CREATION, GENERATION, METAMORPHOSIS

A STUDY OF THE CREATIVE ACTIVITY OF SOUL IN PLOTINUS' ENNEADS IV.3[27].9-14

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Thesis awarded the degree of Ph.D.
University of Liverpool
December 2001

ABSTRACT

This thesis offers a detailed discussion of Chapters 9-14 of the third treatise in the fourth Ennead, entitled "On Difficulties About the Soul I" (IV.3 [27]). It attempts a systematic reconstruction of Plotinus' philosophical views on the creative activity of soul contained in these chapters together with a detailed exegetical interpretation of the text, and it is motivated by a strong interest in the literary aspect of Plotinus' writing. In the three main chapters I shall be examining the initial interaction between soul and body (Chapter 2), the ontological function of the soul (Chapter 3), and the individuation of soul (Chapter 4). One of the two principal aims of the thesis is to assert the importance of the ontological function of soul and to examine Plotinus' conception of this function, which includes three interrelated aspects. Soul operates primarily as the 'natural' administrator of the sensible world, has the power to assert its fundamentally contemplative nature by turning its attention away from the world towards itself, and engages in artistic creation, with the explicit aim of producing beauty. The second aim, is to elaborate the notion of a distinct and internal perspective of the soul which amounts to: first, the elucidation of the function of a variety of literary devices that Plotinus employs in this context, precisely in order to better accommodate the soul-subjects that it concerns; second, the analysis of the process of individuation of soul as a self-constitution of the soul as a particular and distinct point of view within the horizon of the Plotinian metaphysical world; and third, the examination of the way in which a particular soul may orient itself within the complexity and multiplicity of the created universe.

CONTENTS

AKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my Supervisor, Professor S.R.L. Clark, for his inexhaustible patience and encouragement throughout my studies and for his friendship, which has been a source of inspiration and philosophical challenge. I would also like to thank Professors S. Stern-Gillet and J. Dillon for their assistance with my research and their valuable comments on certain parts of the thesis, and Dr. R.G. Woolf for his suggestions on the translation of the ancient text. I would like to express my gratitude to Dr. S. Ramphos for introducing me to Plotinus and inspiring in me the enthusiasm and love for ancient Philosophy. I am indebted to the Greek Foundation for State Scholarships (IKY) and the British Academy for their financial support during the Academic Years 1998-2001 and 1997-8 respectively. Special thanks go to Mrs. G. and Mr J. Aasgaard, Mrs. F. Ali, Mrs. A. Appleton, Mrs. R. Holden, Dr. M. Moreno, Dr. A. Nananidou, Prof. H. Robinson, Dr. L. Stergioulas, Mr. M. Stewart and mostly Ms. L. Jones, for making Liverpool feel like a warm and ambient home. I am particularly grateful to Mr. E. Markolefas who, since the beginning of the thesis has been present in my life in the way soul is present in the Plotinian cosmos. Finally, I would like to thank my family in Athens for their support and understanding and my parents, Φωτεινὴ and Χρῆστο, to whom this thesis is dearly dedicated.

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Considered from a formal point of view, this thesis presents a double aspect. On the one hand, it can be regarded as a detailed discussion of a small Plotinian text (roughly ten pages of Greek in the OCT edition), namely Chapters 9-14 of the third treatise in the fourth Ennead, entitled "On Difficulties About the Soul I" (IV.3 [27]). The place of this treatise within the Plotinian corpus, the context of the selected text within the treatise, as well as the principle behind its identification as a distinct unit, will be discussed below in the first section of this Introduction. At this point, and in relation to the size of the text, it should merely be noted that the aim was not the production of a commentary. Although this piece of text structures the discussion and serves as its focus, and despite some cases of quite detailed textual exegesis, there is no attempt at the exhaustive or comprehensive treatment that would have been appropriate with such an aim in view. Instead, and we come here to the second aspect of this thesis, the discussion that follows, in the familiar philosophical manner, is thematically motivated and proceeds along clearly marked

thematic lines, which will be presented in the second section of this Introduction.

This mixed manner of treatment, assuming simultaneously the burden of the systematic reconstruction of a philosophical position and the exegetical interpretation of a particular piece of text, has of course to occasionally negotiate the necessary compromises between the different requirements of each task. In this respect, an obvious question may be raised. If the interest is fundamentally thematic, motivated by a concern for certain philosophical issues, and not exegetical or historical, why is the material not presented in the standard form of a reconstruction of Plotinus' philosophical arguments which would have taken directly and systematically into account relevant passages from the totality of the Plotinian corpus? With regard to this question, two points should be made in advance. First, despite the fact that this thesis can be considered as an interpretation of a particular piece of text, the discussion does attempt to reconstruct the systematic context necessary for its purposes and is continuously informed by consideration of relevant passages from Plotinus' work. Second, and more importantly, this mixed mode of presentation is also motivated (at a different level) by an interest (to be specified also in the second section of this Introduction) in what may be called the figurative aspect of Plotinus' text or thought. Plotinus, of course, composed treatises and not complex literary artifacts; indeed, according to Porphyry's testimony, his standard manner of composition

can be hardly considered as aspiring to literary distinction.[1] Hence, one may argue that the literary sensitivity necessary even for the philosophical reader of, say, Plato is not required in this case. However, it is also both evident and well-known that Plotinus' work abounds in figurative elements at various levels (similes, metaphors, myths); the question of the function of these literary or rhetorical elements within a philosophical context is, in its own manner, as interesting as the corresponding question in the Platonic context. Given my interest in this question, and the corresponding resolve to be sensitive and alert to the literary aspect of Plotinus' writings while attempting to present and critically discuss the arguments contained in them, this study inevitably had to engage occasionally with Plotinus' philosophical prose at a level of detail that is possible only when a rather small unit of text is kept constantly in focus.

Contexts

It is indeed the case that it is hardly possible to discuss any aspect of Plotinus' thought (or any of his treatises) without facing at some point problems associated with the soul.[2] This state of affairs can be considered as the result of two general features of Plotinus' thought. On the one hand, given his views on the physical world as an embodied soul, there is

[1] "When Plotinus had written anything he could never bear to go over it twice; even to read it through once was too much for him, as his eyesight did not serve him well for reading. ... He worked out his train of thought from beginning to end in his own mind, and then, when he wrote it down, since he had set it all in order in his mind, he wrote as continuously as if he was copying from a book." (Vita, 8).

[2] "[T]here are in fact very few treatises in which P. does not deal with some aspect of the soul." (Helleman-Elgersma, Soul-Sisters, 32).

hardly any topic in Plotinus' 'physics' (and this is especially the case in fundamental issues, such as the nature of space and time) that can be discussed in complete independence from the question of soul. On the other hand, given the 'dynamic' character of Plotinus' thought (the continuous ascents and descents through the various Hypostases) and the central and mediative role of the soul between the sensible 'here' and the intelligible 'there', the discussion of even the most 'metaphysical' areas of Plotinus' thought should get its preliminary bearings through a consideration of the relevant aspects of his psychology.

The reader interested in what may be called Plotinus' psychology would naturally refer first to the fourth Ennead, since this is the volume in which Porphyry, Plotinus' student, biographer, and editor, included the treatises mostly or explicitly devoted to the discussion of the soul. This collection contains essays dealing with a wide range of questions related to the nature of soul, its function within the overall economy of the Plotinian system, and its relationship to body or matter. Within this corpus, the three continuous treatises "On Difficulties about the Soul" (IV. 3-5; 27-29 in Porphyry's chronological order) stand easily apart and above; their significance for Plotinus' psychology can be provisionally appreciated if we take into account the following two considerations.

First, according to Porphyry's testimony, these treatises were composed during the time of Porphyry's stay with Plotinus in Rome (between, that is, 263 and 268 AD, and closer to the earlier date, if we

assume a relatively constant rate of production of treatises). In fact, in view of their content, these treatises could be naturally connected with the incident recorded by Porphyry in which he and Plotinus (on Porphyry's insistence) had once a three-day conversation "about the soul's connection with the body" (Vita, 13). Whatever our views about this connection,[3] and whatever our views about the extent and the importance of Plotinus' development as a thinker after he started, late in life, writing his books,[4] it is unquestionable that these treatises are the product of a mature thinker. Moreover, we should note that all but one of the other short treatises contained in the fourth Ennead were written earlier than IV.3-5 (and most of them quite early), while the only later treatise ("On Sense-Perception and Memory", No.41 in chronological order) can be read as a short appendix to IV.3-5.

Second, in the absence of evidence that Plotinus wished to divide IV.3-5 in this or any other way,[5] but mostly with reference to the text itself, these treatises could be, and have been read, as a continuous piece of work, a unified whole.[6] In this case, we are dealing with a treatise that

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[3] For this issue, see Blumenthal, Plotinus' Psychology, 16.

[4] The greatest part of Plotinian scholars share the view that strictly speaking there is no development in Plotinus' thought. Some however, although still reluctant to attribute a radical change in Plotinus' doctrines, support the view that certain aspects of Plotinus' philosophical system assumed their definitive shape during the writing of the first dozen or so of the treatises. For a brief discussion of the issue and further references, see O'Daily, Plotinus' Philosophy of the Self, 20.

[5] In this particular case, this claim can be supported by a marginal scholium in a number of manuscripts, according to which Eustochius, the physician friend and other editor of Plotinus' works, divided the second from the third treatise "On the Soul" at the end of IV.4.29. See the critical apparatus of the OCT edition ad loc.

[6] First of all by Longinus, to the extent that the treatise "On the Soul" mentioned in his letter to Porphyry quoted in the Vita (19) can be identified with IV.3-5.

covers roughly two thirds of the fourth Ennead and obviously bypasses any other treatise in this group as to the depth and extent of its elaboration of the relevant issues. Taken together, all these factors indicate that, despite views to the effect that "there is no single treatise which one could go to in order to discover anything like a definitive statement of Plotinus' views on a central question",[7] IV.3-5 can be indeed considered as the text containing the most extensive and authoritative Plotinian discussion of the central issue of the soul, or even as "the culmination of Plotinus' treatment of the soul".[8]

As their collective title indicates, these treatises have a strong aporetic and topical character. Indeed, the impression their reader may form at a first reading is of a list of issues (some of which were then, and still are today, undoubtedly quite important) discussed one after another in the absence of any systematic, or otherwise particular, order. This impression is certainly justified to some extent: as a whole, the text is not presented in some recognisable systematic manner, say, in a strict or loose deductive or inductive fashion, and the transition between certain chapters relies merely on local chains of association. However, the work neither lacks unity, nor moves along in an unmotivated and haphazard paratactic manner. This unity is not guaranteed only by the theme of the work in the abstract (namely, soul), but primarily by the specific point of view from which the issue is addressed. Throughout the work, the

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[7] Gerson, Plotinus, xvi.
[8] Helleman- Elgersma, Soul-Sisters, 38.

question concerns directly the soul in relation to matter (or, more correctly, the condition of embodied soul or ensouled matter, the interaction of soul and matter through which the sensible world and living bodies are generated): the entire discussion is an attempt to deal with this specific problem in all its various levels and aspects. Moreover, the unity of the work does not rest solely on the fact that every issue discussed falls within the horizon of this central problem. The entire philosophical analysis follows, in its broad outline, a framework in which the philosophical issues are presented in the narrative form of an account of the adventures of the soul in its coming into contact with the body.

In the present context, there is no need for a detailed summary of the contents of the three treatises (the interested reader may consult Armstrong's summary at the beginning of IV.3 in the Loeb edition). However, if we take our provisional bearings from the indications of its narrative form, the entire work can be divided into four large sections (IV.3.1-8; IV.3.9-23; IV.3.24-IV.4.17; IV.4.18-IV.5.8), which may be briefly outlined here.

The first section (IV.3.1-8) stands apart from the narrative framework and is devoted to a single, but complex, issue: the categorical clarification of the ways in which particular souls are related to the cosmic soul and all individual souls (including the cosmic soul) are related to the Hypostasis-soul. In a polemical context shaped by contrasting interpretation of certain Platonic passages, Plotinus examines various

possibilities and articulates the notion of a Hypostasis-soul to which all individual souls, ontologically at the same level and in sympathy with each other (hence the image of soul-sisters), relate as species to genus.[9] As we shall see at length in our discussion, each member of this whole displays the internal hypostatic extension that characterises the entire Hypostasis-soul (that is, each individual soul 'extends' in a certain way between Intellect and matter), while its order of rank within the whole is determined by the extent and the nature of its creative capacities.

After this conceptual clarification, Plotinus proceeds to the exploration of the nature of soul's relationship with body. The first part of this discussion (IV.3.9-23) is framed between an account of the first encounter of the soul with body (9-10; this episode amounts to the creation of the sensible world by the cosmic soul) and a general elucidation of the way in which soul can be said to be present within body (19-23; Plotinus' equivalent to the 'mind-body' problem). Included in this part, there are a number of chapters (IV.3.11-18) mostly concerned with the individuation of souls and with problems related to the ensuing hypostatic multiplicity. The narrative focus of the second part (IV.3.24-IV.4.17) is the question concerning the circumstances of the soul when it leaves its body, or rather the nature and effects of the journeys of the soul in and out of body through death and birth. From a philosophical point of

[9] For a detailed discussion of the debate in which Plotinus is engaged (including the identification of possible opponents and of the Platonic passages implicated in the background) and a synoptic presentation of views held by modern scholars on the issue, see Helleman-Helgersma, Soul-Sisters, 104-121; 190-206.

view, this amounts to an extensive discussion of memory. Plotinus starts with an examination of memory with regard to ordinary souls (soul animating mortal bodies; IV.3.24-IV.4.5); continues with a discussion of memory with regard to extraordinary souls (souls animating immortal bodies, like the souls of the stars or the cosmic soul; IV.4.6-11); and concludes (IV.4.12-17) with a more general discussion elucidating the nature of the (mental) life of entities that have memory in comparison to entities which do not require its function. The prominence of memory in this context can be easily explained. Apart from the weighty presence of recollection within the Platonic tradition, memory is the internal faculty of the soul par excellence, since it implicates everything that is distinctive in the mental or cognitive life of the soul (distinctive also in the sense that, unlike, say, perception, it does not seem to be generated immediately through its interaction with body) and cannot be attributed to the mental activity characterising the Intellect (in sum, the transition from a non-discursive to a discursive mode of thought, from Intellect's eternity to soul's time). The rest of the embodied soul's experience (this time in its actual interaction with body) is treated in the last part of Plotinus' account (IV.4.18-IV.5.8). The first section of this part (IV.4.18-29) is a general discussion of passion, desire, and perception; it is followed by a parenthesis (IV.4.30-45) discussing the universal sympathy binding together all the parts of the universe (the notion of sympathy is central to

Plotinus' account of perception and affection). The entire work ends with a detailed discussion of visual perception (IV.5.1-8).

The reasons underlying the choice of IV.3.9-14 as the focal text of the present discussion from within the entire Plotinian corpus are obviously entirely dependent on the research interests motivating it, and thus should be presented in the context of the account of these interests in the next section of the Introduction. However, a few remarks may be in place here about the extent to which this piece of text can be characterised as a distinctive unit. As my summary above indicates, what can be naturally considered as a distinctive unit of text is actually IV.3.9-18. This text amounts to a relatively brief but comprehensive overview of soul's presence in the universe (the issue of the emergence of soul itself, presented most vividly in III.7.11, is never discussed in IV.3-5), containing both an account of the functions assigned to the soul within the overall economy of the Plotinian Hypostases (its creative and administrative tasks with regard to the sensible world) and an account of the 'spatio-temporal' multiplicity that characterises the Hypostasis-soul after its interaction with the body (the individuation of souls, their 'localisation' as souls of individual bodies of various kinds, their 'spatio-temporal' circulation in and out of bodies within the universe shaped by the cosmic soul). My discussion, being limited to IV.3.9-14, examines thoroughly the initial interaction between soul and body (Chapter 2), the ontological function of the soul (Chapter 3), the individuation of the soul (Chapter 4), but

addresses only from a specific point of view the issues generated by the multiplicity of embodied soul (Chapter 5). Ending the discussion at that point is not arbitrary: if we shift our narrative focus from the soul to the universe, IV.3.9-13 contains all the elements of Plotinus' account that can be presented in the form of a story of the genesis of the world; IV.3.14 is a transitional chapter that summarises the previous discussion and prepares the ground for what follows; and IV.3.15-18 discusses a number of basis aspects of the already created world. Since a complete account of Plotinus' overview at the level of detailed engagement sustained by the present discussion would require two more extensive chapters (an examination of the nature and effects of the sympathy enjoyed by all souls and a discussion of Plotinus' views concerning the destinies of particular souls and cosmic justice) and could not be undertaken within the limits of the present occasion, the obvious choice was to end with a discussion of IV.3.14 that can serve also as an epilogue to the entire thesis.

Themes

The summary of IV.3-5 offered in the previous section indicates clearly that what I have been so far calling, justifiably from a Plotinian point of view, Plotinus' psychology includes aspects that today would not be considered as legitimate psychological issues (and this is particularly the case in the part of the text that interests me here primarily). The obvious reason for this state of affairs is Plotinus' view that a discussion of

the relation between soul and body should take into account the entire hypostatic extension and complexity of soul considered as a distinct and irreducible principle of reality. As a result, Plotinus oscillates constantly between the discussion of issues pertaining to particular souls (but these, apart from human or animal souls, include, say, the souls of stars) and the discussion of issues relating to the function of the universal world soul (raising thus de facto cosmological or physical questions).

The present discussion follows Plotinus in this respect: although its main concern is the soul, hardly anything in its contents (with the exception of Chapter 4) would qualify as a psychological issue, whether of a cognitive or a moral philosophical psychology, within a modern context. However, its thematic interests are primarily neither cosmological nor physical: they are ontological, and at the most fundamental level they concern the establishment of the soul as a distinct Hypostasis within the Plotinian system. Plotinus works undoubtedly within a Platonic framework articulated around the distinction between the sensible and the intelligible. The general way he interprets this distinction, through the mediation of Aristotle and the Platonic tradition responsible for turning Plato's account of the chora in the Timaeus into a theory of matter, is by conceiving the sensible as a result of an interaction between the intelligible and the material mediated by the soul. In this context, although the ontological status of the soul is undoubtedly clarified with comparison to its rather peculiar position in Plato and the soul is actually

promoted to the rank of a distinct ontological principle, its function seems apparently to be reduced to that of a mere medium for the communication between the intelligible and the material. Thus, A.H. Armstrong, commenting on a passage where Plotinus stresses the close connection between the sensible and the intelligible realm (V.8.7.13-17), writes the following:

> The insistence on the immediate and intimate relationship of the intelligible and sensible universes and the comparative unimportance of the mediation of soul should be noted. Soul in Plotinus never has a world of its own intermediate between the intelligible and sensible worlds; it belongs to both worlds, and is normally thought as linking them; but here it seems to be hardly necessary even as a link.[10]

The present discussion can be considered as a reaction to a comment of this kind. As we shall see at length in what follows, it is indeed the case that the principal ontological function of the soul within Plotinus' system should be grasped in terms of an activity of mediation. Moreover, it is also true that the soul discharges this function as a 'vanishing' or 'self-effacing' mediator, engaging in a kind of activity that, when successful, leaves no traces of itself behind. Nevertheless, from these premises it follows neither that the activity of the soul is characterised by "comparative unimportance" nor that the soul "never has a world of its own". The detailed analysis supporting these two claims constitutes essentially the content of the present thesis; here, a few programmatic remarks may be useful.

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[10] Plotinus, Enneads (Loeb edition), vol.v, 258-9.

