate need of help. It might seem

that the soul of the physician could either decide to help or to stick to her original plan and have her lunch instead, risking the death of the person in need. But clearly, if the physician decided against helping the poor person, her soul would prove to have some serious misconception about how the sensible world is and should be arranged. It would reveal itself not to have understood some basic facts about the providential arrangement of the sensible world. The thought or temptation not to help would not even occur, however, to a wise soul. Based on its understanding of the proper workings of the sensible world, the wise soul would help. What is more, it would not even have to ponder about whether to help or to have lunch. For already the thought of having lunch instead of helping could only occur to a soul on the basis of some misconception or lack of understanding.

Let us assume the victim of the accident dies nevertheless even though the physician has done everything in her power to help him. This does not matter to the wise soul of the physician in the least. For the death of the patient, under these circumstances, is a matter of complete indifference to the soul of the physician, just as the hitting of the mark, according to the stronger interpretation, is a matter of complete indifference to the archer. This behaviour might appear selfish because it seems that the wise physician or soul has no real concern for other people but rather is only interested in its (her) own life. However, I believe that this is not the right way of understanding this. Indeed, the soul would treat its own body in exactly the same way and the death of its own body, under the same circumstances, would not grieve the soul at all. So if we feel Plotinus' view to be off the mark at all here, then this feeling is not grounded in the relation of self to other people but rather in his attributing to bodies far less value than we tend to do.

Generalising the archer example, we can see that – in a crucial sense – the soul's life in the sensible world does not matter to the soul at all. It is rather its life in the intelligible world that, far from being purely instrumental, is all that matters to the soul. Accordingly, only its activity in the intelligible world, that is, its thinking, is essential to it. The soul's activity in the sensible world only follows from its essential activity in the intelligible world just as the hitting of the mark just follows the exercise of the archer's art.

In order to better understand what it means for the external activity to *follow* from the soul's inner life and to see that the former, as opposed to the latter, is not essential to the soul, we have to step back and look at an important feature of Plotinus' layered ontology. Plotinus explains relations between higher and lower levels of his ontology often by using the notions

of internal and external activity, and the soul's inner life and its relation to its external activity can also be understood in these terms.⁵⁰ Quite generally, he claims that the internal activity of something is essential to it and that by exercising its internal activity, an external, non-essential activity follows. Stock examples of this relation are the activities of fire and of snow.⁵¹ The essential activity (*energeia*) of fire is its being hot.⁵² Yet fire also heats things in its environment. The latter heating – the fire's external activity – is not essential to the fire while the former – its internal activity – is essential to it. Fire would be what it is even if there were no bodies to be heated in its environment. However, if there are bodies to be heated in the environment of the fire, they will be heated by the fire and the external heat is a necessary (i.e. necessary *given these circumstances*) consequence of the fire's internal activity. Another example is that of snow. Snow is essentially cold. Its own being cold is the essential activity of snow. Following from this activity there is an external activity. This external activity is the cooling of things in the environment of snow. If we remind ourselves of the example of the archer, we can see how the internal activity of snow corresponds to the archer's exercise of his art and its external activity corresponds to the hitting of the mark.

Plotinus explains the soul's inner life and its external activity on the basis of this model. I already quoted *Ennead* IV 3, 10, 35–40. After having discussed the example of fire Plotinus states:

Both the activity of the soul in itself, as well as that which goes out to something else, is something awake. Thus the soul makes alive all the things which do not live by themselves, and [makes them live] a life similar to that by which it lives itself . . . for what it gives to the body is an image of life. (*Enn.* IV 3, 10, 35–40)⁵³

The soul, Plotinus states in this passage, has a twofold activity, one within itself and another one that “goes out to something else”. While its internal activity, as I have suggested, consists in its essential activity in the intelligible world, its external activity consists, according to this passage, in

⁵⁰ For Plotinus' account of the relation between internal and external activity see in particular Rutten (1956), Lloyd (1990) 98–107, O'Meara (1993) chs. 6–7, Emilsson (1999) and Emilsson (2007) ch. 1f.

⁵¹ *Enn.* V 4, 2, 27–33; *Enn.* V 1, 6, 28–35. The examples are, of course, taken from the *Phaedo*.

⁵² It may seem odd to say that being hot is an *activity* but Plotinus conceives of it this way. He identifies the fire's being hot with its internal heating activity.

⁵³ ψυχῆς δὲ ἔργον καὶ τὸ ἐν αὐτῇ ἐργηγορός τι καὶ τὸ εἰς ἄλλο ὡσαύτως. ζῆν οὖν καὶ τὰ ἄλλα ποιεῖ, ὅσα μὴ ζῆ παρ' αὐτῶν, καὶ τοιαύτην ζῶην, καθ' ἣν αὐτὴ ζῆ . . . καὶ γὰρ καὶ εἰδωλον ζῶης, ὅσον διδωσι τῷ σώματι.

making “alive all other things which do not live of themselves”. Thus, its activity in the sensible world is the soul’s external activity.

The considerations of this chapter have shown that the soul is active both in the intelligible and in the sensible world. Furthermore, I have argued that its activity in the sensible world is not the soul’s primary activity; in fact, it is not even essential to the soul. Rather, this activity is a consequence of the soul’s own life which is its primary activity and its essence and consists in the soul’s being actively thinking in the intelligible world.

In the following chapters I will discuss the ways in which the soul is active in the sensible world. We will have to distinguish different types of individual soul (such as the World Soul and the human soul) and consider them separately. Despite significant differences between different types, the same pattern will recur: the activity of each individual soul in the sensible world is their non-essential external activity in the sense discussed in this chapter. We will also discuss in more detail a claim made in the first section: that each soul is active in the sensible world by means of a power.

Divine individual souls

In the [last chapter](#) I considered the claim that all individual souls live a life in the intelligible realm and thus contemplate reality, and that this is one of their essential activities. Since the contemplation of reality is a divine life, according to Plotinus, there is a sense in which all rational souls are divine and blessed. However, there is also a sense in which this is not the case and in which there exists a distinction between the souls of gods and those of human beings. There is, it seems, both for us and the ancients, something odd about claiming that all human beings lead blessed lives. Our view of the stars and the earth, however, differs considerably from that of most people living in antiquity, when it was widespread practice to call the sun, the earth and perhaps even the world as a whole divine, for such beings were considered gods and their lives were accordingly seen as blessed. Plotinus, in any case, clearly makes a distinction between divine beings such as the sun on the one hand and human beings on the other, beings whose divinity is not apparent – not even to themselves. We will see that this distinction, according to Plotinus, is based, not on any essential difference, but rather on differences concerning the respective external activity in the sensible world. As the next two chapters will show, the fact that our divinity is hidden to us is due to the fact that we *experience* the sensible world while being active in it.

The present chapter is devoted to divine souls in the narrow sense: the World Soul, the souls of the stars and the soul of the earth. We shall see that they are neither perturbed nor distracted by their external activity. They are active in the sensible world while remaining fully absorbed in their contemplation. We may call living beings belonging to the sensible world that are taken care of by divine souls ‘visible gods’. These comprise the sensible world as a whole, the stars (including the planets, sun and moon) and the earth. The chapter is divided into four sections. The first section is devoted to the World Soul, the second to the souls of the stars and the third to the soul of the earth. The fourth section will

discuss why divine souls are unperturbed and not distracted by their external activity.

The World Soul

In [Chapter 3](#) I argued that individual souls are distinct from the hypostasis Soul since they each focus on one particular aspect, respectively, of the whole providential thinking while the hypostasis Soul does not focus on anything in particular. This distinction needs to be further elucidated in the case of the World Soul which, although being an individual soul, is not particularly concerned with one specific *part* of the sensible world but rather with the body of the sensible world as a *whole*. In fact, it is the only individual soul whose thinking is not specifically concerned with a part. This appears to create the following problem for Plotinus: in the case of other individual souls we can explain their individuation by their focusing on a *part* of the providential arrangement of the sensible world. But neither the World Soul nor the hypostasis Soul focuses on any part of this providential arrangement. So, as far as their thinking is concerned, in what way is the World Soul distinct from the hypostasis Soul?

We have seen that the hypostasis Soul consists of pure discursive thought, part of whose content is the providential arrangement of a sensible world to be created. Importantly, the fact that the thinking of the hypostasis Soul possesses content does not imply that the Soul focuses on any object in particular. In fact, as we have seen in [Chapter 3](#), it does not – and this crucially distinguishes it from the World Soul which, by contrast, focuses on an object in particular, namely the sensible world as a whole. Even though the sensible world is a whole, it is still a body – it is just a body that encompasses all other bodies. And just as in the case of any other living body, there is a soul (in this case, the World Soul), which is particularly interested in organising *this* body and giving life to it. In this way, the World Soul is an individual soul just like any other and is distinct from the hypostasis Soul in the same way that all other individual souls are distinct from the hypostasis Soul. Thus, contrary to first appearances, there is no special problem in considering the World Soul an individual soul.

All individual souls are active in the sensible world. This activity is, as we saw in [Chapter 3](#), a consequence of their focusing and taking a particular interest in one specific body and its life. If so, this must also hold true in the case of the World Soul. Indeed, a consequence of the World Soul's thinking about the providential arrangement with a particular focus on the sensible world as a whole is that it gives order to the sensible world. The

view that the world is given order by the World Soul was, in fact, widely held in Late Antiquity. Galen, for example, claims that one of his Platonist teachers, a pupil of Gaius, maintained that the World Soul creates the body of the world, including all bodies which are part of it.¹ Galen himself expresses some doubts about the view of his teacher for the following reason. Although, as he states in *De Foetuum Formatione*, he believes it to be within the art and power (*technē kai dunamis*) of the World Soul to create such things as spiders, scorpions and vipers, it would be below its dignity to do so.² After all, the World Soul is, as it were, the queen of the sensible world and it would be odd, Galen thinks, that such a majestic being had to occupy herself with pests and lowly creatures.

Plotinus would not have any problem with these beings in particular since he believes that the sensible world, along with all its parts, is organised in a most excellent way. Hence, there are no beings which he considers useless.³ However, even so it might be thought that Galen's worry about spiders, scorpions and vipers can be generalised to everything corporeal (at least in the sublunary sphere), since one might think that the dignity of the World Soul is incompatible with an immediate interaction with corporeal matters – at least with corporeal matters in the sublunary sphere.

In order to be able to appreciate what precisely the problem is here, we have to bear in mind that Platonists ranked activities according to value. We have discussed in some detail that they considered the contemplation of Forms the highest and most dignified activity. Since bodies count rather little on the Platonist scale of value, such activities as forming bodies are not in high regard either: the production of something of little value is in itself not a very valuable activity. Indeed, as we shall see, Plotinus considers this activity the lowest that a divine power might get involved in. Just like other Platonists, Plotinus claims, in opposition to the Stoics, that the divine Craftsman himself is not immediately involved in forming matter at all; however, he also argues, this time contrary to both the Stoics and other Platonists, against the view that the World Soul – being an individual soul and distinct from the divine Craftsman – is itself immediately involved in forming matter.⁴

¹ *De Foet. Form.* IV 700f. K.= CMG V 3, 3, 104.

² In his commentary on this passage Nickel explains: "Die aufgezählten Tiere [...] sind aus der Sicht des Menschen gefährlich, lästig oder schädlich; ihre Ausformung als das Werk der Weltseele anzusehen, hält Galen deshalb für unangemessen, weil sich diese Vorstellung mit der Erhabenheit der Weltseele nicht vereinbaren läßt" (Nickel (2001) 168).

³ Even though, of course, they might be useless or even dangerous *for human beings*. This would not affect, however, their worth and usefulness for the whole of creation.

⁴ See, e.g., Plutarch, *De an. procr.* 1016Cff. The background of this view is *Ti.* 34Cff.

There is further reason for why it is important to Plotinus to argue that the World Soul is not directly involved in all the activity of its body: The World Soul would have to be in time in order to be active throughout its body. For activities in the sublunary sphere are ordered temporally in such a way that, in order to be an agent directly causing sublunary events, one has to be in time oneself. For example, if Jane builds a house then she has to know *when* it is time to place the roof on top. As I argue in Caluori (forthcoming), Jane cannot possibly act at the right time if she is not herself in time. In other words, from an atemporal (eternal) point of view, it is impossible to act at specific times while not acting (or not acting in this way) at other times. But if the World Soul (or, for that matter, also the souls of the stars) were in time in this way, it would necessarily distract them from their contemplative life and thus be inconsistent with their being divine beings in the strict sense, for divine beings in the strict sense do live an eternal life of bliss, as we will discuss in the final section of this chapter.⁵

It appears that, on the one hand, the World Soul should be free of such things as forming matter but, on the other, its activity in the sensible world must, at least in some way, consist in forming bodies since this is necessary for the organisation of its body. Moreover, this organisation of the body of the sensible world is clearly a duty and activity of the World Soul.

Plotinus attempts to solve this problem in *Ennead* IV 8. However, before discussing Plotinus' solution, let us first consider a treatise that bears many verbal and doctrinal resemblances to *Ennead* IV 8, namely the pseudo Aristotelian treatise *De Mundo*.⁶ The author of this treatise considers God to be the creator of the world and his description of the relation of God to the world corresponds, as we shall see, in striking detail to the way in which Plotinus describes the relation of World Soul to sensible world in *Ennead* IV 8.⁷

The author of *De Mundo* rejects the Stoic view that God is an immanent part of the sensible world. He states: "For God is truly the preserver of everything and the creator of whatever is completed in this world without, however, taking upon himself the toil of a self-working and laborious living being. Instead, he uses an indefatigable power by means of which he

⁵ For a detailed defense of this argument see Caluori (forthcoming).

⁶ A discussion of this treatise can be found in, e.g., Strohm (1952), Reale (1974) and Moraux (1984), 5–82. Reale claims that *De Mundo* is authentic. For a critical evaluation of Reale's argument see Barnes (1977) and Mansfeld (1991).

⁷ It is fairly clear that either Plotinus knew *De Mundo* or he knew a text depending on *De Mundo* or on which *De Mundo* depends. Given that both the date of *De Mundo* and the date from which *De Mundo* was considered Aristotelian is not settled, it seems advisable to suspend judgement on what the precise textual relation is between *De Mundo* and *Enn.* IV 8.

prevails even over what appears remote” (*Mu.* 397b20–24).⁸ His opponents went astray, the author continues, because they did not distinguish between God’s essence and his divine power (*Mu.* 397b19 f.) and because they thought that what the divine power does is the immediate work of God. In the following lines, the author of *De Mundo* compares God to the Persian Great King who, although being the king of a huge empire who arranged everything in it, did not even have to leave his palace in order to do so. Instead, he remained there, using his power to arrange things in his realm. If this holds true of the Great King, our author claims, all the more so of God: “it is more honourable, more becoming for him to reside in the highest place, while his power, penetrating the whole cosmos, moves sun and moon and turns the whole of heaven and is the cause of the preservation for the things upon earth” (*Mu.* 398b6–10).⁹

The view of the author of *De Mundo*, namely that God is not essentially involved in acting in the sensible world but rather acts there by sending a divine power into it, was quite widespread in Late Antiquity. Irenaeus, for example, ascribes it to a certain Cerinthus, but we also find it in Galen and in Plotinus.¹⁰

At *Ennead* IV 8, 2, 31–38 Plotinus claims:

Now, since the divine soul [i.e. the World Soul] is always said to providentially arrange (*dioikein*) the whole of heaven in this way, transcendent in the better place but sending its lowest power into the interior of the world, God could not still be blamed for making the World Soul exist in something worse, and the soul would not be deprived of its natural due, which it has from eternity and will have for ever, which cannot be against its nature in that it belongs to it continually and without beginning. (*Enn.* IV 8, 2, 31–38)¹¹

⁸ σωτήρ μὲν γὰρ ὄντως ἀπάντων ἐστὶ καὶ γενέτωρ τῶν ὅπωςδὴποτε κατὰ τόνδε τὸν κόσμον συντελουμένων ὁ θεός, οὐ μὴν αὐτουργοῦ καὶ ἐπιπόνου ζώου κάματον ὑπομένων, ἀλλὰ δυνάμει χρώμενος ἀτρύτω, δι’ ἧς καὶ τῶν πόρρω δοκούντων εἶναι περιγίνεται. The term “αὐτουργός” is used by Plotinus in the same context at *Enn.* IV 8, 2, 29. I shall come back to this below.

⁹ σεμνότερον δὲ καὶ πρεπωδέστερον αὐτὸν μὲν ἐπὶ τῆς ἀνωτάτω χώρας ἰδρῦσθαι, τὴν δὲ δύναμιν διὰ τοῦ σύμπαντος κόσμου διήκουσαν ἥλιον τε κινεῖν καὶ σελήνην καὶ τὸν πάντα οὐρανὸν περιάγειν αἰτίον τε γίνεσθαι τοῖς ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς σωτηρίας.

¹⁰ Irenaeus *Adv. Haer.* I 21, 1; Galen, *Prop. Plac.* CMG V 3, 2, 56f. The view also seems to have been popular among Neo-Pythagoreans (see Ps. Onatas, *De deo* 139, 5–8 Thesleff) and, as early as the second century BCE, among interpreters of the Old Testament (Ps. Aristas 132; perhaps also Aristobulus in Eus. *PE* XIII 12). According to Epiphanius, *Adv. Haer.* I 6 (= DG 588, 24–27) it was part of Plato’s teaching.

¹¹ τῆς δὲ θείας ψυχῆς τοῦτον τὸν τρόπον τὸν οὐρανὸν ἅπαντα διοικεῖν αἰεὶ λεγομένης, ὑπερεχούσης μὲν τῷ κρείττονι, δύναμιν δὲ τὴν ἐσχάτην εἰς τὸ εἶσω πεμπούσης, αἰτίαν μὲν ὁ θεός οὐκ ἂν ἔτι λέγοιτο, ἔχειν τὴν τοῦ τῆν ψυχῆν τοῦ παντός ἐν χεῖρονι πεποικέναι, ἣ τε ψυχὴ οὐκ ἀπεστέρηται τοῦ κατὰ φύσιν ἐξ αἰδίου τοῦτ’ ἐχούσα καὶ ἐξούσα αἰεὶ, ὃ μὴ οἶόν τε παρὰ φύσιν αὐτῇ εἶναι, ὅπερ διηλεκκὸς αὐτῇ αἰεὶ ὑπάρχει οὐποτε ἀρξάμενον. For the lowest power see also *Enn.* II 9, 2, 14f.

Thus, just like God in *De Mundo*, Plotinus' World Soul sends a power into the sensible world in order to be active there. This power enables the World Soul to handle bodies and, in particular, to handle the body of the whole sensible world. The activities in the sensible world that we attribute to the World Soul are thus to be attributed to one of its powers, indeed to its *lowest* power. Its essential activity, however, is completely independent of this. We have thus in Plotinus' discussion of the World Soul a confirmation of the more general thesis about the internal and external activity of individual souls as developed in [Chapter 4](#) if we assume that the external activity is exercised by this power.

We may wonder, however, whether this is sufficient to preserve the World Soul's dignity. The fact that the World Soul is active in the sensible world by means of one of its powers, and that this activity is not essential to it, does not imply that this lowly activity is not an activity of the World Soul. However, if it still is an activity of the World Soul, then the World Soul seems to be still active in this undignified way and we have not solved the problem posed above. In order to do so, we have to gain a better understanding of how precisely the World Soul is active in the sensible world.

Let us once more go back to the image of the Great King in *De Mundo*. We are told:

The King himself, it is said, lived in Susa or Ecbatana, invisible to everyone, in a marvellous palace . . . Outside [the walls of the palace] the leaders and most distinguished men were drawn up in order, some as personal bodyguards and attendants to the King himself, some as guardians of each outer wall . . . and others – each responsible for taking care of a particular task, as they were necessary. (*Mu.* 398a13–26)¹²

The Great King is active in his whole realm without leaving his palace. In order to make this point, the author claims that the Great King is not *self-working* (*autourgos*).¹³ Plotinus uses the same term when distinguishing between two ways in which souls care for their bodies: one involves self-working, the other does not – the distinction is one between human souls and the World Soul: “The care for the All is twofold, on the one hand for the whole by the effortless command of one setting in order by royal authority, and on the other hand in relation to particulars, already by

¹² αὐτὸς μὲν γάρ, ὡς λόγος, ἴδρυτο ἐν Σούσοις ἢ Ἐκβατάνοις, παντὶ ἀόρατος, θαυμαστὸν ἐπέχων βασιλείου οἶκον . . . ἔξω δὲ τούτων ἄνδρες οἱ πρῶτοι καὶ δοκιμώτατοι διεκεκόσμηντο, οἱ μὲν ἀμφ’ αὐτὸν τὸν βασιλέα δορυφόροι τε καὶ θεράποντες, οἱ δὲ ἐκάστου περιβόλου φύλακες . . . τῶν τε λοιπῶν ἔργων ἕκαστοι κατὰ τὰς χρῆας ἐπιμεληταί.

¹³ *Mu.* 6, 397b22.

some self-working activity (*autourgōi tini poiēsei*) which is in contact with the thing acted upon – a care filling the acting thing with the nature of the thing acted upon” (*Enn.* IV 8, 2, 26–30).¹⁴

The passage quoted from *De Mundo* above shows what it means for the Great King to rule by royal authority. There are many agents that work in the Great King’s name and through his authority, in this way exercising the Great King’s power. Through these agents his royal power spreads through the entire kingdom. Each agent possesses his own individual function in the whole organisation of the kingdom. If every agent fulfils his or her function properly (and if the organisation as a whole is well established), all his agents together realise the wishes of the Great King and organise his realm in precisely the way he considers best – and they do so through the Great King’s power.

The Great King and his agents are organised in a hierarchical structure. There is a whole chain of authority, running from the Great King down to his most humble subjects. This, at least, is how the author of *De Mundo* understands it. He emphasises this aspect when applying the simile of how the Great King rules his realm to God’s rule of the world:

So also the divine nature with a simple movement of the first confers its power to the neighbouring parts and from there again to the more remote parts until it permeates the All. One thing is moved by another and itself then moves a third in regular order, all things acting in the manner appropriate to their own constitution. (*Mu.* 398b19–24)¹⁵

Thus, God is not himself immediately active in all quarters of the sensible world but rather uses agents, organised in a hierarchical chain, who work on his behalf. Every agent acts according to his own individual constitution and possesses his or her proper function. But it is important to note that their activity is the exercise of God’s (or, in the simile, the Great King’s) power. Let us call the exercise of one’s power by other agents *agent-based* and distinguish it from the *immediate* exercise of power.

Just like *De Mundo*’s God, Plotinus’ World Soul exercises power by using agents and there is very little that it does immediately (as far as its

¹⁴ διττὴ γὰρ ἐπιμέλεια παντός, τοῦ μὲν καθόλου κελεύσει κοσμοῦντος ἀπράγμονι ἐπιστασίᾳ βασιλικῇ, τὸ δὲ καθέκαστα ἤδη αὐτουργῶ τινι ποιήσει συναφῇ τῇ πρὸς τὸ πραττόμενον τὸ πρᾶττον τοῦ πραττομένου τῆς φύσεως ἀναπιμπλάσῃ. I shall discuss this passage with a view to the human soul in the [next chapter](#). There I shall in particular consider in what sense the soul “gets filled” with the nature of the body.

¹⁵ οὕτως οὖν καὶ ἡ θεία φύσις ἀπὸ τινος ἀπλῆς κινήσεως τοῦ πρώτου τὴν δύναμιν εἰς τὰ συνεχῆ διδωσι καὶ ἀπ’ ἐκείνων πάλιν εἰς τὰ πορρωτέρω, μέχρις ἂν διὰ τοῦ παντός διεξέλθῃ· κινήθην γὰρ ἕτερον ὑφ’ ἑτέρου καὶ αὐτὸ πάλιν ἐκίνησεν ἄλλο σὺν κόσμῳ, δρώντων μὲν πάντων οἰκείως ταῖς σφετέραις κατασκευαῖς, κτλ.

external activity is concerned). The difference between the immediate and the mediated way of exercising one's power is very important for the following reasons. Imagine the World Soul exercises its power exclusively immediately. In this way everything in the sensible world would be immediately arranged by the World Soul. This would have the following two consequences. Firstly, the World Soul, by means of its own power, would be active in the lowly ways Galen wants God not to be active (creating scorpions etc.). Accordingly, even though this activity would be the World Soul's non-essential activity, it would still be its immediate activity and thus incompatible with its dignity.

Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, the power would not be exercised by proper rational agents in the sensible world. Since this power would accomplish everything in the sensible world, there would be no room for rational agents in the sensible world apart from the World Soul. As we know from [Chapter 1](#), this is not how Plotinus conceives of the World Soul's activity in the sensible world. The World Soul's exercise of its power is to a large extent (but not exclusively) agent-based. Next to the World Soul, there are many other rational souls active in the sensible world. These rational souls act as agents of the World Soul, being active on behalf of the World Soul and thus contributing to the organisation of the latter's body. They are not, however, puppets on strings in the hands of the World Soul. Instead, they are proper agents, being endowed with rationality and thus in principle able to exercise power on the basis of their own proper understanding of how the sensible world should be arranged and of what their contribution to this arrangement is.¹⁶

Even though most of the World Soul's activity in the sensible world is performed by means of agents, there still is some immediate external activity. At *Ennead* IV 8, 2 Plotinus claims that the World Soul rules by an effortless command (*Enn.* IV 8, 2, 28). Earlier in the same chapter he claims, using the same metaphor, that the World Soul only needs a kind of brief command (*brachu hoion keleusma*) in order to rule the sensible world (*Enn.* IV 8, 2, 16). What is this brief command? Again, a comparison with *De Mundo* is helpful. The author of *De Mundo* explains how God rules the sensible world as follows: "by means of a simple revolution of the whole heaven completed in a night and a day, the various motions of all the

¹⁶ In the long treatise *Enn.* VI 4–5, in particular in *Enn.* VI 4, 3, Plotinus expresses a worry about the soul sending powers into the sensible world. Note, however, that the worry concerns powers that act independently of the soul from which they originate. The powers I am discussing here are not cut off. I do not deny, for example, that the World Soul is present everywhere in the sensible world (just as the Great King is present throughout Persia). It is so by means of a power.

heavenly bodies are initiated, and though all are embraced in one sphere, some move faster and others more slowly, according to their distances and their individual constitution" (*Mu.* 399a1–6).¹⁷ In this way, all stars together produce a single harmony, each star contributing its own individual share to giving order to heaven. With this in mind we can now see that the World Soul's immediate external activity consists in moving the whole heaven by moving the outermost sphere of the sensible world. Every other activity of the World Soul in the sensible world is agent-based. The World Soul is thus not immediately involved in forming matter, creating scorpions and so on. In this way, the World Soul's dignity is preserved. For moving the sphere of the fixed stars does not seem to be unworthy of this majestic being.

We are now in a position to better understand what the lowest power is. At *Ennead* II 2, 3, 1–3 Plotinus claims: "The lowest power of the soul, beginning at the earth, is interwoven through the Whole."¹⁸ This passage refers to *Timaeus* 36D8–E2, where we read: "When the soul [i.e. the World Soul] had been constructed in a way that pleased him who had constructed it [i.e. the divine Craftsman], then he went on to fashion inside it all that is body-like, and, joining centre to centre, he fitted the two together. The soul was interwoven [with the body] from the centre on out in every direction to the outermost heaven."¹⁹ Plotinus uses the same word for 'being interwoven' as Plato and the similarity is so striking that it is clear that Plotinus must have had this passage in mind when writing *Ennead* II 2, 3, 1–3. There is, however, a crucial difference to the *Timaeus*, with which we are already familiar by now: Plotinus does not think that the World Soul itself is interwoven with the body of the world but rather only its lowest power.

