

2 Plotinus's metaphysics of the One

Of the three first principles (*archai*) or hypostases, One, Intellect, and Soul, the One or Good is the most difficult to conceive and the most central to understanding Plotinian philosophy. It is everything and nothing, everywhere and nowhere. The One is the source (*archê*) of all beings and, as the Good, the goal (*telos*) of all aspirations, human and non-human. As the indemonstrable first principle of everything, as transcendent infinite being, and as the supreme object of love, the One is the center of a vibrant conception of reality many of whose facets resist philosophical analysis. Efforts to understand or to define the nature of the One, Plotinus believes, are doomed to be inadequate. We speak *about* it, but in reality these efforts only amount to “making signs to ourselves about it”; it is not possible for anyone to say what it is (V.3.13.7, 14.1–7).¹ Despite this insistence on the ineffability of the first principle Plotinus talks about it constantly, making radical claims about its universal role in the structure of reality. Only by reflecting on the internal logic of his metaphysics can we recognize the multi-faceted nature of this unitary principle.

I TALKING ABOUT THE ONE

Three interrelated factors motivate Plotinus's philosophy of the One: tradition, reason, and experience.² Since the influence of his predecessors, especially Plato and Aristotle, on Plotinus is discussed in Chapter 1, here we will examine the contributions made by rational argument and personal experience toward articulating the metaphysics of the One.

His ways of speaking about the One warrant attention because thought and speech achieve greater or lesser degrees of clarity and

accuracy in proportion to their proximity to the One itself. The One's existence is certainly not in doubt: otherwise, thought and speech would be impossible (VI.6.13.44–9). But being the first principle of reason requires that the One transcend determinate being and even the highest type of thought (cf. VI.9.4.1–16). Discussions about the first principle, therefore, usually stress the limits of reasoning and insist on transcending analysis and conceptualization. By contrast, on many other topics Plotinus readily offers explanations of the doctrines he holds and argues for the truth of his philosophical and religious views, for example, against the Gnostic view that the physical universe is evil in II.9. Nevertheless, the transcendence and ineffability of the One should not, I think, be taken as evidence of deep-seated hostility to reason, for Plotinus's skepticism about the capacity of language and thought to grasp the One is itself inspired by intense reflection. He is convinced that discursive thinking is a weakened form of thought, which is inferior to and relies on intellection (*noêsis*), the immediate, intuitive, and comprehensive understanding that, when we have access to it, provides the most accurate view of the One available to us: for “if there is anything before it, Intellect knows clearly that this is what it derives from” (V.5.2.15–16). Since so much of what Plotinus says about the One is an expression of the noetic vision of intelligible reality, we should note what he says about it. Intellect, intellection, or intelligible being are: (1) incapable of error (V.5.1.1–2); (2) eternally knowing (V.5.1.4); (3) not based on demonstrative proof (*apodeixis*) (V.5.1.7, 2.13–14); (4) self-evidently true (V.5.2.16, VI.9.5.12–13); (5) unnecessary to search for (V.8.4.36–7); (6) not acquired by reasoning (*logismoi*) (V.8.4.35); (7) changeless (III.7.3, IV.4.1); (8) nondiscursive, nonpropositional (V.3.17.21–4, V.5.1.38–40, V.8.5.20–2); (9) a kind of unknowing (V.8.11.33–4); (10) radiant and transparent (V.8.4.5–9, 10.5–8; VI.7.12.22–30).³

Since even pure visionary thinking cannot grasp the One, far more limited is the derivative faculty of discursive rationality (*dianoia*), which utilizes reified conceptual objects for analysis and reasons successively, that is, inferentially (V.3.2–3, 7–9). Now Plotinus does mention demonstrations that the One is the ultimate goal of philosophizing – but these “proofs” are clear to individuals who already accept its existence (I.3.1.2–6). It is perhaps more accurate to say that for the true philosopher, who has direct access to the intelligible world (VI.5.7.1–9), the existence and truth of both Intellect and

the One are self-evident, indemonstrable starting-points for further reflection on the nature of the One and its effects. Discursive reasoning must retreat before intuitive thought and visionary experience, which for Plotinus justify the claim that " 'whoever has seen, knows what I am saying,' that the soul then has another life and draws near . . . and has a part in him, and so is in a state to know that the giver of true life is present and we need nothing more" (VI.9.9.46–50). To achieve this transcendent level of existence requires both philosophical reasoning and affective training:⁴

[starting from the soul's experience of the Good] we must speak of it . . . proceeding by rational discourse. The knowledge or touching of the Good is the greatest thing, and Plato says it is the "greatest study" [*Rep.* 505a2], not calling the looking at it a "study," but learning about it beforehand. We are taught about it by comparisons [*analogiai*] and negations [*aphaireseis*] and knowledge of the things which come from it and certain methods of ascent by degrees, but we are put on the way to it by purifications and virtues. (VI.7.36.2–9)

Both cognitive and emotional training seem to be necessary conditions for achieving the highest stage of human development – mystical union with the One – though Plotinus is not always clear about whether they are sufficient. It must be recognized, however, that for Plotinus rational inquiry or 'learning' lacks to a considerable degree the critical, tentative, and revisionary attitude considered essential to the practice of philosophy today. Simply put, for him philosophy ultimately attains the truth. Yet Plotinus's deep skepticism about the capacity of language and thought to reach the One's ineffable reality may, unexpectedly, be the most vital and appealing feature of his thought.⁵

Learning about the One has positive and negative aspects. The affirmative way, as we have seen, includes: (1) the recognition of properties that may pertain to the One by way of reasoning, for example, from effect to cause, as well as the use of analogy, metaphor, and symbol; and (2) the emotional discipline that produces psychic excellence – the engine to climb the hierarchy of being. However, doubts persist whether affirmations can tell us very much at all about the One in itself: "For to say that it is the cause is not to predicate something incidental of it but of us" (VI.9.3.49–50). Not surprisingly, then, the negative way to the One is often thought to be superior.⁶

Language cannot specify what the One is, only what it is not (V.3.14.6–7). Even the designations One and Good are deficient signs of the One's reality (II.9.1.1–8, V.5.6.26–30, VI.7.38.4–9, VI.9.5.29–34). Paradoxically, these reflections on the limits of reference are emblems of Plotinian optimism, just as intense emotional purification (*katharsis*) is the tonic of the spirit. Working together, these disciplines actually produce philosophical and spiritual progress by deconstructing language, thought, and the empirical self. The goal of this universal way, then, is not emptiness but the unveiling of the noetic self and the One beyond it.

Both reasoning to the first principle and meditations on symbolic theophanies of the One (e.g., the rising of the sun of the Good in V.5.7–8) point beyond themselves, beyond understanding, to unmediated visionary experience of the first principle:

The perplexity (*aporia*) arises especially because our awareness (*sunesis*) of that One is not by way of reasoned knowledge (*epistêmê*) or of intellectual perception (*noêsis*), as with other intelligible things, but by way of a presence (*parousia*) superior to knowledge. (VI.9.4.1–3)

Therefore, Plato says [*Letter VII*. 341c5], 'it cannot be spoken or written', but we speak and write impelling towards it and wakening from reasonings to the vision of it, as if showing the way to someone who wants to have a view of something. For teaching goes as far as the road and travelling, but the vision is the task of someone who has already resolved to see. (VI.9.4.11–16)

Communication between those who have had "the good fortune to see" (VI.9.11.1–4) apparently counts as meaningful discourse about the One, a sort of mystical dialectic; "but we are not prevented from having it [sc. the One], even if we do not speak it. But just as those who have a god within them and are in the grip of divine possession may know this much, that they have something greater within them, even if they do not know what" (V.3.14.8–11).