The basic problems of the claim that the ontological activity or function of the soul can be regarded as unimportant can be made immediately evident with the help of a comparison employed by Plotinus himself and discussed extensively in Chapter 3. Consider the case of an interpreter translating between two speakers of different languages. The principal task of this interpreter is the transmission of meaning, both generally (i.e., the interpreter ought to be able to recognise when a speaker engages in a behaviour that amounts to meaningful verbal expression) and specifically (i.e., the interpreter ought to be able to translate correctly, in the ordinary sense of this term, the words spoken). The success of the whole enterprise can be judged, say from the perspective of a fourth person who knows both languages, by the degree to which this flow of meaning remains unobstructed by the presence of the interpreter, who, ideally, should not make any contributions of his or her own in the exchange of the two speakers. Under these circumstances, the interpreter can be considered as a vanishing mediator, in the sense outlined above. However, the interpreter's activity, far from unimportant, should be rather deemed indispensable; moreover, the instant and apparently effortless transference of meaning through a good interpreter is the result of years of study and experience. My principal claim with regard to the status of the soul in Plotinus is exactly analogous. Plotinus' "insistence on the immediate and intimate relationship of the intelligible and sensible universes", an insistence that would be philosophically deeply problematic

in an orthodox Platonic context and probably reflects Plotinus' reaction to the crude other-worldly orientation of the spiritual character of his age (e.g., the various forms of Gnosticism), becomes philosophically plausible not only through his reinterpretation of the nature of the intelligible realm (i.e., the analysis of the Intellect as a living thing), but, primarily, through his reinterpretation of the status and function of the soul. In other words, it is only to the extent that Plotinus was able to articulate the conception of a soul whose translating abilities between the intelligible and the sensible far exceed, say, the corresponding capacities of the cosmic Demiurge in Plato's Timaeus, that a case concerning the immediate relationship between the two realms and the apparent superfluity of soul could even make sense.

The second point from Armstrong's passage, concerning the sense in which the soul may have or have not a world of its own, cannot be so easily addressed in a brief manner, because it implicates rather deeper issues. At the most fundamental level, one may observe that, whether we are talking about Plato, Plotinus, Kant, or any other philosopher, there are not many worlds to start with, but only one world, this one in which philosophers themselves live, rich enough to be experienced, viewed, or analysed in a variety of ways and from many perspectives: as unconditioned, conditioned, one, many, eternal, temporal, material, sensible, intelligible, animate, living, and so on. This is certainly a philosophical claim that cannot be defended here in its generality. In the

immediate Plotinian context, two points should be made. First, the notion of "having a world" is particularly inappropriate in this context, if the aim is to capture the distinctive independence of a Plotinian principle of reality. The Intellect does not have a world but enjoys a kind of life, the life of unobstructed contemplation; similarly, the soul has its own kind of life, the life in time, since time for Plotinus is not an external feature of the sensible world, but the mode of the internal life of soul. Second, the substantive continuity implied in the claim concerning the immediate relationship between the intelligible and the sensible realm makes no sense if, from another perspective, it cannot be understood as a qualified incorporation of the sensible world into the Plotinian system of higher principles. Yet, this incorporation, along lines drawn in Plato's Timaeus, is nothing other than the qualified incorporation of the cosmic soul, or else, the animation of the universe by it. In this sense, the (cosmic) soul has indeed a world, the sensible world which is its very body and which would immediately collapse into the darkness of a pure materiality if the soul were to be withdrawn from the picture.

Thus, one of the two principal aims of my thesis is to assert the importance of the ontological function of the soul and to examine in detail Plotinus' conception of this function, which includes three interrelated aspects. Soul operates primarily as the 'natural' administrator of the sensible world, has the power to assert its fundamentally contemplative nature by turning its attention away from the world towards itself, and

engages in artistic creation, with the explicit aim of producing beauty. The second aim is rather more complex, since it brings together two apparently independent sets of considerations that oscillate between the substantive and the methodological. Consider the problem presented within a Platonic-Plotinian context by an account of the sensible world, aiming to illuminate either its origin or its order. This account, as Plato himself noted when, in the Timaeus, he introduced the notion of an eikos logos or mythos, cannot assume the normal form (whatever this may be) of a philosophical exposition. In a Plotinian context, the special problem raised by such an account can be expressed in the following schematic way. Although there may be an intelligible idea of the world within the Intellect (or, more correctly, even if the Intellect itself is the intelligible universal animal that the sensible universe imitates), this idea does not contain the fact of its materialisation. In other words, what is at stake in such an account is primarily the mechanism through which the intelligible order generated by the proper activity of the Intellect is imposed on matter, something about which the Intellect itself is entirely ignorant. As a result, even if a philosopher were able to experience or transcribe (in whatever form this could be possible) the entire contents of the Intellect, the emergence of the sensible world would be an issue not addressed in such a dialectical reconstruction. Hence an account of the emergence of the sensible world cannot be written by a philosopher reconstructing the

point of view of the Intellect and would make no sense to an audience of human beings occupying the same perspective.

As we saw before, the ontological function of transmitting the intelligible order to matter is undertaken and dispensed by soul. It seems then that one may try to solve the epistemological problem formulated above along similar lines. The ensuing hypothesis would be that an account of the emergence of the sensible world would correspond to a philosophical reconstruction of a distinctive point of view of the soul (i.e., a perspective with its own epistemological norms, different to the ones associated with the reconstruction of the intelligible realm) addressed to an audience of human beings who are able (qua souls) to occupy this perspective. This perspective would be in a sense internal or self-explicatory: in giving an account of the emergence of the sensible world, a philosopher qua soul would try to reconstruct the deeds of the soul for an audience of souls. However, given the rest of what a philosopher knows and the limits of the creative activity of the soul (the soul, we recall, is a transmitter and not an original creator of intelligible order), the final result would be a mixed account, oscillating between an external point of view (i.e., the point of view from which Plotinus can make claims about the unfolding of the Hypostases, or assert that, in the end, the sensible world is composed exclusively of an intelligible and a material element) and an internal point of view (in which Plotinus must present what the cosmic soul saw, did, and suffered in a way that would be persuasive to its sister-

souls comprising his audience, the only entities who are actually interested in what their older sister did and how the sensible world emerged).

The second major aim of my thesis is precisely the elaboration of this idea of a distinct and internal perspective of the soul. This elaboration takes place in three contexts, one quite general and two more specific. The presentation of the general context requires the mention of the second set of considerations implicated here. As we have already noted, Plotinus' treatises are full of figurative or literary elements of all kinds, including simple and complex images and metaphors (some of which, like the image of the mirror or a point with lines radiating in all directions, occur again and again in different contexts), larger passages shaped with the help of literary devices (e.g., speeches of various personified abstract entities), and allusion, accounts, and interpretations of a variety of traditional myths. Despite the fact that Plotinus never composed an extensive myth of his own in the grand Platonic style, literary elements of this kind are ubiquitous in the corpus, and, obviously, generate some perplexity as to their function within a philosophical context.[11] In this perspective, our target text (IV.3.9-14) stands out by the unusual, even for Plotinian standards, concentration of figurative element: within ten pages of text, apart from a number of isolated metaphors and images (some of which play a rather crucial role), we encounter an

[11] The relevant material can be surveyed with the help of Ferwerda, La signification des images et des métaphores dans la pensée de Plotin.

extended set of images capturing the emergence of the sensible world, an essentially literary allusion to some mysterious "sages of old" and their activity, and a number of more or less elaborate references to Dionysus, Zeus, Prometheus, Epimetheus, Pandora, and Heracles.

Overall, Plotinian scholarship has treated the presence of this literary element in Plotinus' thought concentrating on two general fronts. On the one hand, a main concern was the safeguarding of the philosophical status of the text, and hence an interpretation of all these literary or rhetorical devices in terms of a fully dependent illustrative or paedagogical function. On the other hand, the presence of this figurative element has been connected in various ways with Plotinus' views concerning the non-discursive manner of thought that characterises the Intellect.[12] Both these approaches are in general justified within appropriate limits: overall, Plotinus' use of figurative language is clearly motivated by philosophical concerns, and, in specific contexts, this motivation is related to issues pertaining to the intuitive character of intellection. However, all philosophically significant uses of figurative elements in Plotinus' work cannot be attributed to the same philosophical problematic. In the present thesis, primarily in Chapter 2 but also throughout, the attempt is to show (sometimes at a quite detailed level)

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[12] A good representative of older discussions is Pépin, "Plotin et les Mythes"; for a more recent discussion, see Rappe, "Metaphor in Plotinus' Enneads V.8.9". The central image of light presents problems of its own that cannot be addressed here; see, Beierwaltes, "Plotins Metaphysik des Lichtes", and, more generally, Blumenberg, "Light as a Metaphor of Truth".

how the function of the relevant figurative elements can be understood on the basis of philosophical requirements pertaining to the tasks of the construction of an account of the emergence of the sensible world and the articulation of the internal perspective of the soul that, as we saw, is implicated in such an account.

The two other uses of the notion of an internal perspective of the soul within the present discussion are methodologically more straightforward. In Chapter 4, which is dedicated to the problem of the individuation of soul, the guiding claim is that this individuation should be understood as a process in which each soul constitutes itself through a reflective self-recognition that takes place within an internal, specular perspective: the establishment of a particular perspective of this kind is precisely the individuation of a particular soul. In Chapter 5, which forms the epilogue of our discussion, the aim is the identification of some basic characteristics of the perspective in which a particular soul (here in the sense of an ordinary individual human being) may orient itself within the totality of the universe created by the cosmic soul. In terms of the overall narrative form of Plotinus' text, the end of our discussion is thus the moment in which, after the cosmic soul has created the world and the particular souls have descended to their bodies (that is, after the cosmic genesis is complete), individual human beings turn around and look at the world in which they live. Obviously, as we noted earlier, many more things could be said about the condition of this already established world;

on the other hand, if first impressions are sometimes quite important, this point of ending has undoubtedly its merits.

CHAPTER 2

Creation, Generation, Metamorphosis: The Genesis of the World

The Setting

In Chapter Nine of the first treatise "On Difficulties about the Soul" (Ennead IV.3 [27]), Plotinus raises the issue of the relation between soul and body and immediately draws a distinction between two fields of enquiry. On the one hand, there is a set of problems concerning the way in which a particular soul relates to a particular body; on the other hand, there is the issue of the way in which soul relates to body in general. Plotinus introduces both problems with the help of the same familiar metaphor: in both cases, the question concerns the way in which the soul "enters" or "penetrates" (εἴσοδος, εἴσκρισις) the body and thus "takes upon itself a bodily nature" (9.12-3). In the context of this metaphor, the difference between the two problems acquires a temporal dimension: the general problem is presented as the "first communication" (πρώτη κοινωνία) between soul and body, soul's original "passage from bodilessness to any kind of body" (9.8-9); the particular one concerns the

subsequent movements of souls which, already embodied, pass from one body to another.

After framing the issue in this way, Plotinus naturally announces his intention to start with the more fundamental problem. At this level of generality, the issue undoubtedly concerns the relation of the soul considered as one of the Hypostases of the Plotinian system with matter as such. However, a number of qualifications should immediately be made, in view of the metaphor of an encounter between soul and body. On the one hand, Plotinus is not addressing the full question of the origin and status of matter: although the issue of the generation of lower matter will certainly be implicated in what follows (especially since in many relevant texts it is unclear whether Plotinus talks about the generation of matter or of body), other aspects of the issue (e.g. the origin of intelligible matter) are irrelevant here.[1] In other words, as will become apparent in what follows, Plotinus is not concerned here with the hypostatic status of soul or matter prior to their postulated moment of intercourse. The metaphorical formulation of the problem in these temporal terms is a way to indicate that what interests him is not the origin of the soul or matter and whatever can be said about their separate existence, but rather the origin, through their interaction, of the embodied soul or the ensouled body of which the sensible universe is made.

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[1] Plotinus faces the issue of matter primarily in I.8 and II.4. For discussions with further references, see D. O'Brien, "Plotinus on Matter and Evil" and K. Corrigan, Plotinus' Theory of Matter-Evil, ch. 6 (esp. pp. 258-60 for the generation of lower matter and its Plotinian ambiguities).

It appears thus that the initial question concerning the entry of soul to body, when understood with the proper qualifications, is in fact a cosmological question presented in a cosmogonic manner: how are we to understand or explain the existing order of the world through a discussion of its origin or manner of coming together? Anyone familiar with Plato will recognise the question animating the Timaeus.[2] The suggestion is corroborated by the way Plotinus proceeds to set up the problem:

> With regard to the Soul of the All -because it is perhaps <suitable> (εἰκὸς),[3] or rather it is necessary to start with it- we must of course consider that the terms 'entry' and 'ensoulment' are used in the discussion for the sake of clear explanation (τῷ λόγῳ ... διδασκαλίας καὶ τοῦ σαφοῦς χάριν). For there never was a time when this universe did not have a soul, or when the body existed in the absence of soul, or when matter was not set in order. But in discussing these things one can consider them apart from each other, because it is legitimate to analyse any kind of composition in thought and language (ἀλλ' ἐπινοῆσαι ταῦτα χωρίζοντας αὐτὰ ἀπ' ἀλλήλων τῷ λόγῳ οἷόν τε. Ἔξεστι γὰρ ἀναλύειν τῷ λόγῳ καὶ τῇ διανοίᾳ πᾶσαν σύνθεσιν). For the truth is as follows. If body did not exist, soul would not go forth, since there is no place other than body where it is natural for it to be (ὅπου πέφυκεν εἶναι). But if it intends to go forth, it will produce a place for itself (γεννήσει ἑαυτῇ τόπον), and so a body (9.12-23).

Plotinus' claim about the starting point of the discussion makes clear that his interest is directed at the genesis and order of the sensible world, and not the nature and activity of the various hypostases considered independently. Although the issue of the relation between soul in general,

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[2] Cf. Plotinus' program for a reading of the Timaeus in the context of an enquiry about the descent of the soul outlined in IV.8.2; the fundamental questions concern (1) πῶς ποτε κοινωνεῖν σώματα πέφυκε [ἡ ψυχή]; (2) περὶ κόσμου φύσεως ... ἐν ᾧ ψυχὴ ἐνδιαιτᾶται; (3) περὶ ποιητοῦ.

[3] Inserted by Theiler; accepted by Henry-Schwyzer and Armstrong.

cosmic soul, and individual souls is extremely vexed in Plotinus,[4] the cosmic soul is distinguished from all the other souls (at least with regard to its activity) precisely by the fact that it is the creator of the sensible world, the subject of the "first communication" between soul and body, through which the "dwellings" (οἰκήσεις) of all other individual souls are "prepared" (προπαρασκευασάσης). In this sense, it is indeed the appropriate starting point for an account of the creation of the world in the manner of the Timaeus, with the cosmic soul apparently taking over the role of the Platonic Demiurge.[5]

The rest of Plotinus' remarks establish more specific relations with the project of the Timaeus. At a first level, to the extent that they concern the (relative) temporal order of the appearances of soul and body in the cosmic stage, they appear as an acknowledgement of Plato's own warning before his description of the construction of the cosmic soul. In Timaeus' account, this construction takes place after the creation of the cosmic body, and Timaeus warns his audience that the order of the presentation of the activities of the Demiurge may be misleading, as the soul, which is "prior in birth and excellence" (γενέσει καὶ ἀρετῇ προτέραν καὶ πρεσβυτέραν), appears in the discourse after the body. Timaeus attributes this problem

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[4] For a discussion of this issue, see H. Blumenthal, "Soul, World-Soul, and Individual Soul in Plotinus"; for a terminological exposition which reveals its complexities, see W. Helleman-Elgersma, Soul-Sisters, 132-147.

[5] Against the notion of creation in time, see further II.2.1.20; III.7.6.49; V.8.12.20; VI.6.18.46; and also G.H. Clark, "Plotinus on the Eterniy of the World". Plotinus mentions the special creative role of the cosmic soul in a number of passages; see, in particular, IV.3.6 (the metaphors quoted come from ll.14-5) and V.1.2. We will return to the issue of the relation between the cosmic soul and the figure of Demiurge later in this chapter.

to the nature of his account, which as an eikos mythos or logos, shares in the accidental or casual (προστυχόντος) element which characterises human existence and falls short of the desired rigour (34C). However, the problem is more complicated than the issue of the correct genetic order in an account of the creation of the world.

The question, in Plotinus, initially concerns the adequacy of the set of metaphors which so far has structured the issue. Terms like εἴσοδος or ἐμψύχωσις, although used διδασκαλίας καὶ τοῦ σαφοῦς χάριν, should not be taken literally because they may obscure the issue (or bring to it a deceptive clarity) by those aspects of their metaphorical logic which do not correspond to the reality they are supposed to render comprehensible. A term like 'entry' brings into play a specific spatio-temporal staging of what is to be thought or explained: A, initially outside B, will be finally inside B. Plotinus concedes that the reflective analysis (ἐπινοῆσαι) of a composite structure is allowed or possible (οἷόν τε, ἔξεστι) "in thought and language", and that such an analysis will take the form of a genetic narrative which will establish spatio-temporal relations between the constituent parts of this structure. However, he also warns his readers of the problems associated with the establishment of such spatio-temporal frameworks of analysis.

How are we to understand this warning? First, by examining Plotinus' literal claims in the closing argument of the passage, where the truth is explicitly to be stated. In this argument, in agreement with the

starting point of the discussion (the cosmic soul) and the claim that the body never existed in the absence of soul, the original synthesis of body and soul is accounted for in terms of the generative capacities of the (pre-existing) soul: body is generated by soul as its place (γεννήσει ἑαυτῇ τόπον). A first correction of the metaphorical framework becomes apparent: the cosmic soul does not enter in a pre-existing body, but generates it. However, this generation can not be conceived in this context, in accordance with the Platonic notion of creation, as an act of 'ordering' of a given material, since, as Plotinus states explicitly, "there never was a time ... when matter was not set in order" (9.17-8).[6] Setting a fortiori aside the possibility of generation ex nihilo, we are forced to conclude that, for Plotinus, the entire spatio-temporal framework (whether of an encounter or an act of generation) is figurative: the creation of the world is not an event to be presented in this or that, correct or incorrect, order.[7]

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[6] Contrast here the Timaeus. Plato claims both that the soul "is prior in birth and excellence" (34C) with regard to the body of the world and that one of the ingredients in its construction is the "being which is transient and divisible in bodies" (περὶ τὰ σώματα μεριστὴ οὐσία) (35A). If we respect the narrative order (whether or not we want to interpret the Timaeus literally), this "being" cannot be the sensible world, but is the chaotic "becoming" (γένεσις), which exists before the creation of the world (52D). In Plotinus' terms, that would be "not ordered matter".

[7] Against the notion of creation in time, see further II.2.1.20; III.7.6.49; V.1.6.19; V.8.12.20; VI.6.18.46. That Plotinus understands creation in terms of ordering, but not of an act of ordering is made clear in IV.4.10.9-11: "for the things it [the universe] ought to have have already been discovered and ordered without being set in order; for the things set in order were the things that happened, and what made them was the order" (ἤδη γὰρ ἐξεύρηται καὶ τέτακται ἃ δεῖ, οὐ ταχθέντα· τὰ γὰρ ταχθέντα ἦν τὰ γινόμενα, τὸ δὲ ποιοῦν αὐτὰ ἡ τάξις).

The issue is obviously connected with the venerable and vexed question of the literal or figurative interpretation of the Timaeus.[8] My claim that Plotinus' own cosmogony is to be treated figuratively is in agreement with the fact that Plotinus followed the orthodox Platonic tradition, originating in Speusippus, Xenocrates, and Crantor, which understood Timaeus' account figuratively, "σαφηνείας ἕνεκα διδασκαλικῆς". Within this tradition, he is credited by Proclus with the view "that it is [the world's] compositeness that is [in the Timaeus] called 'created', and to this is subsidiary the fact of being generated from an external cause".[9] Plotinus' own clearest statement on the relation between generation, compositeness, and myth is contained in the following passage. (We should note that Plotinus' remarks do not refer explicitly to the creation myth of the Timaeus. However, they are occasioned by an issue, which, as it will become clear below, is very similar. Plotinus is discussing Diotima's account of the origins of Eros in the Symposium and is

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[8] For an orientation in this issue, see the exchange between G. Vlastos ("The Disorderly Motion in the Timaeus"), H. Cherniss (Aristotle's Criticism of Plato and the Academy, 421-431), G. Vlastos ("Creation in the Timaeus"), and L. Tarán ("The Creation Myth in Plato's Timaeus").