From both Plotinus' passage and the corresponding passage from the *Timaeus*, it becomes apparent that, in Plotinus' interpretation, the power that the World Soul sends into the sensible world permeates the whole body of the world. If the lowest power is that by means of which the World Soul is creating and maintaining its body, this is not surprising. But how should we think about the fact that this power seems to be everywhere?

¹⁷ διὰ γὰρ ἀπλῆς τοῦ σύμπαντος οὐρανοῦ περιαγωγῆς ἡμέρα καὶ νυκτὶ περατουμένης ἀλλοῖαι πάντων διέοδοι γίνονται, καίτοι ὑπὸ μιᾶς σφαίρας περιεχομένων, τῶν μὲν θάπτον, τῶν δὲ σχολαιότερον κινουμένων παρά τε τὰ τῶν διαστημάτων μήκη καὶ τὰς ἰδίας ἐκάστων κατασκευάς.

¹⁸ τῆς ψυχῆς ἡ μὲν τις δύναμις ἡ ἐσχάτη ἀπὸ γῆς ἀρξαμένη καὶ δι' ὅλου διαπλεκεῖσα ἐστίν.

¹⁹ ἐπεὶ δὲ κατὰ νοῦν τῷ συνιστάντι πᾶσα ἡ τῆς ψυχῆς σύστασις ἐγγεγνήτο, μετὰ τοῦτο πᾶν τὸ σωματοειδὲς ἐντὸς αὐτῆς ἐτεκταίνετο καὶ μέσον μέση συναγαγὼν προσήρμοττεν· ἡ δ' ἐκ μέσου πρὸς τὸν ἔσχατον οὐρανὸν πάντῃ διαπλακεῖσα κτλ.

And how does this relate to what I claimed earlier, namely that the World Soul is for the most part not immediately active in the sensible world but bestows its power onto other rational agents?

Note how Plato says in the above quotation that everything corporeal was fashioned *inside* the World Soul. According to Plotinus' interpretation, this means that the body of the world is *in* the lowest power of the World Soul. This is an unusual claim and we will discuss what it means for the body of the world to be in this power in quite some detail in [Chapter 8](#). However, to briefly anticipate the conclusion of that discussion, it means that the lowest power of the World Soul *acts on* the body of the world. What it means for a body to be *in* a soul (or *in* a power) is for the soul (or power) to act on the body. This helps us to answer our two questions. The lowest power of the World Soul is everywhere in the sensible world, in the sense that activity exercised by the World Soul occurs throughout the whole body of the world. It does not imply, however, that the power of the World Soul is *immediately* exercised by the World Soul itself. Instead, it is perfectly consistent with the claim discussed earlier that the World Soul acts in the sensible world by mean of agents who exercise the World Soul's power. When we say that the Great King fights a war, we do not have to picture him on the battlefield. Rather, his fighting a war is perfectly consistent with his never leaving the palace. In the same way, the World Soul acts throughout its body without ever being immediately involved in any activity inside it. In the next section, we will see how the World Soul's immediate external activity relates to the external activity of its primary subjects, the stars.

The souls of the stars

As became apparent in the first section, discussing the external activity of the souls of the visible gods is discussing the creation and maintenance of the sensible world, in which the stars play a key role. To start with, it is useful to distinguish between the fixed stars on the one hand and the sun, moon and planets on the other. The fixed stars always maintain the same position relative to one another and in this sense, Ptolemy tells us, they are rightly called 'fixed' (*aplanēs*).²⁰ Moreover, they have a regular local movement corresponding precisely to the movement of the whole heaven and thus to the movement that is due to the World Soul's immediate external activity. Depending on the position of their bodies in heaven, the souls of

²⁰ See Ptolemy, *Alm.* II 2–12 Heiberg.

the fixed stars have to move their bodies faster or more slowly in order to maintain their relative position to the other fixed stars.

The fixed stars also seem to revolve on their axes in Plotinus' view, although this is not perfectly clear. Plotinus does not say much about the fixed stars in particular and where he mentions them at all, he treats them in the same way that he treats the sun, moon and planets.²¹ Accordingly, his claim that all stars not only have their spherical movement together with the whole universe but also have their individual movement around their own centres also seems to apply to the fixed stars (*Enn.* II 2, 2, 23–26). If so, then Plotinus follows the *Timaeus*, where fixed stars not only move through space in complete concord with the movement of the whole heaven but also revolve on their own axes (*Ti.* 40B).

In what follows I will, following ancient custom, include the sun and moon when speaking of the planets. In contrast to the fixed stars, all planets have their own individual movement through space. Moreover, unlike the fixed stars, each of them moves on epicycles along its own sphere.²² Their spheres are ordered according to their relative distance from the earth (which is at the centre of the universe). In antiquity there was dispute about the right order of the spheres. According to Plato (*Ti.* 38D), Aristotle and Eudoxus (*Arist. Metaph.* 1073b17ff.; Proclus *in Ti.* III 62 Diehl), the sun is the second planet in order (the first being the moon). According to an alternative view the sun is fourth in order and thus in the middle of the seven planets. Macrobius calls the former the Egyptian and the latter the Chaldean order.²³ The Chaldean order seems to have become more prominent from the first century BCE onwards. It can be found, for example, in Cicero (*Rep.* VI 17; *Div.* II 91), in Philo of Alexandria (*De vita Mosis* II 103) and, most importantly, in Ptolemy (*Almagest* II 206 f. Heiberg). Despite Ptolemy's authority, however, some later Platonists were reluctant to accept it (see Macrobius *In Somnium Scipionis* I 18, 3; Proclus *In Timaeum* III 63 Diehl).

Plotinus does not discuss the order of the planets, but he seems to consider the sun the first of the stars, for where he discusses the stars, he

²¹ See, for example, *Enn.* II, 3, 9, 3; *Enn.* III 1, 2, 27f.

²² The planets are not, in late antiquity, believed to move cyclically but rather on epicycles. Hence talking of spheres of planets is slightly misleading. However, Ptolemy also talks of the spheres of the planets and, to simplify things, I shall follow him in this. For ancient astronomy see in particular Dicks (1970).

²³ Macr. *Somm.* I 19 – referring to Cic. *Rep.* VI 17. For discussion of the two orders see Immisch (1919) 69–71; Taylor (1928) 192–194; Boyancé (1936) 59–65; Neugebauer (1975) 690–693. Note that Cassius Dio (37, 19, 1f.) and Achilles (*Intr. Arat.* 43, 28 Maass) call the Chaldean order 'Egyptian'.

often uses the expression “the sun and the other stars”.²⁴ Moreover, in one passage, he considers in particular the position of the sun in relation to the other stars and to the sublunary world (*Enn.* IV 4, 31, 13–15), and in another passage he claims that ‘we’ pray to the sun while others pray to the stars (*Enn.* IV 4, 30, 3 f.).²⁵ I take these passages to indicate that Plotinus considers the sun to be the most important and thus the most powerful star. He also calls the sun, referring to Plato’s simile of the sun, the cause of things coming to be (*Enn.* VI 7, 16, 25; *Rep.* 509B) and, more cautiously, an auxiliary cause of the creation of human beings (*Enn.* II 3, 12, 5). The middle position of the sun would fit the prominent position of the sun perfectly although, as the example of Plato shows, it is not implied by it. Plato, despite considering the sun the most powerful star, adheres to the Egyptian order.

Let us now discuss the movement of the stars. While the fixed stars move their bodies according to the movement of the whole heaven (which is the immediate external activity of the World Soul), the case of the planets is more complicated since their local movement deviates from the movement of heaven. How do they determine where and how fast to move? First we have to remind ourselves that the planets are part of a chain of authority. Let us assume that the soul of the sun is the most powerful soul among the souls of the stars. If so, then the soul of the sun follows immediately after the World Soul. In order to move its body, it thus has to take into account the movement of the whole heaven. This is necessary but not sufficient to determine the movement of the body of the sun. The soul of the sun also has to take into account that, if it moves its body in this way, the other planets, following the sun, will move their bodies according to its movement. The result of the whole movement of all stars ought to make the sensible world an excellent image of the world of Forms. On the basis of its wisdom the soul of the sun knows how the sensible world has to be providentially arranged and it also wishes the sensible world to be arranged thus. If so, it has to move its body in such a way as to contribute its share to this excellent arrangement. Thus the sun acts as an agent of the World Soul and helps the World Soul in this way organise its body by commanding the other planets on the basis of the movement of the whole heaven which is immediately caused by the World Soul (and hence on the basis of the command of the World Soul).

²⁴ E.g. *Enn.* II 9, 18, 18; IV 4, 25, 13; IV 4, 35, 37f.; IV 4, 45, 38f.

²⁵ ‘We’ presumably refers to the Greeks.

Accordingly, the soul of the star next in order after the sun will take into account both the movement of the whole heaven and the movement of the sun in order to determine its movement. Given the movement of heaven and given the movement of the sun, it will know that, if it moves its body in this way, the other planets will, following it, move their bodies in their ways so that the whole movement will contribute to the providential arrangement of the sensible world. This pattern will apply to all of the other planets also. The planets thus form a chain of authority that reflects the order of the souls in the intelligible world.²⁶

So far we have seen that the stars move their bodies in order to contribute to the providential arrangement of the sensible world and that they are hierarchically organised. However, we have not yet discussed how their bodily movement contributes to the providential arrangement of the sensible world. Crucially, the stars, through their movement, influence the sublunary sphere. It was a common view in antiquity that stars are active in the sublunary sphere. This claim is certainly true; undeniably, the sun and the moon cause such events as seasons and tides. According to the ancients, however, the activity of the stars in the sublunary sphere goes well beyond what we would usually be willing to attribute to the moon and to the sun, let alone to the (other) planets or fixed stars.

Determining the extent and type of influence of the heavenly beings on the sublunary sphere was a crucial part of astronomy. According to Ptolemy, a leading authority, astronomy has two parts:

One, which is first both in order and in power, is that by means of which we understand on each occasion the aspects (*schēmatismoi*)²⁷ of the movements of sun, moon, and stars in relation to each other and to the earth; the second is that by means of which we observe the changes which they bring about in that which they surround [i.e. the sublunary sphere] through the natural particular character of these aspects (*schēmatismoi*) themselves. (Ptolemy *Tetrabiblos* I 1, 1)²⁸

Thus, the second part of astronomy is what we call astrology, an art that was widely held in high esteem in ancient and early modern times.

²⁶ While the chain of authority can be explained easily in the case of the planets, it is more difficult to see how it works in the case of the fixed stars. The souls of the fixed stars, unlike those of the planets, all seem to be under the immediate command of the World Soul. Since Plotinus does not discuss this issue at all, I shall leave this question open.

²⁷ Aspects are specific configurations of stars – those that are thought to possess specific powers.

²⁸ ἐνὸς μὲν τοῦ πρώτου καὶ τάξει καὶ δυνάμει, καθ' ὃ τοὺς γινομένους ἐκάστοτε σχηματισμούς τῶν κινήσεων ἡλίου καὶ σελήνης καὶ ἀστέρων πρὸς ἀλλήλους τε καὶ τὴν γῆν καταλαμβάνόμεθα· δευτέρου δὲ, καθ' ὃ διὰ τῆς φυσικῆς τῶν σχηματισμῶν αὐτῶν ἰδιότητος τὰς ἀποτελουμένας μεταβολὰς τῶν ἐμπεριεχομένων ἐπισκεπτόμεθα· κτλ.

The extent of the influence of the stars was disputed. While Peripatetics, granting an influence on a general level, denied them much influence over particular events, astrologers of different sorts would go so far as to attribute all events in the sublunary sphere to the influence of the stars. Plotinus criticizes astral determinism vigorously, for example, in the first few chapters of *Ennead* II 3,²⁹ for the following reason: these astrologers reject the practical rationality of human beings because they eliminate human beings as rational agents in the sensible world. Thus, a problem discussed earlier recurs. The immediate exercise of the power of the stars in the sensible world is restricted for a reason that we have already discussed in the case of the World Soul.

Despite criticising astral determinism, however, Plotinus nevertheless believes that the influence of the stars on the sublunary sphere is considerable. In the first section I claimed that the World Soul's immediate activity in the sensible world is restricted to making heaven rotate and we can see now how, at the same time, the World Soul's power penetrates the whole sensible world. It does so in the same way in which the Great King's power penetrates the whole of Persia: the stars act as the World Soul's agents and thus exercise a power that they possess by virtue of being the World Soul's agents.³⁰

There is in the sensible world, as Plotinus puts it immediately before the above quotation, a wonderful variety of powers. This variety is due to the stars, since every star, be it a fixed star or a planet, possesses its own individual function (or set of functions) in the providential arrangement of the sensible world. The sun provides the earth with light and heat and so makes life on Earth possible and is also responsible for seasons. Commenting generally on the stars and their configuration, Plotinus states at *Ennead* IV 4, 35, 44–49:

Thus, all stars are unified in some or other aspect (*eschēmatismenon*) and provide correspondingly different powers so that the aspects (*schēmata*) have powers – for depending on whether the aspect is thus and so, different things will follow – and some things happen through the stars themselves being in a certain aspect (*eschēmatismenon*) – for something happens if this star is in an aspect, something else if another star.³¹

²⁹ But see also *Enn.* III 1, 2.

³⁰ For a highly interesting Peripatetic account of how the heavenly power is *transmitted* to the sublunary sphere see Alexander of Aphrodisias, *Quaestio* II 3. For discussion on this point see Bruns (1890), Moraux (1967) and Sharples (1992). Note, however, that Alexander's account, as opposed to Plotinus', is reductionist. In Plotinus, a power does not need to be transmitted by a body; rather, it is independent of any body.

³¹ Καὶ πάντας δὴ ἐν τῇ οὕτως ἐσχηματισμένον γενομένους τὴν διάθεσιν ἄλλην καὶ ἄλλην αὐτὴν διδόναι. ὥστε καὶ τὰ σχήματα δυνάμεις ἔχειν – παρὰ γὰρ τὸ οὕτως ἢ οὕτως ἄλλως καὶ ἄλλως – καὶ δι' αὐτῶν τῶν ἐσχηματισμένων γίνεσθαι τι – παρὰ γὰρ [τὸ] τούτους ἄλλο καὶ ἄλλο αὐτὸ παρ' ἄλλους.

Moreover, the influence of the stars and their aspects is different depending on the subject of the affection. One human being may be influenced by some aspect while another is not influenced by it at all (*Enn.* IV 3, 35, 53–55). We find further examples in other ancient authors: the moon, according to Plutarch, makes childbirth easier (*Quaest. Conviv.* 658 F). Galen too discusses the effects of the moon in the sublunary world in quite some detail, in particular their influence on sublunary living beings (*Di. Dec.* IX, 903ff. K.). Yet the stars are not only active in the sensible world in these and many other ways but also serve human beings as signs. The fixed stars, for example, are important for the art of navigation. Moreover, the change of day and night as well as that of seasons (which both are due to the sun) and the dynamic relations of the stars to one another help human beings to develop (or recall) their conception of time and of number (*Ti.* 47A). Furthermore, all stars, in their relation to other stars and, according to their position in heaven, serve to predict particular events in the sublunary sphere (*Enn.* II 3, 7). In sum, the souls of the stars possess important teleological functions and considerably contribute to providentially arranging the sensible world.

The soul of the earth

If the earth is a god, too, it is clear that its way of contributing to the providential arrangement of the sensible world must be significantly different from that of the stars.³² At the beginning of *Ennead* IV 4, 22 Plotinus asks whether the earth has its own individual soul or whether its soul is only an illumination coming from the heavenly sphere. In the following chapters he comes to the conclusion that the earth is a god and thus indeed possesses its own individual soul.

The view that the earth is a god can already be found in Hesiod.³³ In the *Phaedrus* (*Phdr.* 247A) it is claimed that, while the other Olympic gods move on their chariots through heaven, Hestia remains at home alone. Since in this myth the Olympic gods are identified with the heavenly gods, it is a likely interpretation that the only one of those gods who does not move through heaven is to be identified with the earth.³⁴ This interpretation seems at least

³² For the soul of the earth in Neoplatonism see now also Steel (2009), with whose account I am in agreement.

³³ See Hes. *Th.* vv. 104–115.

³⁴ Hackforth (1952) 73; Guthrie (1962) 293; Guthrie (1965) 63. See Cherniss (1944) 564 for a discussion of an alternative interpretation according to which Hestia in the *Phdr.* is the Pythagorean Central Fire.

to have been widespread at the time of Plotinus (*Enn.* IV 4, 27, 16).³⁵ In the *Timaeus* the earth is claimed to remain in the middle of the world, being the first and most revered of the visible gods. Plato attributes two functions to the earth: it is our nourisher and the creator of night and day (*Ti.* 40BC). The change of day and night makes it possible for sublunary living beings to be active but also to have time to recover from their exertions. Thus, both functions are crucial for our lives in the sensible world, given the constitution of our bodies. Moreover, the earth provides us with a stable foundation on which to live.

Commentators of the *Timaeus* in late antiquity had difficulties explaining why and in what way the earth is the creator of night and day. Proclus, for example, interprets it as follows. The earth creates night by its shadow. By creating night, he states, it also creates, together with the sun, day. He concedes though that it would be more adequate to call the sun the creator of day and the earth only the creator of night.³⁶

Plotinus does not discuss this function and thus it is not clear whether he would attribute it to the earth or to the sun. He does, however, discuss the second function mentioned in the *Timaeus*, namely that the earth is our nourisher. This claim needs to be read against a later passage in the same dialogue, namely *Timaeus* 76E–77C, where we are told that the gods make plants grow in order to provide (other) corporeal living beings (in particular human beings) with food. The gods did so because they realised that such highly complex bodies as those of corporeal living beings living in the sublunary sphere would, without food, soon be completely emptied. Although the earth is not the only god involved in the creation of plants, it plays a crucial role in it. After all, plants are only able to survive if they are rooted in earth. Plato seems to have thought that the crucial role that the earth plays in the creation of plants makes it our nourisher. It achieves this, of course, not only directly by providing us with tomatoes and potatoes to eat but also indirectly by allowing animals to survive, which again serve us as food.

While in the *Timaeus* it remains an open question in what way the earth is the creator of plants, in the *Enneads* Plotinus gives us some more details. At *Ennead* IV 4, 22, 1–5 he asks: “But in the case of plants, is what is like an echo in their bodies one thing and that which provides it another – namely that which is the appetite in us but the vegetative power in them –, or is this [power] in the earth, if there is a soul in the earth, and in plants is what

³⁵ See Plutarch *De facie* 923A and *De primo frigido* 954F; Theo Sm. 200, 7–10 Hiller; D. Chr. or. 36, 46; D.H. II 66, 3. But see already Euripides fr. 944 Nauck.

³⁶ Proclus in *Ti.* III 139, 21–140, 2 Diehl.

comes from this power [in the earth]?”³⁷ Plotinus considers two possibilities. Either plants possess their own vegetative power (their own nature in this sense) or the earth (but not plants) possesses a vegetative power and provides plants with an echo (or image) of it.³⁸

Unfortunately, Plotinus immediately moves on to another question that is preliminary to our question, namely whether the earth possesses a soul at all. As I claimed above Plotinus answers this question affirmatively, even stating that the earth is a god. In *Ennead* IV 4, 27, however, he resumes the discussion of the relation of Earth to plants: “If, then, the earth gives the generative power to plants – either [it gives] the generative power itself, or the generative power is in the earth itself and a trace of it is what is in plants – plants will be like flesh which is already alive; and if plants possess the generative power in themselves, they have acquired it [from the earth]” (*Enn.* IV 4, 27, 1–5).³⁹ At first sight this looks like a repetition of the former quotation (if we identify, as I think we should, the vegetative and the generative power). However, it provides us with one important new piece of information. While in the former quotation it was not clear whether, if plants possess their own vegetative power, this is derived from the earth or whether they somehow possess it by themselves, it now becomes clear that no matter whether plants possess a vegetative power or only a trace of it, the fact that they are capable of living is due to the earth. For this reason, the difference between the two alternatives is no longer important to Plotinus’ point. He now wishes to show that the earth possesses a generative or vegetative power and that it is due to this power that plants grow. If either of the alternatives holds true, Plotinus has proved his point.

While Plotinus does not argue in detail that either of them does hold true, the ensuing lines give us the following reason to believe that the disjunction is true. If you cut off a plant, then it is no longer a plant but rather a piece of wood (*Enn.* IV 4, 27, 5–7). This is supposed to show that a plant, if cut off, loses its life. Since plants only live as long as they are enrooted in the earth, so the argument goes, they actually owe their life to

³⁷ ἐπὶ δὲ τῶν φυτῶν ἄρα ἄλλο μὲν τὸ οἶον ἐναπηχηθὲν τοῖς σώμασιν αὐτῶν, ἄλλο δὲ τὸ χορηγήσαν, ὃ δὴ ἐπιθυμητικὸν μὲν ἐν ἡμῖν, ἐν ἐκείνοις δὲ φυτικόν, ἢ ἐν μὲν τῇ γῇ τοῦτο ψυχῆς ἐν αὐτῇ οὐσίας, ἐν δὲ τοῖς φυτοῖς τὸ ἀπὸ τοῦτου; See also *Enn.* III, 8, 1, 4.

³⁸ For the echo, see the discussion of the trace of the soul in [Chapter 8](#). I assume that the echo is the same as the trace and the shadow discussed there (see also the next quotation where Plotinus uses ‘trace’ for what he uses ‘echo’ in this passage).

³⁹ εἰ οὖν τοῖς φυτοῖς δίδωσι τὴν γεννητικὴν – ἢ αὐτὴν τὴν γεννητικὴν, ἢ ἐν αὐτῇ μὲν ἡ γεννητικὴ, ταύτης δὲ ἵχνος ἢ ἐν τοῖς φυτοῖς – καὶ οὕτως ἂν εἴη ὡς ἡ σὰρξ ἔμψυχος ἦδη καὶ ἐκομίσαστο, εἰ ἔχει καὶ τὴν γεννητικὴν ἐν αὐτοῖς τὰ φυτά. I follow Igal and delete the comma between ἔχει and καὶ (as implied by Igal’s translation).

the earth. This may be a somewhat dubious argument but, however that may be, the earth, according to Plotinus, provides plants with their life, by providing them with either a generative power or a trace thereof. Because the earth is in this sense the maker of plants, it is both our nourisher and the nourisher of animals. Since animals are used by human beings in various ways, the earth, in providing them with food, also contributes to making it possible for us to use them.⁴⁰

The blissfully unperturbed life of divine souls

At the beginning of this chapter I claimed that divine souls, unlike other individual souls, are not affected by their external activity in the sensible world. Instead, they remain unperturbed in the intelligible world, eternally and fully absorbed in contemplation. They are thus to be called divine in a stricter sense than other individual souls. In what follows I wish to discuss why they are unperturbed. This will also be helpful for our understanding of why our souls, in contrast to divine souls, are perturbed and thus why our lives, as opposed to those of the visible gods, appear to be far from happy and blissful. The effect that the life in the sensible world has on human souls is complex and will need to be discussed in detail in [Chapter 6](#). However, a main source of perturbation for human beings is the fact that taking care of their bodies makes it necessary to be almost permanently focused on them. Their care makes it in particular necessary to be aware of the environment of the body by means of sense perceptions and to be aware of the states of the body by means of emotions. Divine souls are free of both sorts of affection. Let us first look at the World Soul.

The body of the world, although highly complex, is self-sufficient, and there is nothing contrary to its nature (*Enn.* IV 8, 2, 14–16). Unlike human bodies, the body of the world does not need any exchange with any environment: there is no environment to its body since the sensible world comprises everything corporeal. Instead, “nothing goes out of it and nothing comes into it” (*Enn.* IV 8, 2, 18 f.).⁴¹ Accordingly, one major reason why we need sense perception is simply absent from the sensible world as a living being. Moreover, there is nothing external that could give rise to emotions, such as fear or desire.

⁴⁰ At *Enn.* IV 4, 27, 7–11 we learn that the soul of the earth also makes stones grow as long as they are attached to the earth.

⁴¹ οὐδὲν γὰρ ἄπεισιν οὐδὲ πρόσεισι. *Enn.* IV 8, 2, 18f. referring to *Ti.* 33C: ἀπῆι τε γὰρ οὐδὲν οὐδὲ προσῆιν αὐτῷ ποθεν.

As far as the inside of its body is concerned, however, we might think that the World Soul needs to be aware of changes and states. After all, the World Soul has to care for a highly complex body and to keep it in an excellent state. It must know, we would expect, the processes and events in the body so as to be able to intervene if something goes wrong, since if this were to happen, the sensible world would fail to be an excellent image of the world of Forms. Plausible as this may seem, however, the World Soul, according to Plotinus, does not have to worry about this either. For it is within the World Soul's power to organise the sensible world in such a way that nothing goes wrong. On the one hand the stars, the earth and human beings act as agents of the World Soul and help it keep its body in an excellent state. On the other hand, the World Soul arranges things in the sensible world in such a way that all other individual souls contribute to an excellent state of its body (whether they intend to or not).

Now even if we grant that the World Soul, due to its overwhelming power, is in full control of its body, this control might be thought to presuppose a sensory awareness of the events and changes in its body. In his discussion of the question whether the World Soul exercises sense perception, Plotinus addresses this problem. He states at *Ennead* IV 4, 24, 32–35:

And even if it [sc. the World Soul] is not affected by other things, why will it not see like an eye that is luminous and ensouled? But he [sc. Plato] says, “it had no need of eyes”. But if this was because there was nothing left to be seen outside, there were still things inside and nothing prevented it from looking at itself.⁴²

Plotinus explains in the following lines that the fact that the sensible world, like an eye, is luminous and ensouled is not sufficient for sight. Instead, the soul must, in addition, be inclined to sensing objects. The World Soul, however, is not inclined to this: “Even if it was possible for [the World Soul] to perceive, it will not do so, due to its being directed towards better things” (*Enn.* IV 4, 25, 4f.).⁴³ The account of the individual soul's life in the intelligible world provided in earlier chapters explains this: the World Soul, due to its discursive providential thinking in the intelligible world, knows everything in the sensible world a priori. There is no need for eyes.

⁴² καὶ γὰρ εἰ τῶν ἄλλων ἀπαθής, διὰ τί ὥς ὄμμα οὐκ ὄψεται φωτοειδὲς ἐμψυχον ὄν; ἀλλ' ὀμμάτων, φησὶν, οὐκ ἐπεδεῖτο. ἀλλ' εἰ ὅτι μηδὲν ἔξωθεν ὑπελείπτο ὁρατόν, ἀλλ' ἔνδον γε ἦν καὶ ἑαυτὸν ὁρᾶν οὐδὲν ἐκώλυσεν· κτλ. The quotation from Plato is *Ti.* 33C.

⁴³ καὶ οἷόν τε ἡ αὐτῇ αἰσθάνεσθαι, οὐκ ἂν γένοιτο τοῦτο τῷ πρὸς κρείττοσιν εἶναι, κτλ.