Clearly, philosophizing about the One in a Plotinian way eventually requires lofty existential qualifications: thus, the One "is always present to anyone who is able to touch it, but is not present to one who is unable" (VI.9.7.4–5). We should think of Plotinus as a "mystical empiricist," that is, a thinker who is committed to the view that ultimate reality can be grasped in itself, in mystical experience that transcends the duality of subject and object and all familiar cognitive and affective states. This transformative type of philoso-

phy works toward an experiential goal. Thus, philosophizing about the One has the concrete aim of nullifying itself, an attitude that is neither nihilist nor antiphilosophical, but which points toward a "soteriology."

I propose charting a course for the One that will traverse three distinct but interrelated perspectives: (1) The One in itself: its transcendent or formal properties. (2) The One and others: (A) The One as efficient cause and immanent presence; (B) The One as final cause and transcendent goal. (3) The One as everything and nothing – a dialectical perspective on the One as source and goal that transcends distinction and nondistinction and provides a comprehensive view of the One in itself.

Perspectives (1) and (2) are closely linked in that the nature of the One in itself grounds the Plotinian metaphysics of causation according to which what is perfect produces, as in the comparison of the One's perfect nature to a fire and its productive power to the heat radiating from it (see Section III, The One as efficient cause). The first perspective on the One we will consider concerns the "substance" or inner "actuality" of the One without any reference to its effects, while the second perspective explores the "external" causal activity of the One.

II THE ONE IN ITSELF

(1) Since we cannot say what the One is but only what it is not, negative predications appear least susceptible to ignoring its complete dissimilarity to its effects and hence to violating the One's absolute transcendence. Strictly speaking, the term "One" does not reify the One as a distinct object or entity (II.9.1.1–8, VI.7.38.4–9, VI.9.5.29–34), but removes all plurality and compositeness, thus laying the cornerstone of a distinctive philosophical theology:

There must be something simple before all things, and this must be other than all the things which come after it, existing by itself, not mixed with the things which derive from it, and all the same able to be present in a different way to these other things, being really one, and not a different being and then one; it is false even to say of it that it is one, and there is "no concept or knowledge" of it; it is indeed also said to be "beyond being." For if it is not to be simple, outside all coincidence and composition, it could not be a first principle; and it is the most self-sufficient, because it is simple and the first of all. . . . A reality of this kind must be one alone. (V.4.1.5–16)

Even if "One" and "Good" do not convey the reality of the first principle, the negative properties unity, uniqueness, and simplicity must be accepted as true if there is to be any understanding of the One at all. Simplicity grounds ontological priority and uniqueness (cf. VI.8.10.10–14). The distinctness of the One from everything else supports the further claim that the One has no relations to other things, whereas the relations of others to the One are real (cf. VI.8.8.12–15, VI.9.6.40). Unity specifies, negatively, that the One is nothing other than itself. Besides indicating what the One is not, the properties of priority, unity, and uniqueness also identify the One affirmatively as a hyperontic entity distinct from sensible and intelligible beings. (This is not to say, however, that the One is one member of the genus being.) Unity also signifies the One's indistinctness from other things, implied in the words "to be present in a different way to these other things." Evidently, two distinct senses of unity are relevant: (i) exclusive or pure unity; (ii) inclusive unity, the unity of indistinction. Consideration of ways in which these two senses of unity might be combined is taken up in Part IV.

(2) The simplicity, self-sufficiency, and uniqueness of the first principle anticipate the medieval concept of necessary being, but the necessity/contingency distinction is not the centerpiece of Plotinus's metaphysics of the One. The One necessarily is what it is (VI.8.10.15–20), but this necessity is identified with the One's absolute freedom, thereby insuring that the One is not constrained to be what it is by anything external to it or independent of it.⁷

The simplicity of the One is based on the claim that it is non-composite, that is, without parts or internal relations, and in fact without external relations either. Thus, the One is beyond being and form because form involves complexity, determinateness, and definability. Noncompositeness is the basis for the radical assertion that the One is formless (*amorphon*) and infinite (*apeiron*), without limitation or determination (*amorphon*: VI.7.17.17, 40, 33.4; VI.9.3.39; *apeiron*: V.5.10.18–22). Let us focus on these properties in succession: simplicity, infinity, and being without relations.

(3) The One must be simple because it is perfect, and being perfect it must be independent from all things, with all things dependent on it. Plotinus is thus committed to divine aseity. But how can the doctrine of simplicity and aseity be consistent with the attribution of many properties to the One? Granted that the properties of good-

ness and formlessness, say, are predicated of the One without introducing complexity into its nature, should we conclude that as a property simplicity is identical with goodness, or with infinity, or, generally, that the One's attributes are all the same or are mutually entailing? Perhaps simplicity operates as a generic property whose species are goodness, etc. If Plotinus means that each property is identical with every other one, he shows no concern for the logical objections to identifying distinct properties that are not coextensive. He rejects the objection that the One as property is an abstract object because its reality transcends all possible descriptions, but this point does not justify the conclusion that the One is a concrete particular. Working out the relations among the One's properties deserves further study.

(4) Most references to the One's infinity concern its infinite power (*dunamis*) to generate the intelligible world (V.4.1.23–6, V.5.10.18–22, VI.9.6.10–12, II.4.15.17–20, VI.9.6.7–8; cf. V.5.11.1–2), the topic of Part III.A. “Unlimitedness” is clearly a negative attribute that does not define the One's nature at all, but indicates only that the One's infinite nature (*apleton phusis*: V.5.6.14–15) is not subject to internal or external limitations. Formlessness (V.5.6.5) attests that the first principle is not limited in the way that being or essence is limited (V.5.5.6, 11.2–3); and formlessness entails self-sufficiency (VI.7.32.9–10), as does simplicity (I.8.2.4–5, II.9.1.9; V.4.1.12–13).

(5) The notion of perfection is closely associated by Platonists with being and by Aristotle with actuality, but Plotinus attributes perfection to the One beyond being, perhaps on the grounds that its perfection derives from its own reality (*ousia*) (V.1.6.38, V.6.2.13). It is perfect because it is completely itself, fully actual, and a perfect actuality (*energeia*: cf. VI.8.20.9–16) “containing everything and lacking nothing” (cf. *Physics* III.6.207a9: “that which has nothing outside itself” is perfect [*teleios*]). Perfection, as we shall see, is a property essential to the One's productivity.

Now Intellect too is perfect (III.6.6.10–17, V.1.4.14–15; perfect life: V.3.16.29; cf. V.1.10.12); actual (II.5.3.31, VI.2.20); self-sufficient (V.3.13.18–21; the One as beyond self-sufficiency: V.3.17.14); and it is even infinite in power and extent (V.7.1, VI.5.12, VI.6.18). Of course, in the case of Intellect these “perfections” coexist with the deficiencies of thought, duality, and plurality. Nevertheless, the

use of the same properties with regard to both One and Intellect raises questions (to be taken up below) whether these properties are predicable by degree and what it means for the One to contain everything.