[9] "τὸ σύνθετόν φασιν ἐν τούτοις κεκλῆσθαι γενητόν, τούτῳ δὲ συνυπάρχειν καὶ τὸ ἀφ' ἑτέρας αἰτίας ἀπογεννᾶσθαι" (In Platonis Timaeum, 85A; the reference is to Timaeus, 28B). The phrase "σαφηνείας ἕνεκα διδασκαλικῆς" comes from 89A. For reports of the ancient opinions, see A. E. Taylor's A Commentary on Plato's Timaeus, 66-70 (ad 28B.4); J. M. Dillon, Iamblichi Chalcidensis In Platonis dialogos commentariorum fragmenta, 303-7; and H. Cherniss, ed., Plutarch's Moralia, XIII.1, 168-71 (ad De anima procreatione in Timaeo, 1013A-B). For a discussion of this material, see R. Sorabji, Time, Creation and the Continuum, 268-283. The two senses of γενητόν mentioned by Proclus are two of the four senses of the term identified by the Middle-Platonist Taurus; see Sorabji, ibid., 274-5 and Dillon, The Middle Platonists, 242-243, with a translation of the relevant texts.

particularly interested in the unifying function of Eros as an affect of the soul in its mediating position between Nous and matter.)[10]

> But myths, if they are really going to be myths, must separate in time (μερίζειν χρόνοις) the things of which they tell, and set apart from each other (διαιρεῖν ἀπ' ἀλλήλων) many realities which are together, but distinct in rank or powers (τάξει δὲ ἢ δυνάμεσι), at points where rational discussions (λόγοι), also, make generations of things ungenerated, and themselves, too, separate things which are together; the myths, when they have taught us as well as they can, allow the man who has understood them to put together again (συναιρεῖν) that which they have separated (III.5.9.24-29).

This important passage clarifies Plotinus' understanding of the issue in a number of different ways.[11] First, it suggests the specific nature of the problem that necessitates the use of figurative language in this context. In a broad sense, the problem concerns the vertical way in which the Plotinian universe hangs together, i.e., the family of problems associated usually with such notions as creation, generation, or emanation. In other words, the issue here is not to understand, say, the nature of the ὁμοῦ πάντα that characterises the contents of Nous or Soul considered as separate hypostases (see, e.g., V.9.6.3-9 or VI.4.14.4), or the perfect simplicity of the One, or even the way in which two sensible objects hang together spatio-temporally in some way resembling the modern notion of causality: in all these cases of 'horizontal' coordination of a manifold of

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[10] Plotinus will return to the unifying function of Eros in terms of the Platonic myth in VI.7.35.23-26, this time discussing the relation between Nous and the One.

[11] This passage is discussed briefly by J. Pépin in the first section of "Plotin et les Mythes", 5-7. Pépin notes the cognitive function of myth ("il est un instrument d'analyse et d'enseignement"), suggests the relation of this function to the general problematic of the image ("or le mythe est un image, et à ce titre, reflète la vérité par une sorte de pacte naturel"), and considers myth (on the strength of VI.9.11) as a stage in a journey the end of which is not conceptual clarification or contemplation but the apophatic experience of the One.

things at the same ontological plane, there is no composition in the sense outlined above.[12] The aim is rather to grasp the way in which even the humblest sensible thing contains (or is contained by) the entire rank of the distinct realities that constitute the universe of Plotinus' metaphysics. In our specific context, the problem is to grasp how a sensible thing or the world at large, through the mediation of the soul, is constituted as a σύνθετον of an intelligible and a material element. Hence, images, metaphors, and myths are not to be used in this case to illustrate the intelligible through the sensible (as, say, in V.8.9) or the sensible though the intelligible (as, say, in I.6.3.25-6), but in order to render comprehensible their interaction. Thus, although terms like myth, image, or symbol retain their usual literary sense centring around the fundamental notion of ἀναλογία as "the correspondence between the surface meaning of the text" and the "metaphysical truths of which it [is] the expression",[13] the content of these myths and images does not merely replicate at the literary or exegetical level the movement from the sensible to the intelligible and beyond, but aims at the presentation of this very movement (the general form of these images is not 'as sensible X, so intelligible Y', but 'as sensible X, so the interaction between the material and the intelligible'). In this sense, one may say that the issue concerns the analogical presentation of the principle of analogy itself. If we want a

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[12] This distinction between the vertical and horizontal dimensions of the Plotinian universe is concisely elaborated in Jonas, "The Soul in Gnosticism and Plotinus", 46-8.
[13] Dillon, "Image, Symbol, and Analogy", 255.

modern formulation of a similar problem, we may refer to Kant's well-known claim in the Critique of Pure Reason that introduces the theory of schematism and thematises directly the relation between the sensible and the intelligible: "there must be a third thing, which must stand in homogeneity with the category on the one hand and the appearance on the other, and makes possible the application of the former to the latter" (A138/B177). This third thing within the Plotinian system seems to be the soul; the 'myths' that interest us here concern precisely its activity as the third thing between the intelligible and the material.

Second, the above passage suggests that the problems we have associated with a mythical genetic presentation of the order of the world cannot disappear easily in a literal or discursive account, since they are rooted in the nature of thought or knowledge itself, at least when it turns to examine certain kinds of objects or processes.[14] Two negative conclusions follow immediately from this suggestion. First, it would be seriously misleading to consider Plotinus' use of figurative language in this context as a regression to myth in a traditional or religious sense. Second, we should be very cautious before we consider this figurative use of language as a transparent and expendable rhetorical or paedagogical

[14] Plotinus' claim reflects the indifference with which Plato uses the terms eikos logos and eikos mythos in the Timaeus. Cf. Vlastos, "The Disorderly Motion in the Timaeus", 382.

device without further philosophical significance.[15] This is not, of course, to claim that every image and metaphor Plotinus uses in this context defies translation in a more conceptual language, or is always motivated by something more than an ordinary effort to illustrate the issue at hand. The claim is that there is a central core in Plotinus' thought on the issue (expressed by such central terms as entrance, descent, generation) in which the figurative element cannot be eliminated so easily and raises rather complicated philosophical problems.

Similar points can be made about Plato's project in the Timaeus, a fact that reflects the unique status of its 'creation myth' among the other great Platonic myths, and the special controversies it has generated throughout the ages. The two projects undoubtedly have a number of substantial differences (e.g. with regard to the overall function of the soul, or the Plotinian assimilation of the Platonic chora to matter, an assimilation that despite its solid traditional support from Aristotle onwards remains always problematic). However, they share enough at a formal level to enable me to use Plato's description of eikos logos or mythos in 29B-D in order to present my negative conclusions in more positive terms. Two important things stand out in this passage and may help us to orient ourselves in the issue as it appears in Plotinus.[16] First,

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[15] In the manner, say, of Ferwerda, Signification des images, 7 or Blumenthal, "Plotinus in the Light of Scholarship", 542. See Schroeder, Form and Transformation, 33, n.29 for further references on this issue.

[16] Since we can not pursue the issue in Plato, we can only cite a number of recent studies illuminating the nature of eikos logos from a number of suggestive different

we should note the demand for a specification of the correct form of an account of the constitution of certain objects, in particular of the sensible world as a generated or composite object, in close connection both with an ontological specification of the nature of these objects and a general epistemological principle of analogy. Timaeus' account has to be "akin" (ξυγγενεῖς) to its object and, since the object "is itself a likeness", it must "be analogous thereto and possess likelihood" (ὄντος δὲ εἰκόνος εἰκότας ἀνὰ λόγον τε ἐκείνων ὄντας). In other words, the general notion of a similarity between an object and its account is first specified as a relation of analogy and then the salient feature of this analogy is chosen: the ontological "likeness" of the object (its status as a sensible thing pointing to an intelligible reality) is correlated with the likelihood or plausibility or persuasiveness of the corresponding account. Second, we should note Timaeus' conscious effort to take into account the (human) nature of the enquirers (ὁ λέγων ἐγὼ ὑμεῖς τε οἱ κριταὶ φύσιν ἀνθρωπίνην ἔχομεν), with its particular strengths, limits, and cognitive interests. Hence, if there is a certain rhetorical element present in Timaeus' account, whether in regard of means or ends (a certain reliance on the figurative, the pursuit of the best under the circumstances, the insistence on the persuasive and not the true), this element reflects inherent (objective or subjective) limitations of the issue, limitations which point to philosophical preoccupations and

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perspectives: Q. Racionero, "Logos, Myth and Probable Discourse in Plato's Timaeus"; C. Osborne, "Space, Time, Shape, and Direction: Creative Discourse in the Timaeus"; R. Brague, "The Body of the Speech".

cannot be easily reduced to paedagogical considerations (except, of course, if one is willing to go all the way and consider, say, the Platonic notion of participation as a rhetorical figure, or deem everything addressed to human beings qua human beings as rhetorical).

If this is the case in the Timaeus, the issue in Plotinus is even more complicated. Plotinus is, of course, fully aware of the alliterative problematic of "likeness" and "likelihood" in the Timaeus (e.g., εἰκότως οὖν λέγεται ο τος ὁ κὸσμος εἰκὼν ἀεὶ εἰκονιζόμενος; II.3.18.16-17), has a clear sense of the distinct ways in which an account can be considered valid or induce assent with reference to distinct mental 'faculties' (ἡ μὲν ἀνάγκη ἐν νῷ, ἡ δὲ πειθὼ ἐν ψυχῇ; V.3.6.11), and explicitly notes the nexus in which the two issues come together in the following passage: "but since we have come to be ... in soul, we seek for some kind of persuasion, as if we wanted to contemplate the archetype in the image" (ἐπεὶ δὲ γεγενήμεθα ... ἐν ψυχῇ, πειθώ τινα γενέσθαι ζητοῦμεν, οἷον ἐν εἰκόνι τὸ ἀρχέτυπον θεωρεῖν ἐθέλοντες; V.3.6.17-9).[17] Thus, it is really no surprise if the account of the deeds of the soul, as told by and to beings who also possess soul, raises the question of persuasiveness, both 'objectively' and 'subjectively'. In order to appreciate more fully the nature of the issue, we should take into account one more general aspect of the problem. Although the narrative primacy granted to the soul in the figurative account of the generation of

[17] Plotinus returns to this distinction and the demand for persuasiveness in VI.4.4.5-7, where the issue concerns whether the One is present everywhere in the same way.

the world can be understood as a device signalling its superior value or rank within the composite structure of the ordered world, this superiority cannot be translated straightforwardly into ontological relations of dependence between separate entities. In other words, the task of constructing or interpreting an adequate 'creation myth' is exhausted neither by deciding 'who comes first' or 'who is inside', nor by straightforwardly translating these relations in ontological terms of priority or dependence, between, let us say, intelligible and sensible entities. After the analysis of the narrative has established the proper distinctions and the order of dependence, we are left with the question of συναιρεῖν, of grasping the reciprocal ὁμοῦ of the elements in the composite structure considered vertically. The primary task is thus not merely to show that, e.g., intelligence is prior to necessity or soul to matter, but rather to describe their interaction and account for it. In the case of the Timaeus, this is evident by the fact that the overall organisation of Timaeus' account is governed by the central claim that "this Cosmos in its origin was generated as a compound (μεμιγμένη), from the combination (συστάσεως) of necessity and reason" (48A 1-2). In this perspective, and given my comments in the previous paragraph, it is not surprising that Plato conceives of this combination in terms of the 'persuasive' or 'plausible' metaphor of an "intelligent persuasion" (πειθοῦς ἔμφρονος) of necessity by

reason: persuasion, in the context of the soul, is at the same time an epistemological virtue and an ontological force.[18]

These remarks may help us to understand the peculiar requirements and objectives of a philosophical reconstruction of the origin of the world. It may be the case, for example, that "from the ultimate metaphysical point of view, ... all sensible properties are mere appearances: what there is at a metaphysical level is matter and its receptivities, Ideas, complex relations of participation that obtain between them, and the soul and its logos that bring them into actuality".[19] It may also be the case that "in this act of explaining the relationship between Form and particulars, the philosopher, as it were, occupies a space between them, ... in pursuit of an objective account which will not confuse these two realities".[20] Both these formulations are indeed justified, but in our context they are seriously incomplete in a number of related ways. The fundamental problem with the "metaphysical point of view" or the "space of the philosopher" described in these passages is that they refuse to occupy or reconstruct the original point of view of the soul, which (as we shall see in this and the following chapters) created the sensible world

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[18] Echoed by Plotinus in a cosmological context in III.2.2.33-36. In another but similar context, Plato notes that "by these, ..., when intelligence (νοῦς) is her helper [the soul] conducts (παιδαγωγεῖ) all things to the right and happy issue" (Laws, 897A). Παιδαγωγεῖν in this context is a metaphor that both illustrates for us the function of the soul and attributes to the soul itself a similar activity. In other words: the account is as persuasive to us as the soul's motions (κινήσεις) (including βούλεσθαι, σκοπεῖσθαι, ἐπιμελεῖσθαι, βουλεύεσθαι, δοξάζειν ὀρθῶς, ἐψευσμένως, χαίρουσαν, λυπουμένην, θα'ρροῦσαν, φοβουμένην, μισοῦσαν, στέργουσαν; a veritable rhetorical arsenal) are ontologically persuasive (through the mediation of secondary motions) to sensible bodies.

[19] Strange, "Plotinus' Account of Participation", 494.

[20] Schroeder, Form and Transformation, 38.

precisely out of a certain confusion, both in a physical and a cognitive sense. The failure to do so, to explore the ontological significance of soul's confusion, in an account of the creation of the world (a failure not to be attributed of course to Plotinus), would have a number of important epistemological consequences (in the case of the Timaeus things are simpler, since Timaeus has to reconstruct the point of view of the Demiurge, a fully rational perspective augmented with certain practical postulates and abilities). It is not only that such an account would lack ordinary persuasive force (how persuasive is to explain away the sensible world to beings whose souls are 'sisters' of the cosmic soul who created it?), but, from a metaphysical point of view, such a failure would render the origin of the sensible world unintelligible and condemn it to contingency. If everything there is consists of form and matter that are not to be confused at any cost, what about the possibility and the necessity of their interaction? The point concerns directly the hypostatic function of the soul: if the soul is a distinct Hypostasis and not the mere executive of Nous and is responsible for the creation of the sensible world, then the intelligibility of the sensible world (which is the primary aim of an account of its creation) demands a reconstruction of the perspective of the soul, even if this perspective is not the ultimate metaphysical point of view.[21] Obviously, this is a task that calls for a lot of caution. The easiest

[21] Even if, to use one of the strongest possible formulations, the nature of the soul is such that "when it goes down it will arrive at evil and in this way at non-existence,

way to put the soul firmly on the map between Nous and matter is to turn its descent into a fall (rendering at the same time the creative perspective fully irrational and the sensible world fully contingent) in ways familiar to Plotinus and to us through the Middle-Platonic and Gnostic tradition. This is something that we have to examine in what follows; for the time being my claim is merely that (a) an account of the creation of the world necessarily involves a reconstruction of the perspective of the soul, and (b) the presence of a certain figurative element in this account may be related to the character of such a reconstruction.

Plotinus' closing argument in the passage from IV.3.9 we have been discussing above is quite instructive in this respect. In the Plotinian system there is certainly no doubt about the relative rank of soul and matter as separate realities, and this rank is reflected directly in the claim that body is generated by soul. However, in the perspective established by the given composite structure of the world, which is also the creative perspective of the soul, the body is designated as the place "where it is natural for [soul] to be" (ὅπου πέφυκεν εἶναι). This designation turns body into both a product and a condition of the "coming forth" (προέρχεσθαι) of the soul, and hence, from the point of view of an account of the existence of the world, the body is both 'before' and 'after', 'inside' and 'outside' soul. With this designation, the simple order of dependence between the cause

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[although] not at absolute non-existence" (ἀλλὰ κάτω μὲν βᾶσα εἰς κακὸν ἥξει, καὶ οὕτως εἰς μὴ ὄν, οὐκ εἰς τὸ παντελὲς μὴ ὄν) (VI.9.11.37-38).

(the soul) and its effect (the body generated by an external cause) becomes a reciprocal determination, since the effect appears as a condition of the activity of the cause that generates it. As a result, what from an external point of view would appear contingent (the soul could or could not create the world at a specific moment) acquires a conditional necessity (if there is to be "going forth" of the soul, there has to be a place) in which, although the primacy of the soul is retained in a genetic account, the unity of the world as a composite structure can be "grasped together" in terms of a metaphysical necessity associated with the very nature of the soul. As we shall see in the last section of this chapter, even this conclusion is not strong enough for Plotinus: if the internal perspective of the soul must be transcended towards a more comprehensive metaphysical point of view, the aim would be to transform the hypothetical necessity outlined (if there is to be "going forth" of the soul, there has to be a place) to an absolute necessity (the soul must "go forth" with the same necessity that, say, the Nous thinks).

The passage about myths, however, apart from legitimising a certain use of figurative language in discussing certain philosophical issues, can be also read as a recipe for writing good or effective myths of the proper kind: a myth about the genesis of a composite reality should be constructed in such a way as to facilitate for the reader the συναιρεῖν of its elements. I shall now turn to the brief cosmogony that follows in the text

and see how such a myth (which, in this case, is a sequence of images) would look, and how it can be effective.

A Concise Cosmogony

As I have already argued, for Plotinus, the creation of the world, is fundamentally the generation of the place in which the soul "goes forth". The first of the three images that make up Plotinus' brief cosmogony tries to capture precisely the activity which leads to the emergence of this place out of soul's initial condition of rest. At its core there is an ordinary experience, but Plotinus formulates it in a very peculiar way:

> As soul's rest was, so to speak, strengthened in rest itself, a great light, we may say, shone forth from it and, in the outermost edge of the fire, there came to be darkness, which the soul saw, since it came into existence [as a substrate], and informed it (τῆς δὴ στάσεως αὐτῆς ἐν αὐτῇ τῇ στάσει οἱονεὶ ῥωννυμένης οἷον πολὺ φῶς ἐκλάμψαν ἐπ' ἄκροις τοῖς ἐσχάτοις τοῦ πυρὸς σκότος ἐγίνετο, ὅπερ ἰδοῦσα ἡ ψυχή, ἐπείπερ ὑπέστη, ἐμόρφωσεν αὐτό). For it was not lawful (θεμιτόν) for that which borders (γειτονοῦν) on soul to be without its share of formative principle (λόγου), as far as the so-called 'obscure within the obscure' in what came to be was capable of receiving it (οἷον ἐδέχετο) (9.23-29).