A further potential source of distraction, next to sense perception, is discursive reasoning.⁴⁴ However, as already discussed in the [previous chapter](#), the World Soul does not reason discursively. Discursive reasoning is only used in order to *acquire* knowledge. Someone who knows (and remembers) has no need to reason – and the World Soul, being wise, knows everything it needs to know; therefore, there is no need for it to reason. As Plotinus puts it:

If we are going to put the ruling principle of the world on the level of learners, we have to attribute to it discursive reasoning, problems (*aporiai*) and memories . . . But if we are going to put it on the level of a knower, we must believe that its wisdom is in a stasis, which has reached its term. (*Enn.* IV 4, 12, 13–18)⁴⁵

Thus, the World Soul neither perceives nor memorises things, has no emotions caused by its body and does not reason discursively: it can do without any mental *processes*.⁴⁶

Let us now turn to the souls of the stars. The souls of the stars, if they are to remain unperturbed, should not be involved in any mental processes either. Thus, they should not perceive and have no need to use memory or discursive reasoning. The stars, like the sensible world, are self-sufficient. However, unlike the world as a whole, their bodies are within an environment that contains other bodies. Plotinus considers this important distinction between the world as a whole and the stars at the very beginning of *Ennead* II 1:⁴⁷

But if we give as the reason for why it [sc. the heaven] does not pass away that it contains everything and that there is nothing into which it could change and nothing outside which could fall on it and destroy it, then for this reason we will grant to the Whole and the All that it cannot be destroyed; but since our sun and the being of the other stars are parts and not each of them a whole and all, the argument will give no assurance that they will last forever. (*Enn.* II 1, 12–19)⁴⁸

⁴⁴ For a detailed discussion of this see Caluori (forthcoming).

⁴⁵ εἰ μὲν οὖν κατὰ τοὺς μανθάνοντας τὸ ἡγούμενον τοῦ παντὸς τάξομεν, λογισμοὺς ἀποδοτέον καὶ ἀπορίας καὶ μνήμας . . . εἰ δὲ κατὰ τὸν εἰδότα, ἐν στάσει ὅρον ἔχουσῃ νομιστέον αὐτοῦ εἶναι τὴν φρόνησιν.

⁴⁶ That the World Soul has no emotions arising from the body does not imply that it has no emotions. Rather, its being in an undisturbed state of contemplation may well provide it with intellectual joy.

⁴⁷ For a discussion of this treatise see Wilberding (2006), in particular 48–68.

⁴⁸ εἰ δὲ τῷ πάντα συνειληφέναι καὶ μὴ εἶναι εἰς ὃ τὴν μεταβολὴν ποιήσεται μηδέ τι ἔξωθεν ἂν προσπεσόν φθεῖραι δύνασθαι τούτῳ δώσομεν τὴν αἰτίαν τῆς οὐ φθορᾶς, τῷ μὲν ὅλῳ καὶ παντὶ δώσομεν ἐκ τοῦ λόγου τὸ μὴ ἂν φθαρήναι, ὃ δὲ ἥλιος ἡμῖν καὶ τῶν ἄλλων ἀστρῶν ἡ οὐσία τῷ μέρη καὶ μὴ ὅλον ἕκαστον εἶναι καὶ πᾶν, οὐχ ἕξει τὴν πίστιν παρὰ τοῦ λόγου, ὅτι εἰς ἅπαντα μένει τὸν χρόνον κτλ.

Because the stars are parts moving within an environment, we may think that they, just like us, have to look where they are moving and see where the other stars are so as to avoid collision. However, Plotinus argues at length that this is not the case, for the souls of the stars move their bodies unvaryingly on the same course. Since all stars do so, they together form the harmonious order they have to form in order to fulfil their providential function. Since each star knows what its course is and since it also knows what the courses of the other stars are and that the other stars, being gods, will always remain on their courses because they understand that this is the right thing to do, the stars need not worry about the movements of the other stars. They do not need to fearfully look out for them. Instead, they can move their bodies through space blindly and confidently, knowing that this is precisely what they have to do. Nothing will interfere.

Consider Plotinus' long discussion of whether the stars need memory. At *Ennead* IV 4, 6, 4–7 Plotinus states: “the enquiry is about the memory of the souls of all the stars but in particular of the sun and of the moon and in the end it will go as far as the World Soul.”⁴⁹ He also considers sense perception and discursive reasoning. At *Ennead* IV 4, 12 he claims that the stars, because of their wisdom, do not need to reason discursively, and this is precisely for the same reason that the World Soul does not.⁵⁰ Plotinus further argues that the souls of the stars do not need any memory either, because they always do the same thing. Instead, they eternally remain thinking in the intelligible world without any perturbation and, in the sensible world, move their bodies along the same unvarying courses. Since there is no change in the life of a star, a star has no need for memory. As Plotinus states at *Ennead* IV 4, 35, 37–39: “If then the sun and the other stars act in any way on the things below, one must assume that the sun – one must consider only one star – remains looking above.”⁵¹

Moreover, the stars do not have to look down to what is happening on the earth for their influence (or for checking whether they influence things in the right way). In the section of *Ennead* IV 4 referred to above, Plotinus is particularly interested in the question of whether the stars are affected by prayers. If prayers affected them, then they would be affected by sublunary events. However, the reasons given above also apply to prayers. They do not affect the stars because the stars know in advance who will pray and it is

⁴⁹ ἄστρον δὲ περὶ ψυχῆς τῶν γε ἄλλων ἀπάντων καὶ δὴ καὶ περὶ ἡλίου καὶ σελήνης ἐπιζητεῖ ὁ λόγος τὰς μνήμας, καὶ τελευτῶν εἶσι καὶ ἐπὶ τὴν τοῦ παντός ψυχὴν, κτλ.

⁵⁰ This has already been observed by Richter (1867) 26f. See now also Caluori (forthcoming).

⁵¹ εἰ δὲ δρᾷ τι ἡλῖος καὶ τὰ ἄλλα ἄστροα εἰς τὰ τῆδε, χρὴ νομίζειν αὐτὸν μὲν ἄνω βλέποντα εἶναι – ἐφ' ἐνὸς γὰρ τὸν λόγον ποιητέον κτλ.

part of divine providence whether these prayers will have any effect or not. Thus, Plotinus concludes at *Ennead* IV 4, 42, 1–3: “Hence the stars will have no need for memory for this purpose [i.e. of answering prayers] – this was the reason why this investigation was undertaken – nor for sense perceptions sent up from below.”⁵²

On the basis of our discussion of the World Soul and of the souls of the stars, we would expect that the soul of the earth lives, in order to be unperturbed, without sense perception too. This is indeed the case. However, on the basis of *Ennead* IV 4, 27, one might get the contrary impression because Plotinus there mentions sense perception in the context of discussing the soul of the earth as if it possessed it: after having mentioned the generative power of the earth he states: “after this the nature of sense perception was no longer mixed with the body” (*Enn.* IV 4, 27, 13f.).⁵³ However, even if he attributes the *power* to perceive to the soul of the earth, this does not imply that the soul of the earth ever uses it. When Plotinus considers the possibility that the soul of the earth makes use of sense perception he immediately generalises by comparing the soul of the earth to the souls of the stars. Firstly, see *Ennead* IV 4, 22: “But how does the soul of the earth perceive? For how do also the stars perceive?” (*Enn.* IV 4, 22, 27f.).⁵⁴ Secondly, at the beginning of chapter 24, Plotinus is still concerned with the question of whether the soul of the earth perceives or not. Starting with this question he explicitly generalises it to include all visible gods: “But if this is so, our investigation should not be confined to the earth, but must be about all the stars and most of all about the whole heaven and the world” (*Enn.* IV 4, 24, 12–14).⁵⁵ Thirdly, in his discussion of whether the stars hear our prayers and need memory to remember them and to act later according to the prayers, Plotinus also resumes his discussion of the earth and, in chapter 30, discusses the soul of the earth (called Demeter and Hestia) in the context of the discussion of the souls of the stars.

For these reasons, it seems to me that the conclusion reached at the end of this treatise about the World Soul and the souls of the stars also holds true of the soul of the earth. The soul of the earth does neither use sense perception nor does it reason discursively. Moreover, the external activity

⁵² ὥστε οὐτε μνήμης διὰ τοῦτο δεήσει τοῖς ἀστροῖς, οὐπερ χάριν καὶ ταῦτα πεπραγμάτευται, οὐτε αἰσθήσεων ἀναπεμπομένων κτλ. This passage, by the way, shows that the claim at *Enn.* IV 4, 30, iff. (granting sense perception to the stars) was only a preliminary conclusion, to be corrected later.

⁵³ εἴτα τὴν τοῦ αἰσθητικοῦ φύσιν οὐκέτι τῷ σώματι συμπεφυρμένην κτλ.

⁵⁴ ἀλλὰ τὸ αἰσθάνεσθαι πῶς; πῶς γὰρ καὶ τὰ ἄστρα;

⁵⁵ ἀλλ’ εἰ τοῦτο, οὐ περὶ τῆς γῆς ἄν μόνον εἴη σκοπεῖσθαι, ἀλλὰ καὶ περὶ ἀστροῦ ἀπάντων καὶ μάλιστα περὶ παντός τοῦ οὐρανοῦ καὶ τοῦ κόσμου.

of the soul of the earth consists in providing the power of growth to its body so that plants (and stones) can grow. Neither sense perception nor discursive reasoning is necessary for this activity. The same will hold true of emotions and memory.

The discussion of this chapter has shown what the external activity of the visible gods is and how they can fulfil their teleological function without perturbation. In particular, it has been argued that divine souls do not have to interact with bodies. True, they move their bodies but they can do so without using sense perception, taking into account emotions arising from the body, remembering anything or reasoning discursively. This shows how divine souls differ from human souls and it indicates why human souls, as opposed to divine souls, are perturbed. Indeed, as we will see in the next two chapters, they are so busy with their bodies that they lose sight of their own essential activity and thus also of what they truly are.

CHAPTER 6

The human soul: its descent and its confusion in the sensible world

The descent of the soul plays a prominent role in Plato's work (in particular in the *Phaedo* and the *Republic*) and was also widely debated among Platonists in late antiquity. Platonists usually held that the soul, although ideally residing in the intelligible world, at times descends through heaven into the sublunary sphere in order to give life to human bodies. Yet if human souls, like divine souls, are eternally involved in their thinking in the intelligible world, as Plotinus believes they are, then we may wonder what it means for him to say that they sometimes descend into the sensible world: how can they descend and at the same time remain in the intelligible world?

I shall address this problem in the first section of this chapter. I will argue that the soul's descent takes place within the soul and has nothing to do with travel through space. In the second section I shall consider how their activity in the sensible world affects human souls in ways in which divine souls are never affected: while the latter remain eternally unperturbed in the intelligible world, human souls care for their bodies in such a way that they are at most rarely aware of their own activity in the intelligible world. Moreover, as a consequence of their activity in the sensible world, they become perturbed and confused. Since this confusion is also the key to Plotinus' ethics, I will briefly sketch his notion of purification as the way of leaving one's confused state behind.

Descent as experience

When ancient philosophers discussed the soul they usually had in mind the human soul. The human soul is, for us, the most interesting type of soul because it is the type of soul we need to know about if we want to know what we are. As was stated in earlier chapters, the soul was generally considered to be the principle of life and, more precisely, the principle of the specific sort of the life that a specific living being leads. Accordingly, the

soul of a star, for example, must account for the life of a star and the human soul for human life. Human life, unlike that of a star, is immediately familiar to us and in this sense we already know pre-philosophically at least some of the functions that a human soul, if we accept this entity as the principle of human life at all, must account for. Hence we would expect such a soul to account, for example, for such activities as growth, reproduction, sense perception, memory, reason and having opinions.

The claim that the soul accounts for such activities does not imply that these activities are exercised by the soul.¹ Aristotle, for example, famously attributes such activities to the composite living being and not to the soul. According to him, the living being, and not the soul, weaves or sees. The soul nevertheless accounts for such activities because the composite living being can exercise them only in virtue of having a soul. This view marks a sharp contrast with Plato, who instead attributes at least some of the activities of the living being, not to the composite, but only to the soul. The composite living being can only be said to be active in such ways derivatively. If the body has any function as far as these activities are concerned, it is at most a tool by means of which the soul is active in these ways. An example for this can be found at *Timaeus* 45AB, where Plato explains that sense organs are tools that the soul uses in sense perception. While the sense organs are merely its tool, the soul is the proper subject of sense perception. Hence, Plato, in contrast to Aristotle, makes room for activities of the soul alone. The body is merely the soul's instrument for their exercise. Famously, the soul, according to Plato, can also be active without any involvement of the body. It is able, for example, to grasp intelligible entities, such as Platonic Forms. In the *Phaedo* (79C), Plato asserts that the body is not even a tool for this kind of cognition but rather a hindrance to it. In order to contemplate the world of Forms, it is better for the soul to be on its own and without a body (*Phd.* 79Dff.). This is the life that the soul has on its own – a life that is independent of the body.

Platonists were acutely aware of Plato's distinction between these two sets of functions. The former covers the functions that we might be inclined to attribute to the human soul in order to explain the activities of the corporeal human being or – in other words – in order to explain the activities of the composite of body and soul, whereas the latter covers the functions that a human soul exercises if it is not concerned with corporeal matters but rather does such things as contemplating eternal truths. Platonists often also put the difference between the soul's exercising the

¹ For the following see Caluori (2005).

first set of functions and the soul's exercising the second set of functions in the following way. In exercising the first set of functions the soul is said to be *in the sensible world* and in exercising the second set of functions it is said to be *in the intelligible world*.

Emphasising Plato's claim that the body is a hindrance to the exercise of functions belonging to the intelligible world, Platonists usually considered the exercise of functions in the sensible world at least to some extent to be incompatible with the exercise of functions in the intelligible world – an incompatibility to which I shall return. Accordingly they believed that the human soul, when it is in the sensible world, is not usually² in the intelligible world. In order to explain that the human soul nevertheless exercises functions of both types, they found the following solution: the human soul naturally resides in the intelligible world. However, for some reason or other, it sometimes descends into the sensible world and gets embodied in a human body. After some time there, the soul leaves its body and ascends back to the intelligible world. Thus, Platonists distinguished – broadly speaking – *temporally* between the exercise of the two types of function: during its incarnation, a soul is active in ways we are familiar with from our own (embodied) lives. Before and after its incarnation, however, it resides in the intelligible world, contemplating true reality. Platonists filled in the details of this story in various ways; some had elaborate views about the ascent and descent of the human soul. Some of them took it quite literally, often combining their theory of ascent and descent with astrological views.

An example of such a view can be found in Porphyry's *De antro nympharum*. In this treatise Porphyry provides the reader with an allegorical interpretation of the description of a cave of nymphs on Ithaca in Homer's *Odyssey*. The cave, in Homer's description, has two entrances, one in the north for human beings to descend by, and one, for immortals, in the south. Porphyry reports that the theologians identified these gates with two signs of the zodiac, namely with Cancer in the north and Capricorn in the south.³ Numenius and Cronius, according to Porphyry's testimony, claimed that souls descend through Cancer and re-ascend through Capricorn, thus explaining why Cancer and Capricorn are not only signs but also gates (Numenius fr. 31 Des Places). Accordingly, the descent and ascent of the soul is taken literally as a voyage through space. It is stated

² I qualify this claim with 'usually' because we should allow for some embodied souls sometimes to be in the intelligible world, i.e. sometimes to be aware of, e.g. true reality.

³ Porphyry, *Antr.* 21ff.

where in space souls descend and where they re-ascend. In other ancient texts explaining the descent and the ascent of the soul we find claims about how the stars influence the descending soul when the soul passes through their sphere. In each sphere the soul is thought to be given certain characteristics or powers that, according to the corresponding astrological view, belong to the respective star. To give but one example, according to Macrobius the soul acquires the capacity for desire in the sphere of Venus.⁴

What was the point of these colourful stories? The ascent and the descent of the soul was a solution to the following problem. On the one hand, the soul, according to Platonist lore, belongs to the intelligible world. Following the *Phaedo* and the *Phaedrus*, Platonists believed that the human soul is in its best state when it is in the intelligible world, contemplating true reality. On the other hand, human souls are at least sometimes embodied in human bodies. Moreover, in our ordinary lives most of us do not appear to contemplate true reality, at least most of the time. Instead, we are busy doing all sorts of things, most of which are in some way or other related to our bodies. The views considered above explain why human souls, during their embodied lives, for the most part do not seem to contemplate true reality: during their incarnation they are in the sensible world, not in the intelligible world. Even if a Platonist does not take stories of descent literally (because they do not think, for example, that the intelligible world is a place in the same sense as Paris is) and if, instead, they understand them metaphorically, they might still hold that the soul, when embodied, does not for the most part exercise such functions as contemplating reality.

Plotinus, like other Platonists, believed that there are periods in the life of the human soul when it does not have to care for a body, but rather simply remains unperturbed in the intelligible world contemplating reality (*Enn.* IV 8, 4, iff.). Being a Platonist, he also discusses the descent of the human soul in several treatises. However, unlike many of his fellow Platonists, he argues that, in a crucial sense, the soul never (literally speaking) descends into the sensible world.⁵

At *Ennead* IV 3, 9–23 we find a long discussion of the relation of soul to body. After having considered the World Soul in chapters 9–11, Plotinus turns, in chapter 12, to the human soul. He immediately starts with a discussion of the descent of the soul, the topic that dominates the whole of

⁴ See, e.g. Macrobius *In Somn. Scip.* I 12, 14ff. and Proclus *in Ti.* III 355, 13ff. Diehl. For a detailed discussion see Festugière (1953) III, 63–96.

⁵ See Rich (1971) 622f.

this section of *Ennead* IV 3, from chapters 12 to 18. In this context we find a passage which might seem to indicate that Plotinus conceives of the descent of the soul in the same way as the Platonists discussed above. For chapter 15 begins as follows:

The souls when they have peeped out of the intelligible world go first to heaven, and, when they have put on a body there, go on by its means also to the earthier bodies, stretching themselves so far in length.” (*Enn.* IV 3, 15, 1–4)⁶

The passage might seem to mean, and has been taken to mean, that the soul leaves the intelligible world and travels, through heaven, into the sublunary sphere.⁷ However, this is not, I think, how the passage should be understood. The imagery that Plotinus uses rather suggests that the soul remains in the intelligible world but stretches out from there into the sensible world. Both the word ‘*ekkupsai*’ and the expression ‘*eis hoson an eis mēkos ektathōsi*’ speak in favour of this interpretation. As far as the former is concerned, Athenaeus, for example, uses the word ‘*ekkuptein*’ with reference to the snail’s eyes (Ath. 10, 455e Kaibel). The eyes of the snail, when they peep out, do not leave the snail’s body. Rather, they crucially remain part of the snail, stretching out to enable the snail to see farther. The second expression that Plotinus uses is more explicit: the word ‘*ekteinein*’ precisely means ‘to stretch out’ and the metaphor is emphasised by the quantitative expressions ‘*eis hoson*’ (‘so far’) and ‘*eis mēkos*’ (‘in length’).

Despite the details that Plotinus provides in this passage, in particular by stating that the soul in heaven takes on a body, I suggest that the claim that souls stretch out from the intelligible realm down to sublunary bodies must not be taken literally. It is difficult to imagine souls having a certain length, let alone different lengths. Instead, the content of the quoted passage should be taken as an image to show that souls, while remaining in the intelligible realm, also have to care for such remote things as human bodies. The remoteness should be understood, I would suggest, as a distance on the ontological scale: souls caring for sublunary bodies are said to stretch down even further than the heavenly sphere; that is, they have to care for the lowest layers on the ontological scale. Thus, this passage does not support the view that Plotinus took the story of the descent of the soul literally.⁸

⁶ Ἰασι δὲ ἐκκύψασαι τοῦ νοητοῦ εἰς οὐρανὸν μὲν πρῶτον καὶ σῶμα ἐκεῖ προσλαβοῦσαι δι’ αὐτοῦ ἡδη χωροῦσι καὶ ἐπὶ τὰ γεωδέστερα σώματα, εἰς ὅσον ἂν εἰς μήκος ἐκταθῶσι.

⁷ For example, by Dodds in his classic treatment of the astral body. See his edition of Proclus’ *Institutio Theologica* (1963) 318.

⁸ Another passage which might be taken to suggest a descent through heaven, namely *Enn.* IV 3, 17, also allows for a non-literal interpretation. For this, see in particular *Enn.* IV 3, 21, where Plotinus argues that the soul is not in any place at all. Since it is not in any place, it cannot change place.

If Plotinus, despite clearly being very interested in the question of the descent of the soul, does not believe that the soul literally descends through heaven, we must ask what, indeed, he makes of it. The great French scholar Bréhier has suggested understanding it in terms of the soul's experience. In his *notice to Ennead IV 8* he compares Plotinus' conception of the descent with that discussed above and remarks:

Aux images des espaces célestes où voyagerait l'âme, Plotin substitue sa propre expérience interne: l'état de méditation intérieure qui la place dans un monde intelligible s'oppose à l'état ordinaire où l'âme est occupée par les sensations et les émotions: c'est donc en lui-même dans le passage du premier état au second qu'il saisit cette chute; le problème devient celui de la méditation intérieure.⁹

Festugière, following Bréhier, makes the same point, also in relation to the beginning of *Ennead IV 8*, as follows: "Plotin transpose ici en termes d'expérience le mythe de la chute de l'âme."¹⁰ I shall pursue a similar line of interpretation.

Bréhier and Festugière refer to the beginning of *Ennead IV 8*, where Plotinus tells us that he had woken up out of his body to himself (*egeir-omenos eis emauton ek tou sōmatos*), seeing there an extraordinarily great beauty, living the best life and becoming, during his stay in the intelligible world, one with the divine. After his sojourn in the intelligible world Plotinus has to descend. He describes the descent as follows: "After this stay in the divine I descended from understanding to discursive reasoning and I am often puzzled about how I ever descended and how the soul ever came to be in the body, being in itself such a thing as appeared to me, despite being in a body" (*Enn. IV 8, 1, 7–11*).¹¹

During his stay in the intelligible realm the soul appeared to Plotinus as it is in itself: an entity belonging to the intelligible world. Plotinus is puzzled about how such a thing, that is, an intelligible incorporeal entity, can be in a body. What does it mean for the soul to be in a body? He also wonders what the soul is and why it is not always in the state he then experienced it to be in.

Let us first discuss the first part of the quotation. Plotinus describes the descent as one leading from understanding (i.e. from proper thinking) to

⁹ Bréhier (1927) 211 (= *notice to Enn. IV 8*).

¹⁰ Festugière (1953) III 65. See also O'Meara (1974), in particular 244.

¹¹ πολλάκις . . . μετὰ ταύτην τὴν ἐν τῷ θεῷ στάσιν εἰς λογισμὸν ἐκ νοῦ καταβάς ἀπορῶ πῶς ποτε καὶ νῦν καταβαίνω, καὶ ὅπως ποτέ μοι ἔνδον ἡ ψυχὴ γεγένηται τοῦ σώματος τοῦτο οὕσα, οἷον ἐφάνη καθ' ἑαυτὴν, καίπερ οὕσα ἐν σώματι. Note that ,πολλάκις' relates to ,ἀπορῶ' (as O'Meara (1993) 104f. has shown).

discursive reasoning. Thus, unlike the Platonists discussed above, Plotinus considers the descent of the soul to take place *within* the soul; it is a change from one mental state to another. Bréhier specifies the two mental states in claiming that the descent is a change from one state of *experience* to another state of *experience*. I agree. However, his specification needs further discussion because the passage quoted also seems to allow for the following alternative.

One might think that the descent is actually a descent from one kind of *activity* to another. According to this interpretation, the two kinds of activity are mutually exclusive. The human soul is active either in the intelligible world or in the sensible world but not in both worlds at the same time. The claim that the soul is in the intelligible world is understood as meaning that it only *thinks* in the proper way and thus only exercises, as I claimed above, its essential activity. If and when the soul cares for a body, however, it only *reasons*, according to this interpretation; that is, it is involved in a process of reasoning. Accordingly, the claim that it is in the sensible world (if and when it is there) is understood as meaning that it is active in a certain way, namely reasoning discursively. Thus, the interpretation under discussion attributes to Plotinus a view in keeping with the basic claim of the Platonists discussed above without, however, committing him to their view that the soul literally travels from a place above the heavens to the sublunary sphere.

Although I disagree with this interpretation, I believe it has two virtues. Firstly, it shows a way in which we can make sense of Plotinus' claim that divine souls do not descend while human souls do. Divine souls always remain in the intelligible world. Due to their power, they are able to exercise their activity in the sensible world without being disturbed in their contemplation. Human souls, by contrast, due to their weakness, have to descend. This means, according to the interpretation presently under consideration, that they no longer think in the proper way and thus no longer understand the truths of the intelligible world and the providential arrangement of the sensible world. In this way the interpretation under discussion makes sense of the claim that human souls, by contrast to divine souls, descend.

Secondly, it explains why human souls in the sensible world, with the possible exception of sages, neither seem to understand the theoretical truths of reality nor seem to be able to base their actions on practical understanding. They cannot do so because, during the time of their incarnation, they lack the corresponding knowledge. Only in the intelligible world do they grasp the relevant truths. As soon as they leave the

intelligible world, they no longer think about it in the appropriate way and are thus forced to reason. Reasoning is here understood as the imperfect kind of thinking that *aims at* knowledge (as discussed in [Chapters 5 and 7](#)). The claim that the soul descends “from understanding to discursive reasoning” seems to describe this state of affairs perfectly.

Despite these two virtues, I do not think that this interpretation is tenable. Firstly, the language Plotinus uses at the beginning of *Ennead* IV 8, that is, the passage under discussion, is the language one uses to describe an experience.¹² He speaks in the first person singular, describes how he was struck by the overwhelming beauty of that other world and how he is puzzled after his sojourn there about how he ever came down to this world. Moreover, he states that he “has woken up out of the body to [him]self”.¹³ This kind of language is much more appropriate to describe an experience than to explicate the difference and incompatibility of two kinds of activity.

Secondly, in the last lines of the passage quoted Plotinus is puzzled about “how the soul ever came to be in the body, being in itself such a thing as appeared to me, despite being in a body”. According to this passage the soul is in itself, despite being in a body, such a thing as appeared to Plotinus in the intelligible world. Thus, the soul is in itself an entity that belongs to the intelligible world even when it is (in some way) in a body. Also note that he uses the notion of appearance here.

Proponents of the two-activities interpretation might find this second argument unconvincing for the following reason. They might insist that the soul is not active in both worlds at the same time. If and when it is in a body, it is not usually active in the intelligible world. What Plotinus means in the passage quoted, they might argue, is this: the soul, despite being in a body, is such a thing as *to be able* to be active in the ways he has seen it to be active in the intelligible world. It thus certainly keeps the capacity to be active but, during its incarnation, it is usually hindered in exercising it and only exercises other capacities.

According to this argument, the soul’s essence, that is, what it is in itself, rather than being an activity, is only a capacity, for all of the soul’s activities belong either to one or the other of two exclusive classes. If and when the human soul exercises activities of one of these two classes, it does not exercise any activities of the other class. Hence, since the human soul exercises, at different times, activities of both classes, activities of neither class can belong to the essence of the soul, since what is essential to a thing

¹² See O’Meara (1974). ¹³ ἐγειρόμενος εἰς ἑμαυτὸν ἐκ τοῦ σώματος κτλ.

must belong to it as long as the thing exists. Therefore, no activity can belong to the essence of the human soul.