(6) That the One is without external relations is a corollary of divine aseity and simplicity. Here Plotinus agrees with classical theists that the relations of created things to the first principle are real, whereas its (apparent) relations to other things are not, and hence are Cambridge properties. Being without relations follows from the One's independence and ontological priority (VI.8.8.12–15, 11.32). However, Plotinus makes the remarkable claim that the One is internally related to itself: "He himself is by himself what he is, related and directed to himself, that he may not in this way either be related to the outside or to something else, but altogether self-related" (VI.8.14.25–7). It is preferable, I think, to interpret this statement as driving home the point that the One is what it is rather than a literal reading that its internally differentiated parts are interrelated. Equally troublesome, if taken literally, is the claim that the One is cause of itself (VI.8.13.55, 14.41, 16.14–15), which is better construed to mean that the One has no cause, that is, that it is a necessary being whose being is completely self-derived.⁸ Plotinus himself seems to deliteralize the notion of self-causation in the assertion that "he [the Good] is not to be classed as made, but as maker; we must posit that his making is absolute" (VI.8.20.4–6).

III THE ONE AND OTHERS

The starting point for reflection about the One is the things that come from it (III.8.10.34–5, 11.33–9; V.3.14.1–8). Statements about the One that employ properties of composite things are inadequate but not false, since the analogical or equivocal use of terms is justified (VI.8.8.1–7; cf. VI.9.3.49–51). The One, therefore, is and is not the first principle of all things (*archê*: VI.8.8.8–9). The One is a cause in two respects: as the causal origin of reality and as the universal object of desire, that is, as efficient cause and as final cause: "the source therefore of being and the why of being, giving both at once" (VI.8.14.31–2). Efficient causality occurs in the procession (*proodos*)

of lower realities, the second explains their reversion (*epistrophê*) back to the One.

The One as efficient cause

(1) Efficient causality – from the side of the effect – is passage from (i) nonexistence to existence and (ii) potentiality to actuality. To the One's efficient causality can be applied the counterfactual conditional: without the cause the effect would not have occurred (III.8.10.1–2, IV.8.6.1–3, V.5.9.1–4). Most importantly, the simple and noncomposite One is conceived as the cause of the existence of all complex and composite things (III.8.11.40; V.2.1.7–8, 13–14; V.3.15.28–30, 17.12; V.5.5.5–7; VI.6.13.50; VI.7.32.2; VI.8.19.12–20). It is the cause both of things' coming into existence and of their being sustained in existence by continuous participation in the One (V.3.15.12, 17.8–9; VI.7.23.20–4, 42.11).

That the One is cause of being means that it imparts oneness to things as well (V.3.15.11–15; V.5.3.23–4; VI.9.1.3–4; 2.15–29; VI.6.13.52); so when things cease to be one they cease to exist.⁹ Here Plotinus uses the Aristotelian point (*Met.* 1054a13ff.) that unity and being have different intensions but the same extension. Plotinus promotes, therefore, an even purer version of degrees of being and degrees of unity metaphysics: the greater the unity, the closer the proximity to the One and the greater the value of the entity (III.8.10.20–6, VI.2.11.9–18, VI.9.1.14).

In bringing things into existence and sustaining them the One's efficient causality differs from Aristotelian efficient causality among sensible substances, with its more limited focus on (i) initiating motion or (ii) explaining how an object or event gives rise to another that is numerically distinct from it, but which is like it in kind. The One, in sharp contrast, is the ultimate ground of being of all things.

(2) Plotinus analyzes the generation of Intellect as the primary case of the One's causality: the doctrine of emanation and return, or, more precisely, "procession" (*proodos*) and "reversion" (*epistrophê*). These logically distinct, successive, but nontemporal events of procession and reversion will be discussed separately under the rubrics of efficient and final causality, respectively. Three notions are in play in the following accounts of procession: (i) the prior actuality

principle; (ii) the principle of undiminished giving; and (iii) the principle of immanence.

All things when they come to perfection produce; the One is always perfect and therefore produces everlastingly; and its product is less than itself. (V.1.6.37–9)

Now when anything else comes to perfection we see that it produces, and does not endure to remain by itself, but makes something else. This is true not only of things which have choice, but of things which grow and produce without choosing to do so, and even lifeless things, which impart themselves to others as far as they can: as fire warms, snow cools, and drugs act on something else in a way corresponding to their nature. . . . How then could the most perfect, the first Good, remain in itself as if it grudged to give of itself or was impotent, when it is the productive power (*dunamis*) of all things. (V.4.1.27–36)

In each and every thing there is an activity (*energeia*) of the substance and there is an activity from the substance; and that which is of the substance is each thing itself, while the activity from the substance derives from the first one, and must in everything be a consequence of it, different from the thing itself: as in fire there is a heat which is the content of its substance, and another which comes into being from that primary heat when fire exercises the activity which is native to its substance in abiding unchanged as fire. So it is also in the higher world; and much more so there, while it [the One] abides in its own proper way of life, the activity generated from the perfection in it and its coexistent activity (*energeia*) acquires existence (*hupostasis*), since it comes from a great power, the greatest indeed of all, and arrives at being and substance, for that is beyond being. That is the productive power (*dunamis*) of all, and its product is already all things. (V.4.2.28–39)

(i) Plotinus employs Aristotle's prior actuality principle, which holds: (a) everything complete or perfect tends to reproduce itself; (b) the cause is in actuality what the effect is potentially but will be actually (*Phys.* 201a27–34, *Met.* 1049b23–6, *GA* 734a30–2; cf. VI.7.17.6–8); (c) the identity (in natural things) of efficient and formal cause; (d) the effect resembles the cause and is *in* its cause (*Met.* 1032a22–5; cf. IV.3.10.32–42, V.5.9.1–10) or participates, Platonically, in its cause. Each point is modified by Plotinus in some respect when applied to the One's productivity, in conjunction with the non-Aristotelian principle (e) that the cause is greater than the effect.

In his use of (a) and (b) Plotinus describes the One's "essence" or "substance" as activity (*energeia*) and what proceeds from this activity as both "activity from the substance" and as power or active potentiality (*dunamis*).¹⁰ In itself the One's existence (*hupostasis*) is one with its activity (VI.8.7.47), with its will (VI.8.13.56–7), and with its "essence" (VI.8.12.14–17).¹¹ Insofar as it is efficient cause the One's operational attributes are activity and power. Do *energeia* and *dunamis*, which figure in Aristotelian causal connections between sensible substances, substantialize the One? Plotinus answers this objection by insisting that "the first activity (*energeia*) is without substance (*ousia*)" and that this fact is "his, so to speak, existence (*hupostasis*). But if one posited an existence without activity, the principle would be defective and the most perfect of all imperfect" (VI.8.20.9–13; cf. V.6.6.8–11). To rule out any duality VI.8.7.46–54 identifies activity, existence, and being, often invoking the qualifier "as if" (*hoion*); (cf. also VI.8.16.15–18, 25). Typically, Plotinus asserts that the One is beyond actuality (I.7.1.17–20, V.3.12.16–28, VI.7.17.9–11), especially when he wants to distinguish it from Aristotle's first principle, the divine Intellect.