There are many striking features in this image, all directed to a calculated reversal of our ordinary experience of phenomena of propagation of light. There is, first, a spatio-temporal inversion. While one should normally say that light comes after darkness and takes its place by 'chasing it away', while darkness perhaps 'resists', Plotinus asserts that darkness comes into being after the shining forth of light (ἐγίνετο, ὑπέστη, ἐκλάμψαν) as its boundary. More precisely, darkness

comes into being when light (for reasons left unclear, but not because it encounters darkness) stops at some point: at the border, darkness comes into being as visible darkness, as 'proximate' darkness ready to be seen in the light of the soul and be informed by it.[22]

The process that leads to the generation of darkness is quite peculiar, as evidenced by the complex syntax of the sentence. The centre of the construction is occupied by the clause "σκότος ἐγίνετο", as if the subject of the whole process is darkness, or rather the emergence of darkness, since "σκότος" is not the grammatical subject of an active verb (this is not, of course, strange, since this is an account of the emergence of body or matter). The central presence of darkness is countered by the fact that "ψυχή" is the subject of the only active and transitive verb (ἐμόρφωσεν) of the entire sentence, which appears at the very end of it. Nevertheless, soul does not initiate explicitly the whole process: the event that precipitates the whole sequence, namely the "shining forth" of light, occurs as a consequence of the strengthening of soul's rest in the intelligible realm and is not presented as an intended action of the soul. Only after the soul 'overflowed', and, in the presence of the light of this overflowing, darkness emerged and was seen by the soul, did the soul take an active part. Moreover, we should note that this overflowing is set apart from all the other 'events' in this story, by the fact that "ῥωννυμένης", which sets

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[22] Cf. here: "ἡ πᾶσα ψυχὴ οὐδαμοῦ ἐγίνετο οὐδὲ ἦλθεν· οὐδὲ γὰρ ἦν ὅπου· ἀλλὰ τὸ σῶμα γειτονήσαν μετέλαβεν αὐτῆς" (III.9.3.1-3).

the temporal framework for the entire sequence, is the only participle in the present tense, and hence not an event, but a condition present for the entire sequence of the subsequent events.

The initial act of the cosmic drama is thus an 'event' that cannot be described easily within an ordinary framework; processes that can be described in terms of an interaction between distinct entities occur only at the very end of the original 'event'. Two points should be particularly noted. First, throughout this whole process, there is a strong sense in which the cosmic soul remains separate and at rest in itself, suffering no alteration or relation, despite the overflow caused by its 'strengthening'.[23] Second, darkness can be considered neither as intentionally generated by the soul (it comes into being as a side-effect of its strengthening and overflowing), nor as an effect of the activity of the soul in any normal sense (the proper effect of light is to enlighten and not to darken).[24] However, it would not be also correct to say that the darkness is merely encountered by the soul as an absolutely alien element: it is soul's light that brings it into existence and makes it visible, by stopping at a certain point.[25] Thus the notion of proximity or neighbourhood (γειτονοῦν), which Plotinus

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[23] Plotinus usually makes the point in terms of a distinction between powers or parts of the soul, as in the next chapter: "but one power belongs to soul which remains within it, and another which goes out to something else" (10.33-4); cf. also, II.3.9.31-4; V.1.3.7-11 (in the general context of II.6.3.14-20 and V.4.2.27-34); and II.3.18.8-14, where we encounter again the image of strengthening (πεπληρωμένης) and overflowing (ἀπομεστουμένης). We will return to the issue of the 'extension' of soul in Chapter 4.

[24] Plotinus denies explicitly that the soul made (ποιῆσαι) the darkness, in the context of his anti-Gnostic polemics (II.9.12.40-44).

[25] Given this image one would expect that the darkness circumscribes light, i.e., the familiar picture of a point-like source of light radiating in all directions. We shall see below that this implication stands in need of qualification.

introduces in order to account for the initial affinity between light and darkness which allows the soul to fulfil its function as a spontaneous transmitter of λόγος (like a diffusion process through a semi-permeable membrane) falls equally and undecidedly between spatial contiguity and genetic resemblance: on the one hand, darkness occupies a certain place, it happens to be there close to light; on the other, it comes into being by the light of the soul as its boundary.[26]

I shall now make a final comment about the only intentional action in the image, namely soul's ἐμόρφωσεν. Plotinus stresses, in almost paradoxical terms, its close connection with vision: the soul ἰδοῦσα (in seeing, by seeing, after seeing) darkness, informed it. This formulation should be juxtaposed with the way Plotinus describes elsewhere the process of 'information', particularly the information of matter. On these occasions, the activity of information is described as the 'covering up', the 'concealment', the 'hiding' (περιτίθεμεν, κρυφθεῖσαν) of matter beneath form.[27] One may ask then: What exactly does the soul see? Does it ever see matter itself? Or does it always see informed (i.e., 'hidden' and thus luminous) matter and hence encounters only projections of itself?

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[26] Cf. here: "The only possibility that remains, then, is that all things exist in something else, and, since there is nothing between, because of their closeness (γειτονείᾳ) to something else in the realm of real being something like an imprint and image of that other suddenly (ἐξαίφνης) appears, either by its direct action or through the assistance of soul" (V.8.7.12-16).

[27] Cf.: "καὶ ὁ κόσμος δὲ γένοιτο ἂν ἄνευ μεταλλοιώσεως, οἷον οἷς περιτίθεμεν" (III.6.11.20-1); "ἀλλ' οὖν εἴδεσι κατάσχηται ἐξ ἀρχῆς εἰς τέλος, (the universe) ... ὅθεν καί χαλεπὸν εὑρεῖν τὴν ὕλην ὑπὸ πολλοῖς εἴδεσι κρυφθεῖσαν" (V.8.7.19-23).

At this stage, the soul has generated the place of its "going forth". In this clearing of luminous darkness,

> there came into being (γενόμενος) something like a beautiful and richly various house which was not cut off (ἀπετμήθη) from its maker (πεποιηκότος), but he did not give it a share (ἐκοίνωσεν) of himself either; he considered it all, everywhere, worth a care (ἐπιμελείας) which conduces to its very being and excellence (τῷ εἶναι καὶ τῷ καλῷ) (as far as it can participate in being) but does him no harm in his presiding over it, for he rules it while abiding above (ἄνω γὰρ μένων ἐπιστατεῖ) (9.29-35).

The transition from the first image to the second is really unexpected. In the original the effect is more pronounced since the innocuous "γενόμενος", which stands in the very beginning, has a double function: looking backward, it seems to describe the outcome of ἐμόρφωσεν; looking forward, it introduces us to the new image.

If we set aside this transition, we are temporarily on rather familiar Platonic ground, since the motivation behind this image and the role it plays appear easily recognisable. On the one hand, Plotinus has to account for the rich diversity and order of the sensible world considered as a whole and thus he has to invoke the image of a more complicated and intentional process than the mere propagation of light: the building of a house is a paradigmatic case of making a 'total' and complex artefact. On the other hand, he has to underline for obvious reasons two pairs of complementary points: (a) the transcendent status of the maker and the dependent status of the creation, and (b) the goodness of the creator and

the beauty of the generated world.[28] However, we should note that Plotinus passes over in silence the most salient points of the metaphor of building, the aspects which, after Plato's Timaeus, we would expect him to elaborate. As far as the motivation of the maker is concerned, Plotinus notes his general resolve to make the house as real and beautiful as possible as an expression of his care for his creation. But the rational or technical aspect of building (the laying out of the plan, the determination of the objectives and the steps necessary for their realisation, the choice of the proper materials, the final execution) is never mentioned, although Plotinus was fully aware of it, as the discussion of the work of the architect in I.6.3 shows. The activity of building itself simply disappears in the gap of the transition between the first and the second image and there is nothing in this image to correct the metaphor of instant diffusion or imprinting carried over from the previous image.[29]

Plotinus has so far depicted a world created and "mastered" (κρατούμενος) (9.36) by a soul which apparently remains separate and external to it. The time has now come to present how this world, once

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[28] The transcendent status of the Demiurge is also safeguarded in the Timaeus: having completed the creation of the body and soul of the world and having relegated the rest of creation to the lesser gods, the Demiurge "was abiding in his own proper state" (ἔμενεν ἐν τῷ ἑαυτοῦ κατὰ τρόπον ἤθει) (42E). The goodness of the creator and the created world is also, of course, unambiguously asserted (e.g., in 29A, 29E, 92C).

[29] Plotinus will make his position on the spontaneous nature of the creative activity of the soul clear in the next chapter: "For whatever comes into contact (ἐφάψηται) with soul is made as the essential nature of soul is in a state to make it; and it makes, not according to a purpose brought in from outside, nor waiting upon planning and consideration (ἡ δὲ ποιεῖ οὰκ οὐκ ἐπακτῷ γνώμῃ οὐδὲ βουλὴν ἢ σκέψιν ἀναμείνασα)" (IV.3.10.13-16). The claim should be obviously read in the context of Plotinus' notion of intelligible creativity (e.g., V.8.7); we will return to this issue in the next chapter.

created, does not remain a dead artefact, how "soul makes alive all the other things which do not live of themselves, and makes them live the sort of life by which it lives itself" (10.37-8):

> [The house] lies (κεῖται) in soul which bears it up (ἀνεχούσῃ) and nothing is without a share of soul. It is as if a net immersed (or soaked) in the waters was alive,[30] but unable to make its own that in which it is (αὑτοῦ ποιεῖσθαι ἐν ᾧ ἐστιν). The sea is already spread out (ἐκτεινομένης) and the net spreads with it (συνεκτέταται), as far as it can; for no one of its parts can be anywhere else than where it lies (κεῖται) (9.36-43).

With this final and vivid image, we return to the imagery of natural elements with which we started. There are three points of particular interest here. First, the image of the net, which apparently contains and delimits the sea, which actually contains and permeates it, corrects the implication of the first image that the soul is contained or surrounded by the body. The correction is extremely interesting not only because it boldly reverses the common point of view which structures Plotinus' initial questions, but also because it transforms implicitly this common point of view into an illusion that can be associated with the point of view of the body and its vain effort "to make its own that in which it is". Second, there is the aspect of movement, which in this context stands as a metaphor of life. The image of the net, which by being imperceptibly pushed by the sea which carries it, follows smoothly and passively the movement of sea and,

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[30] The clause reads: "ὡς ἂν ἐν ὕδασι δίκτυον τεγγόμενον ζῴη". " ζῴη" is characterised "uix recte" by Henry-Schwyzer and is deleted (as "seltsam") by Theiler. Henry-Schwyzer conjecture without conviction "ἐρῳῇ": "as if a net immersed in the waters moved forth". In any case, the sentence makes sense under the assumption that the image refers to the passive movement of a net thrown in the sea, in a context where the existence of motion gives the appearance of life.

on account of its agility, gives the appearance of being alive and determining its own effervescent movement on the inert background of the sea, is a perfect physical analogue of an animistic universe, even if it runs counter to the intuition that the soul directs things 'from the inside'.

Finally, we should note that for the first time we learn something about the active intentions and capacities of the body, which is thus personified at the very end of the account, presumably after the end of the activity of the soul. Each of the first two images contained a clause referring to the passive capacities of the body to accommodate the activities of the soul: οἷον ἐδέχετο [μοῖρα λόγου] (9.28-9); ὅσον δὴ τοῦ εἶναι δυνατὸν ἦν αὐτῷ μεταλαμβάνειν (9.33-4). The interest of the clause added in this image (οὐ δυνάμενον δὲ αὑτοῦ ποιεῖσθαι ἐν ᾧ ἐστιν) is not exhausted by the fact that it assigns to the body some form of active initiative. We should further note that this initiative is formulated in the same terms with the creative abilities of the soul, but in direct contrast to them, to the extent that it follows the metaphoric logic of 'ποιεῖν' = 'περιτιθέναι' we have already noted. In this sense, one may say that it captures the agonising and precarious nature of the life that the body lives: sustained almost indifferently in life by the soul, it is eager but incapable of securing this life, which may slip away at any minute, as its own. On the other hand, however, one may equally consider this effort of the body as an activity that reflects back to the soul, in an attenuated and hence ineffective degree, the activity it exercises with regard to the body.

At this point, where the initial metaphor has been completely reversed and the entry of the soul into the body has become the immersion of the body into the soul, Plotinus' brief cosmogony ends. Before we move to the concluding section to discuss some aspects of the character of this account, a few additional remarks are in place. In accordance with Plotinus' understanding of the function of generation myths, the next chapter starts with the following advice:

> having then heard this, we must, going back again to that which is always such, grasp all as existing simultaneously (ἐπὶ τὸ ἀεὶ οὕτως ἐλθόντας ὁμοῦ λαβεῖν πάντα ὄντα) (10.1-2).

Presumably in order to help us to accomplish this task, Plotinus offers a concise reformulation of his cosmogony, in which the three consecutive images of his account are replaced with three contiguous (= simultaneously existing) parts of the same image:

> so here there is soul always static, or the first, then the next in order, like the last gleams of the light of a fire (ὡς πυρὸς ἔσχατα); afterwards the first coming from this last gleam is thought of a shadow of fire (νοουμένου πυρὸς σκιᾶς), and then this at the same time is thought of as illuminated (ἐπιφωτιζομένου), so that it is as if form was diffused over what is cast upon soul, which at first was altogether obscure (ὥστε οἷον εἶδος ἐπιθεῖν τῷ ἐπιβληθέντι πρώτῳ γενομένῳ παντάπασιν ἀμυδρῷ) (10.5-10).

This image looks like a static snapshot of the first image of Plotinus' cosmogony, in which all temporal relations have been turned into spatial determinations. It can thus be considered as Plotinus' effort to undermine or abolish altogether the temporal order of his account, in order to make clear that this order is only for the sake of "explanation". Alternatively, we

may consider this image as a description of the composite structure of the sensible world in its final and permanent state, after everything that an account of the creation of the world may include has already taken place. The spatial determinations (πῦρ - πυρὸς ἔσχατα - πυρὸς σκιᾶς) can be thus considered as indexes of the differences τάξει δὲ ἢ δυνάμεσι of the various components of the composite structure (and, of course, the first term (πῦρ) points to a reality (the 'upper part' of the soul; see n. 23) which, although present in some sense in the composite structure is not really contained in it). We should note, however, that Plotinus cannot abolish all temporal determinations: the presence and the function of matter (the 'information' of which is the act of creation) can be grasped only with the help of a temporal differentiation between the πρῶτῳ γενόμενον παντάπασιν ἀμυδρόν and the πυρὸς σκιᾶς, which unavoidably gives a temporal colouring to the otherwise spatial ἐπιφωτιζομένου, ἐπιθεῖν, ἐπιβληθέντι.[31]

In a certain sense, then, the emphasis in the metaphorical framework of Plotinus' account of the genesis of the world falls on spatial determinations. This is not, of course, surprising, since the creation of the

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[31] This image should be compared with a similar image from an earlier treatise, V.1.2.14-28 [10]. There, "before soul, it was a dead body..., or rather the darkness of matter and non-existence (πρὸ ψυχῆς σῶμα νεκρόν, ... μᾶλλον δὲ σκότος ὕλης καὶ μὴ ὄν)" and we should imagine "soul as flowing in from outside, pouring in and entering it everywhere and illuminating (εἰσρέουσαν, εἰσχυθεῖσαν, εἰσιοῦσαν, εἰσλάμπουσαν): as the rays of the sun light up a dark cloud (σκοτεινὸν νέφος), and make it shine and give it a golden look (λάμπειν ποιοῦσι χρυσοειδῆ ὄψιν διδοῦσαι)". From the present point of view, the strength of this image, which understandably appealed to the imagination of Sts. Basil and Augustine (see Armstrong's note ad loc), is its weakness: it derives from a number of stark antitheses (inside-outside, before-after, light-darkness) that, in our reading, Plotinus himself tries here to undermine.

world is fundamentally conceived as the generation of the place in which the soul goes forth and, in more neutral terms, space in general is presumably generated at this moment of the unfolding of the Plotinian universe.[32] I shall finish, then, this section by discussing in some detail the issue of the proper spatial imaging of the relation between body and soul, taking into account both the conceptual claims Plotinus wants to make and the corresponding aspects of the imagery he uses to convey them.

In the ordinary physio-psychological context, the problem of the localisation of the soul is addressed thoroughly by Plotinus later on, in IV.3.19-23. Plotinus starts with a discussion of the sense in which an individual soul can be said to be divisible or indivisible, continues with a critical analysis of a number of different alternatives with regard to the

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[32] In the same sense, in which the generation of time occurs, in a similar metaphorical framework, at the previous stage, namely during the generation of soul itself out of Nous (III.7.11.1-26). The similarity is noticed by Plotinus himself: in this context, he introduces a brief digression on the generation of the sensible world by the soul with the clause "in the same way" (οὕτω δή) (27) and concludes: "for since the world of sense moves in soul -there is no other place for it than soul - it moves also in the time of soul" (ἐν ἐκείνῃ γὰρ κινούμενος -- οὐ γάρ τις αὐτοῦ τοῦδε τοῦ παντὸς τόπος ἢ ψυχή - καὶ ἐν τῷ ἐκείνης αὖ ἐκινεῖτο χρόνῳ) (34-36). The significance of this development can be hardly overestimated. On the one hand, resolving the ontological discrepancy between space and time in Plato's Timaeus, Plotinus opened up the possibility of a logically or metaphysically parallel treatment of space and time. On the other hand, privileging time over space by associating it more firmly with soul (soul is hypostatically unthinkable without time, while space pertains to its activity), he opened up the possibility of an understanding of time as a more important inner sense. For the issue, see Sambursky, The Concept of Place in Late Neoplatonism, 15-6 and Ousager, "Plotinus on Motion and Personal Identity", 111-3. Ousager (in n.74, ibid.) criticises H. Jonas for mistakenly considering "time in Plotinus to be logically primary in relation to the sensible world" and continues: "Plotinus places them logically in a parallel position because they are one from an ontological perspective". In the terms of our discussion, this is a clear example of the differences in interpretation which result from the degree in which one takes seriously the point of view of soul as developed by Plotinus: space and time may be ontologically parallel but not for soul.

way in which (the parts of the) soul can be said or not to inhere in body (i.e., as a thing in a receptacle, as an affection of a substrate, as form in matter, etc), and concludes with a presentation of his own views on the issue. The details of the argument are determined by Plotinus' obvious effort to support Plato's trilocation of the tripartite soul in the Timaeus (69C-70D), his reliance for the formulation of some of the problems and a part of his solution to Alexander of Aphrodisias and the Peripatetic tradition in general, and the philosophical exploitation of certain anatomical findings presented by Galen.[33] Obviously, these details cannot be very helpful here, since this discussion is conducted at a level that presupposes everything that is at stake here, namely the existence of body, place, and space. However, it would be useful to summarise here some of Plotinus' conclusions and keep them in mind in what follows. The salient points are three: (a) Soul as a potency (δύναμις) is present everywhere in a body without being localised at all (22.15-16); the localisation of (parts of) the soul in specific areas or organs of the body indicates merely the place of the beginning (ἀρχή) of its activity or actualisation (ἐνέργεια) (23.20-1); (b) the activity of the body depends on the activity of the soul, but the latter is entirely independent from the bodily activity it incidentally generates (this is most clearly expressed in III.6.4.38-42); and (c) the resulting bodily activity is determined by the

[33] The relevant Quellenforschung can be found in Blumenthal, "Plotinus Ennead IV.3.20-1 and its Sources" and Tieleman, "Plotinus and the Seat of the Soul".

extent to which each bodily part or organ is appropriately adapted for the specific function the soul assigns to it (πρὸς τὸ ἔργον ἐπιτηδειότητα; 23.4).[34]

With regard to the cosmic soul and the world, Plotinus has three points to assert, elaborate, and connect: (a) the soul, being incorporeal, has no size or magnitude (ὅτι μὴ τοσήδε; 9.44) and hence occupies no place and extends in no space; (b) the world lies in a place generated somehow by soul; and hence (c) something must be said about the way in which soul is present in this place (this, we recall, is the question with which his cosmogony begins). The elaboration of these three claims generates two fundamental problems. First, the conjunction of the claim that the body is the place in which it is natural for soul to be in its going forth (9.23) with the claim that the soul is the only place in which the sensible world can be (III.7.11.34) raises obviously the issue of containment: Does soul contain body or vice versa? The issue is already present in Timaeus' account. The soul is there "set" (θεῖς) in the centre of the body, but is extended in such a way as to envelop the entire exterior of the body (34B; 36D). The qualification neutralises the most obvious inference of the metaphor: the soul ceases to be 'in' body, but somehow contains it from the inside. Plotinus, contrasting the two alternatives, applauds Plato's decision to put "the body in the soul" (22.8-10)[35], but he

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[34] This summary is based, with some modifications, on O'Meara, "Plotinus on How Soul Acts on Body"; see esp. pp. 259-62.