It is difficult to see, however, how this could be Plotinus' view. As we have seen in [Chapter 4](#), life is essential to the soul. The soul is both the principle of life and self-moved. Indeed, according to Plotinus, its being self-moved is necessary for its being the principle of life (something without life cannot be the principle of life). Since the soul is the principle of life, it must possess a life of its own – a life that is essential to it.¹⁴ Thus, the essence of the soul cannot only consist of capacities. Moreover, its essential activity must belong to one of the two worlds. And, given our discussion in [Chapter 4](#), it is clear that it belongs to the intelligible world. If the soul is always active in the intelligible world, no matter whether it is currently caring for a body or not, then the two-activities interpretation fails, as the descent cannot consist of a change from one kind of activity to another.

Thirdly, the [final chapter](#) of the treatise (the first lines of which I quoted above (*Enn.* IV 8, 8)) begins thus: “And, if one ought to dare to express one's view more clearly, against the opinion of others, not every soul descended, and in particular our soul did not, but there is always something of it in the intelligible” (*Enn.* IV 8, 8, 1–3).¹⁵ Plotinus here explicitly states his opposition to the canonical Platonist view. There is a sense of ‘descent’, according to him, in which the human soul did not descend into the sensible world but always remains in the intelligible world. The human soul in so far as it thinks discursively always remains in the intelligible world, as I argued in [Chapter 2](#). But even if one disagrees with my view of the nature of the soul's activity in the intelligible world, the following is clear from *Ennead* IV 8, 8: each human soul eternally remains in the intelligible world according to Plotinus.

I suggested above that other Platonists introduced the descent in order to account for the incompatibility (as they saw it) of the soul's activity in the intelligible world with, at the same time, that in the sensible world. But precisely what form is that incompatibility supposed to take? There does not seem to be any logical or metaphysical incompatibility between the two kinds of activity such that they could not both occur at the same time. The reason why Platonists nevertheless believed in it might have been the

¹⁴ See the discussion in [Chapter 4](#) and *Enn.* IV 7, 9.

¹⁵ καὶ εἰ χρή παρὰ δόξαν τῶν ἄλλων τολμήσαι τὸ φαινόμενον λέγειν σαφέστερον, οὐ πᾶσα οὐδ' ἡμετέρα ψυχὴ ἔδου, ἀλλ' ἔστι τι αὐτῆς ἐν τῷ νοητῷ αἰεὶ κτλ. Alternatively, one could translate “οὐ πᾶσα οὐδ' ἡμετέρα ψυχὴ ἔδου” as “not even our soul descended as a whole”. Yet it seems to me that Plotinus wishes to emphasise that *our soul* does not descend (as opposed to: that a *part* of our soul does not descend). This is the new claim.

following. During our incarnation we are, at best, only rarely aware of any higher activity of our soul. This observation alone does not justify the claim that the two activities are incompatible. However, the Platonist view under discussion can be defended if we add a further premise: the human soul is always fully aware of all its activities (or, at least, of all its mental or cognitive activities). In early modern times, this view was famously held by Descartes, who writes: “nothing can be in me, that is to say, in my mind, of which I am not aware,” and this “follows from the fact that the soul is distinct from the body and that its essence is to think” (AT 3:273).¹⁶

Although Plotinus, like Descartes, believes both that the essence of the soul consists in its thinking, and that the soul is distinct from the body, he would disagree with Descartes’ argument. According to Plotinus, we are not entitled to infer from Descartes’ two premises the conclusion that the soul is aware of everything mental in it. Unlike Descartes he believes that thinking is not necessarily accompanied by a corresponding awareness.¹⁷ At *Ennead* IV 8, 8, 7–9 he states: “For we do not realise everything which happens in a part of the soul before it comes to the whole soul.”¹⁸ This holds true not only, Plotinus claims, of appetite, remaining in the appetitive part (*epithumētikon*) of the soul but also of the soul’s thinking in the intelligible world. In fact, Plotinus argues in this way in order to explain how it is possible that we are, more often than not during our embodied lives, unaware of our own activity in the intelligible world (see *Enn.* IV 8, 8, 6 f.). Furthermore, this is the background of our interpretation, following Bréhier’s, of the beginning of *Ennead* IV 8; it explains how it is possible for a soul to *become* aware of its own activity: if we were always aware of all our mental activities we could not *become* aware of any mental activity. But the human soul in so far as it is active in the sensible world only experiences its higher activities in rare moments.

If we distinguish between a mental activity and its awareness in such a way that our souls can be cognitively active in certain ways without our being aware of it, then there is no reason to suppose that we cannot be active in the intelligible world without being aware of it. Following this view, it is possible for a soul who is only aware of its activity in the sensible world at the same time to be active in the intelligible world. Plotinus, I submit, holds that this is not only possible but actually the case. As a

¹⁶ “Pour ce que ie mets en suite, que *nihil potest esse in me, hoc est in mente, cuius non sim conscius*, ie l’ay prouvé dans les Meditations, & il suit de ce que l’ame est distincte du cors, et que son essence est de penser” (Lettre à Mersenne, 31 Décembre 1640).

¹⁷ See also Emilsson (1988) 112.

¹⁸ οὐ γὰρ πᾶν, ὃ γίνεται περὶ ὁτιοῦν μέρος ψυχῆς, γινώσκωμεν, πρὶν ἂν εἰς ὅλην τὴν ψυχὴν ἦκη.

consequence of this view, Plotinus rejects the view that the descent is necessary to account for any apparent incompatibility between the two sorts of activity of the human soul.

Now if the descent of the soul occurs *within* the soul, we can no longer refer to it in order to explain the soul's activity in the sensible world. Therefore, we need to further explore how Plotinus explains what traditionally had been explained by means of the descent of the soul. When discussing divine souls we already encountered a model for how a soul can be active both in the intelligible and the sensible world: by sending one of its powers into the sensible world. Since human souls are not essentially distinct from divine souls, it seems reasonable to assume that they work in the same way.

Explaining activities by means of powers (or, more generally, *dunameis*) was widespread in ancient psychology and physics; it was part of the Aristotelian heritage.¹⁹ On the basis of patterns of activity philosophers inferred the existence of certain powers or capacities which explained those patterns of activity and were thought to bring them about. Even Galen, a philosopher that was rather reluctant to make metaphysical claims, states in his *De Propriis Placitis* that he knows the *dunameis* of the soul since they reveal themselves in the activities of living beings. He professes, however, not to be able to infer anything about the essence of the soul from his knowledge of its *dunameis*, believing the essence of the soul to be utterly unknown.²⁰

Plotinus, although believing himself to know more than Galen on this last point, agrees that at least some of the powers of the soul are active in the sensible world and that we can identify these powers through an examination of the corresponding activities. At *Ennead* IV 8, 5, for instance, he considers what it would have meant for the human soul to eternally remain in the intelligible world (without ever descending in any sense) and states that it would not have known the powers by means of which it is (now, actually) active in the sensible world. Moreover, these powers would have been of no use, since “activity everywhere reveals completely hidden power” (*Enn.* IV 8, 5, 34 f.),²¹ and: “Now everybody wonders at what is

¹⁹ The word δύναμις has of course a number of related meanings. It can mean capacity or faculty (as often in Aristotle) but also power. The latter seems to me often to be the right translation for Plotinus for reasons that will become clear in the final two chapters. However, when talking more generally, it might be prudent not to translate it since other ancient authors used the word δύναμις in the same context in different (but related) senses.

²⁰ Galen, *Prop. Plac.* CMG V 3, 2, 59ff.

²¹ ... πανταχοῦ ἡ ἐνέργεια τὴν δύναμιν ἔδειξε κρυφθεῖσαν ἂν ἀπάντη κτλ.

within [i.e. powers] because of the variety outside [i.e. activities]” (*Enn.* IV 8, 5, 36 f.).²² Thus, what powers a being possesses can be inferred from how these powers reveal themselves in activities. While at least some activities of the soul in the sensible world are apparent, the powers bringing them about are hidden.

The view that the soul acts in the sensible world by means of powers can also be found in *Ennead* IV 7. In arguing against materialists, Plotinus tries to show that the *powers* of the soul cannot be corporeal; neither can they be reduced to corporeal powers. Instead, he claims, such powers as that for sense perception, reasoning and desiring belong to the (immaterial) soul (*Enn.* IV 7, 8¹, 6–9). There are other passages showing that the human soul, according to Plotinus, is active in the sensible world by means of powers. Given how widespread the view was that activities are due to powers, this is not surprising. Now if we combine this with our earlier result that the human soul is essentially active in the intelligible world, we can see that the human soul’s relation to its activity in the sensible world has the same structure as that of divine souls: human souls, too, are active in the sensible world by means of their (or some of their) powers. Furthermore, claiming that it is active in the sensible world by means of one or several of its powers is compatible with claiming that there is indeed a sense in which the human soul does not descend into the sensible world. It is compatible because the powers of the soul that are active in the sensible world are not everything that the soul is. Rather, the soul is active in the intelligible world while, sometimes simultaneously, being active in the sensible world by means of a power or a set of powers.

I shall discuss the powers of the soul by means of which it is active in the sensible world in the next two chapters. For now I hope to have shown that the following three claims are compatible. Firstly, the human soul is eternally active in the intelligible world; it never literally descends. Secondly, the descent of the soul is a descent occurring in the human soul’s experience. Thirdly, in spite of not literally descending, the human soul is sometimes active in the sensible world; it is active by means of a power or a set of powers.

In the next section I will discuss how the activity in the sensible world brings it about that the human soul is no longer aware of its activity in the intelligible world (or only rarely so). What is more, the soul tends to get confused and perturbed. I will show that the fact that the human soul gets confused in the sensible world is crucially related to the fact that descent is

²² Νῦν μὲν γὰρ θαῦμα ἔχει τῶν ἔνδον ἕκαστος διὰ τῆς ποικιλίας τῶν ἔξω κτλ.

an experience. Moreover, I will sketch Plotinus' notion of purification as the way out of this confusion.

Experience and the confusion of the human soul in the sensible world

Like divine souls, human souls are active in the sensible world by caring for a body. I argued above that souls of both types do so by means of powers. However, what crucially distinguishes human souls from divine souls is the fact that they, as opposed to divine souls, are affected by their activity in the sensible world: not only do they lose sight of their own activity in the intelligible world, but they also become confused as to what they are. This is due to what Plotinus calls their *participation in the perceptible*, a participation that, in a way to be discussed, arises necessarily for the human soul.

Let us start with the notion 'participation in the perceptible'. Plotinus states: "Since there is this twofold nature, an intelligible nature and a perceptible nature, it is better for the soul to be in the intelligible yet since it has this kind of nature, it must also be able to participate in the perceptible" (*Enn.* IV 8, 7, 1–4).²³ It is perhaps clear why it is better for the human soul (exclusively) to be in the intelligible world rather than (also) to be in the sensible world. But two things need further elaboration: what does Plotinus mean by 'participation in the perceptible'? And why is it that human souls *must* be able to participate in the perceptible? What kind of necessity is this? We should not simply identify participation in the perceptible with being active in the sensible world, since divine souls, while being active in the sensible world, do not participate in the perceptible. What distinguishes divine from human souls? At *Ennead* IV 8, 7 Plotinus explains the difference by saying that the latter, by contrast to the former, "plunge" into the sensible world and experience all sorts of things.²⁴ So at least part of the meaning of 'participation in the perceptible' must be that human souls, unlike divine souls, *experience* the sensible world.

Why and in what sense is this necessary? In the chapter referred to above Plotinus defends the view that it is good for human souls to experience evil in order to gain a better knowledge of the Good.²⁵ This would seem to give

²³ διττῆς δὲ φύσεως ταύτης οὐσης, νοητῆς, τῆς δὲ αἰσθητῆς, ἄμεινον μὲν ψυχῇ ἐν τῷ νοητῷ εἶναι, ἀνάγκη γέ μὴν ἔχειν καὶ τοῦ αἰσθητοῦ μεταλαμβάνειν τοιαύτην φύσιν ἐχούσῃ κτλ.

²⁴ See in particular *Enn.* IV 8, 7, 9–14.

²⁵ *Enn.* IV 8, 7, 15–17. This argument was to become a staple argument in the discussion of the problem of evil.

us at least one reason. Plotinus emphasises that this experience is only necessary for weaker souls, assuming that divine souls are strong enough to possess sufficient knowledge of the Good without plunging into the sensible world.²⁶ However, there is another and, I believe, more promising reason.

Human souls have to care for their body. It is true, of course, that divine souls also care for their bodies. However, in a way their job is easier than ours because the visible gods do not need to experience their environment to fulfil their function (as we saw in [Chapter 5](#)). Sublunary bodies are more fragile and crucially depend on interaction with their environment. At *Ennead* IV 8, 2 Plotinus describes the situation of human bodies thus: “[our bodies] need a lot of troublesome care (*pronoia*) because many alien things assail them and they are continually in need and require every sort of help as being in great trouble”²⁷ (*Enn.* IV 8, 2, 11–14). This brings out clearly the difference between human bodies and those of the visible gods – a difference that calls for a different degree, and a different sort, of engagement.

Plotinus sometimes calls the involvement of human souls in the body’s interaction with its environment ‘self-working’. When discussing the World Soul we have seen that this divine soul is exempt from this. In the [last chapter](#) we discussed *Ennead* IV 8, 2, 26–30, where the term ‘self-working’ occurs, but with a focus on divine souls. Let us now look at it again, this time with a view to the human soul:

The care (*epimeleia*) for the All is twofold, on the one hand for the whole, by the effortless command of one setting in order by royal authority, and on the other hand in relation to particulars, already by some self-working activity (*autourgōi tini poēsei*) which is in contact with the thing acted upon – a care filling the acting thing with the nature of the thing acted upon. (*Enn.* IV 8, 2, 26–30)²⁸

While the World Soul fulfils its function in the sensible world by royal authority, human souls are more deeply involved with their bodies, so deep indeed that their activity affects them: the soul “gets filled with the nature of the thing acted upon”; that is, it gets filled with the nature of its body. In a similar vein Plotinus claims: “there are two reasons why the soul’s association with the body is hard to endure: because the body becomes a

²⁶ *ibid.*

²⁷ πολλῆς δὲ καὶ ὀχλώδους προνοίας δεομένων, ἅτε πολλῶν τῶν ἀλλοτρίων αὐτοῖς προσπιπτόντων αἰεὶ τε ἐνδεία συνεχόμενων καὶ πάσης βοηθείας ὡς ἐν πολλῇ δυσχερεῖα δεομένων.

²⁸ διττὴ γὰρ ἐπιμέλεια παντός, τοῦ μὲν καθόλου κεύσει κοσμοῦντος ἀπράγμονι ἐπιστάσι βασιλικῇ, τὸ δὲ καθέκαστα ἤδη αὐτουργῶ τινι ποιήσει συναφῇ τῇ πρὸς τὸ πραττόμενον τὸ πρᾶττον τοῦ πραττομένου τῆς φύσεως ἀναπιμπλάσας.

hindrance to thought and because it fills the soul with pleasures, desires and pains” (*Enn.* IV 8, 2, 42–45).²⁹

It is worthwhile to pay attention to the language of these two passages. In both Plotinus uses the notion of the soul’s *being filled*.³⁰ In the former we learn that it gets filled with the nature of the body and in the latter it gets filled with emotions arising from the body. What does Plotinus mean by ‘being filled’ and, in particular, by being filled *with the nature of the body*? We will also have to consider in some detail what precisely the two reasons are for why the soul’s fellowship with the body is displeasing.

Perhaps the most important text for an understanding of what problems the soul encounters, when it is embodied, is Plato’s *Phaedo*, where the right sort of care for one’s body is a central topic. We learn in the *Phaedo* that, while still embodied, we should separate our souls as far as possible from the “so-called pleasures” of food, drink and sex (*Phd.* 64CD), that is, from the pleasures that are provided by satisfying necessary natural desires – desires that we possess because of our embodiment. While separating our soul from such things we should concentrate on the soul’s proper activity, its thinking about truth (*Phd.* 65Cff.). These two things are related; Socrates in the *Phaedo* explicitly states that the body is a hindrance to the soul’s proper activity (*Phd.* 66BC).

Reading the *Phaedo* from a Plotinian point of view provides one reason why the soul’s fellowship with the body is displeasing: the body is a hindrance to the soul because caring for its body keeps the soul from being aware of its thinking in the intelligible world. Human souls have to care for bodies that are most fragile and that, for this reason, need a lot of care. While paying more or less continuous attention to its body, the soul cannot, at the same time, direct its attention to its intelligible nature. As long as a human soul has to care for a body, devoting ourselves to contemplation is only possible at rare moments, even for the best of us.³¹

A version of this problem is famously discussed by Aristotle in *Nicomachean Ethics* X.7 f. Aristotle there considers the contemplative life not only as distinct from the practical life but also as preferable and, indeed, as divine. Thus he says that we should attempt to make ourselves immortal

²⁹ δύο γὰρ ὄντων δι’ ἃ δυσχεραίνεται ἡ ψυχῆς πρὸς σῶμα κοινωνία, ὅτι τε ἐμπόδιον πρὸς τὰς νοήσεις γίγνεται, καὶ ὅτι ἡδονῶν καὶ ἐπιθυμιῶν καὶ λυπῶν πίμπλησιν αὐτήν, κτλ.

³⁰ See also *Enn.* I 8, 13.

³¹ At *Enn.* I 8, 14 Plotinus describes in less technical terms the soul’s turning towards matter and away from the Good as its *fall*. The soul as such is pure; it only becomes corrupted because it has to take care of things corporeal.

and to do everything to live according to what is best in us.³² What is best in us, he thinks, is understanding, or *nous*. Burnyeat explains this as follows: “What is special about the exercise of *nous*, the highest form of cognition that humans can attain, is that it is no longer a more or less distant imitation of the divine life. It is a limited span of the very same activity as God enjoys for all time.”³³ Hence, if we follow Burnyeat’s interpretation, Aristotle argues that we can become like God in a very strong sense indeed, namely by sharing in a divine life – even if only for short period of time.

For Aristotle, as for Plato, a human life is such that it cannot *exclusively* be devoted to contemplation. Our being embodied makes it certain that we cannot avoid practical concerns. We have to take care of our embodied selves in a way that will by necessity distract us from divine contemplation. This is, I think, the reason for Aristotle’s separation of the practical from the contemplative life. This separation has as a consequence Aristotle’s famous separation of the virtues into two classes. Aristotelian moral virtues belong to human beings because of our practical concerns as embodied beings. The contemplative life of understanding, on the other hand, is free of such concerns and thus also, in itself, free of the exercise of moral virtues. Thus, the first reason Plotinus mentioned above is attributed great significance to by both Plato and Aristotle.

The second reason Plotinus adduced in the aforementioned passages also has its source in the *Phaedo*. Plotinus claims that the body fills the soul with pleasure, desires and pains and, in the other passage quoted, that the soul gets filled with the nature of the body. While the former claim seems reasonably clear, the latter is not. Yet we find the very same claim in the *Phaedo* where Socrates warns us to avoid getting filled with the nature of the body (*Phd.* 67A) and, on the basis of the *Phaedo* passage, Plotinus’ meaning will become clear.

We are told at *Phaedo* 80E_f. that, if the soul manages to leave its body, itself being in a state of purity and drawing nothing of the body with it, then the soul will go to what is akin to it, namely to the divine, immortal and wise. Arriving at this place, its life will be blissful, free of folly and the ills of what we may call the human condition. The polluted soul, however, which has served and loved its body and which has been bewitched by it and its passions and pleasures and which believes that only the body-like (*sōmatoeides*) is real, will not arrive at a blissful life. In a later passage Plato even has Socrates say that such a polluted soul becomes itself body-like in

³² EN 1177b31–34.

³³ Burnyeat (2008) 43.

that it shares in the opinions of the body (*Phd.* 83D). This is what it means to get filled with the nature of the body.

The problem of the polluted soul, for Plotinus, is not that it would not reside in the intelligible realm (it does reside there) but rather that it is not aware that its true nature belongs to the intelligible world. It seems to me that this is of great significance to Plotinus' ethics. During our embodied lives, from the very beginning, we have to care for our bodies. In order to do so, we need the help not only of our senses and emotions but also of our parents and of other members of our society. In this way we acquire a great many opinions about how to live our lives, about values that are involved in it and so on. Without learning about how to deal with our body, we could not fulfil our function of taking care of it. Now since, because we have to learn how to live a life largely devoted to a body, most of the opinions a soul acquires are usually concerned with its body, the soul tends to appropriate these opinions and thus to make them its own. The soul gets corrupted and becomes impure in the sense that it makes its body's life its own. This is what I think is meant both in the *Phaedo* and in Plotinus by the claim that the soul becomes body-like.

Purification is the way in which we rid ourselves of this body-likeness that according to the *Phaedo* is a sort of pollution.³⁴ Plotinus has the above passage in mind when discussing purification at *Ennead* I 2, 3.³⁵ He claims there that the non-wise soul is mixed with the body and shares the latter's affections and opinions.³⁶ It is not, of course, literally mixed with the body: immaterial and material things cannot literally get mixed. Rather, the soul is mixed with the body in the sense that it makes the life of the body its own life. Purification consists in gaining independence from the desires and opinions that arise in the soul through its relation to the body.³⁷ During a long process the soul must learn and understand that it is not body-like, that the desires and needs of the body are not its own. It has to carefully consider the opinions it has acquired and attempt to rid itself of wrong ones. Surely the soul will also have acquired many true opinions concerning its body (for this is necessary for the human soul to get things right in

³⁴ See also Pl. *Soph.* 230D, where the importance of removing false opinions that interfere with learning is emphasised and identified as a form of purification.

³⁵ See also *Enn.* I 8, 7.

³⁶ Plotinus uses the expression 'συνδοξάζειν' where Plato uses, in the same context, 'ὁμοδοξεῖν' (*Phd.* 83D7). Moreover, note that Plotinus characterises the soul as 'συμπεφυρμένη' (being mixed), an expression we also find in the *Phaedo* (*Phd.* 66B5), also to characterise the relation of soul to body.

³⁷ For this see also Kalligas (2000) 35–37 and O'Meara (2003) 40–44.

the sensible world and to properly care for its body).³⁸ But even in the case of those true opinions the soul will have to understand that these opinions only concern the body, and not the soul or true reality. For this reason having *appropriated* such opinions is a mistake that needs to be corrected.

After having discussed the two reasons why the soul's being with a body is displeasing, it is worthwhile to discuss how they are related and how they are distinct. Both reasons have their origin in the fact that the soul must care for a body. The first reason was that the soul, in caring for its body, must, almost all the time, give its full attention to the body and can devote little time to attending to its own essential activity. As we know from Aristotle, giving one's full attention to the body is an unavoidable consequence of the fact that we have to care for a body. In the first section I argued that Plotinus understands the descent of the soul in terms of experience: the descent consists in a change from one sort of experience (that of its activity in the intelligible world) to another sort of experience (that in the sensible world). The problem arising from the descent, as we saw, is not that the soul no longer actively thinks in the intelligible world but rather that, when being active in the sensible world, it is no longer aware of it. This is because the soul has to care for a body. So the descent of the soul in terms of experience is necessitated by the first reason discussed in this section. There is no confusion involved in the first reason. It is simply a regrettable, and perhaps tragic, consequence of the fact that the soul has to care for a most fragile body.

The confusion of the soul in the sensible world is the second reason. Such confusion is due to the fact that the soul identifies its own life with the life of its body. The opinions and desires it appropriates stand in the way of understanding what it truly is. Its true life does not consist in the life of the body and not even in its care for its body. Instead, it belongs to the intelligible world. While the first reason is unavoidable and cannot be overcome as long as we have to care for a body, purification is the way to overcome our confusion. This, unlike the first reason, gives us an ethical task – perhaps *the* ethical task for our embodied life.

³⁸ Accordingly, Plotinus' warning at *Enn.* I 1, 9, 5 (ψευδῆς γὰρ δόξα καὶ πολλὰ κατ' αὐτὴν πράττεται τῶν κακῶν) should not be understood as saying that all opinions are *false*. This reading of *Enn.* I 1, 9, 5 should also be rejected because the negation of a false opinion is true.

CHAPTER 7

The human soul: the higher and the lower soul

In the [last chapter](#) we considered Plotinus' view that the human soul does not – properly speaking – descend. Instead, it only sends a power (or a set of powers) into the sensible world. This power enables the soul to be active in the sensible world – for instance, by seeing, hearing and desiring things. For reasons that, I hope, will become apparent, Plotinus sometimes wishes to call both the soul in so far as it remains in the intelligible world, as well as the power by means of which it is active in the sensible world, a soul. I shall follow scholarly tradition in using the terms 'higher soul' and 'lower soul' to distinguish between the two.¹ Since scholars use these terms in different ways, it is important to note that 'higher soul' shall mean the soul in so far as it remains in the intelligible world, while 'lower soul' refers to the power of the soul by means of which it is active in the sensible world. In the first section I shall explore in more detail how the lower soul is related to the higher soul. The second section is devoted to the question of what the lower soul is. I will argue that it is crucially a faculty of presentation and that it is functionally comparable to the ruling part of the Stoic rational soul. This discussion will also explain in what sense it is called 'soul'. In the final section of this chapter I will consider a passage that may be understood as suggesting that the lower soul stems from the sensible world and perhaps ultimately even from the World Soul. I will explore whether this is indeed the case. In this context, I shall also briefly discuss a set of late ancient theories according to which we possess two really distinct souls.

¹ Plotinus sometimes uses the expressions 'ἐκείνη ἡ ψυχή' to refer to the higher soul. The German equivalents of the expressions 'higher soul' and 'lower soul' were already used by Zeller (1923) III.2, 63off.

The higher soul and its power in the sensible world

The *First Alcibiades*² forms the background against which Plotinus discusses the soul and its activity in the sensible world in *Ennead* I 1.³ In this dialogue Socrates and Alcibiades consider whether there is an art that teaches human beings virtue, understood as an art to improve human beings. Now in order to know any art it is first necessary, we are told, to know the subject matter with which it is concerned. Accordingly, in order to understand what the art is that aims to improve us, we first need to know what we are. For this reason the interlocutors of the *First Alcibiades* embark on a study of what we are: firstly, the body is distinguished from the soul by virtue of the fact that the body is an instrument of the soul and that the soul is the entity that uses the body as a tool. Given this distinction, Socrates suggests identifying us, that is, the human being, either with the body or with the soul or with the composite of body and soul (*Alc. I*, 130A). The ensuing discussion concludes with the claim that what we truly are is neither the body nor the composite but the soul. While Plato does not distinguish between the soul and the *soul using the body* (the latter expression only serves to distinguish the soul from the body), Plotinus thinks that this distinction is crucial.

The reason for this becomes apparent if we ask whether the individual soul in the intelligible world should indeed be identified with the soul using a body. If we identify the higher soul (i.e. the soul in so far as it is in the intelligible world) with the soul using a body, and if the soul using a body is affected by its activity in the sensible world, then the higher soul is affected by its activity in the sensible world. This seems problematic. However, if we do not identify the higher soul and the soul using a body, then we need to clarify in what way they are distinct but also in what way they are the same. To clarify these issues, I wish to discuss some important passages from *Ennead* I 1.