The Aristotelian background can be summed up in this way. In his analysis of efficient causality, especially in *Physics* III. 1–3 (cf. *Met.* IX.7), Aristotle locates causal agency in the form/actuality of sensible substance: that is what transmits properties to or causes the existence of the product. Plotinus employs the physical model of property-transmission to explain the first stage of the One's generation of Intellect: the procession of potential Intellect.¹² Aristotle's first principle, the Prime Mover, can not be the universal efficient cause because its actuality cannot be directed outside itself.¹³ But its final causality determines the structure of the second stage, the change from potential to actual Intellect: on the cognitive model the mind actually thinks when actualized by the object of thought and desire (cf. Section III, The One as Final Cause).

(ii) The principle of undiminished giving is exemplified by the external activity of the One, its overflowing productive power (*dunamis*), which is metaphorically likened to water flowing from a source or spring, and to the life-force springing from the root of a plant, and to light radiating from the sun (cf. Plato, *Rep.* 509b9–10). Because it contains nothing "The One . . . overflows, as it were, and its superabundance makes something other than itself" (V.2.1.7–9).

What is above life is cause of life, for the activity of life, which is all things, is not first, but itself flows out, so to speak, as if from a spring. For think of a spring that has no other origin, but gives the whole of itself to rivers, and is not used up by the rivers but remains itself at rest, . . . or of the life of a huge plant, which goes through the whole of it while its origin remains and is not dispersed over the whole, since it is, as it were, firmly settled in the root. (III.8.10.2–12)

The activity, which, so to speak, flows from it like a light from the sun, is Intellect and the whole intelligible nature, but that he himself, staying still at the summit of the intelligible, rules over it; he does not thrust the outshining away from himself . . . but he irradiates for ever, abiding unchanged over the intelligible. For what comes from him has not been cut off from him, nor is it the same as him. (V.3.12.39–45)

According to the principle of undiminished giving the One (a) produces eternally, (b) from an inexhaustible reality (VI.9.9.3–4), (c) without undergoing any change or alteration (III.8.8.46–8), and (d) without deliberation or inclination to produce (V.1.6.25–7, V.3.12.28–33; cf. V.5.12.43–9) and without knowledge of its products (VI.7.39.19–33). The natural phenomena of water flowing and radiating light that symbolize the generation of plurality from the One are well suited to illustrate each of these points. Natural entities or processes can more easily than voluntary agents be assumed to act in a continuous manner, without intentionality, and to exercise their causal agency from abundant stores of energy. Light has the appealing feature of being not just a quality of a certain medium, but an activity springing from a certain substance (cf. IV.5.9). The productive power on display in this imagery and examined discursively elsewhere (V.3.12.39, 16.1–3; VI.8.1.10–11) illustrates the One's omnipotence.¹⁴ It follows that the first principle's causal power has generated everything that is metaphysically possible: "it is not possible for anything else to come into being; all things have come into being and there is nothing left" (V.5.12.46–7).

These natural metaphors of procession create problems for Plotinus. Although they signify the nondeliberativeness he ascribes to the first principle, they also imply that the One's giving cannot not have occurred and cannot cease.¹⁵ Plotinus's solution to this problem is simple if not completely convincing: what proceeds from the One does so necessarily (II.9.3.8, III.2.3.1–5, IV.8.6.1–3, V.1.6.31) – instanced, again, in the necessary connection between

fire and heat – but the One itself is not compelled to generate reality. It simply causes the existence of everything by the principle that what is perfect produces. In VI.8 Plotinus adds the important and un-Aristotelian point that this perfection is the Good's freedom to be itself beyond necessity, to which all its products are subject (VI.8.9.10–15). He adds that the One generates as it wills and wills what ought to be, what comes from it (VI.8.18.41, 49; 21.16–19), maintaining also that such willing introduces no deliberation or duality into the One.

(iii) The immanence of the One, that is to say its omnipresence (cf. VI.8.16.1, V.5.8.24), is necessary in order that it be the universal cause of all things. For the One to “fill all things” requires that it be “everywhere,” as well as “nowhere” (cf. III.9.4). Being everywhere and nowhere are mutually entailing for Plotinus since the One must be “alone by itself” and simple “if it is to be seen in other things”: compositeness requires prior simplicity (V.6.3.10–15). In the fire/heat model the immanence of the One is represented in the external activity that surrounds and is attached to its source, an image of its archetype (V.1.6.32–4). Plotinus notes the dynamic continuity between the One and its product Intellect at V.1.6.50–4: there is nothing between them, they are separated only by otherness; “neither cut off nor identical” (V.3.12.44). Continuity is perhaps best expressed by the notion of life:

All these things are the One and not the One: they are he because they come from him; they are not he, because it is in abiding by himself that he gives them. It is then like a long life stretched out at length; each part is different from that which comes next in order, but the whole is continuous with itself, but with one part differentiated from another, and the earlier does not perish in the later. (V.2.2.24–9)

An alternative model for representing ontological continuity and dependence is the geometric image of radii (intelligible beings) drawn from the center (the One) of a circle (cf. I.7.1.23, VI.8.18.7–30).

Each of the three principles of prior actuality, undiminished giving, and immanence has specific applications to the initial stage of the generation of Intellect. The first establishes that what began as the external activity of the One produces an indefinite, potential entity (VI.7.21.5), something that is potentially what its cause is actually, but in the end will be inferior to it.¹⁶ The second stipulates

that (i) the procession of Intellect is eternal (II.9.3) and without temporal limits: the stages of the generation are logically but not temporally distinct; and (ii) that the One's infinite power produces an indefinite potentiality, that is, an entity that can "become all things." The third ensures the presence of the One throughout the procession and actualization of Intellect: what is distinct from the One eternally desires and participates in it (III.8.11.24–5).

Plotinus refers to this potential, inchoate, or pre-Intellect in various terms, which we can classify in two groups: (i) the indefinite dyad (V.1.5.6, V.4.2.7–8), motion (*kinêsis*: V.6.5.8, VI.7.16.16–18), otherness (II.4.5.28–30); (ii) potentiality (*dunamis*: III.8.11.2), desire (*ephêsis*: V.3.11.2, V.6.5.10), indefinite life (*zôê*: VI.7.16.14–15, 17.13), indefinite seeing (V.3.11.12, V.4.2.6, V.6.5.10, VI.7.17.14–15), and intelligible matter (II.4.5.24–37). The sources of these terms are, roughly: (i) the Platonic "greatest kinds," namely, Otherness and Motion as well as the late Academic indefinite dyad and (ii) "Aristotelian" matter and potentiality (in the cognitive model of actualization, desire and vision are potentialities). The actualization of this first, potential stage in the life of Intellect occurs by means of the One's final causality, to which we now turn.

The One as final cause

The One's final causality operates in two distinct domains: (1) the actualization or perfection of Intellect; (2) the mystical return of the soul to its source.