[35] Cf. also Plotinus' comments in III.9.3.3-4 and V.1.10.21-4.

also notes, in more careful language, that "soul is not a body, and is no more contained than containing" (καὶ οὐ περιεχόμενον μᾶλλον ἢ περιέχον; 20.14-15). Second, there is the problem of extension. At a first level, although the soul has no size, Plotinus wants also to claim that "wherever body extends, there soul is" (καὶ ὅπου ἂν ἐκταθῇ ἐκεῖνο, ἐκεῖ ἐστι; 9.44), that "the universe extends as far as soul goes" (τοσοῦτον γάρ ἐστι τὸ πᾶν, ὅπου ἐστίν αὐτή; 9.46-7). Moreover, implied in Plotinus' account is the notion of an extension of the soul itself. The physical universe (and hence physical place or space) is co-extensive with what, in modern physical terms, appears as a psychic field, the field of effectiveness of the soul: even if it turns out that the physical universe is identical with this field, this way of presenting the issue necessitates an analysis of two different notions of extension (in modern terms: a causal and a spatial concept of extension). It is clear that in both issues, Plotinus privileges one set of metaphors over the other (the body is contained in soul; the body extends as far as the soul goes) in accordance with the hierarchical rank of the realities involved, but it is equally clear that he is after some notion of soul's presence that is neither localisable nor spatial.

How are the images of Plotinus' cosmogony to be judged from this point of view (and also with regard to the three conclusions about the localisation of the soul summarised above)? The images that involve light and shadow facilitate the concrete presentation of Plotinus' position concerning the issue of soul's extension in a number of ways. At a first

level, the distinction between πῦρ and πυρὸς ἔσχατα (conceived either in a dynamic or a static way) establishes a pictorial differentiation between soul conceived as an extensionless entity and soul conceived as an extended field: the distance between fire and its last gleams is not really defined in a spatial sense, but refers essentially to the locus (or, rather, the presence) of a certain ability or effectiveness (the ability to enlighten, shine, heat). In this sense, if we accept that the activity of the soul in the context of the image is to enlighten, we may also say that this activity is entirely independent of the presence of the body: the light is generated between the fire and its gleams independently of what exists outside the circle of light. This circle of light, however, acquires a real spatial measure precisely by the size of the shadow that surrounds it at its edges (in the way in which a flame from a candle and a flame of acetylene in the centre of an absolutely dark room generate light circles of different dimensions, as measured by their dark circumference, and thus luminosity is transformed to spatial extension). In this sense, Plotinus may write that the "shadow [i.e., the sensible universe] is as large as the rational formative principle which comes from soul" (καὶ τοσαύτη ἐστὶν ἡ σκιά, ὅσος ὁ λόγος ὁ παρ' αὐτῆς; 9.47-48).

But the edge does not provide only a spatial measure: it is there, in the γειτονία of light and shadow, that we may also localise the soul with regard to the body in general, that we may search the beginning (ἀρχή) of its activity or actualisation (ἐνέργεια) with regard to the body. Any further

illumination of this activity in a general way depends essentially on the way we understand the expression πυρὸς σκιά, which designates the status of the sensible world. The word "σκιά" is repeatedly used by Plato in the Republic for similar purposes (e.g., 500A, 515D, 517D, 532C) and the expression "τὰς σκιὰς τὰς ὑπὸ τοῦ πυρὸς" occurs in the story of the cave (515A). In the context of Plotinus' account, the genitive "πυρὸς" seems to range over the entire spectrum of possible meanings: the shadow which emerges at the border of light as its privation, shadow as an attenuated form of light, shadow as a dim reflection of light. The emphasis with which each of these possible alternatives should be weighed (obviously, there is no way to eliminate ambiguity here) should be determined by a number of considerations that we have already raised during our discussion. If we take seriously the literal claim that "there never was a time ... when matter was not set in order" (9.17-8), we have to conclude that the soul, in its creative movement from πῦρ to πυρὸς σκιαί, does not come into (direct) contact with something alien to itself, the "altogether obscure" or the "σκότος ὕλης" (see n. 31 above), even if such a thing exists in another perspective. In other words, the σκότος with which the soul comes into contact is always already visible in the light of the soul: visible in the perspective of the soul and visible in general since no other entity (e.g., the Nous) has eyes for this shadow. From the other side, this means (as we have already noted) that the final product, the sensible world, is always illuminated in some degree, and even reflects back, obviously in a

diminished way, the light it receives. But all these claims are parallel to the conclusions we have reached above in the context of the issue of the localisation of an individual soul within a human body. On the one hand, we see now how the activity of the soul is incidental with regard to the activity of the body in this general sense which refers to the very emergence of the body. It is not only that in Plotinus' imagery the soul does not intend to generate the body, but also that the effects of its activity are in a sense contrary to the nature of this activity: in its natural urge to illuminate, the soul manages only to make visible the darkness in the form of a shadow. On the other hand, this result is also determined by the extent to which matter in general is appropriately adapted for its illumination: Plotinus' imagery allows us to understand this adaptation either in terms of a passive capacity of a pre-existing element, or as a result of the spatial contiguity between the soul and the surface of this element, or, more radically, as a result of the fact that there is no pre-existing element but only the visible darkness emerging at the edges of light.

Some Conclusions

Now that we have explored Plotinus' brief cosmogony, we may draw a few general conclusions. We saw that Plotinus followed the precedent set by Plato and responded to the issue of the order of the world with a

creation story. As it has become evident by now, the scale and the degree of elaboration of the two projects are very different. However, a broad comparison between them will allow us to identify some of the special characteristics of Plotinus' enterprise and to determine the reasons which motivate it.

It is evident that Plato's intention in the myth of the Timaeus was the creation of a coherent narrative whole, which places the 'events' of the generation of the universe in a well-structured temporal order and unfolds in reasonably or plausibly connected steps. Apart from the epistemological aspect of this effort, which we have already identified, it is clear that there is a literary or artistic dimension in this project: as Critias notes in the Critias (107B), "the accounts given by us all must be, of course, of the nature of imitations (μίμησις) and representations (ἀπεικασία)". From this literary point of view, the story of the Timaeus can be regarded as a piece of poetic art composed in a way that satisfies the most important conditions of successful poetry set by Aristotle in the Poetics.[36] From a subjective point of view, the dramatic content of Timaeus' account is a mimesis of the actions of the Demiurge, whose well-defined character is substantiated in his actions.[37] From an objective

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[36] The issue has been discussed by P. Hadot, in "Physique et poésie dans le Timée de Platon"; cf. also Β. Κάλφας, ed., Τίμαιος, 55-57. The relevant Aristotelian material comes mostly from Book VI of the Poetics. On the issue of mimesis in the Timaeus, see also, S. Halliwell, Aristotle's Poetics, 117-19.

[37] The literary character of the Demiurge is discussed in Brisson, Le Même et l'Autre, chap.1 and Charrue, Plotin lecteur de Platon, 123-127 (who relies on Brisson). Obviously, although as their discussion shows, the Demiurge is endowed with all the

point of view, the story is obviously the mimesis of an important action (the making of the world), which is completed by events skilfully arranged by the most competent creator (whose rationality guarantees that nothing in the narrative is idiosyncratic or eccentric).

The presentation of events is based on the Homeric technique of beginning in medias res: presenting first the "works of reason", Plato opens a parenthesis in order to deal with "what comes about of necessity", and ends his story with a description of "the co-operation of reason and necessity".[38] This narrative device (we call it a device since in the dramatic temporal order established by the Timaeus itself necessity ought to have been presented first) enables Plato to attain maximum dramatic intelligibility: a fully personified creative force is established first, the narrative focuses on the interaction between this personified character and impersonal forces, and all the other elements are incorporated in the story by direct reference to this single agent. In this way, the dramatic interest is concentrated on the actions of the Demiurge, which in a natural manner succeed each other. The plot, the "soul" of tragedy according to Aristotle, is thus constituted by a specific set of actions and their internal relations (which correspond to the complex structure of the world they

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major subjective faculties (including affection), one cannot avoid the feeling (common in all didactic literature) that "le demiurge n'est pas un individu, mais une fonction" (Charrue, ibid., 123).

[38] The headings are taken from F. M. Cornford's division of the Timaeus in Plato's Cosmology: The Timaeus of Plato.

bring about): the internal disposition or any irrelevant action of the characters involved in the story is not allowed to interfere with this plot.[39]

In the perspective of Plato's practice and Aristotle's theory, our story appears rather odd, to put it mildly. This does not mean that there are no Aristotelian literary concepts that can be fruitfully applied to an analysis of Plotinus' account of the genesis of the world. As it will become evident in later chapters, one can grasp a fair number of differences between Plato's and Plotinus' account with the help of the Aristotelian distinction between simple (ἁπλοί) and complex (πεπλεγμένοι) myths (Poetics, 1452a 11-21). Plotinus' account of the deeds of the soul is undoubtedly complex in this sense, since it involves all the plot elements that imply some form of ignorance or illusion with regard to one's identity or the outcome of one's actions, such as peripeteia and anagnorisis.[40] At this stage, however, the most obvious and baffling question is the following: How are we to think of the unity of Plotinus' account? The question becomes more pressing if we take into account that our aim is to see how a myth may help us to "grasp together" the elements of the composite structure of the world. In general terms (which exceed the Aristotelian precepts for the unity of a plot), a narrative can be unified ultimately either on the basis of the characters that appear and act in them or on the basis of some

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[39] Cf. Poetics, 1450a 22-39.

[40] And, of course, a major issue of the interpretation of Plotinus' conception of the soul (especially in view of the Gnostic controversies) would be the extent in which the actions of the soul can be considered as a form of Aristotelian hamartia. This discussion, however, would have to start from an interpretation of Chapter 13 of the Poetics, a formidable task on its own.

framework established by the events that are being recounted. We may thus begin by considering these two options.

While the soul indeed assumes the leading role in Plotinus' narrative, the portrayal of its nature and activity is both complex and vague. As we have seen, the soul is personified as a maker in the second image, but Plotinus passes over the opportunity to present its character, capacities, and actions; its creative nature is merely asserted by concentrating on its creation. Given its other appearances, as a source of light and its light and as a sea, the soul cannot be 'reconstructed' as a character in any ordinary way: we cannot attribute to it intentions directly and we cannot infer the existence of intentions from the data of its activity. In fact, everything that Plotinus has said so far about the soul as a 'character' seems directed at a single end: to present the creation of the world as an action for which the soul (or, through it, any other higher principle) cannot be blamed. In pursuing this objective, Plotinus has used two general strategies which may appear somewhat contradictory with regard to the status and the substance of the soul as a subjective character.[41] On the one hand, there is the general claim that the activity of the soul is in accordance with cosmic justice (recall the θεμιτόν of 3.9.27), produces results conducive to beauty and excellence (recall τῷ εἶναι καὶ τῷ καλῷ of 3.9.33), and even reflects a certain care exercised, in a

[41] These two general defence strategies are presented consecutively by Plotinus in III.2.3.3-9.

rather cautious formulation, by the soul (ἄξιος ἐπιμελείας νομισθεῖς ὁ οἶκος (3.9.31-2); Plotinus avoids active attribution to an agent). If all these claims make sense only within the internal perspective of a subjective soul-creator, we have to take into account, on the other hand, Plotinus' insistence that the creation of the world is not actually intended by the soul through some kind of conscious deliberation, but is the result of an activity that, on the one hand, follows 'spontaneously' from the nature of the soul and, on the other, reflects a universal necessity that transcends the perspective of the soul.[42] We are thus guided overall to understand the creative activity of the soul not as the externalisation of a subjective structure, but as the manifestation or appearance of a rational, but 'unconscious', acting force; hence, the unity we are seeking cannot be, at least at this level, expressed in subjective terms.

It would be appropriate to open a parenthesis here in order to present an issue that will reappear in many guises in what follows: the place of Plotinus' position in the spectrum of the various Middle-Platonic, Gnostic, and Early Christian speculations about the nature of the descent of the soul. Within the Platonic tradition, this issue had been largely shaped by Plato's ambiguous inheritance, ranging, as noted by Plotinus

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[42] Cf. here: "This universe has come into existence, not as a result of a process of reasoning that it ought to exist (οὐ λογισμῷ τοῦ δεῖν γενέσθαι) but because it was necessary that there should be a second nature (ἀλλὰ φύσεως δευτέρας ἀνάγκη); for that true All [the intelligible world] was not of a kind to be the last of realities" (III.2.2.8-13) or "For why it was necessary for the soul to illuminate, unless the necessity was universal? (τί γάρ ἐλλάμπειν ἔδει, εἰ μὴ πάντως ἔδει;)" (II.9.12.32-3). Plotinus continues the discussion of the latter question by claiming that this illumination was "according to the nature" (κατὰ φύσιν) of soul.

himself in IV.8.1.28-51, from the 'pessimistic' views about the fate of the soul and the disapproval of its association with the body expressed in the Phaedrus and other middle works to the 'optimistic' assessment of its cosmic function in the Timaeus as a transmitter of the intelligible reality to the sensible world.[43] So far, everything we have said about the soul (which, being limited to the cosmogonic context, reflects more strongly the inheritance of the Timaeus) places Plotinus firmly in the optimistic wing of Middle-Platonic speculations about the nature of the descent of the soul.[44] Moreover, as we saw, Plotinus has tried hard in this context to avoid the personification of the soul in terms of motivations and intentions. This picture is incomplete: in other places, Plotinus clearly personifies the soul, attributing to it certain subjective intentions and motivations. When we examine these intentions, we end up with a more ambiguous picture. On the one hand, as we have already seen, there is the intention of caring (ἐπιμελεῖσθαι) for the body, which is fully compatible with an optimistic assessment of the nature and activity of the soul.[45] On the other hand, in

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[43] "And though in all these passages [Plato] disapproves of the soul's coming to body, in the Timaeus when speaking about this All he praises the universe and calls it a blessed god, and says that the soul was given by the goodness of the Craftsman, so that this All might be intelligent" (IV.8.1.40-44).

[44] The relevant material, mostly from Iamblichus and Albinus, is assembled and discussed in Dillon, "The Descent of the Soul". From the alternatives presented there, Plotinus' views can be associated both with the notion of the function of the soul in terms of the "manifestation of divine life" (θείας ζωῆς ἐπίδειξις, 359) and the notion of a certain affinity (οἰκείωσις) between body and soul (understood in the Plotinian context, as we have seen, in terms of generation) (360).

[45] All philosophically loaded occurrences of ἐπιμελεῖσθαι and its cognates in Plotinus refer to the soul, frequently with reference to Plato's claim that "ψυχὴ δὲ πᾶσα παντὸς ἐπιμελεῖται τοῦ ἀψύχου" (Phaedrus, 246B): II.9.18.40; III.2.7.24; III.4.2.1; IV.3.1.34;

a number of passages (most notably in V.1.1 and in III.7.11, from which the following terms are taken) Plotinus ascribes to the soul a number of more problematic subjective characteristics: ignorance of various sorts (ἐπιλάθεσθαι, ἀγνοῆσαι), audacity (τόλμα), restless activity (πολυπραγμοσύνη), dependency on bodily things (ἠξηρτημέναι τούτων), enjoyment of their separation from the intelligible reality and their self-determination (τῷ αὐτεξουσίῳ ἡσθεῖσαι). On the basis of this evidence, one can make a case not only for Plotinus' assimilation in the pessimistic side of the Platonic tradition, but also for a fundamental affinity (despite the explicit differences) between Plotinus and his Gnostic or Christian contemporaries (such as the Valentinians or Origen): the case has been made quite forcefully by H. Jonas.[46] However, a full elucidation of this issue presupposes two steps not yet taken in our discussion: first, the clarification of the precise nature of soul's creativity (the topic of the next chapter), and second the descent from the level of the cosmic soul to the level of the individual souls, where one can, in an essentially ethical

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IV.3.7.13; IV.39.31; IV.7.8a.8; IV.8.2.27. Two more occurrences refer to the ordinary care of parents for their children (IV.4.4.7) and of the living for their dead (VI.7.26.11).

[46] See Jonas, "The Soul in Gnosticism and Plotinus", with summaries of the relevant Gnostic and Origenist material. Jonas's presentation of the Plotinian material is undoubtedly one-sided (e.g., he overlooks everything implied by the metaphor of ἐπιμέλεια or pertaining to the close connection between the soul and Nous in the creative activity of the soul; he does not mention that τόλμα characterises everything below the level of the One), but two related conclusions of his analysis are worth mentioning in the context of our discussion. First, the claim that "it is peculiar to the hypostasis 'Soul' ... that, in addition [to being directed toward its higher Hypostasis], it is also directed toward that which is "lower" than itself", and, second, the remark that, as a result of this peculiarity, Plotinus' language in describing this step in the unfolding of his system "turns from philosophical to mythological" (ibid., 53).

context, both envisage different modes and purposes of descent, and address the issue of its remedy in the form of a turning back upwards.

Let us return to the second option: What can be said about the events narrated in Plotinus' creation story with regard to its unity? Although, as we have seen, within the images themselves spatio-temporal relations are established in quite complex ways, there is no overall spatio-temporal framework which could provide some external sort of unity. Moreover, if we examine the natural phenomena or artificial activities which constitute the content of these images, we realise that there is nothing internal to them that would suggest any kind of normal continuity: a light is struck and, out of the darkness, a house emerges to become a net immersed in the sea. How are we to think the unity of this 'event', which seems to transcend all the classical unities?

At this point perhaps it would be helpful to approach the issue the other way round and return thus to the issues raised in the first section of this chapter: What are the requirements of a myth that could present effectively the "being together" of the elements of a composite structure? This myth would have initially to separate these elements and their activity and use an appropriate metaphorical framework in order to present their relative order of priority within the composite structure. However, if the final aim is the "συναιρεῖν" of these elements in their unity, we would expect a 'deconstructive' use of this metaphorical framework: the various figurative devices would unite as much as separate, and the

activity of the elements would be described in such terms as to make these elements 'efface' themselves in the final product, i.e. lose their separate and distinct nature in the emergent dynamic unity of the composite, which would be thus presented almost as containing its own source of movement or development.

In the case of a generated, composite thing, such as the sensible world, the elements to be separated and united are ultimately form and matter. As Plotinus puts it, echoing the discussion of chora in the Timaeus (50-1), the nature of such things can be thought of as a synthesis of an inert material and an active form which shapes it:

> for in some things, because of their bodily nature, individuality is fluid because the form comes in from outside and they have continual existence only according to specific form (τῶν σωμάτων τῇ φύσει τοῦ καθέκαστον ῥεοντος ἄτε ἐπακτοῦ τοῦ εἴδους ὄντος τὸ εἶναι κατ' εἶδος ἀεὶ ὑπάρχει), in imitation of the real beings; but in others, since they are not produced by composition (οὐκ ἐκ συνθέσεως οὖσι) ... (IV.3.8.25-28).

From an ontological point of view, form and matter remain always separate and distinct, without suffering any real change in their interaction. In Plotinus' words, "νοῦς μόνος, ἀπαθὴς ἐν τοῖς νοητοῖς ζωὴν μόνον νοερὰν ἔχων ἐκεῖ ἀεὶ μένει" (IV.7.13.2-3), while matter "μένει ὃ ἐξ ἀρχῆς ἦν" (III.6.11.18); even soul, the agent of their interaction, "ἄνω μένει" (9.34). This absolute separation, however, cannot belong to the perspective of a discourse dedicated to an account of the emergence of the composite, since this emergence would be simply impossible without some kind of interaction in which the soul gets itself involved with the sensible world.