Before I do so, however, let me rule out one option right from the start, namely that the soul and the soul using a body are two *really distinct* entities (such that neither depends on the other for their existence).⁴ If they were,

² Many modern scholars judge the *First Alcibiades* to be spurious, Schleiermacher being the most influential (Schleiermacher (1826)). Among the proponents of authenticity one is Friedländer (1921 and 1923) and, more recently, Denyer (2001). Ancient readers did not doubt its authenticity. Indeed, the *First Alcibiades* served at Platonist schools in late antiquity as the introductory dialogue to the study of Plato's work. See Westerink (1962) xxxvii–xl; Festugière (1969). So Plotinus had no doubts about its authenticity, which is why this question is irrelevant for present purposes.

³ For the importance of this dialogue for Plotinus see O'Daly (1973) ch. 1 and Aubry (2004) 15ff.

⁴ I am using the expression 'real distinction' in the sense used by Duns Scotus, who defines real distinction in this way: two things are really distinct if and only if they are separable (even if only by

then individual human souls (being in the intelligible world) either would not be active at all in the sensible world or would only be so by means of a power exercised by (separate) souls-using-a-body. In the latter case, their activity in the sensible world would be agent-based just as most of the World Soul's activity in the sensible world is (as discussed in [Chapter 5](#)). However, as we saw in the [last chapter](#), human souls are self-workers. Hence, they are active in the sensible world and their activity is not agent-based. Therefore, they cannot be entities that are really distinct from corresponding souls-using-a-body.

Ennead I 1 starts with the following question: "Pleasure and pain, fear and audacity, desire and aversion, and suffering – whose are they?" (*Enn.* I 1, 1f).⁵ While, in the quoted passage, only emotions and desiderative states are listed and it is asked what their proper subject is, the list gets extended in the following lines: Plotinus asks what the proper subject is of such things as discursive reasoning, opinions and sense perception, things that we might call, following Aristotle, 'affections of the soul'.⁶

At first sight Plotinus' question seems to differ considerably from that of the *First Alcibiades*. However, all the affections of the soul that are listed are, in an important sense, *our* affections (see *Enn.* I 1, 10). If this is the case then, in determining the proper subject of our affections, we also determine in an important sense what we are. In this sense Plotinus' starting point is crucially related to the task of the *First Alcibiades* even though, as we shall shortly see, the relation of the proper subject of our affections to our true self is more complicated than the [first chapter](#) of *Ennead* I 1 may suggest.

What is the subject of those affections? Plotinus offers three candidates: "for either they belong to the soul or to the soul using a body, or to a third thing consisting of both [i.e. of soul and body]" (*Enn.* I 1, 1, 2–4).⁷ The list only partially corresponds to that in the *First Alcibiades*. The soul and the composite of body and soul are candidates in Plato and in Plotinus. However, Plato's body does not occur on Plotinus' list while his distinction of soul and soul using a body is absent from the *First Alcibiades*.

divine power). They are separable if and only if one can exist without the other (*Ord.* 1, d. 17, pars 1, qq. 1–2, nn. 60–62; *Quodl.* q. 18, nn. 3–6.).

⁵ ἡδοναὶ καὶ λύπαι φόβοι τε καὶ θάρρη ἐπιθυμίαι τε καὶ ἀποστροφαὶ καὶ τὸ ἀλγεῖν τίνος ἂν εἴεν; Note that the first four of these affections correspond to *Ti.* 69D, where we find them attributed to the second form of soul.

⁶ πᾶσθι τῆς ψυχῆς *DA* 403a3ff.

⁷ ἢ γὰρ ψυχῆς, ἢ χρωμένης ψυχῆς σώματι, ἢ τρίτου τινὸς ἐξ ἀμφοῖν.

At *Ennead* I 1, 2 Plotinus sets out to discuss the soul *simpliciter*. He considers two possibilities: either the soul is simple or it is a composite. If it is a composite then the claim that the soul possesses affections of the types listed above is unproblematic. If, on the other hand, the soul is simple then the soul will not admit of any affections. Plotinus continues: “For in this way we can truly call it immortal, if the immortal and incorruptible must be without affection, giving something of itself somehow to another thing but receiving nothing from anything else, except what it has from what is prior to it, from which it is not cut off because this is better than it” (*Enn.* I 1, 2, 9–13).⁸ Thus, the soul, if it is simple, truly is immortal and incorruptible. If it is a composite, however, it could, in principle, be dissolved and hence would not be in itself immortal. Plotinus continues by claiming that the soul, if it is simple, will always be what it is. It will have no sense perception, discursive reasoning or opinions, “for perception is reception of a form or also of an affection of a body and discursive reasoning and opinion are based on perception” (*Enn.* I 1, 2, 26f.).⁹ Thus, if the soul is simple then the mental activity that we usually ascribe to it cannot be ascribed to it and the soul is free of affections of the soul.

Now is the soul in itself simple in this way according to Plotinus? If the soul is simple then it “will not be receptive of all these activities which it imparts to something else, having in itself an immanent connatural activity” (*Enn.* I 1, 2, 5–9).¹⁰ Furthermore, if the soul is of such a nature, it will be immortal and incorruptible; it will receive only what it has from what is prior to it. These descriptions fit the higher soul perfectly. This impression is confirmed later in the treatise when Plotinus argues, referring back to the [first chapter](#), that the simple soul is free of sin (*Enn.* I 1, 12, 6–9), particularly because it is free of opinion, which Plotinus considers a main source of evil. A further indication of its being the higher soul is the claim that this soul is completely separate even while we care for a body (*Enn.* I 1, 10, 7–11). Finally, if we bear in mind Plotinus’ view that the soul is indeed by itself immortal, then, according to the passage quoted above, it cannot be affected. The higher soul, being by itself immortal, cannot, therefore, be the proper subject of the affections of the soul.

⁸ οὕτω γὰρ καὶ τὸ ἀθάνατον ἀληθὲς λέγειν, εἴπερ δεῖ τὸ ἀθάνατον καὶ ἀφθαρτον ἀπαθὲς εἶναι, ἄλλω ἑαυτοῦ πῶς διδόν, αὐτὸ δὲ παρ’ ἄλλου μηδὲν ἢ ὅσον παρὰ τῶν πρὸ αὐτοῦ ἔχειν, ὧν μὴ ἀποτέμνεται κρειττόνων ὄντων.

⁹ αἰσθησις γὰρ παραδοχὴ εἴδους ἢ καὶ πάθους σώματος, διάνοια δὲ καὶ δόξα ἐπ’ αἰσθησιν.

¹⁰ . . . ψυχὴ ἀδεκτον τούτων ἀπασῶν τῶν ἐνεργειῶν, ὧν ἐποιστικόν ἄλλω, ἑαυτῷ δὲ συμφυᾶ ἔχον τὴν ἐνέργειαν ἐν ἑαυτῷ κτλ.

I do not want to discuss in full length what Plotinus means by claiming that the soul is *simple*. The term 'simple' has, of course, a variety of meanings. However, given the context in which he uses it here, his characterisation of the soul as simple will presumably be motivated by some considerations along the following lines. He thinks that the soul's simplicity is incompatible with its having affections. Now if a simple entity is affected in any way, it becomes another entity. If we wish to make room for affections of an entity (while preserving its identity), then we must distinguish between a part of the entity that is unaffected (and thus preserves the entity's identity) and a part of the thing that is changeable and whose change does not affect the entity's identity. We could, for example, distinguish between the essence of a thing (being identity-preserving) and a part consisting of its non-essential attributes (i.e. attributes that the thing might acquire, possess, not possess or lose without thereby being affected in its identity). If we distinguished two parts in an entity in this way, then the entity could be affected without losing its identity. It would only be affected, in fact, in its non-essential part; otherwise the entity would, because of the change, lose its identity and thus cease to exist. Thus, by calling the soul simple, he may mean that it is such that any change in it would lead to its destruction. This fits nicely with what we know about the individual higher soul (see [Chapter 3](#)), in particular with the view that the higher soul consists of unchanging activity (namely that of its proper discursive thinking in the intelligible world).¹¹

Plotinus rejects not only the view that the simple soul is the proper subject of the affections of the soul but also the view (a version of which is defended by Aristotle) that the composite of body and soul should be considered the proper subject of all of these affections. At *Ennead* I 1, 6 Plotinus first considers the view that the powers of the soul are active in the body without, however, being affected by this activity at all. According to this view, the soul thus only provides the power to perceive, for example, without itself being the proper subject of perception, however. Instead, the composite gets identified as the proper subject of the corresponding affections and thus it is the composite that perceives, feels and reasons discursively. Plotinus describes it thus: "But if this is so, also life will not belong to the soul, but to the composite. Certainly the life of the composite will not be that of the

¹¹ See *Enn.* III 6, 2 for a similar argument.

soul; and the power of sense perception will not perceive, but that which has the power” (*Enn.* I 1, 6, 7–10).¹²

Against this, Plotinus defends the Platonist view that it is not the composite but the soul that is the proper subject of sense perception: “the soul’s power of sense perception need not be aware of [external] sense objects but rather of impressions (*tupoî*) originating in the living being from sensation. For these impressions are already intelligible entities” (*Enn.* I 1, 7, 9–12).¹³ I shall ignore Plotinus’ striking claim that the soul’s power of sense perception becomes aware of impressions rather than of external sense objects.¹⁴ Instead, the claim that sense perception, properly speaking, is an activity of the soul, not of the composite, is important.

The discussion of the composite has thus led to the conclusion that the soul must be the subject of (at least some) affections of the soul, but our earlier discussion has shown that the higher soul is not the proper subject of any affections of the soul. Therefore, there must be a way in which the soul is affected but also a way in which it is not (if we want to avoid attributing the affections of the soul to a really distinct second soul, which, as I discussed earlier, we should). Previously I claimed that Plotinus distinguishes the soul and the soul using a body, and in what follows I shall argue that this distinction solves this problem.

When considering the soul’s use of a body, Plotinus wonders whether the soul is in any way affected by this use. As a first step, he argues that this need not be the case. He points to the fact (if it is one) that craftsmen are not affected by their tools even though they use them (*Enn.* I 1, 3, 3–5). Perhaps a better example would be divine souls who, as we have seen in [Chapter 5](#), are not affected by their activity in the sensible world. Yet, as we saw in the [last chapter](#), this will not suffice as an argument in the case of the human soul using a body, since the soul in the sublunary sphere must *experience* the sensible world; in particular it must use sense perception in order to care for its body. Thus, the fact that the soul uses its body (in the way souls in the sublunary sphere do) seems to imply that the soul using a body is indeed affected by sense perception. If this is the case, the

¹² ἀλλ’ εἰ τοῦτο, καὶ τὸ ζῆν ὅλως οὐ τῆς ψυχῆς, ἀλλὰ τοῦ συναμφοτέρου ἔσται. ἢ τὸ τοῦ συναμφοτέρου ζῆν οὐ τῆς ψυχῆς ἔσται· καὶ ἡ δύναμις δὲ ἢ αἰσθητικὴ οὐκ αἰσθήσεται, ἀλλὰ τὸ ἔχον τὴν δύναμιν.

¹³ τὴν δὲ τῆς ψυχῆς τοῦ αἰσθάνεσθαι δύναμιν οὐ τῶν αἰσθητῶν εἶναι δεῖ, τῶν δὲ ἀπὸ τῆς αἰσθήσεως ἐγγιγνομένων τῷ ζῳῳ τύπων ἀντιληπτικὴν εἶναι μᾶλλον· νοητὰ γὰρ ἤδη ταῦτα· κτλ.

¹⁴ The classic discussion of this is Emilsson (1988) [ch. 6](#), who convincingly argues that this passage does not (as it might seem to) imply an antirealist view on perception. Note that ‘sensory object’ does not necessarily mean an object like a cat or a horse. It may also be a state of affairs that the subject perceives. More about this in the next section.

distinction between soul *simpliciter* and soul using a body becomes important: in so far as the soul is on its own, it is not affected by sense perception (or anything else). In so far as it cares for a body, however, it is affected by sense perception since this necessarily accompanies this kind of care.

Our next task is to establish what affections of the soul are. I shall not discuss all kinds of affections of the soul here but will restrict myself to the example of sense perception. Moreover, I will only discuss sense perception here in so far as it helps to explain what affections of the soul are.¹⁵ Affections of the soul-using-a-body other than sense perception will be affections in the same sense. Thus, my task is to answer the following question: in what sense of ‘affection’ is the soul-using-a-body affected?

Perhaps the most obvious understanding of ‘affection’ would be, roughly, that a thing becomes affected by an external object in the sense that it gets changed or altered under the influence of this external object. So I might think that, when I see red, my soul gets changed from a state of not seeing red to a state of seeing red and that this change is *caused* by the external object which is red (or by the redness of the external object). However, according to Plotinus, sense perception is not an affection of the soul in this sense. This is clear, I believe, from the following passage: “We said that sense perceptions are not affections but activities and judgements concerning affections; affections belong to something else, for instance to the qualified body, while the judgement belongs to the soul because the judgement is not an affection” (*Enn.* III 6, 1, 1–4).¹⁶ If the affections from *Ennead* I 1 discussed above were affections in the same sense as those referred to in this passage, then Plotinus would contradict himself for, as we have seen above, he considers sense perception an affection of the soul. However, there is no need to assume that there is a contradiction. It is true that, in the passage just quoted, Plotinus distinguishes between affection and judgement, both of which are related to sense perception. Sense perception, properly speaking, is no affection (in the sense relevant here). It is rather a judgement and thus an activity. The affection that *does* occur in sense perception is not an affection of the soul but rather of the body. In other words, the body, not the soul, is the proper subject of sensory

¹⁵ For details see in particular Emilsson (1988). I will say more about sense perception in the next section.

¹⁶ τὰς αἰσθήσεις οὐ πάθη λέγοντες εἶναι, ἐνεργείας δὲ περὶ παθήματα καὶ κρίσεις, τῶν μὲν παθῶν περὶ ἄλλο γινομένων, οἷον τὸ σῶμα φέρε τὸ τοιόνδε, τῆς δὲ κρίσεως περὶ τὴν ψυχὴν, οὐ τῆς κρίσεως πάθους οὗσης κτλ. For this passage see Fleet (1995) 71–75.

affections. This claim can also be found in passages where Plotinus does not qualify the claim with a ‘for instance’ (e.g. *Enn.* IV 3, 26, 1–9).¹⁷

The key to understanding Plotinus’ view on sense perception is thus the distinction between sensory affection and sense perception in the narrow sense.¹⁸ He does so in such a way that sense perception itself does not involve sensory affections. This allows for the possibility that sense perception is nevertheless an affection but one that is different from that which occurs in the qualified body. Following Emilsson, however, I will make the stronger claim that the affection of the soul is not only different from the affection of the qualified body but also an affection *in a different sense*: the qualified body becomes passively affected while the soul is active in sense perception, and this activity itself is called an affection. Before explaining this in more detail, let us first look at a way in which one could think that the soul becomes affected in sense perception in the same sense in which the qualified body is affected. It would thus also change and its change would be caused by external objects (be the external object something like the white chair, for example, or the whiteness of the white chair).

One might think that at least the content of sense perception is acquired and that the soul, by making judgements caused by sensory affections, in some way acquires some perceptual content. In this way, the soul might be thought to build up a stock of concepts that arise out of sense perception. Despite not being subject to sensory affection, the soul would nevertheless get affected and altered by sense perception. However, Plotinus argues against this, stating: “the activity [of sense perception] is not an alteration but it [i.e. the soul] simultaneously approaches what it possesses” (*Enn.* III 6, 2, 35f.).¹⁹ Thus, sense perception is an activation of something that the soul already possesses. If so, it does not acquire it. In order to explain this state of affairs, Emilsson helpfully points to the analogue case of memory. If we remember something we call forth something that we already possess.²⁰ Whereas the case of memory is perhaps at least intuitively more or less clear, the claim that something analogue applies to sense perception may need further explanation.

We should remind ourselves, however, of Plato’s theory of recollection (e.g. *Meno* 81Aff.), according to which we already dispose of the knowledge

¹⁷ The *qualified* body is the body of a sublunary living being (as opposed to non-living bodies, such as tables, and as opposed to the bodies of the visible gods). I will discuss this in the [final chapter](#).

¹⁸ Already Dodds, in the discussion of Schwyzer (1960), noticed this (Dodds (1960) 385). The distinction has been worked out in detail by Emilsson (1988), in particular in [chapters 4](#) and [7](#).

¹⁹ ἡ δὲ ἐνέργειά ἐστιν οὐκ ἀλλοίωσις, ἀλλ’ ὅμα προσήλθε πρὸς ὃ ἔχει.

²⁰ Emilsson (1988) 133 with reference to *Enn.* IV 6, 3. See also Magrin (2010) 284–286.

of Forms from birth although we are not aware of this knowledge. With reference to the *Meno* we may say more generally that we already possess the notions or concepts that are involved in sense perception and by means of which we conceptualise what we perceive. These notions are not acquired but rather what early modern philosophers called 'innate'. Thus our souls are not affected by sense perception in the sense of acquiring concepts by means of it.

If the soul is neither affected by sensory affections nor affected in the sense of acquiring concepts by means of sense perception, in what way is it affected? Since the concepts that are involved in sense perception are already present in the soul, sense perception only *activates* them. Hence, although the soul is not affected in the sense of acquiring something from outside and thus suffering a change, it is nevertheless affected in the sense that it *becomes aware* of external things. It is, however, important to note that this becoming aware of external objects is not *caused* by them. This is important because otherwise the soul would again be affected in the sense in which Plotinus denies that the soul is affected. Rather, the awareness of external things is *occasioned* (but not caused) by the occurrence of sensory affections in the body. The external world – or at least perceptual objects in the external world – makes itself cognitively available to us by causing sensory affections. Sensory affections allow the soul to become aware of corresponding objects in the external world. This becoming aware, however, is a genuine activity of the soul (and not something the soul suffers, or is caused to have, due to an external object).

Let us look at an example. If I direct my eyes to a black cat in front of me, a sensory affection occurs in my qualified body. This occasions, by means of a complex process, the occurrence of a sense perception of the fact that there is a black cat in front of me. Part of this process is the activation of the (innate) notions or concepts necessary for this perception (such as *cat* or *black*). This activation, occurring in the soul, is caused by the soul at the occasion of the occurrence of the corresponding sensory affection in the qualified body.

After having attempted to explain in what sense of 'affection' the soul is *not* affected, we may wonder why and in what sense Plotinus nevertheless considers such things as sense perception and emotions to be affections of the soul.²¹ Why consider certain (but not all) activities of the soul

²¹ See *Enn.* I 1, 12, 9; I 8, 4, 6ff. At *Enn.* V 1, 3, 17ff. Plotinus claims that only the soul's activities in the intelligible world are rightly called its activities while everything else (including its body-related activities) should rather be called its affections. See also *Enn.* II 3, 10, 5ff.; *Enn.* III 6, 5; *Enn.* IV 3, 26, 56 etc.

affections? The origin of Plotinus' distinction between two senses of 'affection' is Aristotle *De Anima* II 5. There Aristotle uses the term 'affection' in one sense to refer to the actualisation of a potentiality. He insists that this actualisation is not a physical change or alteration. Plotinus follows Aristotle in this usage.²² However, while Aristotle's sense perception (in the sense of actualisation) occurs in the living being (the hylemorphic whole consisting of soul and body), the corresponding Plotinian actualisations occur in the soul. This is the sense in which he calls sense perception an affection of the soul.

The fact that there are affections of the soul in the sense of actualisations of capacities of the soul does not imply that all activities of the soul are affections of the soul. The comparison with Aristotle suggests that only those activities of the soul that are actualisations are affections. A capacity only gets actualised if it is active sometimes but not always. Thus, if a power never gets actualised because it is always active, it is not an affection of the soul. The activities of the soul in the intelligible world (the activities of the higher soul) are not affections of the soul because they are eternally unchanging. Affections of the soul rather belong to (and occur in) the power by means of which the soul is active in the sensible world.

I will now argue that the distinction between higher and lower soul allows Plotinus to explain in what way both positions considered at the beginning of *Ennead* I 1 are correct: in one way the soul is completely unaffected. It is not even affected in the sense of actualising capacities. Yet in another way the soul is affected by sense perception, emotions and so on in precisely this way. At *Ennead* I 1, 12 Plotinus presents his solution in the following words: "The argument which concludes that the soul is blameless assumes that it is a single completely simple thing and identifies the soul with its essential being; that which concludes that it sins interweaves with it and adds another form of soul which bears the dreadful affections; so that this soul becomes a compound of everything" (*Enn.* I 1, 12, 6–10).²³ The higher soul – the soul in its true being – is completely unaffected by sense perception, emotions and indeed by any of the so-called affections of the soul. In its care for a body in the sensible world, the soul only gets affected in so far as its power gets affected. The power by means of which the soul is active in the sensible world is its

²² See Emilsson (1988) ch. 7.

²³ ὁ μὲν γὰρ τὸ ἀναμάρτητον διδούς τῇ ψυχῇ λόγος ἐν ἀπλοῦν πάντῃ ἐτίθετο τὸ αὐτὸ ψυχὴν καὶ τὸ ψυχῇ εἶναι λέγων, ὁ δ' ἁμαρτεῖν διδούς συμπλέκει μὲν καὶ προστίθησιν αὐτῇ καὶ ἄλλο ψυχῆς εἶδος τὸ τὰ δεινὰ ἔχον πάθῃ· σύνθετος οὖν καὶ τὸ ἐκ πάντων ἡ ψυχὴ αὕτη γίνεται κτλ.

lower soul.²⁴ Thus, I suggest that what Plotinus, referring to the *Timaeus*, calls another form of soul in this context is nothing else but the lower soul.²⁵

In order to illustrate the relation of higher soul to lower soul further, Plotinus refers in another passage of *Ennead* I 1 to *Republic* 611B–D, where Plato compares the soul to the sea god Glaucus. The sea god is completely covered with shells, seaweed and stones that have grown onto his body. If people see Glaucus in this way they believe him to be a monster, and it is difficult to see what he really looks like. In order to see his real being, one must remove his encrustations. The higher soul is what the soul truly is while the lower soul and its activities are only an addition (*Enn.* I 1, 12, 13–17), but we are so familiar with this addition that we do not see what the soul really and essentially is.

A problem posed earlier can now be solved. How can the soul both be and not be the subject of affections of the soul? The solution is that the soul in itself is simple and without affection. When using a body, however, it does so by means of one of its powers and thus becomes a composite consisting of higher and lower soul. The soul and the soul using a body are for this reason neither completely identical nor two really distinct entities and in this way the soul (*qua* whole of higher and lower soul) *is* and (*qua* higher soul) *is not* the proper subject of the affections of the soul.

In the context of the discussion of higher and lower soul Plotinus often uses the first person plural and scholars have taken a particular interest in the corresponding notion of the ‘ego’ or the ‘self’ in Plotinus.²⁶ In the literature it often seems as if the self or the ego were an entity of its own. Bréhier, for example, writes: “Il semble parfois que Plotin ait l’intuition d’une activité proprement subjective qui, elle, ne peut se transformer en chose et s’hypostasier . . . En d’autres termes, notre moi, ce que nous sommes pour nous n’est pas adéquat à notre âme.”²⁷ Dodds, in a much quoted phrase, called the self “a fluctuating spotlight of consciousness”.²⁸ Even though it is a topic of great significance, I do not wish to discuss the

²⁴ For the distinction between two souls see Rist (1967b). Plotinus sometimes uses the expression ‘the middle’ (τὸ μέσον) in order to refer to what I call the lower soul (*Enn.* I 1, 11, 6; *Enn.* IV 3, 12, 6). See also Schibli (1989), who distinguishes terminologically between higher, middle and lower soul, using the expression ‘middle soul’ for what I call ‘lower soul’ and using the expression ‘lower soul’ for nature (the vegetative soul).

²⁵ In the *Timaeus* the second form of soul is introduced as “another form of soul”.

²⁶ O’Daly (1973); Remes (2007). ²⁷ Bréhier (1968) 68.

²⁸ Dodds (1960) 385; see also Emilsson (1988) 29 for the related view that the soul is a fluctuating entity.

notion of the self but shall be content with attempting to identify its referent or referents.

The term 'we' occurs at *Ennead* I 1, 7, where Plotinus asks: how is it that *we* perceive? (*Enn.* I 1, 7, 6). This question is raised because, in this context, the soul itself is said not to be involved in sense perception while *we* clearly are. At that point in the text, Plotinus has not yet explained the difference between higher and lower soul. So it is still unclear how the soul can be unaffected while we are affected. The solution, as I have argued, is to say that the lower soul is affected. In chapter 10 of the same treatise Plotinus explicitly distinguishes between two 'wes', one of which refers to the soul that is pure and separate from the body even when caring for it. This, I suggest, is the higher soul, which is our true self and what we really are. The other referent of 'we' is the soul that is together with the living body (with the 'animal', as Plotinus calls it). This, I suggest, is the lower soul.

I will not discuss whether or in what way Plotinus' use of the first person implies a notion of subjectivity. However, it seems to me that the referents of the 'we' are fixed in the way I tried to explain and that this may provide a promising starting point for further explorations of the notion of subjectivity or of a first person point of view in Plotinus. Moreover, as we shall see, Plotinus' notion of the lower soul is quite akin to a notion of consciousness popular in contemporary philosophy.

The lower soul as faculty of presentation

As we have seen in [Chapter 6](#), the idea of explaining the activities of an embodied living being with reference to its capacities or powers was widespread in antiquity and goes back to Aristotle's *De Anima*.²⁹ Plotinus' discussion of the powers of the soul in the sensible world has led Blumenthal to maintain that Plotinus, in his explanation of what Blumenthal calls the embodied human soul, relies on Aristotle's conception of the soul.³⁰ It seems to me, however, that Plotinus' conception of the capacities of the (embodied) soul is quite different from that of Aristotle. I already discussed one crucial difference between Aristotle and Plotinus earlier: while for Aristotle such activities as that of sense perception are explained with reference to the soul, they are not activities of the soul. For Plotinus, by contrast, such activities are affections of the soul in the sense of actualisations of capacities of the soul. They occur in the soul and not (or

²⁹ For Aristotle's theory of the soul see, for example, Sorabji (1974) and Frede (1992).

³⁰ Blumenthal (1971a) 135. See also Blumenthal (1972) and (1976).

not only) in the composite. The soul itself sees and reasons. A better model than Aristotle's soul, I suggest, will be the Stoic ruling part.³¹ I shall argue that, just as in the Stoic ruling part, the capacities of the Plotinian lower soul are all in one way or other related to presentations (*phantasiai*).³² More specifically, I will argue that the lower soul is identical with the power that allows us to form and to deal with such presentations: the faculty of presentation (*phantastikon*).³³

A good way to start may be a consideration of Plotinus' theory of sense perception.³⁴ I have already shown that Plotinus argues that, in sense perception, the soul *becomes aware* of sensory objects. In a similar vein Plotinus calls sense perception in another treatise an act of awareness (*Enn.* IV 4, 23, iff.).³⁵ We become aware of something in the sensible world if an act of sense perception occurs. This act is occasioned by a sensory affection, which, in turn, is caused by the external object of which the soul becomes aware. Plotinus uses Stoic terminology to refer to that by means of which the soul becomes aware of sensible objects: he sometimes calls them impressions (*tupoi*)³⁶ and sometimes presentations (*phantasmata*, *phantasiai*).³⁷ When the soul becomes aware of a sensible object then it possesses a corresponding presentation that occurs in the faculty of presentation (*to phantastikon*). I take it that this is what Plotinus means when he says at *Ennead* IV 3, 29, 24ff: "for it is in this [the faculty of presentation] that perception terminates."³⁸ What does it mean for sense perception to 'terminate' there? If we look at sense perception as a process, then the forming (and judging) of a presentation is, as it were, the final step. Before

³¹ Of course, there are also notable differences, in particular in relation to the fact that the Stoic ruling part is corporeal while the Plotinian lower soul is not. But functionally, I think, the two work in quite similar ways.