(1) The actualization of Intellect is the primary instance of the One's final causality. The One gives being and the why of being (VI.8.14.32). The genesis of Intellect is for the sake of the One, its first principle. And the end (*telos*) for potential Intellect is its actuality (*energeia*), its perfection (cf. *Met.* 1050a7–10). The actualization of Intellect is modeled, first, on the simile of perception and knowledge and the comparison of the Good to the sun in *Republic* 507–9 and, second, on Aristotle's account of perception and thought. In the latter the faculty of sight is a passive potentiality that gets actualized as seeing through contact with the sensible form, as wax is imprinted by a signet ring (*DA* 424a18–28). Likewise, in the case of thought the noetic faculty is "potentially identical in character with its object without being the object" (*DA* 429a16–7); and it is

"before it thinks, not actually any real thing" (*DA* 429a24). So thinking is caused by the object of thought; and it may be because for Aristotle the mind is moved by the object of thought and desires it (*Met.* 1072a30, *DA* 433a9–b18) that Plotinus describes potential Intellect as indefinite motion and desire for its end the Good, though Aristotle himself distinguishes motion from activities like perception and thought (*Met.* 1048b28–30). Plotinus often weaves together Platonic and Aristotelian elements: the Good "moved what had come into being to itself, and it was moved and saw. And this is what thinking is, a movement toward the Good in its desire of that Good; for the desire generates thought and establishes it in being along with itself" (*V.6.5.7–10*). For Plotinus the Aristotelian object of cognition and the Platonic Good in *Republic* 508e–9d offer complementary, if subordinated, accounts of final causality: the Aristotelian theory provides a precisely structured model that can be grafted onto the Platonic hierarchy of being with its transcendent Good.

Light also plays a significant role in the One's actualization of Intellect, as a rough equivalent of the cause's external actuality. The One is a "generative radiance" (*VI.7.36.20*), the source of light that serves as the medium of noetic thought (*V.5.7.16–21*, *VI.7.21.13–17*). Here too Plotinus combines the Platonic account of the Good as illuminating power (*Rep.* 508d4–6) with the Aristotelian theories of perception and thought. Light serves as the medium for transmitting the sensible object to the sense organ. The cause of thought is the productive intellect, which is compared to light (*DA* III.5).¹⁷

Where Plotinus departs from the Aristotelian cognitive model is on the crucial point of the latter's provision for the reception of form: the grasping of the sensible or intelligible object in itself is what defines the actualities of perception and thought. For Plotinus, however, Intellect cannot grasp the One in itself because it is beyond being and form. The potential Intellect is in fact actualized or perfected by contemplating or "looking at" the One (*V.1.7.16*, *V.3.11.10–16*, *V.4.2.4–8*, *VI.7.16.16–22*), but what it sees is not, so to speak, the One itself but the image of the One its inchoate vision has multiplied (*V.3.11.7–9*; *VI.7.15.12–24*, *16.10–13*). The products of this fragmented vision are: (i) the actuality of pure thought (*noēsis*) and (ii) the multiplicity of forms or beings (*V.3.11.14–15*, *V.4.2.43–8*).

In the account of the generation of Intellect certain complications,

which have a bearing on the One's final causality, result from (i) the One's radical transcendence and (ii) combining the Platonic and Aristotelian analyses of the first principle's causality. To recapitulate: the One is the efficient cause of the potential Intellect (procreation), which the One perfects, as the goal of Intellect's desire for completion (reversion). On the other hand, "Intellect also has of itself a kind of intimate perception of its power, that it has power to produce substantial reality. Intellect, certainly, by its own means even defines its being for itself by the power which comes from the One, and because its substance is a kind of single part of what belongs to the One and comes from the One" (V.1.7.11–15). Similarly, "that Good is the principle, and it is from that that they are in this Intellect, and it is this which has made them from that Good. . . . Intellect therefore had the power from him to generate and to be filled full of its own offspring, since the Good gave what he did not himself have" (VI.7.15.14–16, 18–20). With good reason these passages have convinced some that Intellect, and not the One, is the primary cause of intelligible being or essence, whereas the One is the cause of Intellect's existence.¹⁸

The view that Intellect generates being or essence depends on three points. (i) The great difference between the One and Intellect: the One gives what it does not possess. (ii) The principle that the recipient alters what it receives requires that the external activity or active potentiality generated by the One is altered and diminished; it is then the internal activity of Intellect, whose desire for the Good generates intelligible beings. (iii) Though the Good continually operates as final cause, this causality comes second to Intellect's self-creative activity. One version of this interpretation is quasi-idealistic: "it is not the One which actualizes the sight (or capacity to think) of Pre-intellect, but *the One as seen (or thought)* by Pre-Intellect."¹⁹ But precisely because Intellect's view is distorted one wonders whether Plotinus gives an account from the One's "point of view." Such an "objective" interpretation would call for the priority of the One's causality in the actualization of Intellect and in the generation of its essential attributes being, goodness, beauty, and the like. It would employ the language of image and participation to convey the likeness between the two principles. III.8.11, for example, states that "it is the Good which brings fulfilment to the sight of Intellect" (7–8); and when Intellect

attains the Good it becomes conformed to the Good and is completed by the Good, since the form which comes upon it from the Good conforms it to the Good. A trace of the Good is seen in it, and it is in the likeness of this that one should conceive its true archetype, forming an idea of it in oneself from the trace of it which plays upon Intellect. The Good, therefore, has given the trace of itself on Intellect to Intellect to have by seeing. (I.6–23)

This important passage combines Aristotle's cognitive model of actualization with the Platonic model of illumination (the analogy of the sun and the Good), in company with the Platonic-Pythagorean notion of the One limiting the indefinite dyad (cf. V.1.7.26–7; V.4.2.7–9), to highlight the One as primary cause of Intellect's actualization. Similarly, the goodness of the life that comes to the potential Intellect is responsible for the goodness of actualized Intellect (VI.7.18.2–7, 41–3; 21.4–6). On the question of the generation of being and substance Plotinus observes that the Good is "the generator of substance" (VI.7.32.2); "each of the beings which come after the One has in itself a kind of form of it"; "being is a trace of the One"; "that which came to exist, substance and being has an image of the One since it flows from its power" (V.5.5.10–13, 22–3; cf. also V.1.7.1–4). These texts raise some difficulties for the view that Intellect is the sole or even primary cause of being and substance. *Prima facie* they seem to make the One the formal or essential cause of Intellect. But this judgment would contradict claims made elsewhere that One and Intellect are radically dissimilar and that the One gives what it does not have.

If Plotinus is not flatly contradicting himself, and I don't think he is, it might be the case that he makes some statements about the genesis of Intellect from the vantage point of the One – his version of the "god's eye view" – and some from Intellect's point of view; or that some statements have different meanings when considered from each point of view. Both images – the imposition of limit and definition by the One on the indefiniteness or passive potentiality of the inchoate Intellect, or the form of the Good that "comes upon" the potential Intellect – seem to require less ingenious exegesis when viewed from the side of the One than from Intellect's. If indeed the use of these two perspectives helps to clarify things, note that V.1.7.11–15 quoted above, the passage that refers to the fact that Intellect "defines its being for itself by the power which comes from the One," also says that "its substance is a kind of single part of

what belongs to the One." Perhaps superimposing the two views only blurs our vision!