In other words, such a discourse should separate these elements merely in a relative way, i.e., with reference to their order in the composite structure.

We have already seen in detail how carefully the spatio-temporal frameworks of Plotinus' images, in accordance with his concrete narrative goals, establish relations that separate the elements of the structure (correcting, when necessary, familiar intuitions, such as the notion that the soul enters or is contained in body, in ways that make clear the primacy of the higher element). Beyond these spatio-temporal markers, Plotinus had at his disposal two (or, perhaps, three) different substantive models for the interaction between form and matter, already developed, at different lengths, in Plato's Timaeus. The first is, obviously, the 'deliberate creation' model, in which the interaction takes the form of a production of the sensible in accordance with the mental original of the intelligible, centred around the figure of the Demiurge as the "maker of the universe" (ποιητὴν τοῦ παντός; 28C) and setting the framework of the first part of the Timaeus. The second is the 'generation-procreation' model, which is also announced in 28C, where the Demiurge is called "father of the universe" (πατὴρ τοῦ παντός), but is left, at least explicitly, idle for the rest of the account of the activities of the Demiurge.[47] The same model is apparently invoked again, after the introduction of chora, in 50D. However, in this

[47] The theme of procreation returns in 41A-E, with the generation of the lesser gods (in 41A the Demiurge calls himself again δημιουργό and πατέρα).

case the application of the model is rather different, since the Demiurge as a mediating figure disappears from the picture. This role is now assigned to chora as the "mother" of all becoming, which mediates between the "father", a role attributed now directly to the intelligible element, and the "offspring", namely the sensible product. Apart from the details concerning the paternity of the sensible world, two general points can be made with relative assurance about the simultaneous presence of these two models. First, these models are obviously very different to the extent that they point to quite different orders of creation, that of art (τέχνη) and nature (φύσις), and have quite different, and even contradictory, implications (e.g. the status of an artefact is quite different to that of an offspring with regard to the craftsman or the parent). Second, Plato's decision to use both these models in the Timaeus, despite their differences and the problems that could be generated, reflects exigencies of the issue that he could not avoid (e.g., to the extent that the sensible universe partakes itself of intelligence and even divinity, the model of procreation suggests itself naturally; to the extent that the ontological transcendence and the rationality of the maker must be safeguarded, the model of the craftsman appears unavoidable).[48]

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[48] Plato's claim that the Demiurge is both the maker and the father of the universe has been the subject of a lot of commentary in the Platonic tradition. Plutarch discusses the issue in his Platonic Questions, ii and his own position (1001A.4-B.6) is that the procreation model follows naturally to the extent that the world "has in it a large portion of vitality and divinity" (μοῖρα πολλὴ ζῳότητος καὶ θειότητος). Immediately afterwards, Plutarch makes the interesting suggestion that one may consider the Demiurge as a craftsman with regard to the ordering of the matter and as a father with regard to the

Before we draw our final conclusions, it would be useful to discuss in some detail an issue that we have left open. So far, not without justification (see n. 28), I have treated the cosmic soul as equivalent to the Platonic Demiurge. However, this identification merits a fuller discussion and such a discussion would have to include three dimensions: (a) the relation between the Demiurge and soul in the Timaeus (in the context of Plato's other late works, such as the Laws); (b) Plotinus' interpretation of Plato's position; and (c) Plotinus' own views on the issue. Here we cannot undertake this examination in this full extent; we shall limit ourselves to a few remarks pertaining to the needs of our discussion.

With regard to Plato, we should note two points. First, the interpretation of the figure of the Demiurge within the systematic context of the Platonic philosophy is still an open issue: as the survey of the issue by H. Cherniss shows, the Demiurge has been identified, in direct or indirect ways, with all possible candidates such as the idea of the good, intelligence (νοῦς), and the cosmic soul.[49] Second, a major problem within this issue concerns, already in Plato, the status of the soul: the (cosmic) soul is described, on the one hand, as generated and, on the other, is characterised as the source of motion (and hence as the origin of any

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creation of the soul. Plotinus usage of the metaphor of the father seems to follow similar lines: in some places (e.g. V.1.2.37 or V.1.3.20) the notion of the father is invoked for the Intellect with regard to soul; in other places (e.g. IV.4.11.22) the notion of procreation is invoked to account for the presence of intelligence within the sensible world. The problem is discussed extensively by Proclus (In Platonis Timaeum, i.299-319); for a modern reading of the Timaeus sensitive to this issue, see Sallis, Chorology, esp. 14-6; 52; 86-7.

[49] See H. Cherniss, Aristotle's Criticism of Plato and the Academy, Appendix XI, 603-610.

creative activity of generation).[50] Plotinus, exploiting the resources of his own metaphysical system, understands Plato's position in terms of a threefold distinction, associated with the three principal hypostases, in which the One is identified with the Good and is called "the father of the cause", the Intellect is identified with the Demiurge and is called the "cause", and the Soul is described as being made by the Intellect (V.1.8.1-8; cf. IV.8.1.40-51; VI.7.42.15-25).[51] Hence, it would seem that Plotinus himself considers the cosmic soul as generated by the Intellect, which is thus the real Demiurge behind the creation of the soul and the world (ποιητὴν ὄντως καὶ δημιουργόν (V.9.3.26); ποιητὴς ἔσχατος (II.3.18.13)). However, if we move beyond the obvious, in the Plotinian context, point of the generation of the soul by the Intellect, things are not actually so clear-cut or simple: Plotinus seems, perhaps not surprisingly, to think in terms of a hierarchical continuum of creative principles. Within this continuum, the (cosmic) soul seems indeed to play an executive or ancillary function. However, depending on the specific contexts, the description of this hierarchy is fluid enough to allow for formulations that, at least, seem to

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[50] Soul as generated: Timaeus, 34A-36E and Laws, 892C, 904A, 967D; soul as the source of motion: Laws, 896A-897B. For a discussion of the ensuing problems, see Vlastos, "The Disorderly Motion", 390-9 and "Creation in the Timaeus", 414-9.

[51] This way of putting things may reflect Numenius' innovations: see frs. 12 and 21 (Des Places) and Dillon, "Orthodoxy and Eclecticism", 125. There is a passage where Plotinus seems to identify the Demiurge of the Timaeus with the cosmic soul, on the basis of the fact that the Demiurge "planned" (διενοήθει) and this is a function of the soul and not of the Intellect (III.9.1.35). As Armstrong notes ad loc, Porphyry identified the Demiurge with the cosmic soul and believed that this was Plotinus' view (Proclus, In Platonis Timaeum, 94A; Proclus disagrees with the attribution to Plotinus). Two things should be noted here: (1) As we have to some extent seen and will see in detail in the next chapter, Plotinus does not really think that the cosmic soul creates by "planning"; (2) Plotinus criticises a similar position as a gnostic misinterpretation of Plato in II.9.6.19-25.

place the emphasis differently: sometimes the creative function of the soul is minimised, sometimes the creative principle is divided between the Intellect and the cosmic soul, sometimes the cosmic soul is designated as the properly creative or executive principle.[52]

It would appear thus that the real issue is neither the one-to-one mapping of Platonic to Plotinian entities, nor the rigid division of the Plotinian creative continuum in well-defined segments, but rather the understanding of the specific nature of the creative activity of this continuum. This will be the task of the next chapter, but two preliminary conclusions, already evident, may be noted here in order to help us draw our final conclusions about Plotinus' short cosmogony. First, the cosmic soul derives the principles which guide its creative activity from the Intellect: as Plotinus puts it, the ordering activity of the soul "depends on an abiding intellect of which the image is the order in soul" (IV.4.10.12-3).[53] Second, the auxiliary function of the cosmic soul cannot be actually conceived in terms of a standard distinction between conception, planning, and execution. As we have already noted, Plotinus thinks of the

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[52] E.g.: (1): "something like an imprint and image of [something in the realm of real being] suddenly appears [in the sensible world], either by [real being's] direct action or through the assistance (διακονησαμένης) of soul" (V.8.7.13-6); (2) "but since the ordering principle (κοσμοῦν) is twofold, we speak of one form of it as the Craftsman (δημιουργόν) and the other as the Soul of All (τοῦ παντὸς ψυχήν)" (IV.4.10.1-3; cf. II.3.18.13-5, where the cosmic soul is called "ποιητὴς ἔσχατος" and the Intellect "δημιουργὸς"); (3) "but perhaps these too [the individual souls] would have been able to make [a world], but as the soul of the All had done so already (ποιησάσης) they were unable to do so" (IV.3.6.17-9). The problem becomes more complicated, because Plotinus extends this hierarchy at the lower side in order to include both an immanent soul of nature (to be distinguished from the cosmic soul) and/or individual souls (cf. II.1.5; II.3.17-8; II.9.6.60-3; IV.4.10; and n. 4).

[53] Cf. II.3.17.13-18; II.3.18.8-14; II.9.4.9-10; V.9.3.24-37.

activity or effectiveness of form in its interaction with matter not in terms of planning and execution, but in terms of an instant and sudden attraction between two elements, one active and one passive, in the close proximity (γειτονείᾳ) generated by the soul's "going forth".

We are now in the position to summarise our results in terms of the way in which the images of Plotinus' cosmogony facilitate the "grasping together" of the elements of the sensible world, after these have been relatively separated in the appropriate way within these same images. At the level of their spatio-temporal framework, Plotinus' concern in this direction is expressed by his effort, on the one hand, to abolish all temporal determinations (leaving thus in this context the metaphysical nature of the prior existence of these elements in the darkness), and, on the other, to image their spatial relations in ways that tend to merge or collapse the separate elements into a single entity: the light-with-its-dark-boundary, the net-within-the-sea. At the substantive level, Plotinus' imagery relies of course on both fundamental Platonic metaphors (of creation and generation), for reasons that are, more or less, similar with the ones that made necessary the simultaneous deployment of these metaphors by Plato himself (e.g., the creation model underlines the gap between creator and creation and the procreation model brings to the fore their affinity). However, it is evident that Plotinus not only privileges the generation model (e.g., omitting all the standard details of the creative activity of the architect), but also tends to elaborate it in impersonal ways

that bring procreation or generation almost to the verge of being transformed into a simple and spontaneous natural process (in a way that reminds us of the function of the generation model in the context of Plato's discussion of chora). In this respect there is nothing more revealing than a comparison between the exasperation expressed in Plotinus' remark that "to ask why Soul made the universe is like asking why there is soul and why the Maker makes" (II.9.18.1)[54] and Plato's careful description of the conscious, rational, and benevolent motives of the Demiurge in the Timaeus (29E-30C).

Plotinus' elaboration of the generation model in this direction is of course fully consonant with his understanding of the nature of the soul and its function in the cosmogonical context (after all, this is what this model is supposed to illustrate). In fact, after all the things we have said, we can see that this function oscillates, in a certain sense, between two quite different perspectives.

On the one hand, given Plotinus' insistence on the potency of the active intelligible element, on the passive capacity (or even the reflective active propensity) of the inert material element to receive its imprint, and the spontaneous nature of their interaction, one could argue that the function of the soul is to create a space (or field) of affinity between the intelligible and the material, in which embodied forms can, so to speak,

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[54] τὸ δὲ διὰ τί ἐποίησε κόσμον ταὐτὸν τῷ διὰ τί ἔστι ψυχὴ καὶ διὰ τί ὁ δημιουργὸς ἐποίησεν. Plotinus continues: "First, it is a question of people who assume a beginning of that which always is: then they think that the cause of the making was a being who turned from one thing to another and changed" (II.9.8.1-5).

emerge spontaneously (or, to put it otherwise, that the soul itself is this spacious proximity between these elements). From this point of view, we might say that the soul is both indispensable (no soul, no proximity, no sensible world) and superfluous (what indeed does soul add to the composite?). As long as the proximity is established and soul enables us to consider form and matter naturally suited for each other, as long as soul fulfils its function as a principle (ἀρχή) that enables us to "weave all things together" (πλέκειν τὰ πάντα; III.1.8.7), then this principle of mediation could disappear (although it is everywhere), having brought into being (or being the order of) a unified composite of form and matter.[55]

On the other hand, consider Plotinus' literary device in shaping the entire account. The story appears as a collection of pictures that present the same tableau from different points of view; its oddness is a result of the fact that, so to speak, Plotinus turns off the light (breaks all narrative continuities) as he moves his camera from place to place in order to capture the different views, focusing his attention exclusively on the emergent structure. The overall effect of the narrative resembles thus the effect of a metamorphosis story: something becomes, in ways that cannot be explained in an ordinary way and point implicitly to some internal

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[55] Thus, given the vanishing ("silent") effectiveness of the mediating and unifying function of the soul, Plotinus can describe the sensible world without reference to the soul: "Then matter, too, is a sort of ultimate form; so this universe is all form, and all the things in it are forms; ... the making is done without fuss, since that which makes is all real being and form (ἐπεὶ δὲ καὶ αὕτη εἶδός τι ἔσχατον, πᾶν εἶδος τόδε καὶ πάντα εἴδη·... ἐποιεῖτο δὲ ἀψοφητί, ὅτι πᾶν τὸ ποιῆσαν καὶ οὐσία καὶ εἶδος)" (V.8.7.23-25). It is clear that this interpretation brings the Plotinian soul close to the Platonic chora, but this is something that cannot be pursued here.

ability of self-transformation, something else. Instead of a narrative sequence of the form 'A and B interacted in such a way as to produce C' or 'A generated B and remained distinct from it', Plotinus' account appears to have the shape of 'A became B became C', without differentiation between separate entities and reference to external determinations. That Plotinus is capable of presenting his cosmogony as a metamorphosis story is suggested by the early announcement of its contents in terms of that "which happened, when the soul which was altogether pure from body took upon itself a bodily nature" (τὸ γινόμενο πάθος τότε, ὅτε ψυχὴ καθαρὰ οὖσα σώματος πάντη ἴσχει περὶ αὐτὴν σώματος φύσιν) (9.13), the story of the soul which did not create or generate the world, but rather became (or, at least, assumed the appearance of) the world. This suggestion is further strengthened by the way in which Plotinus handles the two edges, so to speak, of his account. In this light, the fact that Plotinus does not start his cosmogony with a psychogony can be explained as a sign of his reluctance, in this context, to bring into account anything that would point outside this process of the self-transformation of the soul. A similar motivation may be said to underlie his effort, noted above in our analysis of the images, to treat matter not as something that exists prior and independently of the activity of the soul, but as something that is generated simultaneously with the activity of the soul, as an index of the inability of the soul to carry its formative or ordering activity beyond certain limits. From this point of view, Plotinus is able to present the

genesis (and hence the order) of the sensible world in terms of a single creative force, the cosmic soul, which, with all the relevant qualifications, acts upon itself. With the help of this entity, the interaction between the two separate elements (matter and form) appears as a self-transformation which contains within itself the principle of its development; in this sense, the sensible world acquires a certain immanent intelligibility.

Is there a choice between these two alternatives, that of a vanishing mediator and a self-transforming entity? Any further discussion presupposes a closer look at the creative activity of the soul, the theme of the next chapter. But, with regard to both alternatives, we have now a clearer sense of what it would mean for a creation myth to facilitate the grasping together of the elements that at the same time it separates by necessity.[56]

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[56] An earlier version of this chapter has been published as "Creation or Metamorphosis: Plotinus on the Genesis of the World", in A. Alexandrakis, ed., Neoplatonism and Western Aesthetics (Suny Press, Albany, New York, 2001). Also, parts of this chapter have been presented previously as a paper entitled "Plotinus' Use of Images", at "Neoplatonism and Western Aesthetics" International Conference (Crete, July 1998) and as a lecture at Trinity College Dublin (May, 1999).

CHAPTER 3

Soul and Creation

In the previous chapter the focus of the discussion has been Plotinus' account of the emergence of the ordered, sensible world. As a result, the preceding analysis was limited essentially to the activity of the "eldest" individual soul, namely the cosmic soul, which through its initial interaction with matter brought into existence the world. In this respect my primary effort had been to understand the nature of this activity within the metaphorical framework that structures Plotinus' creation myth. In particular, we have examined in detail both the spatio-temporal terms in which this activity is to be understood (the senses in which soul is prior to body and can be considered as a kind of emanation that establishes a certain "neighbourhood" between the Intellect and matter) and the ways in which Plotinus presents this activity in terms of the substantive metaphorical models at his disposal, mostly through the Platonic heritage of the Timaeus (creation, generation, metamorphosis).

As we move along to a discussion of Chapter 11 of Plotinus' treatise (which, however, will take place in the last section of this chapter, since it requires a rather extensive preparation), our focus becomes

simultaneously wider and narrower. On the one hand, following Plotinus' lead, we shall be also concerned with the activity of other individual souls, or more generally, with the subsequent involvement of soul with the already informed (visible or ensouled) matter of the physical universe. On the other hand, in this chapter, we shall set aside any general considerations about the various metaphorical models and their function and concentrate on certain aspects of the creative activity of the soul, or else on the soul considered as a creator. More specifically, the thematic orientation of the present discussion will be provided by two issues that I have already raised in the previous chapter. The first concerns the place of the soul within the Plotinian continuum of creative principles, and in particular its dependency on the Intellect in this respect. The second concerns the nature and the objectives of the creative activity of the soul, and in particular the sense in which this activity can be considered rational.

Creation in the Chain of Being

As we have already noted in the previous chapter, the rather fuzzy hierarchy of creative entities in the Plotinian universe includes, if we set aside the One, the Intellect and various instances of soul: the cosmic soul, various individual souls, and the immanent 'lower' soul which Plotinus associates with natural processes.[1] We may thus start from the level of

[1] Cf. the references in n.4 and n.52 in Chapter 2.

the Intellect and work our way downwards in an attempt to identify and elucidate the fundamental nature of this creativity, as well as the differences that may characterise its manifestation at the level of the various distinct principles. Given the Platonic precedent of the figure of the Demiurge and its evident presence in Plotinus' work, it would be convenient to structure the discussion that follows in terms of a comparison between the Plotinian notion of creativity and a number of important characteristics that not only have been actually noted or elaborated by Plato in his presentation of the activity of the Demiurge in the Timaeus, but should also be included in any model of creativity based on the notion of a 'craftsman'.[2] Any such model must be based on the central figure of an agent who, even if he does not share the perfection and the extremely powerful theoretical and practical skills of the Platonic Demiurge, must at least have (a) a tolerably well-defined intention to create (something that necessitates the discussion of his motivation or incentives); (b) a tolerably clear conception of what he wants to create (something that entails the possession of certain cognitive capacities); (c) a tolerably adequate capacity to think and act in instrumental ways in order to actually bring about in the appropriate manner what is to be created from whatever material he has to start with (something that entails the

[2] As we have already noted in the previous chapter, the Intellect is called δημιουργός or ποιητής in a large number of passages. See, among others, II.3.18.13; IV.4.10.1-3; V.1.8.1-8; V.8.3.9; V.9.3.26; V.9.5.20. The extensive and global presence of arts and artisans in Plotinus' thought and work is amply documented in Ferwerda, La signification des images et des métaphores dans la pensée de Plotin, 139-158.

possession of other cognitive and certain practical capacities); and, finally, (d) a tolerably well-defined and relatively constant attitude towards what is to be created (which obviously includes an affective component, the index of some kind of interest towards the existence of the created object).