³² As Emilsson (1988) ch. 5 has shown, Alexander of Aphrodisias' common sense, itself influenced by the Stoic ruling part, is also a forerunner of Plotinus' faculty of presentation (see Alex. Aphr. *De an.* 63, 6–20 Bruns). The basic notion is already there in Aristotle's *Parva Naturalia* (e.g. *Sens.* 449a17).

³³ Plotinus often uses the expression 'αἰσθητικόν' (power of sense perception) to refer to what I call the lower soul. He does so in contexts where he is concerned with the activity of the lower soul in the sensible world and where its relation to the intelligible is not in focus. I prefer to call the lower soul a 'φανταστικόν' because this expression is not restricted in this way. We will see that the lower soul is also receptive of content from the intelligible world.

³⁴ For more details on sense perception see Emilsson (1988) and Magrin (2010).

³⁵ δεῖ δὲ θέσθαι, ὡς τὸ αἰσθάνεσθαι τῶν αἰσθητῶν ἐστι τῇ ψυχῇ ἢ τῷ ζῳῷ ἀντίληψις κτλ. For a discussion of the notion of awareness (or apprehension), ἀντίληψις, see Schwyzer (1960) (in particular 367f.), Warren (1964) and Schibli (1989).

³⁶ They are not, of course, impressions in the literal sense.

³⁷ E.g. *Enn.* IV 4, 13, 11ff. For this and the following consideration see Emilsson (1988) 107ff.

³⁸ τοῦτο γὰρ ἐστίν, εἰς ὃ λήγει ἡ αἴσθησις κτλ. Already H. von Kleist noted the close relationship between perception and presentation. See von Kleist (1883) 82f. n 1. Emilsson (1988) III sees "no sharp distinction between sense-perception and representation".

the presentation occurs, there must be an external object causing a sensory affection in the qualified body. The soul then becomes aware of the external object. This step consists of the formation of a corresponding presentation by means of concepts.

Now let us look again at the passage quoted in the first section of this chapter: “We said that sense perceptions are not affections but activities and judgements concerning affections; affections belong to something else, for instance to the qualified body, while the judgement belongs to the soul because the judgement is not an affection” (*Enn.* III 6, 1, 1–4).³⁹ Plotinus calls sense perceptions judgements. What does this mean? Here again a comparison with the Stoic theory of sense perception is helpful.⁴⁰ According to the Stoics, assenting to impressions or presentations means accepting them to be true (and thus believing their content). It is true that Plotinus does not use the Stoic term for assent but his term, ‘judgement’ (*krisis*), possesses the same function. As Emilsson has shown, already Alexander uses ‘judgement’ in this way.⁴¹ What is judged, that is to say, what is assented to, is a presentation. This is interesting because it means that presentations must have a truth-value. Accordingly they must also have a propositional form.

The notion of assent is crucial in Stoic epistemology but it is perhaps less clear – at least in the case of sense perception – what the corresponding function of a judgement is in Plotinus. Sense perception is not basic (neither epistemically nor causally) to Plotinus’ epistemology. However, as far as action in the sublunary world is concerned, sense perception is crucial. At least for this reason, it is also important for the soul to have an adequate grasp of its environment: the soul must not accept everything that appears to it as an adequate presentation of events or states of affairs in the sensible world. Instead, it must carefully check what appears to it and accept only what it judges to be adequate.

Now the fact that presentations have propositional form may seem to lead to the following problem – a problem that already occurs in the Stoic theory of sense perception. If presentations are propositional, the object presented to the soul by means of the presentation would seem to have to be a state of affairs rather than a non-propositional object such as a chair or a cat. But if the object is a state of affairs or a fact, it cannot be the cause of a

³⁹ τὰς αἰσθήσεις οὐ πάθη λέγοντες εἶναι, ἐνεργείας δὲ περὶ παθήματα καὶ κρίσεις, τῶν μὲν παθῶν περὶ ἄλλο γινομένων, οἷον τὸ σῶμα φέρε τὸ τοιόνδε, τῆς δὲ κρίσεως περὶ τὴν ψυχὴν, οὐ τῆς κρίσεως πάθους οὕσης κτλ. For this passage see Fleet (1995) 71–75.

⁴⁰ For the Stoics on sense perception see, for example, Görler (1977); Arthur (1983); Frede (1983).

⁴¹ See Alexander of Aphrodisias *De Anima* (66, 9f. Bruns) and Emilsson (1988) 121–125.

presentation. Whatever the solution of this for the Stoics, Plotinus can solve this problem as follows. A (non-propositional) object causes a sensory affection in the qualified body. By means of this corporeal affection the soul, through a (propositional) presentation, becomes aware of a state of affairs. This confirms what I claimed above: sense objects do not *cause* sense perceptions in the soul.⁴²

Even though presentations have propositional form, they are not exclusively propositions and cannot be reduced to propositions.⁴³ Rather, they possess non-propositional content as well. If I have a presentation of a state of affairs then this state of affairs will present itself to me *in a certain way*. Accordingly, it is perfectly possible that two people are presented with the same state of affairs and thus their presentations of this state of affairs will have the same propositional content. However, their presentations of this same state of affairs may well be different because the state of affairs may present itself to them in different ways. For example, the fact that there is a burglar in my house presents itself differently to me than it does to you. Of course, the very same person can also be presented with the very same state of affairs in different ways. The fact that Joe's shirt is green presents itself differently to me if Joe tells me about his shirt and if I see it.

The fact that presentations also have non-propositional content constitutes a crucial distinction between the higher soul's grasping of intelligible objects and the lower soul's grasping of sensible objects. Any content of the sensible world can only present itself to us through presentations. Things in the sensible world will always appear to us in certain ways. The intelligible world, however, can be grasped immediately and precisely in the way it is in itself. The higher soul, as we have seen, grasps the truths of the intelligible world in propositional form and thus, as far as propositionality is concerned, in the same way in which we perceive things in the sensible world. However, the higher soul, in its thinking, grasps these propositions immediately and thus not mediated by means of presentations. It grasps the truth precisely as it is in itself. The fact that this is unmediated means that there is no presentation presenting content *in a certain way*.

While the higher soul exclusively grasps intelligible objects (and thus, as such, no sensible objects at all), the lower soul does not exclusively grasp

⁴² The relation between the non-propositional object and corresponding state of affairs would need to be worked out in more detail, of course. I shall not do this here, however.

⁴³ For propositional and non-propositional content of Stoic rational impressions on which the Plotinian distinction is based, see Frede (1983).

sensible objects. It is also receptive of intelligible objects. Indeed, the soul's proper thinking is the second major source of things of which we are (or can become) aware. We saw in [Chapter 6](#) that Plotinus distinguishes between the soul's thinking and its awareness of this thinking in such a way that it is possible to think without being aware of it. Yet it is also possible for us to become and to be aware of our thinking. When the lower soul becomes aware of the thinking of the higher soul, it thereby grasps intelligible objects (because the thought of the higher soul is identical to the object of its thought).

Plotinus explains the relation of proper thinking and awareness at *Ennead* IV 3, 30, 11–16: “thinking is one thing and the being aware of it another, and we are always thinking but are not always aware of it; and this is because that which receives it does not only receive thoughts but also, on the other side, sense perceptions.”⁴⁴ This passage gives us the reason why our soul is not always aware of its thinking. Our soul is so much occupied in the sensible world and affected by its activity there that it loses sight of its thinking (as explained in the last chapter). Were the soul always fully aware of its thinking, it could not be confused; it would always be in a state of complete intellectualisation. Note, however, that this state is still different from the state in which the higher soul always is because it is a state of *being aware* of one's thinking (as distinct from the state of one's being thinking).

Whether or not we are aware of something, be it our thinking or sensory objects, depends on whether corresponding mental activities occur in the faculty of presentation, which is the centre of our awareness (*Enn.* IV 3, 30, 9–11). Awareness of both sorts of object will occur by means of presentations. Thus, when the soul is aware of its own thinking, its thought will appear to it *in a certain way*. This, I think, is apparent from the vivid description that Plotinus gives us of how his thinking appeared to him at the beginning of *Ennead* IV 8 (as discussed in the last chapter): the description of his awareness of his thinking as an *experience* shows us that his thinking presented itself to him *in a certain way*. Thus, Plotinus describes to us the impression he had while he was aware of his thinking and how he was experiencing it. What we have discussed so far is supposed to provide the theoretical background for what we discussed in [Chapter 6](#).

Perhaps it is worthwhile to rule out a potential misunderstanding at this point. The claim that the soul *becomes aware* of its proper thinking and thus of the truth (if and when it does so) does not imply that we can as well

⁴⁴ ἄλλο γὰρ ἡ νόησις, καὶ ἄλλο ἡ τῆς νοήσεως ἀντίληψις, καὶ νοοῦμεν μὲν αἰεὶ, ἀντιλαμβανόμεθα δὲ οὐκ αἰετ'· τοῦτο δέ, ὅτι τὸ δεχόμενον οὐ μόνον δέχεται νοήσεις, ἀλλὰ καὶ αἰσθήσεις κατὰ θάτερα.

use meditational techniques such as those practised by, for example, Zen Buddhism to achieve this state. What we primarily need to do is to reason correctly, to try to get our metaphysics right and to rid ourselves of the confusion discussed in the last chapter. In other words, we need to do philosophy. For what you become aware of is not only the truth of certain things but also the reasons for this truth. A person who is aware of her own thinking will be able to justify the claims she makes on the basis of what appears to her to be true when she is aware of things in the intelligible world. After all, what the lower soul becomes aware of are propositions whose crucial inter-relatedness we discussed in [Chapter 3](#).

Think of a parallel case in mathematics. Assume that, after working hard on a proof, you have finally figured it out. Undoubtedly, being aware of the solution is a most pleasant mental state and the fact that things have become clear to you may rightly be called an experience. This does not imply, however, that you could have achieved this result by means of meditational techniques. Rather, to get things right, you need to think long and hard. You need to do maths. There is no mysticism implied here.

The sort of cognitive process that is necessary to achieve insight into something is not thinking, properly speaking (the latter not being an activity of the lower soul), but what I have been calling discursive *reasoning*. We are now in a position to discuss what this is in more detail. Discursive reasoning is necessary for both theoretical and practical purposes. It is the sort of cognitive process that we are familiar with from our ordinary lives and what early modern empiricists such as Locke believed to be thinking quite generally.

Just like sense perception, discursive reasoning is an activity of the faculty of presentation. It is based on presentations and consists in analysing them and relating them to one another.⁴⁵ Here is a passage already briefly discussed in the first section: “For perception is reception of a form or of an affection of a body and *discursive reasoning and opinion are based on perception*” (*Enn.* I 1, 2, 26f.).⁴⁶ We receive further details in another passage:

⁴⁵ See *Enn.* I 1, 2, 26f. quoted in the first section. Already Richter emphasised the close relation between the faculty of presentation and discursive reasoning. He states: “Hand in Hand mit dem Gedächtniss und der Einbildungskraft geht die Thätigkeit des endlichen Verstandes, das discursive Denken, das denselben Seelen, nämlich den menschlichen, in demselben Zustand ihrer irdischen Existenz zukommt” (Richter (1867) 75). For the central role of the faculty of presentation see Whittaker (1918) 51–53 and Warren (1966). They do not, however, distinguish between discursive thinking and reasoning.

⁴⁶ αἰσθησις γὰρ παραδοχὴ εἰδους ἢ καὶ πάθους σώματος, διάνοια δὲ καὶ δόξα ἐπ’ αἰσθησιν.

That which reasons discursively in it [i.e. in the soul], in combining and dividing, makes its judgement about the presentations that are available to it as derived from sense perception; and, as for the things which come to it from the thinking part, it observes what one might call their impressions, and has the same capacity also in dealing with these; and it adds understanding (*sunesis*) as if by recognising the new and recently arrived impressions and fitting them to those which have long been in it. (*Enn.* V 3, 2, 7–13)⁴⁷

Discursive reasoning weaves together and analyses presentations. In doing so, it uses presentations that the soul receives through sense perception or by being aware of its own proper thinking. But it may also use presentations stored in memory. By doing so, the lower soul achieves a sort of understanding (*sunesis*) that is, however, distinct from the proper understanding of the higher soul. It can only be a restricted form of understanding for at least two reasons.

Firstly, the lower soul exclusively works with presentations that will present things in certain ways. Secondly, it can usually only work with *a few* presentations presenting *a few* things at the same time. Note that this last point seems to be factually correct: we can usually only be actively aware of very few things at the same time. Our consciousness in this sense is very limited.⁴⁸ The holistic view of the higher soul is not usually available to the lower soul though Plotinus suggests that it is possible for the lower soul, in rare moments, to be completely intellectualised – which I take to be a holistic experience. Thus, Plotinus thinks that it is possible to overcome the narrowness of our consciousness. This mental state of cognitive insight, however, is different from discursive reasoning. Yet, as I said above, this does not imply that it is not the result of a long and arduous process of discursive reasoning.

Here is an example of how discursive reasoning works:

Now sense perception has seen a human being and given the impression to discursive reason. What does discursive reason say? It will not say anything yet, but has only recognised [the human being], and stopped at that; unless perhaps it asks itself: ‘who is this?’ if it has met the person before, and says, using memory, that it is Socrates. (*Enn.* V 3, 3, 1–5)⁴⁹

⁴⁷ τὸ δ' ἐν αὐτῇ λογιζόμενον παρὰ τῶν ἐκ τῆς αἰσθήσεως φαντασμάτων παρακειμένων τὴν ἐπικρίσιν ποιούμενον καὶ συνάγον καὶ διαροῦν· ἢ καὶ ἐπὶ τῶν ἐκ τοῦ νοῦ ἰόντων ἐφορᾷ οἷον τοὺς τύπους, καὶ ἔχει καὶ περὶ τούτους τὴν αὐτὴν δύναμιν. καὶ σύνεσιν ἔτι προσλαμβάνει ὥσπερ ἐπιγινώσκον καὶ ἐφαρμόζον τοῖς ἐν αὐτῷ ἐκ παλαιοῦ τύποις τοὺς νέους καὶ ἄρτι ἥκοντας· κτλ.

⁴⁸ Locke calls this phenomenon “the narrow mind of man” (*An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* II, 10, 2).

⁴⁹ ἢ μὲν γὰρ αἰσθησις εἶδεν ἄνθρωπον καὶ ἔδωκε τὸν τύπον τῇ διανοίᾳ· ἢ δὲ τί φησιν; ἢ οὐπω οὐδὲν ἔρεῖ, ἀλλ' ἔγνω μόνον καὶ ἔστη· εἰ μὴ ἄρα πρὸς ἑαυτὴν διαλογίζεται τίς οὗτος, εἰ πρότερον ἐνέτυχε τούτῳ, καὶ λέγοι προσηλωμένη τῇ μνήμῃ, ὅτι Σωκράτης.

In the following lines Plotinus explains that discursive reason is now in a position to make all sorts of judgements about Socrates. It can, for example, do so by analysing the content of the impression and thus unfolding what it has received from sense perception. But it can also make judgements such as “Socrates is good”. In this case discursive reason uses a predicate that is not present in the presentation it received from sense perception. Instead, it uses a presentation of something it receives from its proper thinking, namely the concept of the good, and claims that the corresponding attribute holds true of the subject of the presentation received from sense perception (namely of Socrates).⁵⁰

In the above passage we have also seen that memory plays a crucial role in the lower soul’s activity of discursive reasoning. Just like sense perception and discursive reasoning, memory belongs to the faculty of presentation.⁵¹ In a long discussion of memories of things perceived Plotinus states: “if the presentation of what is already absent is present to someone, she is already remembering” (*Enn.* IV 3, 29, 26f.).⁵² Thus, what I possess when I remember is a presentation. This shows that memories are also presentations: they are presentations of things that are no longer present to the soul by means of sense perception. Plotinus explicitly draws the conclusion that memory is a function of the faculty of presentation in the same chapter: “Therefore, memory belongs to the faculty of presentation” (*Enn.* IV 3, 29, 31).⁵³

I hope it has become clear that the faculty of presentation is the centre of awareness and the key faculty of cognition in the sensible world. However, it also has an important role to play in action. In order to be able to do so, the lower soul needs a further capacity, namely that of impulse. At *Ennead* IV 3, 23, 31–33 we read: “For the ability to perceive is somehow the ability to form judgements and the faculty of presentation displays intelligence, and *impulse* and desire follow presentation and reason.”⁵⁴ Thus, impulse also belongs to the faculty of presentation.⁵⁵ We therefore have a further element in Plotinus’ theory of the lower soul that he borrows from the

⁵⁰ ‘Receiving’ here should not be understood, of course, literally – as discussed above.

⁵¹ For memory see Warren (1965) and King (2009).

⁵² εἰ οὖν παρὰ τοῦτω τοῦ ἀπόντος ἤδη ἡ φαντασία, μνημονεύει ἤδη κτλ.

⁵³ τοῦ φανταστικοῦ ἄρα ἡ μνήμη κτλ. See also Emilsson (1988) 109–112.

⁵⁴ αἰσθητικὸν γὰρ κριτικὸν πῶς, καὶ φανταστικὸν οἷον νοερὸν, καὶ ὁρμὴ καὶ ὄρεξις φαντασίᾳ καὶ λόγῳ ἐπόμενα (*Enn.* IV 3, 23, 31–34).

⁵⁵ See also *Enn.* IV 3, 23, 21f. Note that this is a further mark that distinguishes human souls from divine souls. Divine souls do not need any presentations in order to be active in the sensible world. Human souls do. This difference is a consequence of the different ways in which souls of these two types act in the sensible world (as discussed in [Chapters 5 and 6](#)).

Stoics. It is easy to see why the faculty of presentation is crucially involved in human action. Firstly, in order to act, we usually must take into account sense perception and be aware of the emotional and desiderative states of our body. Often, we also need to go through a process of discursive reasoning in order to decide how to act and we need to remember things. Such activities belong to the faculty of presentation.

Remember the example of Socrates discussed above. Suppose it appears to the soul of Polemarchus that Socrates is in front of him. Having this impression might give rise to judgements of the sort discussed earlier. Polemarchus' soul might judge, for example, that Socrates is indeed in front of him. However, in our ordinary lives it is likely that the soul will not restrict itself to making judgements of this sort. In our example, Polemarchus might wish to stop Socrates, greet him, have a conversation and so on. In order to decide how to act, the soul might take into consideration complex presentations that are stored in its memory, reason discursively about them and, at some point, come to a conclusion as to how to act. At least in such cases, the soul acts only after a mental process has taken place in its faculty of presentation, and terminated in a decision. In this and similar ways the faculty of presentation is crucial for human action in the sensible world.

These are the major faculties of the lower soul that I wish to discuss. I would also like to mention here that emotions work in ways similar to sense perception and are also based on presentations. I will briefly discuss this in the [next chapter](#).

Does the lower soul stem from the World Soul?

In the first section I argued that the lower soul is a power of the individual human soul by means of which it is active in the sensible world and takes care of its body. Yet *Ennead* IV 3, 25–31 might seem to pose the following problem for this account. It may appear that, contrary to what was argued above, the lower soul does not stem from the higher soul but rather from the sensible world (or, as Plotinus puts it, from the Whole). Since the sensible world is the work of the World Soul (in the way discussed in earlier chapters), it may thus even appear that the lower soul ultimately stems from the World Soul.

Plotinus' discussion in *Ennead* IV 3, 25–31 is focused on the question of what the bearer of memory is.⁵⁶ He considers three candidates: "For

⁵⁶ Ἄλλ' εἰ μέλλομεν ὀρθῶς περὶ τούτων τὴν ζήτησιν ποιεῖσθαι, ληπτέον τί ποτε τὸ μνημονεύον ἔστι (*Enn.* IV 3, 25, 5f.).

perhaps someone might raise the problem (*aporia*) that what is called recollection and memory does not belong to that soul but to another soul which is fainter or to the composite, the living being” (*Enn.* IV 3, 25, 35–38).⁵⁷ It is noteworthy that the discussion starts with a problem, an *aporia*, that someone might raise. Depending on the result of this enquiry, Plotinus is thus not necessarily committed to the existence of the two souls mentioned in this *aporia* (or more precisely, to the existence of what he calls “another soul”).

After having rejected the composite living being as a bearer of memory, Plotinus asks: “But to which soul [does memory belong], that which we call the more divine, by which we are ourselves, or the other one which comes from the Whole?” (*Enn.* IV 3, 27, 1–3).⁵⁸ Thus, Plotinus here assumes (at least for the sake of argument) that two individual souls exist within us. One is the soul by which we are ourselves – a soul that Plotinus calls divine – while there is a fainter second soul, which stems from the Whole, that is, from the sensible world.⁵⁹ Moreover, Plotinus characterises the second soul at *Ennead* IV 3, 32, 10–12 as being inferior and states that it is held in check by the divine soul by means of force. Furthermore, even though he mentions that this second and inferior soul stems from the Whole, he does not claim that it stems from the World Soul.

Since it is not clear from the start what the sorts of soul are to which Plotinus refers when talking about two souls here, I will introduce a new pair of terms and call the former soul ‘divine soul’ and the other soul ‘inferior soul’. Now if memory exclusively belongs to the inferior soul, then the present account will contradict the account developed above because it will either mean that memory does not belong to the lower soul or, if it still belongs to the lower soul, then the lower soul will be the inferior soul and thus not stem from the higher soul but rather from the Whole, that is, from the sensible world.⁶⁰

I will now attempt to show that Plotinus, although discussing the view that there are two souls, a divine soul and an inferior soul, does not argue that the lower soul (understood as faculty of presentation of our soul in the way discussed in Section 7.2) stems from the Whole. In other words, his

⁵⁷ “ἴσως γὰρ ἂν τις ἀπορήσειε, μήποτε οὐ τῆς ψυχῆς ἢ ἐκείνης ἢ λεγομένη τοιαύτη ἀνάμνησις καὶ μνήμη, ἀλλὰ ἄλλης ἀμυδροτέρας, ἢ τοῦ συναμφοτέρου τοῦ ζώου.

⁵⁸ ἀλλὰ τίνος ψυχῆς, τῆς μὲν λεγομένης ὑφ’ ἡμῶν θειοτέρας, καθ’ ἣν ἡμεῖς, τῆς δὲ ἄλλης τῆς παρὰ τοῦ ὅλου;

⁵⁹ Note that at *Ti.* 49A, χώρα, traditionally identified with matter, is characterised as faint (ἄμυδρον).

⁶⁰ Note that I use the term ‘lower soul’ in the way introduced above. I do not mean by this the second soul that I will call ‘inferior soul’ below. Whether the second and inferior soul is the lower soul is rather the question that has to be answered.

lower soul is not the inferior soul. Rather, in keeping with what was said above, the lower soul is a power of the higher soul which is indeed, as we have seen, a divine soul. Accordingly, the lower soul does not stem from the Whole but from the Divine. It belongs to “that soul by which we are ourselves”.

In order to explain the relation between divine and inferior soul, Plotinus refers to the *Nekyia* in book eleven of Homer’s *Odyssey*. Odysseus there visits Hades and encounters, among others, Heracles (*Od.* 11.60iff.). We read in Homer that Heracles himself (after his death) stays with the immortal gods while only his image (*eidōlon*) dwells in Hades. Plotinus interprets this passage as elucidating the question of to which soul memory belongs. Heracles’ image (the inferior soul), as Plotinus emphasises, remembers the life (*bios*) of Heracles. Yet Plotinus is particularly interested in the question of whether the Heracles without image – the one residing with the gods (i.e. the divine soul) – possesses memory and thus whether this soul will also remember the deeds and experiences of Heracles’ life. While Homer, as Plotinus remarks, is silent about this question (*Enn.* IV 3, 27, 13f.), Plotinus speaks: “What then will the other soul [i.e. the divine soul] say when it has been freed and is alone? Well, as long as it still draws something along with it, everything that the human being has done and experienced” (*Enn.* IV 3, 27, 14–16).⁶¹

Note that Plotinus here uses language straight from the *Phaedo*. As discussed in [Chapter 6](#), Plotinus heavily relies on the *Phaedo* when discussing the confusion of the human soul in the sensible world. As we saw there, he has in particular *Phaedo* 80E in mind where Plato discusses souls that are no longer attached to their bodies and where he phrases this by saying that they no longer *draw anything of the body* with them. In the passage just quoted, Plotinus, considering souls that post-mortally are still attached to their bodies, uses the same expression for ‘drawing with them’ (*ephelkein*). He claims that, as long as the soul is still attached to its body, it will remember its former life, that is, the life in the sensible world. And as we saw in [Chapter 6](#), the attachment to the body is precisely what generates the soul’s confusion in the sensible world.

The story of Heracles thus shows that the divine soul is capable of remembering its life here. This leads Plotinus to the next question: to which power of the soul does memory belong? I have already shown in the second section that he comes to the conclusion that it is the power (or

⁶¹ τί οὖν ἂν εἴποι ἡ ἑτέρα ψυχὴ ἀπαλλαγεῖσα μόνῃ; Ἡ γὰρ ἐφελκομένη ὁ τι κἄν, πάντα, ὅσα ἔπραξεν ἢ ἔπαθεν ὁ ἄνθρωπος κτλ.

faculty) of presentation (*phantastikon*). We can thus conclude that, since the divine soul possesses memory and since memory is a function of the faculty of presentation, the divine soul possesses a faculty of presentation. If we now identify, as I argued above we should, the faculty of presentation with the lower soul, we can see that this discussion does not conclude that the lower soul stems from the Whole – and *a fortiori* not from the World Soul – but rather confirms that the lower soul (the faculty of presentation) is a power of the individual human soul. Therefore the divine soul in this context is, in our terminology, the soul using a body, that is to say, the composite of higher and lower soul.

Why does it matter where the lower soul stems from? Would not a lower soul stemming from the World Soul fulfil its function equally well? To answer these questions, let us compare an account according to which the lower soul stems from the World Soul with Plotinus' account according to which it stems from the higher soul. It seems reasonably clear, I think, that according to both accounts, the higher soul remains in the intelligible world, is an individual human soul and our true self. So Plotinus' solution to the problem of the relation between World Soul and human (higher) soul, as discussed in the first three chapters of this book, is independent of where the lower soul stems from. In addition to this, however, we must also make sure that our actions in the sensible world remain our own actions, even if the lower soul stems from the World Soul.

This only works if our identifying ourselves with the lower soul does not mean that we literally only *are* the lower soul. For if we literally only were the lower soul, then the following problem would recur: why should we (literally being only the lower soul) identify our true self with a higher soul (let alone with any higher soul in particular) given that we stem from the World Soul? In other words, starting from the (wrong) assumption that what we really are is precisely the lower soul, what is it that makes a particular higher soul our higher soul? This understanding would make the higher and the lower soul two really distinct entities in such a way that our being a lower soul would make it impossible that the higher soul is our true self.