The primacy of the Good in the actualization of Intellect is also prominent where the Good is described as the maker of beauty: "the productive power of all is the flower of beauty, a beauty which makes beauty. For it generates beauty and makes it more beautiful by the excess of beauty which comes from it, so that it is the principle of beauty and the term of beauty" (VI.7.32.31–4). Since procession is an eternal process the One continually brings things into existence and thus also continues to actualize Intellect: "Now as well it is keeping those things in being and making the thinking things think and the living things live, inspiring thought, inspiring life" (VI.7.23.22–4). Both as passive potentiality (i.e., potential Intellect) and as actual thought, Intellect *eternally* depends on the One as external transcendent cause for activation and realization of its possibilities. The derivation of goodness, beauty, life, and so on from the One to Intellect, via efficient and final causality, does not make the One a formal cause of Intellect, in the sense of univocally predicating properties that are possessed to the same degree by both paradigm and instances. The reality of the One is certainly not predicated univocally of its effects.²⁰ Yet, as we have seen, difficulties stand in the way of imputing formal causality completely to Intellect, since everything it has and is derives from the One. Even if Intellect is the proximate cause (from within Intellect's perspective) of the generation of being and essence, the internal activity of Intellect, that is, its power to generate, is derived from the One's external activity; and it is only in its reversion to the One that it becomes actualized as Intellect, substance, and thought (cf. V.3.11.12–16). On a comprehensive and balanced view it is perhaps best to say that both these perspectives on the actualization of Intellect are essential and that neither is primary in every respect.

The One as mystical final cause

Plotinian mysticism is a large and complex subject that can only be considered here briefly insofar as it concerns the metaphysics of the One.²¹ The fundamental principle grounding the actualization of Intellect as well as Plotinus's ethical and psychological teleology is that everything desires the Good. However, the Good's final causal-

ity is not limited to Intellect's actualization nor to an individual soul living virtuously or taking up the intelligible life. The higher aspect of the Good's final causality is to draw lower realities upward toward itself, to the supreme realization of union with the Good: "The soul's innate love (*erôs emphutos*) makes clear that the Good is there. . . . For since the soul is other than God but comes from him it is necessarily in love with him" (VI.9.9.24–7).

The soul's desire for full participation in the intelligible realm is an essential stage in its mystical ascent to the Good. When it attains the intelligible world the individual soul discovers that its true self is an eternal part of the intelligible (IV.7.20.14–20, IV.8.1.1–7). On one view the individual soul transcends itself, becoming "completely other," a fully actualized member of the intelligible world (IV.4.2.23–32, IV.7.10.28–37, V.1.5.1–4, V.3.4.10–14, VI.5.12.16–25, VI.7.35.4).²² A short passage conveys the message: "whoever has become at once contemplator of himself and all the rest and object of his contemplation, and, since he has become substance and intellect and 'the complete living being,' no longer looks at it from outside – when he has become this he is near, and that Good is next above him" (VI.7.36.10–14).

The noetic life lived by the soul is both intellectual (I.3.4.10–17) and visionary (V.8.4.5–9, 12.3–7; VI.7.12.22–30). What Plotinus seems to have in mind is a mystical awareness of a distinctly philosophical character, which combines both cognitive and affective elements.²³ Yet this noetic mystical activity is not the ultimate reality: "there comes to be the intense kind of love for them not when they are what they are but when, being already what they are, they receive something else from there beyond" (VI.7.21.11–13). The intellectualized soul shifts its attention from an intellectual contemplation of forms to an awareness that intelligible beings reflect or even serve as a reflective medium for the light radiating from the Good: "then truly he is also moved to the Forms, and longs for the light which plays upon them and delights in it. . . . For each is what it is by itself; but it becomes desirable when the Good colours it" (VI.7.22.2–6). At this stage the soul realizes that in the beauty and goodness of the intelligible world it "has not yet quite grasped what it is seeking" (VI.7.22.22), that these sublime realities are not self-constituted but derive from a higher reality. The distinction between the "beings as they are" and the "beings as reflecting the One"

corresponds to the two distinct capacities of Intellect: "one power for thinking (*dunamis*), by which it looks at what transcends it by a direct awareness and reception. . . . And that first one is the contemplation of Intellect in its right mind, and the other is Intellect in love, when it goes out of its mind 'drunk with the nectar'" (VI.7.35.20–5). The ascended soul, filled with love for the Good, participates in Intellect's erotic, supraintellectual aspiration for the Good and "sees by a kind of confusing and annulling the intellect which abides within it" (VI.7.35.33–4).²⁴ Transcending Intellect, being, and thought is the final stage of the mystical ascent: the soul "is carried out of it [i.e., the intelligible world] by the surge of the wave of Intellect itself" (VI.7.36.17–18) to vision of the Good as pure light. Elsewhere the soul is "lifted by the giver of its love" (VI.7.22.18–19), a particularly activist characterization of the Good's final causality. Far from ignoring the possibility that these positive descriptions of the Good compromise its radical transcendence, Plotinus insists that it is precisely because the first principle is formless and shapeless that it is "most longed for and most lovable, and love for it would be immeasurable" (VI.7.32.24–6). The infinite, indeterminate nature of the Good requires a capacity or activity on the part of the soul that is infinite and undefined in order to be united with it. The Good "is its beginning and end (*archê kai telos*); its beginning because it comes from there, and its end, because its good is there. And when it comes to be there it becomes itself and what it was" (VI.9.9.20–2). Becoming simple and unified, the soul is "one with" the Good (3.10–3, 10.9–11), all thought or awareness of duality having been left behind (10.14–7; 11.4–16, 31–2). Union with the Good is "the end of the journey" (11.45).²⁵

IV THE ONE AS EVERYTHING AND NOTHING

If we are to understand comprehensively Plotinus's thinking about the One it is necessary to recognize not only his philosophical and experiential approaches to the first principle but also the dialectical perspective within which they operate. This perspective is not unfamiliar, since it involves, initially, simultaneous application of the positive and negative theologies in understanding the One both as cause and as end or goal. But more is involved than the methodical alternation between negation and affirmation. Since only a begin-

ning can be made here I propose examining two clusters of texts, the first on the One as efficient cause, the second, on the One as mystical final cause.

(A) As we saw in Section III (The One and the Others), the One is the productive power of all things while being none of them. The famous opening passage of V.2.1 articulates puzzling implications of this claim:

The One is all things and not a single one of them: it is the principle of all things, not all things, but all things have that other kind of transcendent existence; for in a way they do occur in the One; or rather they are not there yet, but they will be. How then do all things come from the One, which is simple and has in it no diverse variety, or any sort of doubleness? It is because there is nothing in it that all things come from it. (V.2.1.1–5)

The radical disjunction between the One and its products acquits Plotinus of the charge of pantheism and of propounding an emanationist scheme, at least in the literal sense that the One's being actually constitutes the many existent things. Our difficulties stem from the fact that Plotinus does not leave us with the unambiguous picture of a radically transcendent One that is absolutely incomparable. He also asserts in the strongest terms that the One contains everything (IV.5.7.16–17, V.5.9.33–5, VI.4.2.3–5, VI.5.1.25–6), the grounds for its omnipresence and indeed for efficient causality:

How is that One the principle of all things? Is it because as principle it keeps them in being, making each one of them exist? Yes, and because it brought them into existence. But how did it do so? By possessing them beforehand. But it has been said that in this way it will be a multiplicity. But it had them in such a way as not to be distinct: they are distinguished on the second level. (V.3.15.27–31; cf. also V.4.2.16, VI.7.32.14, VI.8.21.24–5)

For something like what is in Intellect, in many ways greater, is in that One; it is like a light dispersed far and wide from some one thing translucent in itself; what is dispersed is image, but that from which it comes is truth; though certainly the dispersed image, Intellect is not of alien form. . . . He is then in a greater degree something like the most causative and truest of causes, possessing all together the intellectual causes which are going to be from him and generative of what is not as it chanced but as he himself willed. (VI.8.18.32–41)

Earlier in the same chapter Plotinus compares the relation between the One and Intellect to that between archetype and image (26–7),

"evidence of something like Intellect in the One which is not Intellect" (21-2; cf. also VI.8.16.16). On a minimalist view these texts refer only to the existential dependence of Intellect, and all else, on the One. But it is necessary also to explain why Intellect's power, light, and perhaps its thinking come to it from the first principle. The two principles are also alike in that both are actualizations, though Intellect is not self-sufficiently so as is the One (VI.8.16.15-17). The statement that there is "something like Intellect in the One which is not Intellect" alludes to something more than efficient causality of existence.