If we take these four fundamental points as a basis for our comparative discussion, even a quick survey of the relevant passages is enough to show that neither the creative activity of the Intellect nor that of the various instances of soul can be fully understood and elucidated in their terms. As a matter of fact, in a number of passages where the theme of creation is discussed (e.g., V.9.5 with reference to the Intellect; III.8.2. with reference to nature as a lower kind of soul), Plotinus brings up the paradigm and the vocabulary of craftsmanship precisely in order to deny explicitly that the creative capacities and activities under discussion can be comprehended within such a framework. Before we proceed to the details and the philosophical implications, let us note at the outset that Plotinus' position and attitude are not surprising. Although the figure of the expert craftsman or the paradigm of art may have become indispensable for Plato as a theoretical schema in a variety of practical and theoretical contexts (and through him for the entire ancient Greek philosophical tradition), the fact remains that the social significations that animated and pervaded the Greek world were such that in almost every relevant value-distinction possible (contemplation versus creation, nature versus art, procreator versus maker, farmers versus artisans, citizens

versus artisans) the side of artisans and art consistently occupied the inferior side.[3] Within this cultural environment, Plotinus' position, as expressed in his well-known claims in V.8.1 concerning the original and independent access of artists to the intelligible world, raises art above the level of imitation of nature and can be considered as an attempt at a more balanced appreciation of the role of the craftsman or the artist. However, the ambiguities remain, and in what follows we shall explore the way in which these ambiguities, through which the figure of the maker appears as an unavoidable comparandum or an inevitable second-best, were expressed in concrete philosophical terms in Plotinus' metaphysics. In a more positive vein, our task will be to examine the ways in which the model of the craftsman was enriched or supplemented by Plotinus in the service of his philosophical objectives.

At the most fundamental level, almost all the points to be raised in the discussion that follows are programmatically formulated in the following important passage, which, therefore, has to be quoted in extenso:

> This, we may say, is the first act of generation (πρώτη γέννησις): the One, perfect because it seeks nothing, has nothing, and needs nothing, overflows (ὑπερερρύη), as it were, and its superabundance (ὑπερπλῆρες) makes something other than itself. This, when it has come into being, turns back (ἐπεστράφη) upon the One and is filled,

[3] For a discussion of the Platonic ambiguities in this respect within the cultural and political context of classical Greece, see Vidal-Naquet, "A Study in Ambiguity". A glimpse to the widespread presence of the motif of the Demiurge in later Greek thought, indicating clearly the extent to which its theoretical fecundity in various contexts was matched by a certain ambiguity with respect to the value of craftsmanship and art, can be gained, for instance, through Watson, "Discovering the Imagination", 220-25.

> and becomes Intellect by looking at it. Its halt and turning toward the One (πρὸς ἐκεῖνο στάσις) constitutes being, its gaze upon the One, Intellect. ... Resembling the One thus, Intellect produces (ποιεῖ) in the same way, pouring forth a multiple power -this is a likeness of it (εἶδος δὲ καὶ τοῦτο αὐτοῦ)- just as that which was before it poured it forth. This activity, springing from the substance (ἐκ τῆς οὐσίας ἐνέργεια) of the Intellect is Soul, which comes to be this while Intellect abides unchanged (μένοντος): for Intellect too comes into being while that which is before it abides unchanged. But Soul does not abide unchanged when it produces: it is moved (κινηθεῖσα) and so brings forth an image (ἐγέννα εἴδωλον). It looks to its source and it is filled , and going forth to another opposed movement (εἰς κίνησιν ἄλλην καὶ ἐναντία) generates its own image (εἴδωλον), which is sensation and the principle of growth in plants. Nothing is separated or cut off (ἀπήρτηται οὐδ' ἀποτέτμηται) from that which is before it (V.2.1.8-23; cf. V.1.6.40-55).

This passage is enough to show that the intelligibility of all the instances of ontological creativity in Plotinus' universe (i.e., the answer to the question 'why create or generate?') cannot be grounded or understood in terms of a model based on deliberate production (whether through art or procreation, to the extent that procreation can be also considered as a deliberate act) for three basic reasons.[4] First, because these instances are not grounded in some decision process, or else do not correspond to the formation of some definite (or even indefinite) intention. Second, because they are not motivated by the most general incentive of any creative activity, namely the felt lack of something, to be hopefully satisfied,

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[4] In this section, I shall be referring mostly to the Intellect, which can indeed be considered as the paradigmatic instance of Plotinian metaphysical creativity, lacking the complications that have to be addressed in related discussions of the One (e.g., the One never turns back) or the soul (e.g., the soul moves in creating). Nevertheless, it is clear that a number of general aspects of the issue are common in all three Hypostases; accordingly, I shall occasionally use formulations that, in context, refer to the One or the soul without always drawing attention to this fact.

directly or indirectly, through the product of the creative process. Third, because they do not involve any kind of effort or distance (mental, temporal, material) between conception and accomplishment, to be covered in the movement of execution: as Plotinus notes elsewhere with reference to the One, the maker makes "without moving at all, without any inclination or act of will or any sort of activity on its part" (οὐ προσνεύσαντος οὐδὲ βουληθέντος οὐδὲ ὅλως κινηθέντος; V.1.6.27). Instead, to the extent that the formation of intentions is necessary for the designation of some entity as subjective, even in a wide sense, we are asked to envisage the natural or spontaneous activity of impersonal entities and recognize initially the unfolding of this activity as the manifestation of a plenitude of power or a state of perfection (καὶ πάντα δὲ ὅσα ἤδη τέλεια γεννᾷ; V.1.6.38), which lacks nothing and, hence, can aim at nothing outside itself. Indeed the only general law of this creative unfolding seems to be its hastening towards an eventual point of exhaustion, understood of course not temporally, but with regard to the effective capacity of the original power as it becomes diffused in its various (de)gradations: the "unspeakable power" (ἐκ δυνάμεως ἀφάτου) of reality has "to go on forever, until all things have reached the ultimate possible limit [impelled] by the power itself" (χωρεῖν δὲ ἀεί, ἕως εἰς ἔσχατον μέχρι τοῦ δυνατοῦ τὰ πάντα ἥκῃ αἰτίᾳ δυνάμεως; IV.8.6.13-6).

If this is the case, Plotinus, as we have already noted in the previous chapter, cannot offer any general reason as to "why the maker makes" (διὰ τί ὁ δημιουργὸς ἐποίησεν; II.9.18.1). He may say, and indeed says in a variety of contexts and ways, that this creative overflowing should be attributed to the very nature of every creative entity, or indeed to the nature of being and reality in general, "if this is in every nature, to produce what comes after it and to unfold itself" (εἴπερ ἑκάστῃ φύσει τοῦτο ἔνεστι τὸ μετ' αὐτὴν ποιεῖν καὶ ἐξελίττεσθαι; IV.8.6.8-9).[5] Beyond this assertion of the essential productivity of being, Plotinus can offer two sets of considerations. The purpose of the first is to provide some explication of the character and the spontaneous aim of this creative overflowing. In this respect, Plotinus' suggestion seems to be that we should consider this activity as generating or diffusing around each creative entity the shining aura (περίλαμψις) of a familiar environment, a familiarity that Plotinus understands in terms of the similarity between an image and its original in circumstances where the two of them are related through some natural genetic process. "The snow does not only keep its cold inside itself", the cold that presumably made it, and, in the same way,

> all existing things, as long as they remain in being, necessarily produce from their own substances (ἐκ τῆς αὐτῶν οὐσίας ἀναγκαίαν), in dependence of their present power, a surrounding reality (αὐτῶν ἐξηρτημένην ὑπόστασιν) directed to what is outside them, a kind of

[5] Cf. II.9.8.24-6: "only that which is the most powerless of all things has nothing below it".

image of the archetypes from which it was produced (εἰκόναν οὖσαν οἷον ἀρχετύπων ὧν ἐξέφυ) (V.1.6.31.34).[6]

If this suggestion amounts to a principle for the local determination of the activity of each creative instance, which is thus not only a link in a blind chain toward the eventual exhaustion of being, but also the agent of the formation of what comes after it in the chain, the second set of considerations develops further this notion of familiarity and attempts to render more plausible the generative activity in quasi-moral, quasi-affective terms that point at the same time to the corresponding remarks about the motivation of the Demiurge in Plato's Timaeus and to an essentially procreative model of production.[7] In this perspective, the indifferent and spontaneous overflowing of the creative principle acquires a certain moral character (in terms of a classical virtue-morality that oscillates between the notions of efficiency or power and moral goodness), to the extent that it is presented as the result of a generosity devoid of selfishness or grudgingness (φθόνος). In II.9.17.17 or V.4.1.35 this generosity is described in moral terms, while in IV.8.6.12-3 the claim that

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[6] Cf. V.4.1.24-42, where Plotinus makes the same claims and explicitly states that this is the case both with entities which have choice (προαίρεσιν ἔχῃ) and with entities which grow without choice (φύει ἄνευ προαιρέσεως), and IV.3.10.35-6: "and this is of course common to all that exists, to bring things to likeness with themselves".

[7] "Let us now state the cause wherefor he that constructed it constructed becoming and the all. He was good, and in him that is good no envy arises concerning anything; being devoid of envy he desired that all should be, so far as possible, like himself" (Timaeus, 29e). The affective life of the Demiurge includes also the joy and the pleasure (ἡγάσθη, εὐφρανθείς) he feels upon completion of his work (37c) and the special concern he displays for the lesser gods as his immediate offspring (41a-d). Plotinus was fully aware of the affections of the Platonic Demiurge, which of course run counter to his notion of the indifference of the creative entities toward their creation; accordingly, in V.8.8 he interprets the joy of the Demiurge as a didactic device pointing to the delight and the admiration we ought to feel about the world and its intelligible model.

the "unspeakable power ... could not stand still as if it had drawn a line around itself in selfish jealousy" (οὐκ ἔδει στῆσαι οἷον περιγράψαντα φθόνῳ) indicates that this moral interpretation (which, in any case, is problematic, since one can hardly see how moral-affective terms can make sense in view of the radical indifference of the creator) should be at least treated with caution.[8] In the same perspective, Plotinus invests what in the large passage quoted above is described as the "halt" and the "turning toward" (στάσις) of the creature toward its creator with certain affections that both follow naturally from the model of procreation and, in this case, seem more congenial to his explicit claims. In this light, this "turning toward" can be considered as a result of the fact that "everything longs (ποθεῖ) for its parent (γεννῆσαν) and loves (ἀγαπᾷ) it, especially when parent and offspring (γεγεννημένον) are alone", separated only by "otherness" (ἑτερότητι μόνον κεχωρίσθαι) (V.1.6.50-55).[9]

This differentiation between the affections that seem appropriate for the creator and the creature can be also considered as an index to another distinction that can be identified in the large passage quoted above. In this passage, we actually encounter two kinds of creative activity. In the

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[8] In V.4.1.28-9 the situation is presented in a slightly different perspective, in which "we see that anything that comes to perfection produces and does not endure to remain by itself" (οὐκ ἀνεχόμενον ἐφ' ἑαυτοῦ μένειν), something that opens other possibilities, if one wishes to pursue a psychological line.

[9] Cf. here V.3.12.28-32, an intriguing formulation in its tension between Plotinus' philosophical exigencies and the implications in the context of a procreative model: "for the One did not in some sort of way want (οὐ γὰρ οἷον προυθημήθη) Intellect to come into being, with the result that the Intellect came into being with the wanting as an intermediary (τῆς προθυμίας μεταξὺ γενομένης) between the One and the generated intellect".

first instance, the higher principle (the One or the Intellect) produces by its indifferent overflowing something that is merely other than itself, but not yet the distinct and definite lower principle (the Intellect or the soul) with its proper internal articulation. This articulation is presented as the product of another kind of creative activity, a process of self-constitution that is undertaken by the created principle itself and occurs in the circumstances of (or perhaps amounts to) its loving halt and return toward the higher principle. It is clear that the nature of this self-creative activity is radically different from the original instance of generation in ways that bring it much closer to a more ordinary notion of creation or production (of, say, the standard erotic kind elucidated in Plato's Symposium and evidently shaped by various interests). Its starting point is one of a lack to be eventually satisfied (ἐπληρώθη), it is guided (and, in this case, effected) by a certain conscious gaze (βλέπον, θέα) toward that which it aspires, and it is accompanied by longing and love (ποθεῖ, ἀγαπᾷ). On the other hand, it should be also noted that this creative activity seems further removed from any model of ordinary, instrumental production, since what is at stake in this case is a process of self-constitution and not the production of an object external to the maker.

The distinction between these two kinds of creative activity can be expressed in terms of another distinction frequently employed by Plotinus, that between an "activity of the substance" (ἐνέργεια τῆς οὐσίας) and an "activity from the substance" (ἐνέργεια ἐκ τῆς οὐσίας), or else, between an

activity "in its own self" (ἐν ἑαυτῷ) and an activity "to something else" (εἰς τὸ ἄλλο) (V.4.2.26-7; II.9.8.23-4).[10] The notion of an activity from the substance (always presented metaphorically in terms of physical phenomena of overflowing, radiation, or diffusion) is invoked precisely in order to account for the way in which an entity can generate something different from itself not only without having no intention for doing so, but also suffering no change whatsoever, as it abides peacefully and indifferently in itself. On the other hand, the notion of an activity of the substance points to the workings of the internal reality of each creative principle, which as we have already noted is nothing else than a process of self-constitution, "the active actuality which is each particular thing" (αὐτό ἐστιν ἐνέργεια ἕκαστον; V.4.2.28). In this case, the metaphorical presentation has to be of an entirely different order, as in the case of the celebrated image of "working on your statue" (τεκταίνων τὸ σὸν ἄγαλμα; I.6.9.13). Once again it is worth underlining the way in which these two activities interlock in the progressive unfolding of being, distributing in a rather peculiar way causality and teleology, innocence and responsibility, autonomy and heteronomy. The activity from the substance corresponds to a causal power that is indifferently passed on from principle to principle, guaranteeing the continuity of this unfolding in successive

[10] For a general discussion of this distinction and its Platonic-Aristotelian origins, see Gerson, "Plotinus's Metaphysics", 566-570. The same distinction is essentially discussed in the context of the relation between the One and Intellect in Lloyd, "Thought and Existence", in terms that resemble what follows here, but at a level of detail which is beyond the scope of the present discussion.

generations, yet playing essentially no formative role. In this sense, each entity receives its bare existence "as a kind of gracious gift" (οἷον ἐν χάριτι δόντος; IV.8.6.23) from the previous entity in an act that, as much as it exemplifies the ontological power of the higher principle over the lower, cannot be judged in terms of any notion of responsibility: since the higher principle lacks any intention, it cannot produce anything determinate, and hence its action cannot be judged in any perspective defined by determinate standards. The formative activity that makes the emergent entity what it is is assumed by the lower principle, as a teleological task of self-determination, which, although internal in the strongest sense of the term (this is the proper activity of each principle as it abides by itself), is nevertheless guided by the effective presence of the higher principle in the very core of the life of the lower principle as an object of love and as a model to be imitated. The success of this project depends of course on the resources and the power of the lower principle (which thus becomes responsible for what it is). As Plotinus puts it, there is nothing that hinders (ἐκώλυεν) anything from having a share in the nature of the good, but only as far as each thing is able to participate in it (καθόσον ἕκαστον οἷόν τ' ἦν μεταλαμβάνειν; IV.8.6.17-19; κατὰ δύναμιν τὴν ἑαυτῶν ἕκαστα; III.2.3.33).[11]

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[11] Cf. here: "So we must assume that the first realities are actual and without deficiencies and perfect; but the imperfect ones come after and derive from the first, being perfected by their begetters as fathers perfect their originally imperfect offspring (τελειούμενα δὲ παρ' αὐτῶν τῶν γεγεννηκότων δίκην πατέρων τελειούντων)" (V.9.4.7-11). One can discern in

It should be noted, however, that this analysis leads to a necessary reformulation of one of the points made above. If the local aim of the productive activity of each principle is to generate around it a familiar environment or dependent reality, then it would be more appropriate to say that each principle generates around it an environment, and then persuades or seduces (although unintentionally) this environment to shape itself in forms familiar to the higher principle: what comes after is shaped on the basis of the creative recollection and reactivation of what comes before by what comes after.[12] All these points may be better expressed, by saying that when Plotinus calls each principle "representation and image" of the one above it (μίμημα καὶ εἴδωλον ἐκείνου; V.4.2.26), these terms should be understood in a double sense: each principle resembles the higher (subjectively; qua creator) in being an instance of a sovereign but blind ontological power of production (which it receives from the outside and it gives to the outside, without being able to

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this misleading formulation (in that it hides the fact that the first realities actually do nothing themselves in order to perfect their offspring) an extremely powerful model of education, not to mention an intriguing anticipation of Freud's views on the origin and the function of super-ego with regard to the formation of character (see The Ego and the Id, 368-379). The fundamental difference between the two accounts (after the necessary adjustments), namely the presentation by Freud of the moment of the turning back as an instance of mourning, i.e., love for the dead, provides a very fruitful starting point for the exploration of the differences between classical and modern (post-Kantian) conceptions of subjectivity.

[12] The ambiguity about the value of craftsmanship, noted above, appears here in a particularly perspicuous form. As much as reality is presented by Plotinus in thoroughly dynamic and creative terms, the fact remains that "being able to make something by itself (τὸ δι' αὐτοῦ δύνασθαί τι ποιεῖν) is the characteristic of something which is not altogether in a good state (οὐκ εὖ ἔχοντος πάντῃ) but makes and moves (ποιοῦντος καὶ κινουμένου) in the direction in which it is inferior" (III.2.138-41; cf. V.3.12.33, where the same point is made for the One). As a result, the higher principle is the creator, but the job has to be done by the lower principle.

interfere in any way with it) and each principle comes to resemble the higher (objectively; qua creature) through a process of self-determination undertaken as a work of love. In this process, the rather indifferent and fully indeterminate gift of existence acquires its determinate reality and value only to the extent that the lower principle can activate lovingly its heritage through a task of self-determination aiming at what, for Plotinus, lies both above and inside.

The main purpose of this presentation of the fundamentals of Plotinian creativity was to bring out the complexity and the multiplicity of the models of creation employed or exploited by Plotinus. Summarising what has been said so far, we may say that the generation of a Hypostasis by another, is a creative act that starts with a process of spontaneous or 'natural' generation, continues with an affective or conative determination of the creature in terms that seem to follow from a procreative (in the full sense of this term, including an erotic-educational dimension) model of creation, and ends with an activity that could be described in terms of craftsmanship or art, with the important qualification that the aim is not the production of an external object, but rather the self-constitution of the creature. These general considerations apply of course (primarily) to the Intellect, which has indeed a double activity of this kind: "for when it is active in itself (ἐν αὑτῷ ἐνεργεῖ), the products (ἐνεργούμενα) of its activity are the other intellects, but when it acts outside itself (ἐξ αὑτοῦ), the product is Soul" (VI.2.22.26-28), the soul which, in accordance with the

complex manner of Plotinian generation, "is matter to the first reality which makes it and is afterwards given shape and perfected" (ὕλην πρὸς τὸ ποιῆσαν τὸ πρῶτον, εἶτ' αὐτὴν ἔμμορφον ἀποτελεῖσθαι; VI.9.4.11-12). Setting aside for the time being the process of the generation of the soul, let us examine in some more detail the nature of the internal activity of the Intellect, in terms that would be helpful later in our discussion of the creative activity of the soul.

One of the fundamental characteristics of the "proper activity" (οἰκεία ἐνέργεια) of the Intellect is that this activity is absolutely immanent and self-contained. Although, as we have already remarked, the active self-constitution of the Intellect can be presented as a halt toward the One (πρὸς ἐκεῖνο στάσις), in reality there is no external reference. This very formulation amounts to the claim that when the Intellect gazes at and comes to know the One, it sees and knows nothing but itself (ἰδεῖν ἑαυτὸν καὶ εἰδέναι; V.3.7.11-2), since, in the extraordinary circumstances of the ontological transaction beetwen the One and the Intellect, all the Intellect can know is what the One "gives and what its power is" (ἃ ἔδωκε καὶ ἃ δύναται), and hence, itself as the sum of all that was given (πάντα τὰ δοθέντα αὐτός; V.3.7.5-7). In this sense, Plotinus notes that "the being of the Intellect is activity, and there is nothing to which this activity is directed; so it is self-directed" (τὸ εἶναι οὖν ἐνέργεια, καὶ οὐδέν, πρὸς ὃ ἡ ἐνέργεια· πρὸς αὑτῷ ἄρα; V.3.7.18-20).