However, in defence of the view that the lower soul stems from the World Soul, someone might reason as follows: even if the lower soul stems from the World Soul, we could still attempt to understand it as a power of the very same sort as that discussed in the second section of this chapter. The higher soul uses this power just as it does according to the interpretation provided in the first section. The only difference would be its origin. In contrast to the account provided in the first section, the power to be

used by the higher soul stems from the World Soul. This would allow for our actions in the sensible world to be our own actions and hence, so the argument concludes, the origin of the lower soul does not matter.

It seems to me, however, that this account generates a problem concerning the confusion of the soul in the sensible world (and thus concerning our empirical self or our consciousness) that is absent from the account discussed in section one. As we saw in the [last chapter](#), the confusion consists in the soul's (wrongly) assuming that the life of its body is its own life. I will now argue that (under the assumption that we are the divine soul) this is not possible if the power in which the confusion occurs stems from the World Soul.

To bring out this problem more clearly, let us start with a similar case that is, as we will see, in one crucial respect distinct from the case we are discussing. Some people identify themselves with their bodies. Platonists (rightly or wrongly) think that this is a confusion. According to them, people really are their souls while their bodies are nothing other than the tools that those souls use. But for some reason or other, the people under discussion get confused (a Platonist would say) and lose sight of the fact that they are souls. Now in this analogue case, the question of the origin of the body does not arise. As far as the question of whether or not the body is a tool of the individual human soul is concerned, it plainly does not matter where the tool stems from.

Let us now explore whether the case of higher soul and lower soul works in analogous ways. The soul uses its lower soul as a tool and gets confused in believing that the life in the sensible world (the life of the body) is its own life. Now it *seems* that the origin of the lower soul does not matter either (just as in the analogue case of the body). Yet there is a crucial difference between the two cases. For the confusion itself occurs *in the lower soul* and not in the higher soul and thus it occurs in the tool that the higher soul uses. In the presumed analogue case of soul and body, by contrast, the confusion occurs in the soul and not in the tool that the soul uses. I think that this difference is crucial for the following reason. The higher soul as such and alone, given its nature, cannot get confused. For it to be capable of getting confused, it would need (at least partly) to be constituted by a faculty of presentation, which it is crucially not (qua higher soul).

In the account discussed earlier, the lower soul stems from the higher soul. It is a power of the higher soul in such a way that they form a whole together that does not consist of two separate and really distinct entities. In this case we can reasonably claim that the whole soul (the soul using a body,

consisting of both higher and lower soul) gets confused by virtue of one of its parts (the lower soul). To see this, look at the analogous case of sense perception: the soul sees by virtue of its perceptual part; the perception occurs in its perceptual part and, in this way, the soul (as a whole) sees.

Yet if the lower soul stemmed from the World Soul, the lower soul and the higher soul would be two separate and really distinct entities. The higher soul and the lower soul would not form a unity of the relevant sort. For this reason the whole, consisting of the two, could not get confused by virtue of its lower soul. That the two do not form a unity of the relevant sort, according to Plotinus, is clear from his story of Heracles. Assume that Heracles himself is without memory and only his image possesses memory (and assume that the image is the lower soul). After Heracles' death, the image (here, for the sake of argument, identified with the lower soul) goes to a place separate from where Heracles himself (the higher soul) goes. Thus, the two are really distinct entities and we cannot say that the image truly is Heracles or that Heracles in some way is his image – they may share a life in a body for a while, like an old couple a life in a house, but they do not share their being. Whatever the image remembers is of no concern or help to the higher Heracles – it is someone else's memory.

To conclude this argument, if there is only one lower soul and this lower soul stems from the World Soul, then the origin of the lower soul, contrary to first appearances, does matter. We cannot explain the confusion of the human soul in the sensible world properly if the lower soul stems from the World Soul. More generally, our soul would be really distinct from any higher soul (if there were higher souls at all). If so, the account discussed in the first section is clearly preferable if we want to hold on to the Plotinian idea that the soul, our soul, essentially does not descend into the sensible world. This is the main point that I wish to drive home and this concludes my argument.

There remains the question of the inferior soul. What is the inferior soul? Does Plotinus believe that there is an inferior soul or does he only concede its existence dialectically? I think that Plotinus' aim in these chapters consists in establishing the view that the divine soul (which turns out to be the soul-using-a-body or, in other words, the composite of higher and lower soul) possesses a faculty of presentation and that he is less interested in the inferior soul as such. In any case, he does not give us much to go on if we want to understand what the inferior soul is and after the discussion that I have considered above, he focuses on the question of what happens to the divine soul when it ascends to the intelligible realm. He simply drops the topic of the inferior soul. Still, perhaps the following

considerations show how the historical origin of the problem concerning two souls might form the background of Plotinus' discussion.

Porphry reports that some people do not believe in different soul *parts* but rather hold that there are two souls of different types in us: a rational and a non-rational soul (Numenius fr. 44 Des Places = Porph. ap. Stob. *Anth.* I 49, 25a).⁶² This view seems to have been particularly popular among thinkers who believed that matter itself possesses some motivating force.⁶³ In [Chapter 1](#) I already considered Numenius' view according to which there are two World Souls, one being a god (the third god) and the other one being the essence of matter (and thus, in his view, evil). In keeping with this view, Numenius is explicitly mentioned by Porphyry as a proponent of the view that each human being possesses two individual souls (*ibid.*). Numenius was not the only proponent of this view though. Clement of Alexandria reports that the Gnostic Isidorus, son of Basilides, wrote a treatise *On the attached soul* (*Peri Prosphuous Psuchēs*). Clement states: "For like the Pythagoreans that we will examine later, he [i.e. Isidorus], too, postulates two souls in us" (Clem. Al. *Strom.* 113f. = p. 174 Stählin).⁶⁴

In book 6 of the *Stromata* Clement discusses a view according to which there are two kinds of soul in us, a ruling soul and a soul that is its subject (*Strom.* VI 134, 1).⁶⁵ He then quotes the Scripture, *Gal.* 5, 17, where Paul states that the flesh desires against the spirit and the spirit against the flesh.⁶⁶ The flesh, in order to be able to desire against the spirit, must itself possess a soul. Accordingly, the inferior soul is also called corporeal (*pneuma sōmatikon Strom.* VI 136, 1) or carnal (*pneuma sarkikon Strom.* VI 135, 3). The divine soul, by contrast, which is rational, comes to the living being from outside (*Strom.* VI 135, 1). In his *Excerpta ex Theodoto* Clement discusses how another group, the Valentinian Gnostics, interpreted the creation of man in *Genesis* 2, 7. In this context he calls the inferior soul an earthly (*geōdēs*) or material (*hulikē*) soul, which is

⁶² "Ἄλλοι δέ, ὧν καὶ Νομῆνιος, οὐ τρία μέρη ψυχῆς μίᾳς ἢ δύο γε, τὸ λογικὸν καὶ ἄλογον, ἀλλὰ δύο ψυχὰς ἔχειν ἡμᾶς οἴονται, ὥσπερ καὶ ἄλλα, τὴν μὲν λογικὴν, τὴν δ' ἄλογον.

⁶³ For theories of two souls see Ferwerda (1983).

⁶⁴ δύο γὰρ δὴ ψυχὰς ὑποτίθεται καὶ οὗτος ἐν ἡμῖν, καθάπερ οἱ Πυθαγόρειοι, περὶ ὧν ὕστερον ἐπισκεψόμεθα. It is likely that, as Frede (1987) 1073 suggested, this view is similar to that of Numenius, who was often considered a Pythagorean (see fr. 14; 15; 52 Des Places).

⁶⁵ Clement talks about *pneuma*, not about souls, but given the Stoic terminology he uses in this discussion, it seems likely that the *pneuma* here is the soul. Compare Calcidius in *Ti.* ch. 220 about the Stoics: *Spiritus quippe animam esse Zenon quaerit hactenus: . . . naturalis igitur anima est. Item Chrysippus: . . . naturalis igitur spiritus anima esse invenitur* (= SVF II 879). The term *pneuma* (= *spiritus*) allows Clement also to relate his discussion to the Scripture.

⁶⁶ Origen also uses this passage in his discussion of two souls (*De Princ.* III 4).

non-rational and of the same essence as the souls of animals (*Exc.* 50, 1). The superior soul, by contrast, is called divine (*theia*) and of the same essence (*homoousios*) as the divine Craftsman (who is, according to the Valentinians, the God referred to in *Gen.* 2, 7) (*Exc.* 50, 2).

The Christian Origen devoted a whole chapter of his *De Principiis* (III. 4) to a discussion of theories of two souls.⁶⁷ He tries to answer the question of whether there is in human beings a second and inferior soul that possesses its own impulse and motion and provokes us towards evil.⁶⁸ Some, he continues, ask the following question: “do we have to postulate two souls in us, one being more divine and heavenly and the other one an inferior soul?” (*De Princ.* 263, 24–265, 2).⁶⁹ Origen states that the same group of people, presumably Gnostics, answer these questions affirmatively. Thus, Origen also knows of people who postulate the existence of two souls, one divine and heavenly, the other inferior and earthly (*inferior et terrena* (*De Princ.* 264, 18f.)). Finally, to conclude this brief (and incomplete) survey of theories of two souls, I would like to mention Augustine, who wrote a treatise, *On Two Souls* (*De Duabus Animabus*), in which he argued against the Manichean view according to which there are two individual souls in us: a good one and a bad, or evil, one.

Such discussions may have formed the background of the *aporia* that someone might raise and that I quoted above. The views considered share the assumption that, in addition to a divine and rational soul, there is an irrational animal soul that somehow is material or earthly and thus either is constituted of or at least existentially dependent on matter or on a body. It is easy to see how Plotinus might have phrased this by saying that it stems from the Whole. Yet Plotinus himself does not have any use for a bad or evil soul, or one that derives from matter. His psychology is in this respect crucially different from Numenius, the Manicheans and the Gnostics just considered. Indeed, at *Ennead* II 9, 5, 16–23 he explicitly rejects a Gnostic version of the theory of two souls and claims against them that a soul could not possibly be the result of a mixture of corporeal elements.

Now the fact that there is no room in Plotinus for an evil or material soul does not imply, of course, that there is no room for another soul. Indeed,

⁶⁷ The apt title of this chapter: *utrum verum sit quod quidam dicunt, quasi binas animas esse per singulos*. I say the ‘Christian’ Origen to distinguish him from the pagan Platonist of the same name.

⁶⁸ “*In qua re arbitror requirendum si in nobis, id est hominibus, qui ex anima constamus et corpore ac spiritu vitali, est etiam aliud aliquid, quod incitamentum habeat proprium et commotionem ad malum provocantem; ...*” *De Princ.* 263, 20–24.

⁶⁹ “*utrumnam velut duae animae in nobis dicendae sunt, una quaedam diviniore et caelestis et alia inferior.*”

there is a further passage, at *Ennead* II 3, 9, 10ff., where Plotinus claims that there is a soul in us that stems from the stars and refers to it by using the *Timaeon* expression, “another form of soul”. This soul, deeply involved with our body, is, among other things, responsible for our feelings and other affections. Also, at *Ennead* II 9, 11, 19ff. Plotinus distinguishes the rational soul from another soul which in this passage is also referred to as “other form of soul”. In this passage, Plotinus tentatively identifies this non-rational soul with the generative soul.⁷⁰ This generative soul, or nature, as Plotinus sometimes calls it, will be the topic of the next and final chapter. It is not a bad or material soul, but rather a further psychic power that allows the soul to be active in the body. I will discuss the relation of soul to body and attempt to explain how Plotinus conceives of the activity of the soul in the body.

⁷⁰ I do not think that the inferior soul discussed above can be identical with the generative soul because Plotinus does not attribute to the vegetative soul a faculty of presentation, as we will see in the [next chapter](#). The inferior soul, by contrast, possesses such a faculty and even remembers the life, βίος, of the person. Since life in this sense is the sort of thing you can write a biography about and thus is quite distinct from life in the biological sense (ζωή), it is hard to see how the vegetative soul could possess memory of a life in this sense.

CHAPTER 8

The soul and the body

According to Alexander of Aphrodisias, everyone agrees that the soul is in the body.¹ Plotinus, in the following century, was to be the notable exception. He even made the radical and at first sight enigmatic claim that the relationship between soul and body is the other way round: the body is in the soul rather than the soul in the body. In the first section of this chapter I will discuss Plotinus' reasons for rejecting the view that the soul is in the body and what it means for the body to be in the soul. To discuss this, we will have to study different sorts of being-in relation. The second section is devoted to the question of how the soul is active in the body and, in particular, which type of soul is active there. I will argue that the soul active in the body is nature. It is thus distinct from both the higher and lower souls. I will also discuss the trace of the soul and the qualified body. The final section is devoted to animals and plants and to the question of which type of soul they have. In this context I will also consider whether animals are rational or not.

Being in

I argued in the last chapter that the lower soul is the power by means of which the soul is active in the sensible world. I have tried to show that this activity is crucially one of dealing with presentations. Now the argument from [Chapter 7](#), if successful, has already shown that the activity of the lower soul does not occur in the body. The presentations that the soul is working with are immaterial entities and the so-called affections are activations of capacities. The body is constitutive of neither the capacities of the lower soul nor of their activities. Instead, all the activities of the lower soul occur in the lower soul.

¹ Alex. Aphr. *De An.* 13, 9ff.

Plotinus does not deny that the body has a role to play in some of these activities. In sense perception, for example, the body gets affected by sensory affections. However, here also the body is not part of the perceptual *activity* of the soul, though the occurrence of sensory affections (in the body) is presumably a necessary condition for perceptual activity. Now even if we grant that the activity of the lower soul does not occur in the body, we might still think that the (lower) soul is in the body and that only its being in a body allows it to exercise its body-related functions. After all, it is its function to care for its body.

In fact, however, Plotinus thinks that the lower soul is in the body as little as the higher soul. In order to understand this, we have to look at what Plotinus says about what it means for something *to be in* something. One way of gaining an understanding of the way in which the soul would be in the body (if it were) would be by analogy: we look at other cases of something being in something else and then explain the soul's being in a body in the same way. For this to be helpful, it will be necessary for us, of course, to have a clear understanding of the paradigm case. If we have this understanding, and if we can convincingly show that the soul relates to the body analogically in the same way, we have a form of explanation of how the soul is in the body. Here is an example. We have a pretty clear understanding (or let us assume) of how wine is in a bottle. Given this, we could try to explain that the soul is in the body just as wine is in a bottle. This is only an example to show how we could proceed by analogy in such cases.²

Using this method to explain the soul's relation to the body was quite popular in antiquity (in particular among interpreters of Aristotle). But if we want to use it, we first have to distinguish different kinds of being-in relation that are clear to us and then try to establish which one of these (if any) can be applied to the soul's relation to the body. The ancients distinguished more than a dozen senses of *being-in*.³ Here are some examples: the being-in relation is different in the case of wine being in a bottle from that of a species being in a genus and different again from that of accidents being in a subject. Alexander of Aphrodisias had already shown that most types of being-in relations cannot be used to explain how the soul is in the body.⁴ Plotinus adopts much of Alexander's criticism but is also unconvinced by the way

² See *Enn.* IV 3, 20, 15–24.

³ Arist. *Phys.* IV 3, 210a14–24. For a discussion of the being-in relation in Aristotle, see Morison (2002), 54–80. Post-Aristotelian sources include Boethus 22.28–34 Waitz; Alex. Aphr. *De An.* 13.12–14.6; Porphyry *In Cat.* 77.37–78.5; Ammonius *In Cat.* 29.5–17; Simplicius *In Cat.* 348.29–35. I am grateful to Pavlos Kalligas for providing me with this list of references.

⁴ Alex. Aphr. *De An.* 13, 9–15, 9.

in which Alexander himself may have tried to explain how the soul is in the body.⁵

According to this explanation, the soul can be understood to be in the body as a captain is on a ship. Alexander refers to a passage in Aristotle's *De Anima* (DA 413a8f.) where Aristotle says (or is read by Alexander to say) that it is unclear whether the soul is the entelechy of the body in the way a captain is on a ship.⁶ According to Alexander, this passage can be understood in two ways.⁷ We may mean by 'captain' the person who possesses the art of navigation as a disposition. Alexander rejects this possibility as an analogy because the soul is present throughout the whole body whereas the captain *qua* person is only at one location on the ship at the same time. However, Alexander explains, we can also understand the captain as the art of navigation itself. It is disputed whether Alexander endorses this view. However, it seems to me that, if we understand 'disposition' not as an accidental property but rather as an actuality, he may well have thought that, in this sense, the analogy explains the way in which the soul is in the body. In a later passage of his *De Anima*, in any case, Alexander indeed uses the word 'disposition' to characterise entelechy. Thus, in this later passage, 'disposition' is not understood in an accidental sense.⁸ Hence, we cannot conclude from the fact that Alexander uses 'disposition' in the earlier passage that he rejects the captain-in-a-ship analogy on grounds that dispositions are accidents.

Plotinus closely follows Alexander's argumentation up to this point. However, whether or not Alexander accepts the captain-in-a-ship analogy, Plotinus is unconvinced.⁹ There is a crucial difference between the captain and the art of navigation: the captain is not in the rudder but applies his or her art onto it from outside. Why is this a problem? Couldn't we just claim that the disposition is actually in the rudder? Plotinus dialectically concedes this but finds the analogy still wanting, for we must also explain how the ship is moved and it is clear that it gets moved from outside; the principle of this movement is the captain. So in order to explain how the ship is moved, we would need to put the captain into the rudder. Then the disposition (now also understood as the principle of motion) would indeed be *in* the ship. This may at first seem to solve the problem because the soul is also thought to be the principle of movement within the body in the

⁵ For Alexander as a source of Plotinus in this context see Blumenthal (1968).

⁶ ἔτι δὲ ὁδηλὸν εἰ οὕτως ἐντελέχεια τοῦ σώματος ἢ ψυχῇ ὥσπερ πλωτὴρ πλοίου. Ross emends and places 'ἢ' between ψυχῇ and ὥσπερ. Neither Alexander nor Plotinus seem to have read this ἢ.

⁷ See Alex. Aphr. *De An.* 15, 10–26. ⁸ Alex. Aphr. *De An.* 16, 7–9.

⁹ See *Enn.* IV 3, 21 for the whole discussion of this sense of being-in.

Aristotelian tradition. However, the *point* of the analogy is completely lost; the purpose of using analogies is that the paradigm case is a clear case that we understand on its own terms. Putting a living captain into a rudder, however, destroys the whole point of the analogy because we simply do not understand what it means for a captain to be in a rudder. It is a bizarre image rather than a clear paradigm case for how something is in something else.

Plotinus argues against the various senses in which philosophers before him have tried to explain the soul's being in a body by means of such analogies. The deeper reason why they have failed in Plotinus' view is that the soul is not in the body at all. We will see that this does not only apply to the higher soul but to souls of all types. It is rather the other way round: the body is in the soul. Now this may sound like a strange claim but I hope the following discussion of this claim will clarify how Plotinus conceives of the soul-body relation.

Plotinus refers to Plato's *Timaeus* where we learn that, in the case of the World Soul, the body of the world is indeed in its soul and not vice versa. Plato says: "When the soul [i.e. the World Soul] had been constructed in a way that pleased him who had constructed it [i.e. the divine Craftsman], then he went on to fashion *inside it* all that is body-like" (*Ti.* 36D8-E1).¹⁰ In his exegesis of this passage Plotinus makes two further claims that are relevant for our purposes. Firstly, the body of the world is only in that power of the World Soul that it needs. There are thus powers of the World Soul in which there is no body. Secondly, he adds: "And the same account clearly also holds true of the other souls" (*Enn.* IV 3, 22, 11f.).¹¹ Thus, according to Plotinus, the bodies of all souls are in a power of the soul and, for all souls, there are powers of the soul in which there is no body. These are the powers of the soul that are not needed by the body.

Now what does it mean to say that the body is in the soul (or, more precisely, in a power of the soul)? In order to explain this, Plotinus adds a further type of a being-in relation to those considered above, namely that of something's being in the light. We say, for example, that we are sitting in the sunlight. Whole landscapes can be in the light. This is a perfectly good sense of being-in, neither discussed by the interpreters of Aristotle that Alexander considers nor by Alexander himself.

¹⁰ ἐπεὶ δὲ κατὰ νοῦν τῷ συνιστάντι πᾶσα ἡ τῆς ψυχῆς σύστασις ἐγγένητο, μετὰ τοῦτο πᾶν τὸ σωματοειδὲς ἐντὸς αὐτῆς ἐτεκταίνετο κτλ.

¹¹ καὶ δὴ καὶ ἐπὶ τῶν ἄλλων ψυχῶν ὁ αὐτὸς λόγος.

Assume that there is a cone of light, surrounded by darkness, with air flowing through. The air is indeed *in* the cone of light. What is interesting about this paradigm case (as opposed to the earlier ones) is the following. The air may be constantly changing (imagine windy conditions) without affecting the light. Furthermore, light is only present to the air as long as the air is within the cone of light. As soon as the air leaves the cone, light is no longer present to it. Plotinus explains this phenomenon in the following way: when we say that the air is in the light we mean that light is present to this air. Whether something is in the light or not makes a difference to this thing: while a thing is in the light, for example, it is visible while it is no longer visible as soon as it is no longer in the light.

On the basis of this clear paradigm case, we can now explain what it means for the body to be in the soul (or rather: in a power of the soul). Just as a thing is visible when in the light, a body is alive when in a soul. We have seen in [Chapter 6](#) that many philosophers in antiquity explained the activities of living beings by means of powers. Plotinus endorses this view too. More specifically, distinguishing between immaterial soul and material body, he explains the activities in the body with reference to powers of the soul acting on bodies. To put it differently: specific activities occurring in living bodies can (and should) be explained with reference to powers of the soul. These powers are thought to be the cause of the corresponding corporeal activities. These activities constitute the life of the body – a life that is only possible through the soul. This is what it means for a body to be in the soul.¹²

Note that Plotinus emphasises that the light is neither affected by the air nor by the fact that air is in it. This means that the enlightening of the air (in this sense) does not affect the light at all. The only subject of affection in this simile is the air.¹³ Accordingly, if the body is in the soul (or rather in a power of the soul), only the body will be affected. The power of the soul itself will not be affected by its activity in the body. This will be of importance in the next section.

It is clear that the body is not in the soul (or its power) as in a place or location. Nor, of course, is the soul in the body as in a location. What we can localise is only the *activity* of the soul in the body. For example, assume that sensory affections occur in the eye and that the soul is involved in the

¹² The thing on which the soul acts (or, by analogy, the enlightened air) must also be suitable for the corresponding activity – it must possess a corresponding ἐπιτηδεύσις (suitability). The power to see can act on eyes, for example, but not on legs.

¹³ For a more detailed discussion of enlightened air see *Enn.* IV 5, 6.

constitution of these affections by means of one of its powers. Now sensory affections can be localised in the eyes, for example. However, Plotinus denies that we can infer from this that the power of the soul that brings about the sensory affection is also located in the eye. The reason for this depends on quite general considerations of the relation of being-in-a-place to corporeality. The fact that the activities of a power are localised in a body does not imply that the powers themselves are localised in the body too. For Plotinus (as for Aristotle) a location is the place of a body. Immaterial entities can thus only meaningfully be said to be in a place if they inhere in a body or stand in some other relation to a body such that they depend on the body in such a way that they can be localised by virtue of the body.¹⁴ Take colours as an example. Colours are either themselves corporeal or not – a topic hotly debated in antiquity.¹⁵ If colours are material objects, then their being in a place does not pose any special problem because they are considered bodies in this case and bodies are of the sort of thing that is in a place. If colours are immaterial, however, it may still make sense to attribute them a place if they inhere in the body whose colour they are. Even if we assume that colours are incorporeal, the particular quality white that belongs to the paint in a bucket full of white paint is also in the bucket in so far as the paint in which it inheres is in the bucket. However, the soul and its powers are neither corporeal nor inhering in any body. The soul is a substance (and thus not dependent on the body) and its powers depend on the soul whose powers they are rather than on a body. Therefore, neither soul nor its powers are located anywhere. The *activities* of the soul in the body, by contrast, are located in the body and even at specific locations in the body. In order to be able to occur, activities of this sort depend in this sense on the body in which they occur.

I hope that these considerations have shown that the lower soul is *not* the power in which the body is, for the activities of the lower soul do not occur in the body but are actualisations of capacities within the soul. The body is not constitutive of these actualisations. If this is right, then we need to assume that there is, in addition to a higher and lower soul, a further psychic power, one that is active in bodies. The next section is devoted to this further power.

¹⁴ For example, at least some immaterial properties will be instantiated in the body whose property they are. We can localise these instantiated properties by localising the body where they are instantiated. The instantiation may not be an inherence-relation.

¹⁵ See Alcin. *Didasc.* 26 Whittaker; Alex. Aphr.(?) *Mant.* 122–125; [Galen] *De Qualitatibus Incorporeis*.

Nature, the trace of the soul and the qualified body

I argued in the first section that the body is *in* a power of the soul in the sense that there exists a power of the soul that the body is in need of and that acts on the body. I also tried to show that this power can be identified neither with the higher nor with the lower soul. Rather, Plotinus calls the power in which the body is ‘nature’, ‘vegetative soul’ or ‘generative soul’. We will also have to examine the relation of this sort of soul to the living body. Finally, there is a further entity to be discussed, namely what Plotinus calls the trace of the soul.

Let us start with activities that specifically occur in living bodies. By this I mean activities that occur neither in souls nor in non-living bodies. When discussing sense perception in [Chapter 7](#), we have already seen that Plotinus distinguishes between sense perception in the narrow sense (which is the becoming aware of states of affairs in the sensible world by means of presentations) and sensory affections (or sensations). While sense perceptions occur in the lower soul, corresponding sensations occur in the living body that Plotinus, following Aristotle, sometimes calls qualified body.¹⁶

The qualified body is subject not only to sensory affections but also to non-rational feelings and desires. As far as the latter is concerned, desire for food, drink and sex belongs to the qualified body (*Enn.* IV 4, 21, 19–21; 28, 13–15). Moreover, it is affected by pleasure and pain. Plotinus states at *Ennead* IV 4, 18, 8–10 that “pain and bodily pleasures occur in the qualified body; but the pain of this body and this kind of pleasure result for us in a cognition without affection.”¹⁷ This passage shows not only that bodily pain and pleasure occur in the qualified body but also that a distinction has to be made between emotional affections in the qualified body on the one hand and corresponding presentations in us, that is, in the lower soul, on the other: the latter are not affections. We may call the former feelings and the latter emotions. Thus, in this respect, pleasure and pain work in ways similar to sense perception.¹⁸

One interesting aspect of the interrelation of qualified body and lower soul is revealed in Plotinus’ discussion of anger at *Ennead* IV 4, 28. Plotinus points to the fact that we are angry not only when our own body suffers but

¹⁶ See *Enn.* III 6, 1, iff. and *Enn.* I 1, 7, iff.

¹⁷ καὶ τὸ ἀλγεῖν καὶ τὸ ἡδεσθαι δὲ τὰς τοῦ σώματος ἡδονὰς περὶ τὸ τοιόνδε σώμα ἐστίν· ἡμῖν δὲ ἡ τοῦτου ἀλγηδὼν καὶ ἡ τοιαύτη ἡδονὴ εἰς γνώσιν ἀπαθῆ ἔρχεται.