How should we construe this difficult doctrine? One approach has been to argue that the statements about the One in VI.8 do not violate the strictures of negative theology with its insistence on the radical transcendence and ineffability of the One since Plotinus explicitly states that his language should not be interpreted literally, that the properties ascribed to the One, especially the noetic ones, are, strictly speaking, inapplicable to it. In VI.8 Plotinus refers to the One as existence (7.47), actuality (16.15-8, 20.9), being (7.49-50, 20.9-16), substance (7.52), life (7.51), self-will (13.38), cause of itself (14.41-2; 16.14-15, 21, 29; 20.2-6), free will (13.1-8, 16.38-9, 21.12-15) and as being everywhere (16.1-2; cf. III.8.9.25, III.9.4.1-7). These positive descriptions of the One, he says, are "for the sake of persuasion" and the phrase "as if" must be added as a qualifier in each case (VI.8.13.1-5, 47-50). Plotinus consistently maintains that these properties and activities do not admit plurality into the One but comprise an absolute unity (e.g., 20.23-7). Since it is because the One is perfect that it generates reality, these properties help to identify recognizable features of its perfect existence and thus serve the purpose of persuasion by explaining the One's efficient causality and by diminishing the paradoxicality of the notion that the One gives what it does not have.

Construed in this way these expressions are not simply opaque symbols of the One's transcendent reality. Not enough is explained by claiming that negative theology trumps the positive. A more promising recent proposal holds that the One's indistinct possession of intellectual content points to the virtual existence of beings in the One, not their eminent existence.²⁶ On this view the eminent existence of the forms of being in the One, along Thomistic lines for example, would violate its simplicity. Thus, the real meaning of the

claim that the One contains everything (or that the One is all things: VI.5.1.26; *contra*: V.5.12.47–50) is that everything is causally dependent on the One and has its being in reference to the One (cf. V.5.9.36–8). However, it appears doubtful that the virtuality/eminence distinction is flexible enough to explain how the One's being, substance, life, consciousness, and so forth, are predicable of its effects at all. To the extent that Plotinus ascribes, for example, perfect life or pure consciousness to the One he seems committed to some version of an eminence view, on which things exist perfectly in the One – though, of course, it would be wrong to refer to discrete “things.”²⁷ The omnipresence of the One and its similarity to things must be reckoned with: the One “is like the things which have come to be much more originally and more truly and more than as it is on their level in that it is better” (VI.8.14.33–4). This is not to say that the One's properties are univocally predicable of its products: the One's life is not life in the same sense or to the same degree as Intellect's. Nor, on the other hand, is it easy to make sense of these difficult texts if we construe the One's properties (or its perfect activities) as purely equivocal. Surely the One's actuality, that is, the One *as* actuality, surpasses intelligible actuality, but there must also be a sense in which they are similar in nature. This interpretive dilemma might be seen as a variation on the philosophical difficulties that afflict relations between Forms and particulars in Plato's *Parmenides*, though Plotinus's situation is complicated by the fact that unlike the Forms, the One is both ineffable and universal efficient cause.

It might be useful to speculate that in working on this problem Plotinus practices a form of Aristotelian focal analysis, introduced in *Metaphysics* IV.1–2. For Aristotle every instance of being has its being in reference to primary substance (*ousia*). Aristotle's focal meaning, of course, applies to primary substances that can be either sensible or supersensible, that possess discursive definitions, and perhaps even particularity, none of which conditions apply in the case of the One. Yet focal meaning, in combination with Platonic participation, provides some means for understanding the relations and the similarity of things to the One. Such a Plotinian “method” combines Platonic degrees of reality metaphysics, with its gradable univocity (different entities possess more or less of the same property), with a modified Aristotelian *pros hen* equivocity, where a property applies to the One in a primary sense and derivatively to other beings.²⁸ When

he focuses on the transcendent One itself, however, Plotinus prefers pure equivocity: its nature is completely *sui generis*, incomparable.

(B) Bringing this dialectical perspective to bear on the relationship between the One in itself and the effects of its efficient causality suggests not only that the One's indistinct possession of things means causal dependence but it also means that everything is somehow unified in the One. As unification is an aspect of reversion *qua* One as final cause, the inclusive interpretation of the One and others must also consider its function as mystical goal, particularly with respect to these remarkable passages in VI.8:

And he, that same self, is lovable and love and love of himself, in that he is beautiful only from himself and in himself. For surely his keeping company with himself could not be in any other way than if what keeps company and what it keeps company with were the one and the same. But if what keeps company is one with what it keeps company with and what is, in a way, desiring is one with the object of desire, and the object of desire is on the side of existence and a kind of substrate, again it has become apparent to us that the desire and the substance are the same. (VI.8.15.1–8)

But he is, if we may say so, borne to his own interior, as it were in love with himself, the "pure radiance" [*Phaedrus* 250c4], being himself this which he loves: but this means that he gives himself existence, supposing him to be an abiding active actuality and the most loved of things in a way like Intellect. . . . If then he did not come into being, but his activity was always and a something like being awake, when the waker was not someone else, a wakefulness and a thought transcending thought which exists always, then he is as he woke himself to be. (VI.8.16.12–16, 30–3)

Detailed analysis of these texts is not possible here²⁹ but note that in the first the One, or Good, is described not only as object of love but also as the lover and as love itself – all united into one reality. The inner life of the One provides the paradigmatic structure for the erotic trajectory of the soul's mystical life, which is dramatically presented elsewhere in distinct stages. The ascended soul is filled with eros for unification with the Good (VI.7.31.17–18, VI.9.9.33–4, 44–7) and even becomes eros (VI.7.22.7–10, 31.8–9), while both the One, as object of love, and the soul's love are infinite (VI.7.32.24–8). That other modality of desire in the One, free will (*boulêsis*), also has its correlate in the ascended soul: the One's free will can be seen as just another description of the soul's liberation in union (cf. VI.8.7.1 and 20.17–19).³⁰ The mystical union of the One and the soul

occurs because the latter becomes like the former (VI.7.24.11–14, 44) and both these previously distinct entities are then characterized with the same properties. The persuasive purpose of VI.8.15–16 is not, therefore, primarily to portray the Good in an exceptionally dramatic but strictly inaccurate fashion; rather it is intended, I think, to open a glimpse into the One's inner life, which the soul can aspire to and participate in fully.

It is paradoxical, to say the least, to depict an absolute unity as lover and beloved since love arises only between distinct beings longing to overcome separation. Similarly, in the second passage, the reference to the One's self-vision immediately calls to mind the unity in diversity of the second principle, Intellect. However, when Plotinus attributes some sort of awareness to the One he emphasizes that it (cf. V.4.2.17–19) transcends the intellectual thought, which presupposes a distinction between subject and object: "a wakefulness and a thought transcending thought (*hupernoësis*)" (VI.8.16.32); the One has "a simple concentration of attention (*epibolē*) on itself" (VI.7.39.1–2); and it is in a nondualistic way pure intellectual actuality (VI.7.37.15–16, VI.9.5.50–5). Note also that consciousness is ascribed to the One in conjunction with its containing everything:

the One is not, as it were, unconscious; rather all things belong to it and are in it and with it; it is completely self-discerning; life is in it and all things are in it, and its intellection (*katanoësis*) of itself is itself and exists by a kind of self-consciousness (*sunaisthēsis*) in eternal rest and in an intellection different from the intellection of Intellect. (V.4.2.15–19; trans. Armstrong, adapted)

The nature of the One's awareness is a complex topic.³¹ Here I suggest that instead of – perhaps in addition to – defining the One's awareness as the unity of subject and object we should think of it as absolute or infinite consciousness without an object, a nonrelational awareness that lacks intentionality and compositeness. Rather than the One *possessing* quasi-thinking, awakening, actuality, love, and so forth as properties, these might be understood as referring to its existence or goodness in different senses. One advantage of this interpretation is that an objectless, radiant, and luminous consciousness describes rather well the reality participated in by the ascended soul, which, enveloped in light (V.5.7–8), in mystical union is incapable of

distinguishing itself from the One. The absolute consciousness adumbrated here can be seen either as (i) the unattainable goal of the ascended soul's unified awareness or, as I prefer to take it, (ii) as identical with the unified soul's awareness. On either view the soul's mystical cognition transcends being and thought (VI.9.11.11, 40–5) and all duality and difference (VI.7.34.11–14, VI.9.3.10–13, VI.9.10.14–17); it is “another kind of seeing” (VI.9.11.22–3).

If we follow Plotinus in meditating on the metaphysics of eros and consciousness (or of being) in this dialectical perspective the dispersed life of the soul appears to flow into the inner life of the One. The puzzling statement that the One is “borne to his own interior, as it were in love with himself” (VI.8.16.12–13, Armstrong adapted) thus amounts to an attempt to envision the motion of the relative universe *toward* the absolute as motion *within* the absolute itself. This is, then, a visualization of the doctrine that the One contains everything. From this viewpoint within the One dissimilarity and transcendence are set aside in favor of presence, immediacy, and luminous consciousness.

Straightforward discursive analysis may resist the implications of the dialectical perspective, but it offers another glimpse into the minds of those who have attained the One, their true selves (cf. VI.9.9.20–2). It seems to me, therefore, that Plotinus does not temporarily suspend the negative theology in order to converse with those incapable of thinking about the One without attributes or without images, that is to say by descending to speak the language of positive theology to weaker minds. Rather he practices this mystical dialectic, which includes both the so-called positive and negative theologies – but transcends them, going beyond distinguishing and not distinguishing the One from all things. Plotinus's own method of teaching about the One unfolds in three stages: (i) constantly alternating between the positive and negative ways; (ii) transcending the two ways' logic of distinction and indistinction through this comprehensive dialectic; (iii) transmitting direct experiential awareness of the One.³²

NOTES

1 See the admirable discussion of this theme in Schroeder 1985.

2 See Armstrong's classic 1973 and 1974 articles on these subjects.

- 3 For Plotinian Intellect as nondiscursive thought see Lloyd 1970, 1986, and 1990, 164–8.
- 4 On this theme see Hadot 1986, 234–44, 1994, chs. 5–7; and Bussanich 1990.
- 5 Further speculation along these lines in Armstrong 1975.
- 6 This view is strongly expressed by Armstrong 1977b, Sells 1985 and 1994, and Trouillard 1955a.
- 7 Plotinus here employs one of the Aristotelian senses of necessity: “the necessary in the primary and strict sense is the simple” (*Met.* V. 1015b11–12).
- 8 Cf. Leroux 1990, 341–3.
- 9 Gerson 1994, 9 with nn.20–1 argues that the One is not the cause of unity in anything else, whereas essential oneness derives from the intelligible world (V.5.4.20–5, 5.6; VI.2.9.7–8, 33–4; VI.6.11.19–24). It is not clear, in my view, that Plotinus makes such a precise, albeit attractive, distinction.
- 10 The perfume illustration seems to be taken from Aristotle *Met.* 993b25–6. Plotinus also makes the essence/effect distinction using the Platonic language of being and trace, e.g., at VI.8.18.2–7, on which see Bussanich 1988, 164.
- 11 See Gerson 1994, ch. 1 for an incisive analysis of the identity of essence and existence in Plotinus’s One.
- 12 Lloyd 1987, 167–70; 1990, 98–105.
- 13 Lloyd 1976, 147–8. Cf. Gerson 1994, 24.
- 14 Plotinus diverges from classical theism by endorsing omnipotence but denying omniscience: cf. VI.7.39.19–34, 40.38–43.
- 15 For an excellent analysis of freedom and necessity in Plotinus see Gerson 1993 and Rist 1967, ch. 6.
- 16 Lloyd 1987, 177 *identifies* the One’s external activity with potential Intellect.
- 17 On the Plotinian metaphysics of light see Schroeder 1992, 24–39.
- 18 Lloyd 1987, 165–75. Gerson concludes that Intellect, as essential being, has no cause: 1993, 570.
- 19 Lloyd 1987, 175.
- 20 Cf. Gerson 1994, ch. 4 section 1.
- 21 For discussions of mystical themes in Plotinus see Rist 1967, ch. 16, 1989; Beierwaltes 1985, chs. 1, 5; Hadot 1994, ch. 4; O’Daly 1973, ch. 4; and my 1994.
- 22 A spirited debate continues on the question whether the ascended soul “becomes” or merely “participates” in the life of Intellect. See Schibli 1989, Hadot 1987a and my 1988, 128–9.
- 23 See the classic study by Wallis 1976 and also Beierwaltes 1986 and Lloyd 1990, 133, 166, 180–4.

- 24 Rist 1989, 190–7 offers profound remarks on the spiritual aspects of the Plotinian Intellect.
- 25 Armstrong 1977a 59: "Our self does not lose its identity even in this ultimate union, and all its lower powers and activities remain in being, ready for use when required." Similarly, Rist 1967, ch. 16 and Gerson 1994, ch. 10 argue strongly against a permanent identity of the soul and One in mystical union; *contra*, Bussanich 1988, 180–93; 1994, 5325–8.
- 26 Atkinson 1983, 172; Gerson 1994, 32–3.
- 27 See Leroux 1990, 96, 108.
- 28 I am indebted to Gerson 1991, 333–4 for a valuable discussion of *proshen* equivocity and gradable univocity in Aristotle.
- 29 For detailed analysis see Leroux 1990, 354–65; Rist 1964, 78–83, 97–103; and my 1988, 208–20.
- 30 Hadot 1994, 50: "The Good is what all things desire; it is what is desirable in an absolute sense. . . . by willing itself and being what it wants to be, it freely creates the love that beings feel for it, as well as the grace they receive from it."
- 31 See Beierwaltes 1985, 42–50; Rist 1967, ch. 4; and Bussanich 1987. On the lexicography of consciousness terms see Schroeder 1987a.
- 32 On the dialectic of distinction and nondistinction applied to a transcendent absolute see McGinn 1990.