¹⁸ Affections and desires of the body are crucially also alterations (and in this sense activities) and states depending on alterations (e.g. privations) in the body.

also, for example, over the sufferings of friends or family. In the latter case perception and some kind of understanding must be involved. Nonetheless, anger seems also to depend on the constitution and state of our body. The blood (or bile) of some people is more easily boiled and thus they are more prone to anger than others. The same person, when she is ill, is more prone to anger than when she is healthy.

In order to explain this state of affairs, Plotinus argues, we have to assume two origins of anger. When the qualified body suffers, the blood or bile is immediately set in motion, and a perception occurs in the lower soul. The corresponding presentation allows the soul to become aware of the state of the qualified body, and the soul reacts, for example, by launching its body against what has caused the pain (*Enn.* IV 4, 28, 35ff.). But anger can also arise from the soul if a person understands or is of the opinion that he or someone else has been wronged. In this case, the lower soul is the origin of anger and causes the qualified body to change its state into one of anger and to make an ally of spirit (*thumoeides*) (*ibid.*). Thus, anger can arise either out of a bodily state or in the lower soul. Although Plotinus discusses this only in the case of spirit (*thumoeides*), it also seems to hold true of appetite (*epithumētikon*).¹⁹ Otherwise he would exclude the possibility that our faculty of presentation is capable of being the origin of non-rational desires in our body. Anticipating a good meal could not therefore occur and sexual arousal could not have its origin in the faculty of presentation.²⁰

Our discussion so far has shown that the qualified body is active in ways in which an ordinary body is not. Qualified bodies experience desires, feelings and sensations which would allow them to do such things as avoiding harmful things (for they can be painfully affected and fear things) and to go towards beneficial things (since they feel pleasure and desire things). We will now see that they are also active in vegetative ways: by feeding themselves, growing and procreating.

As Theiler had already observed, Plotinus borrows the expression 'qualified body' (*toionde sōma*)²¹ from Aristotle's *De Anima*.²² At *De Anima* 412a11ff. Aristotle distinguishes different kinds of body, one of which is the natural body (*phusikon sōma*). The class of natural bodies gets divided into bodies possessing life and bodies not possessing life (*ibid.*). In this passage,

¹⁹ Both appetite and spirit, the non-rational soul parts from the *Republic*, belong to the generative power, or nature, as Plotinus explains at *Enn.* IV 4, 28, 64ff. I will discuss nature below.

²⁰ For further discussion of emotions in Plotinus see Emilsson (1998) and Caluori (2008).

²¹ For this entity see in particular Igal (1979) 329–340.

²² *Anmerkung* to *Enn.* II 3, 9, 21 in Harder, Beutler & Theiler (1960). *DA* 403a26; 403b11; 412a16f.; b11; 16; 27.

Aristotle means by ‘life’ the sort of life that consists at minimum in self-feeding, growth and decay (*DA* 412a14f.)²³ and uses the expression ‘qualified body’ in the same passage to refer to a body that possesses life in this sense. Now, possibly going beyond Aristotle, we may want to use the notions of life and qualified body in a somewhat broader sense. We may mean a form of life that also includes sensations, desires, feelings and other biological activities that animals may exercise and states they may be in. Indeed, for Plotinus qualified bodies are bodies that possess a life in this broader biological sense. This is clear from the discussion above – qualified bodies possess sensation, feelings and desires.

While we now know that qualified bodies are distinct from ordinary bodies due to the fact that they possess a life in the biological sense, it is still unclear what it is about qualified bodies that allows them to be active in such ways. In some passages Plotinus states that qualified bodies possess a trace or a shadow²⁴ of the soul and claims that this trace or shadow makes the body a qualified body.²⁵ Since this trace, in a way to be discussed, accounts for the fact that a body is a *living* body, and since the only life-giving force that Plotinus accepts in the sensible world are souls, the trace must indeed, if it is a trace, be a trace *of the soul*. This leaves two possibilities: either it is itself a soul or it in some specific way stems from a soul. Either way, the trace of the soul cannot be reduced to the body as such: no matter how complicated a body is structured, it will never be able to become alive without a soul implanting soul-traces into it.

One of the most detailed discussions of the trace of the soul can be found at *Ennead* IV 4, 18, 1–4, where Plotinus brings up “the question of whether the body possesses anything by itself and whether it lives, while the soul is present, already having something of its own or whether what it has is nature and this, nature, is what is associated with it.”²⁶ The question is this: does the body have a life of its own (while the soul is present) or does it not have a life of its own? In the latter case, the life present to it is either nature or due to nature. Either way, it is separate from but associated with the body. Nature is a power of the soul. Hence, according to the second

²³ ζώην δὲ λέγομεν τὴν δι’ αὐτοῦ τροφήν τε καὶ αὔξησιν καὶ φθίσιν.

²⁴ For example, at *Enn.* IV 4, 28, 52f. Plotinus often uses the terms ‘trace’, ‘shadow’ and ‘image’ in this context interchangeably. See *Enn.* I 6, 8, 7f.

²⁵ For the trace of the soul see in particular *Enn.* IV 4, 18–29 but also *Enn.* II 3, 9, 21–23; *Enn.* VI 4, 15, 15–18. For discussion see O’Meara (1993) 77, Emilsson (1998) 341–343, Kalligas (2012) and Noble (2013).

²⁶ περὶ δὲ τοῦ εἰ ἐφ’ ἑαυτοῦ τι ἔχει τὸ σῶμα καὶ παρούσης ζῆ τῆς ψυχῆς ἔχον ἥδη τι ἴδιον, ἢ ὃ ἔχει ἡ φύσις ἐστὶ, καὶ τοῦτό ἐστι τὸ προσομιλοῦν τῷ σώματι ἢ φύσιν.

option, the body has life merely by the fact that a power of the soul (nature) is present to it without, however, having one on its own.

Plotinus continues the above consideration with the claim that the body itself cannot be something lifeless (*apsuchon*). Thus, it is clear that he must mean by ‘body’ the body of a living being, a qualified body. The claim that the body must have a life of its own allows us to answer the initial question: the body is not alive solely because of the fact that nature (a power of the soul) is present to it. Plotinus explains this by means of an analogy: the living body is not like air which is illuminated but rather like air that is warmed. He immediately continues, and here we finally arrive at the trace (or, what amounts to the same, the shadow) of the soul: “The body of a living being and of a plant possesses something like a shadow of the soul” (*Enn.* IV 4, 18, 6f.).²⁷

Before discussing this, let us first consider the analogy: what is the difference between illuminated air and heated air?²⁸ We already discussed air that is illuminated in the first section. Light is not a property of the illuminated air; rather, when air is illuminated, the light remains completely independent of the air. Moreover, when air is no longer in the light, it is no longer illuminated. Heated air, by contrast, becomes heated in the sense that heat becomes a property of it. This can be seen from the fact that heated air, at least for some time, remains warm even if the source of the heat is gone, as Plotinus explains at *Ennead* IV 4, 14, 1–11. Thus, Plotinus understands the presence of light to air quite differently from the presence of heat to air. On the basis of this analogy I would suggest that, while the soul is present to the body as light is to air, life is present to the body as heat is to air.

In the light of this analogy, let us now come back to the two possibilities for explaining how the body is alive. Let us first consider the option Plotinus rejects. If the body were alive in the way air is illuminated, nature would be associated with it but the body would not have a life of its own. What we would call the life of the body would actually be the life of nature – a life that would be present to the body without being the life of the body. What we call the life of the body would be a property of the soul, not of the body. However, if the body is like heated air, then it has a life of its own just as heated air itself is warm. Since the latter is the case, the body must possess its own life. This is compatible, of course, with the view that

²⁷ καὶ ἔστι τὸ σῶμα τοῦ ζώου καὶ τοῦ φυτοῦ δὲ οἷον σκιὰν ψυχῆς ἔχοντα κτλ.

²⁸ The distinction between heated and illuminated air and how it helps us to understand the trace of the soul became clear to me thanks to Noble (2013). I follow his interpretation here. In the end, however, my interpretation of what the trace is will differ from his.

this life still depends on nature and ultimately derives from it (i.e. that *nature* is present to the body as light is to air).

Plotinus concludes from this, as we have seen, that the body must have a shadow or trace of soul. Why does the fact that the body possesses a life of its own imply that it possesses a trace of the soul? I can think of two reasonable types of explanation. Firstly, the trace is the cause of the life and activity of the body, causing the body to be alive and active without being identical to this life. Note that this option is still different from the option rejected above (that the body is alive solely because nature is present to it) because the cause here would be part of the body. One version of this option may be, for example, that the trace is an enmattered form consisting of Aristotelian capacities.²⁹ Alternatively, the trace is itself identical with an activity or a set of activities of the body, perhaps even with the whole life of the body (including its desires, passions, etc.).

While the first of these two alternatives is not explicitly discussed by Plotinus, as far as I can see, he does consider the second one. At *Ennead* IV 4, 29, 50–55 he asks what the trace of the soul is and states that it is either a soul or something like the life of the body (*hoion zōē tou sōmatos*). Plotinus, in this passage, does not tell us which option he prefers. Yet the analogy of heated air discussed above suggests that the trace is not a soul, but rather something like the life of the body, for the soul (or nature) is, as we have seen, present to the body in the way light is present to air yet it is not in the body in the way heat is in the air. The trace of the soul, by contrast, is not just present to the body but rather located in the body (as we have seen). For this reason, it seems to me, Plotinus adheres to the second option.³⁰

Is the trace of the soul located in the whole body or only in parts of it? In *De Placitis Hippocratis et Platonis* (PHP) Galen, interpreting Plato, claims that the brain, the heart and the liver are seats of the three Platonic soul parts of reason, spirit and appetite respectively (PHP V 600–1 K. = 438–440 de Lacy). Galen thinks that, corresponding to these three soul parts, there are three powers (or sets of powers) also located in the three body parts respectively. But he also considers the three organs as starting points (*archai*) of corresponding activities in the body and states that the whole organism is governed beginning from these three starting points (*ibid.*). The three major organs are connected to the rest of the body, according to Galen, by means of nerves (which originate in the brain), arteries (which

²⁹ Noble (2013) 26, for example, proposes that the trace is a “soul-like enmattered form” of the body.

³⁰ What does it mean that the trace is *something like* the life of the body? Perhaps we do not have to take seriously the qualification ‘something like’. After all, a few lines further down in the text (*Enn.* IV 4, 29, 54), Plotinus drops it and simply talks about the life of the body.

originate in the heart) and veins (originating in the liver). The liver, for example, being the origin of corresponding powers and activities (to do with nutrition), expands its activities throughout the body via veins. Now Plotinus, as we have seen, clearly rejects the idea that the soul or any of its powers is located in the body. However, he agrees with Galen that *activities* are located there. Yet in his discussion of spirit and appetite he seems to hold on to the idea that they are related in particular to the heart and to the liver respectively.³¹ For example, when discussing appetite he states: “The place around the liver must be the *starting point* (*archē*) of appetite, because nature which provides the trace of soul to the liver and to the body, is most active there; there because the activity begins there” (*Enn.* IV 4, 28, 15–18).³² The fact that the liver is a starting point for the activity of appetite is thus explained by the fact that nature is most active there and that this activity *begins* in this organ. Plotinus also states that nature provides the trace of the soul to the liver, thereby emphasising the function in particular of the liver for appetitive activities. However, he also claims that the trace is given to the body more generally. Now I suggest that this adds up to the following view. The activity of nature in the body begins at the starting points (*archai*) of the corresponding activities (e.g. in the liver (appetite) or in the heart (spirit)). From there, corresponding activities expand throughout the body. Of course, all these activities, the activities in the liver, for example, and the activities which start there and expand throughout the rest of the body, are ultimately due to nature so that, ultimately, the whole life of the body is due to it. I think that such an explanation of the activities of nature in the body, and thus of the trace of the soul, allows Plotinus to make his own psychology consistent with the medical insights of his day. The phenomena, in any case, that Galen explains are consistent with Plotinus’ psychology. Galen’s further assumption that the powers are also in the body (an assumption rejected by Plotinus) cannot be backed up by empirical evidence. Galen has empirical evidence only for the presence of activities in bodies but not for the presence of powers in bodies. Whether powers are located in the body or not is a philosophical question rather than an empirical one.

Just as air is warm because it gets heated by something (e.g. by the sun or an oven), the life of the qualified body, and in particular the trace of the

³¹ At *Ennead* IV 3, 23, 19ff. Plotinus states that the activity of sensation and of the movement of the body have their starting points in the brain.

³² Ἔστω δὲ ὁ περὶ τὸ ἥπαρ τόπος τῆς ἐπιθυμίας ἀρχή, ὅτι τὸ φυτικὸν ἐκεῖ ἐνεργεῖ μάλιστα, ὃ τὸ ἴχθυος τὸ ψυχικὸν τῷ ἥπατι καὶ τῷ σώματι παρέχει· ἐκεῖ δέ, ὅτι ἐκεῖ ἀρχεται ἡ ἐνέργεια. See also *Enn.* IV 3, 23.

soul, must also have a source. It is clear that the trace of the soul must be produced by a soul (just as the trace of a deer must be produced by deer). At *Ennead* IV 4, 20, 15f. Plotinus claims that *nature* is that which gives the trace of the soul to the body. Moreover, at *Ennead* IV 4, 28, 16f. we learn that the *generative power* gives the trace to the body. Just like the expression ‘qualified body’, Plotinus also borrows the notions ‘generative power’ and ‘vegetative power’ (or ‘nature’) from Aristotle.³³ Plotinus follows Aristotle in postulating that the natural or generative power is the power responsible for the activities of the qualified body. We have seen that Plotinus attributes not only vegetative activities but also desires, feelings and sensations to the qualified body. All these activities and states that constitute the life of the qualified body are brought about by nature. I argued in the first section that there is a power of the soul *in* which the body is; that the body is in need of this power and that this power acts on the body. Our discussion shows that this power is nature. Nature produces the trace of the soul in the living body and thus makes the body a living or qualified body.

Animals and plants

Many activities of animals seem to be of the same kind as corresponding activities of human beings. Animals use their senses, have desires and feelings and move around. This does not imply, of course, that their souls are of the same kind as human souls. Thinking is traditionally seen as an activity that distinguishes human beings from animals. This being the case, animal souls are distinct from human souls in at least one respect. However, one might also follow the Stoic view that animal souls are radically different from human souls.³⁴ According to the Stoics, both human souls and animal souls possess presentations and impulses (D.L. VII 86), yet these are completely different in animals and in human beings. I argued in the last chapter that Plotinus agrees with the Stoics that presentations in human souls (i.e. in Plotinus’ lower soul) are rational in the sense that they are propositionally structured.³⁵ The Stoic animal soul, by contrast, possesses only non-rational presentations. Moreover, for the Stoics, human beings possess the rational ability to assent, or to refuse to assent, to presentations and this is also true for impulsive impressions, that is to say, for

³³ For “φυτικόν” see e.g. *EN* 1102a32f.; for “γεννητικόν” e.g. *GA* II 1, 735a18.

³⁴ See Inwood (1985) ch. 2; Annas (1992) ch. 2; Frede (1994); Long (1999).

³⁵ For the Stoics see S.E. *M* VIII 70

impressions, the assent to which triggers action. Animal impulse, again by contrast, is itself a (non-rational) impression that immediately causes the animal to behave in certain ways.

The view that animal souls are non-rational and thus radically different from human souls was attacked, for different reasons, both by skeptics and by some Platonists (such as Plutarch or Porphyry).³⁶ Moreover, Porphyry reports that Pythagoras himself denied that animals are essentially different from human beings.³⁷ Yet in spite of the importance of Pythagoras for later Platonists, the crucial source for the view that animals are rational is Plato.³⁸ According to the *Timaeus* animals get ensouled by the souls of (foolish and blameful) human beings (*Ti.* 91Dff.). Whatever the details of the story of the *Timaeus*, it is clearly implied that human beings and animals possess souls of the same kind, namely rational souls, the difference being one of degree of intelligence rather than one in kind.

Porphyry's argument in favour of the claim that animals are rational is to a large extent based on considerations of their activities and behaviour. This cannot, according to Porphyry, properly be explained without attributing rationality to them. Like Sextus, Porphyry uses, for instance, the famous example of Chrysippus' dog. According to this example, a dog, upon arriving at a spot where three ways meet, and after sniffing two roads by which its prey did not pass, rushes off at once by the third way without stopping to sniff. Whatever the Stoic explanation of this behaviour, Sextus dialectically concludes that the dog, using Stoic logic, must have reasoned as follows: the prey either went this way, or that way, or the other way. But it went neither this way nor that way. Therefore, it went the other way (S.E. *PH* I 69f.; Porphyry *Abst.* III 6).³⁹ The example of Chrysippus' dog is taken by Porphyry to show that animal behaviour cannot be fully explained without attributing reason to them.

This brief and incomplete historical survey shows that it was not so clear at the time of Plotinus whether animals are rational or not – both views had their defenders. We will see that Plotinus does not firmly belong to either camp. At *Ennead* IV 7, 14, 1–5 he states: “As far as the souls of other living

³⁶ For the skeptics see S.E. *PH* I 62ff.

³⁷ Porphyry, *Abst.* III 26. For Porphyry's claim that animals are rational see in general *Abst.* III 2–18.

³⁸ See Philo of Alexandria, *De Animalibus*; Plutarch, *De Soll.* and *Gryllus*; Celsus, IV 78ff.; Porphyry *Abst.* III. Theophrastus and Strato, although being Peripatetics, were also proponents of animal rationality (see the quotation from the former in Porphyry, *Abst.* III 25, 3 and for the latter Epiphanius, *Adv. Haer.* III 33=fr. 48 Wehrli). But their notion of rationality might have differed from the Platonist one. For a general discussion of animal psychology in antiquity see Haussleiter (1935) 206–212 and 228–233, Dierauer (1977) 253–273 as well as Sorabji (1993).

³⁹ See also Plutarch, *De Soll.* 969AB; Philo, *De Animalibus* 45; Ael. *NA* 6, 59; Basilius, *Hex.* 9, 4.

beings, those of them which have fallen and come into animal bodies must also be immortal. But if there is another form of soul, it cannot come from anywhere other than from living Nature, because this must be the cause of life in living beings.”⁴⁰ According to this passage, the souls of animals are either souls having fallen and come into animal bodies or they stem from Nature.

The first alternative consists of two claims: animal souls are immortal and have “fallen and come into animal bodies”. Their fall and their immortality is best explained if we assume that animal souls are of the same kind as human souls, that is, if we take them to be rational souls in the way human souls are rational. After all, they are said to be immortal. The fall would then be their descent. For the second alternative, Plotinus uses the *Timaeon* expression ‘another form of soul’ that he sometimes (but not always) uses, as we have seen in the last chapter, to denote the generative soul or nature.

Before discussing this further, let us look at another passage where Plotinus, in a similar manner, distinguishes two possible origins of animal souls, namely *Ennead* I I, II, 8–15:

If, as it is said, there are in them [i.e. in animals] human souls that have sinned, the separate part of the soul does not belong to animals but is there without being there for them . . . But if a human soul has not entered the animal it has become this qualified living being by an illumination from the World Soul.⁴¹

The first option suggests that animal souls are of the same sort as human souls. If so, they must also have a higher soul and this is, I think, what is implied by Plotinus’ remark about the separate part of the soul. What does it mean to “be there for them without being there for them”? Now the human soul is there for human beings by means of the lower soul, as we have seen. Yet we have also seen that the lower soul can be influenced by the higher soul in that it is capable of having presentations whose content originates in the higher soul: human beings can be guided by reason. According to this passage, animals, like human beings, possess a lower soul that comes from the higher soul. I would suggest that this is the sense in which the higher soul is there for animals. However, animals are not

⁴⁰ περὶ δὲ τῆς τῶν ἄλλων ζώων ψυχῆς, ὅσαι μὲν αὐτῶν σφαλεῖσαι καὶ μέχρι θηρίων ἦκον σωμάτων, ἀνάγκη καὶ ταύτας ἀθανάτους εἶναι. εἰ δὲ ἔστιν ἄλλο τι εἶδος ψυχῆς, οὐκ ἄλλοθεν ἢ ἀπὸ τῆς ζώσης φύσεως δεῖ καὶ ταύτην εἶναι καὶ αὐτὴν οὖσαν ζωῆς τοῖς ζώοις αἰτίαν, κτλ.

⁴¹ ἢ εἰ μὲν ψυχαὶ εἶεν ἐν αὐτοῖς ἀνθρώπειοι, ὥσπερ λέγεται, ἀμαρτοῦσαι, οὐ τῶν θηρίων γίνεται τοῦτο, ὅσον χωριστόν, ἀλλὰ παρὸν οὐ πάρεστιν αὐτοῖς . . . εἰ δὲ μὴ ἀνθρώπου ψυχὴ εἰσέδω, ἐλλάμψει ἀπὸ τῆς ὅλης τὸ τοιοῦτον ζῶον γενόμενον ἔστιν.

capable of being guided by reason at all. They will, when taking care of a body, neither act for the right reason nor ever enjoy the contemplation of reality. In this sense their higher soul, that is to say, their reason, is not there for them. Even if their lower soul is of the same type as the human lower soul in this case, animal souls are weaker than human souls; their confusion in the sensible world is total. When caring for a body, they are utterly unaware of their reason and completely focused on their body, absolutely identifying their life with that of the body.

The second option crucially distinguishes animal souls from human souls. Animal souls, according to this option, do not belong to the intelligible world at all and thus there are no higher animal souls. Instead, animal souls are, according to the quotation from *Ennead* IV 7, products of Nature and, according to the quotation from *Ennead* I 1, products of the World Soul. These two claims coincide because Nature is the whole non-rational power that acts on bodies. It is a whole of which individual natures are parts.⁴²

According to the second option, animals may, although not being strictly speaking rational, still be sensible in the sense in which some animals, according to Aristotle, are sensible. Aristotle claims that some animals are capable of *phronein* (of being sensible).⁴³ This capacity is supposed to account for the fact that some animals are capable of learning.⁴⁴ However, it is also possible that animals are neither rational nor sensible. Perhaps they are only guided by sensations, desires and feelings just as the living body (as such) seems to be. This may be sufficient to explain animal behaviour. Plotinus does not sort out these things. He nowhere explains whether he thinks that animal souls are the same as human souls, whether they are at least sensible or whether not even this is the case. But perhaps Plotinus considers various possibilities because he does not believe that all animals have souls of the same sort. For it is also possible that souls of some animal species are of one sort (e.g. monkeys may have higher souls) while others are of a different sort (flies may not even be sensible, and so on).⁴⁵

⁴² The activity of Nature (in so far as it is considered an activity of the World Soul) is agent-based and not immediate. See the discussion in [Chapter 5](#).

⁴³ *Metaph.* 980a28–b4; *EN* 1141a26–28; see also *DA* III 3 and Osborne (2000). For Aristotle's discussion of the cognitive abilities of animals see also Fortenbaugh (1971), Sorabji (1992) and (1993) 12–20, and Lorenz (2006) 113–201.

⁴⁴ *HA* 608a11–20.

⁴⁵ I am grateful to Eyjólfur Emilsson for pointing out this possibility to me in discussion.

Let us now turn to plants. According to the *Timaeus* not only human beings and animals possess souls but plants do too. As we have seen in [Chapter 5](#), Plotinus believes that the generative power, nature, is the power that brings about the activities of plants. We have seen there that the nature of plants derives from the soul of the earth and that Plotinus has not decided whether, as we read in the *Timaeus*, plants have their own nature or whether the power of the earth takes care of their activities and they only possess a trace of the nature of the soul of the earth.

Since I discussed the generative power of the earth in [Chapter 5](#), let us here explore the option that plants possess their own nature. If so, is the nature active in plants of the same kind as its counterpart in human beings and animals? This may seem to imply that plants also possess desires, feelings and sensation. While this view may strike us as odd, the *Timaeus* endorses it. Yet it was already under attack well before Plotinus' time. The author of the pseudo-Aristotelian *De Plantis*, for example, argues that only things that possess sensation possess desire: plants do not possess sensation, which can be seen from the fact that they do not have any sense organs. Therefore, pseudo-Aristotle argues, plants do not have desires, either.⁴⁶

At minimum, such functions as nutrition, growth and generation clearly belong both to the nature active in human beings and that active in plants (*Enn.* IV 3, 23, 35f.). The question is only whether plants also possess desire, feelings and sensation. In a highly interesting passage Plotinus considers the question of whether there are angry trees, and he answers at *Ennead* IV 4, 28, 59f. as follows: "But there is no need to be surprised that trees do not get angry although they have the natural power, since they have no share of blood or bile."⁴⁷

This is an ingenious solution to the problem that the view presented in the *Timaeus* poses for later Platonists like Plotinus. The passage suggests that nature in plants and in human beings is the same without committing Plotinus to the view that plants actually sense and desire things. Although plants possess a nature (and thus a soul), which would in principle enable them to have sensation and desire, they are not, in fact, capable of exercising those capacities because they lack the necessary bodily prerequisites (*epitēdeiotēs*). In Plotinus' example, nature cannot cause a tree to be angry because trees lack blood and bile. If anger gets physiologically realised as the boiling of blood or bile, plants, lacking blood and bile, lack the necessary

⁴⁶ See Ps. Aristotle, *De Plant.* 815bff.

⁴⁷ τὸ δὲ τὰ δένδρα μὴ ἔχειν θυμὸν καίπερ τὸ φυτικὸν ἔχοντα οὐ δεῖ θαυμάζειν· ἐπεὶ οὐδ' αἷματος οὐδὲ χολῆς αὐτοῖς μέτεστιν.

bodily prerequisite (*epitēdeiotēs*) for getting angry. Thus, Plotinus might answer the above argument in the pseudo-Aristotelian *De Plantis* as follows. According to the argument plants have no sensation since they have no sense organs. Now the fact that they have no sense organs only shows that plants are not capable of *exercising* sensation. It does not show, however, that they do not have the power of sensation (or, for that matter, of desire or feeling). Accordingly, it is not necessary to distinguish between two kinds of nature, one for plants and one for human beings. Instead, nature is indeed the soul of plants. It is as such of the same type as the corresponding power of human beings.

Incidentally, this shows that for Plotinus not even the lowest psychic power, nature, is to be understood as a constituent of a hylemorphic composite in Aristotle's sense. Nature is present to the body, even to the bodies of plants, quite independently of how plants are structured. If a body does not possess the structure that allows a psychic power to be active in it, the power is still present, even though it is not exercised. Therefore, the natural power of the soul is quite different from an Aristotelian capacity, and Plotinian living bodies are quite different from Aristotelian hylemorphic composites.

During both this and the previous chapter I emphasised that the lower soul and nature are powers of the soul rather than souls in the sense in which the higher soul is a soul. The fact that they are nevertheless called 'souls' is a further example of the systematic equivocity discussed in the Introduction. The word 'soul' is used in different senses. The primary sense of 'soul' is the sense in which we call the soul in the intelligible world, the higher soul, a soul. The lower soul and nature are not souls in the same sense. Instead, the word 'soul' is used in a systematically equivocal way and the lower soul and the generative soul (nature) are not – in the primary sense of the word 'soul' – souls.

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