Another important characteristic of this self-directed activity is that it is entirely foreign from any form of practical activity in the entire range defined, say, between the Aristotelian notions of praxis and poiesis: the Intellect neither does nor makes anything in the ordinary sense of these terms, since "it has no practical activity, and in fact in pure Intellect there is not even any desire for what is absent from it" (ᾧ δὲ μὴ πρᾶξις, οὐδὲ γὰρ ὄρεξις τῷ καθαρῷ νῷ ἀπόντος; V.3.6.39-40), the obvious and necessary prerequisite for any sort of practical activity.[13] Given this remark, which merely brings to the foreground the evident fact that the proper task of the Intellect ought to be thinking and not making, we have to face the following fundamental question: What is the reason that leads Plotinus to present again and again the internal activity of the Intellect with the help of a vocabulary of making and generating, as when he says, for instance, that the wisdom of the Intellect can be appreciated if we consider that "it has made all things" (πεποίηκε τὰ ὄντα; V.8.4.46), or when he calls the intelligibles (νοήματα) "perfect productions" (τέλεον γέννημα; VI.7.2.48)? The rest of my remarks about the Intellect will be an attempt to shed some light on this question in terms of a brief discussion of the nature of this kind of thinking and the necessity that underlies its presentation as a form of making.

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[13] The same point is made even more forcefully in III.2.1.35-8. Since the Intellect "is everywhere one and complete at every point, it stays still and knows no alteration (ἀλλοίωσιν οὐκ ἔχει); for it does not make as one thing acting upon another (ποιεῖ ἄλλο εἰς ἄλλο). For what reason could it have for making, since it is deficient in nothing (τίνος γὰρ ἂν ἕνεκα ποιοῖ ἐλλεῖπον οὐδενί)?"

The nature of the thinking of the 'pure' Intellect and the problems it generates is of course a well-covered topic in Plotinian scholarship, and hence I shall be rather brief here.[14] In this perspective, there are three fundamental aspects that need to be noted. The first concerns the identity between thinking and being. At the level of Intellect, Plotinus' position amounts to a complete and exhaustive idealism: the Intellect "really thinks the real beings and thus establishes them into existence" (νοῦς ὢν ὄντως νοεῖ τὰ ὄντα καὶ ὑφίστησιν; V.9.5.13-4)[15] and these beings have no other existence outside thought. The second aspect concerns the identity between the Intellect and its thoughts: the intelligible beings are not only contained in the Intellect (ἐν αὐτῷ), but are identical with the Intellect. As a result, the Intellect thinks them in itself as (it thinks) itself (ἐν αὐτῷ ὡς αὐτόν; V.9.5.15), in the complete and thoroughgoing identity of Intellect, intellection, and intelligibles (ἓν ἅμα πάντα ἔσται, νοῦς, νόησις, τὸ νοητόν; V.3.5.43-4), the actuality of which is the being of the Intellect (cf. V.5.2; II.9.1.37-40; III.9.1.15-20). Finally, this thinking, in conformity with the general claims made above, occurs in the form of an entirely static activity that does not affect or change (μεταβάλλειν) in any way the condition of the

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[14] The well-known discussion of non-discursive thought in Plotinus (Lloyd, "Non-discursive Thought"; Sorabji, Time, Creation, and the Continuum, 152-156; Lloyd, "Non-propositional Thought") provides a good orientation in the issue, covering problems (such as the complexity of non-discursive thought or the problem of self-consciousness in the Intellect) that will not concern us in this context.

[15] Cf. V.1.815-18 and III.8.8.1-8 for a discussion of this issue invoking Parmenides' formula for the identity between thinking and being.

Intellect: "Intellect is as it is, always the same, resting in a static activity" (ἔστι γὰρ ὡς ἔστι νοῦς ἀεὶ ὡσαύτως ἐνεργείᾳ κείμενος ἑστώσῃ; II.9.1.30).

The static nature of the thinking of the Intellect can be expressed in a variety of ways that point to different aspects of the issue. The most general formulation, excluding at the outset every form of change or becoming, would be the claim that "every act of intelligence is timeless, since the realities there are in eternity and not in time" (ἄχρονος πᾶσα νόησις, ἐν αἰῶνι, ἀλλ' οὐκ ἐν χρόνῳ ὄντων τῶν ἐκεῖ; IV.4.1.13-4; αἰῶν as the life of the Intellect is described in III.7.3). In phenomenological terms, the most important implication of this general thesis is that thought (and hence knowledge) at the level of the Intellect does not appear (or is not experienced) as some kind of inquiry or search after the thing to be thought or known, but amounts to the continuous and undisturbed presence of the objects of thought (which is of course the continuous presence of the Intellect to itself): the Intellect "thinks not by seeking, but by having" (νοεῖ δὲ οὐ ζητῶν, ἀλλ' ἔχων; V.1.4.17; cf. V.8.4.39). Once again, Plotinus attributes to this kind of thought conative and affective features that are inconsistent with any state that we may generally consider as providing the starting point for some creative endeavour: "all things in it are perfect" (πάντα τέλεια), and as a result of this absence of lack "all things remain stationary for ever, as if they were satisfied with themselves for being so" (οἷον ἀγαπῶντα ἑαυτὰ οὕτως ἔχοντα; V.1.4.25-6). Finally, and we come here to the full expression of the intuitive and non-

discursive nature of the thought of the Intellect, this form of thought has no internal distance, extension, or depth in any possible sense of these terms. On the one hand, since there is no seeking for apprehending any objects of thought that are not immediately present (οὐκ ἐπιβάλλων ὡς μὴ ἔχων), or trying to obtain them (ἐπικτώμενος), or going through them discursively as if they were not ready at hand (διεξοδεύων οὐ προκεχειρισμένα; V.9.7.10-11), it follows that there is no temporal succession reflecting conceptual or argumentative elaboration, no mental chain of associations formed by "letting some things go and attending to other" (V.1.4.19). As a result, this thinking amounts to an intuitive knowledge, which, regardless of its propositional content and complexity, "is not composed of theorems, but one thing as a whole" (οὐκέτι συντεθεῖσαν ἐκ θεωρημάτων, ἀλλ' ὅλην ἕν τι; V.8.5.6-7). On the other hand, although the Intellect in the process of contemplating the One and thus constituting itself thinks a multiplicity of objects (III.8.8.30-33; V.3.11.1-4), this kind of thought experiences no resistance and requires no effort. Each individual object of thought is manifest as a whole upon thinking (προεφάνη; VI.7.2.52) and in the totality of thought "everything and all things are clear to the inmost part of anything" (πᾶς παντὶ φανερὸς εἰς τὸ εἴσω καὶ πάντα; V.8.4.5), arranged in a transparent and unified network.

All these claims raise undoubtedly complicated epistemological problems. However, the main reason for their comprehensive but rather

cursory presentation is to underscore the urgency of our guiding question by bringing to the foreground the theoretical oddity (if not violence) of Plotinus' resolution to present the activity of the Intellect in creative terms. Why should he try to present the eternal and static presence of the Intellect to itself in terms of a dynamic process of self-constitution and, hence, as an instance of creation or generation? And how can this entity, present to itself in such a manner and entirely absorbed in itself, be designated as the primary creative instance in the entire hierarchy of Plotinian reality? With respect to these questions, one point that has become evident through our analysis of the nature of pure intellection is that we are dealing once again with a case of a creation, which, in an ordinary perspective, has to be considered as metaphorical. If "in the case of the Craftsman (τοῦ δημιουργοῦ) we must completely eliminate 'before' (πρόσω) and 'after' (ὀπίσω) and give him a single unchanging (ἄτρεπτον) and timeless (ἄχρονον) life" (IV.4.10.5-7), it follows clearly that the notion of craftsmanship involved must be of a rather peculiar nature. Moreover, the analysis of the previous chapter, in which the presentation of the emergence of the sensible world in terms of a creative act was interpreted as a metaphorical account of the order of the sensible world motivated by certain requirements reflecting the ontological status of the sensible world as a composite object, is of no avail in this context. Given the complete identity between thinking and being, the Intellect as the sum of the intelligibles is not an object of composite nature in the relevant sense; as a

result, we must seek elsewhere for the necessity motivating Plotinus' claims.

In order to elucidate this problem, one needs to abandon the issue of pure intellection and return to the question of the creation of the world, with the help of two passages that capture concisely Plotinus' interpretation (or revision) of the function of the Demiurge in the Timaeus. The first of them is actually solidly Platonic (at least in the context of a non-literal interpretation of the Timaeus), both with regard to its inspiration and its implications. It is merely the claim that

> the universe comes from the intellect and the intellect is prior in nature and the cause of universe as a kind of archetype and model, the universe being an image of it (αἴτιος τούτου ἀρχέτυπον οἷον καὶ παράδειγμα εἰκόνος τούτου ὄντος) and existing by means of it and everlastingly coming into existence in this way (III.2.1.23-27).[16]

The second passage considers the same situation from the perspective of a personified Intellect/maker resembling the Demiurge, where Plotinus is nevertheless forced to make an interesting and careful contrast between such a Demiurge and an ordinary craftsman. Commenting on the fact that the universe was not generated by the Intellect "as the result of a process of reasoning" (γέγονε δὲ οὐ λογισμῷ), he notes:

> For if it had sought (εἰ ἐζήτει), it would not have it of itself, nor it would have been of its own substance, but it would have been like a craftsman (τεχνίτης) who does not have the ability to produce from

[16] All this may be considered as an amplification of the claim that "it is wholly necessary that this ordered world should be a copy of something" (Timaeus, 29B).

himself, but as something acquired (ἀλλ' ἐπακτόν), and gets it from learning (ἐκ τοῦ μαθεῖν) (III.2.2.13-15).[17]

These two passages make clear the initial requirements of the problem. On the one hand, there has to be a prior paradigm to guide the creation of the world; on the other hand, if the effectiveness of this paradigm is to be presented in terms of a creative figure, the ultimate function of such a figure (since there may be auxiliary figures, such as the cosmic soul) would be precisely to account for the emergence of this paradigm. The most obvious way to account for such an emergence would be through an act of creation: if, as we have noted above, the Intellect "really thinks the real beings and thus establishes them into existence" (νοῦς ὢν ὄντως νοεῖ τὰ ὄντα καὶ ὑφίστησιν; V.9.5.13-4), then one could argue that the fundamental creative function of the Intellect is precisely the creation of the paradigm that guides all subsequent creation. However, things are not so simple. As Plotinus notes in the same treatise, the Intellect "stands firm in itself, being all things together, and does not think each thing in order to bring it into existence" (ἔστηκεν ἐν αὑτῷ ὁμοῦ πάντα ν, οὐ νοήσας, ἵν' ὑποστήσῃ ἕκαστα; V.9.7.12-3). The tension between these two claims cannot be eased with the help of some distinction between instances of

[17] Again, this claim may be considered as an amplification of Plato's claim that the Demiurge "was looking" (ἔβλεπεν) at the eternal (τὸ ἀΐδιον) while making the world (29A). However, this amplification cannot be directly warranted by anything in the Platonic text, where the original cognitive relationship between the Demiurge and the eternal paradigm is left unclear. That much is conceded by Plotinus himself in III.9.1, where he discusses explicitly his two main problems with the figure of the Demiurge in the Timaeus: the question of the existence of forms prior to the activity of the Intellect/Demiurge and the sense in which the Demiurge planned his creation.

particular thinking (the thinking of particular Forms) and the totality of pure intellection (the thinking of the entire "real living creature"; III.9.1.3). In both cases, if thinking is construed as thinking of something (and in what other way can it be construed?), "what is thought must be prior to this thinking. Otherwise how would it come to thinking it? Certainly not by chance, nor did it happen on it casually" (ταύτης γὰρ τῆς νοήσεως πρότερον δεῖ τὸ νοούμενον εἶναι. ἢ πῶς ἂν ἔλθοι ἐπὶ τὸ νοεῖν αὐτό; οὐ γὰρ δὴ κατὰ συντυχίαν οὐδὲ ἐπέβαλεν εἰκῇ; V.9.7.16-9).

We are now in a position to formulate precisely the issue raised by the creative nature of the Intellect. On the one hand, to the extent that for Plotinus any ontologically significant creative activity is guided by a prior mental conception[18] (which, as we have already noted, can be also presented as a loved object, exercising its ontological effectiveness in a teleological manner), the Intellect can indeed be considered as the primary and fundamental creative instance, the locus or the agent of an apparently radical creative activity that, while being presupposed by any other form of creation both as beginning and end, has in itself no presuppositions or conditions, either in a formal or a material perspective. Yet, this means that Plotinus has to face, in the context of an interpretation of this original creative activity as a form of thinking, the fundamental problem of any attempt to articulate a concept of radical creation: namely, that the only

[18] "Some wisdom makes all the things which have come into being, whether they are products of art or nature" (πάντα δὴ τὰ γινόμενα, εἴτε τεχνητὰ εἴτε φυσικὰ εἴη, σοφία τις ποιεῖ; V.8.5.1-2). I shall return to this issue shortly.

way to think of an unconditional creation with no presuppositions is by considering in a circular manner the created object as a presupposition of itself, a self-effected entity, or, in this particular context, as a thought that thinks itself, "as if the conclusion was there before the syllogism which established the cause and did not follow from the premises" (οἷον εἰ πρὸ τοῦ συλλογισμοῦ τῆς αἰτίας τὸ συμπέρασμα, οὐ παρὰ τῶν προτάσεων; V.8.7.41-2) In this sense, the original entity can be neither a thought (what mind is thinking this thought?), nor an Intellect (what is this Intellect thinking?), since in both cases the result would be the implicit postulation of a condition prior to the creative act. Rather, in the intelligible world, although "the making principles are primary on account of their making" (ἐκεῖ δὲ πρῶτα τὰ ποιοῦντα, ὅθεν καὶ πρῶτα), "the primary principle and the making principle must coincide, and both be one (δεῖ οὖν ἅμα καὶ τὸ ποιοῦν εἶναι καὶ ἓν ἄμφω): if not, there will be need for yet another" (V.3.10.3-5).[19] In other words, neither the making principle (the creator), nor the primary principle (the creature) can be reduced to or absorbed by each other. The duality has to be retained and their relationship presented in terms of a creative act, but only in order to be possible to say that "the thing itself is intellect and its ground is intellect" (καὶ γὰρ τὸ ὑποκείμενον νοῦς καὶ αὐτὸς νοῦς; V.8.4.19), or else to say that the only sense in which the Intellect generates wisdom (ἐγέννησε τὴν σοφίαν) is

[19] As Plotinus himself notes immediately after the passage just quoted, any further discussion of this issue has to take into account the presence and the function of the One. Here, however, our direction is downward.

by being wisdom itself (αὐτὸν ὄντα σοφίαν; V.8.5.13-5), or else to say that the Intellect is "like the primary lawgiver" (οἷον νομοθέτης πρῶτος) only in order to correct ourselves immediately by adding "or rather is itself the law of being" (μᾶλλον δὲ νόμος αὐτὸς τοῦ εἶναι; V.9.4.28-9), since no lawgiver is possible if the law as such does not already exist. However, if this is all we can say, then the only way to deal with the riddle of this circularity is to dilate it through the invocation of a time in which there is no before or after, namely, eternity.

The Soul in the Chain of Creation

Having acquainted ourselves with the real thing, namely intelligible creativity, we are ready, in a solid Platonic-Plotinian fashion, to turn our attention to its image, namely the creative activity of the soul. Since, however, images are invariably more complicated than their originals, we need first to return briefly to the vertical procession of the Plotinian principles and make a few remarks about the hypostatic extension of the soul that will provide the background of our discussion of its creative activity.

In the previous section, the descent had reached the point where the Intellect generates the soul as "a lesser image of it, and in the same way indefinite, but defined by its parent and, so to speak, given a form (ὁριζόμενον δὲ ὑπὸ τοῦ γεννήσαντος καὶ οἷον εἰδοποιούμενον)" (V.1.7.40-2). Beyond this level, a number of complications arise, but for the purposes of

the present discussion we need merely to outline the simple model implied by Plotinus' claims in III.8.4-5.[20] In this context, Plotinus draws two complementary distinctions. On the one hand, he makes the already familiar distnction between two 'parts' of soul, which amounts to the demarcation of an internal extension of the Hypostasis soul. There is a 'part' that "is above and, always filled and illuminated by the reality there, remains above" (ἄνω πρὸς τὸ ἄνω ἀεὶ πληρούμενον καὶ ἐλλαμπόμενον μένει ἐκεῖ), a 'part', that is, that would be very difficult to be always and consistently distinct from the Intellect,[21] and another 'part' that "goes forth" (πρόεισι) (III.8.5.10-13). On the other hand, Plotinus also distinguishes, in a way that seems to indicate a quasi-hypostatic unfolding, between a 'prior' soul (which is soul proper) and nature (φύσις) as a 'weak' soul, "the offspring of a prior soul with a stronger life" (γέννημα ψυχῆς προτέρας δυνατώτερον ζώσης; III.8.4.15-6). For the purposes of our discussion, nature qua lower soul can be sufficiently defined as the formative principle that guides natural processes and distinguished from

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[20] We shall be concerned here neither with the problems of hypostatic economy generated by these claims (e.g., is nature a fourth Hypostasis?), nor with the way various specific souls (e.g., the cosmic soul, the souls of the stars, other individual souls) are integrated in this scheme.

[21] For a detailed survey of relevant passages and problems, see Blumenthal, "Nous and Soul in Plotinus", esp. pp.210-13. Blumenthal identifies a number of passages which support the view that, at least in certain cases, the 'upper' part of soul is to be identified with the Intellect. His argument, however, does not prove that this leads to an identification of the two Hypostases. In order for such a view to hold, the 'upper' part of soul has to be first identified with the Hypostasis soul. However, Plotinus explicitly states in a number of occasions that soul is a twofold nature and therefore, what might be called the Hypostasis soul should comprise not only its 'upper' but also its 'lower' part (see, e.g., IV.4.2-3 or IV.8.4.30). We shall return to the question of the internal hypostatic extension of the soul in the next chapter.

soul proper in two related ways. First, by the fact that it does not engage in mental activity of any kind, rational or not, (it is ἀφάνταστος and ἄλογος; III.8.1.23); second, by its complete immanence, the fact that it is "not directed upwards or even downwards, but at rest with what it is" (στᾶσα δὲ ἐν ᾧ ἔστιν) (III.8.4.17-8).

Given these distinctions and the range they cover, it is evident that the activity of the various instances of soul cannot be discussed in a completely unified manner at the level of detail: a kind of soul that has no power to form mental images and bears no relation at all to language is clearly a rather exotic entity (much more exotic, say, than the Freudian unconscious which retains a fundamental relation to imagination and language), which poses problems of its own and cannot be discussed in terms applicable either to more ordinary instances of soul, or to other extraordinary souls, such as the souls of the stars.[22] However, one of the fundamental issues that we have to elucidate, namely the relationship between theory (knowledge, thought, contemplation) and the creative activity of the soul, is formally (i.e., independently of the specific character of this theory and this activity in each case) presented by Plotinus, with a deliberate and provocative insistence, in unified terms and with reference

[22] Plotinus himself was forced, in view of the unusual circumstances, to present his principal account of the activity of nature qua lower soul in the context of an extended and entertaining personification (III.8.4). Nature is asked why it makes (τίνος ἕνεκα ποιεῖ), reprimands the questioner for the inappropriate form of approach given its nature ("You ought not to ask, but to understand in silence, you, too, just as I am silent and not in the habit of talking"; III.8.4.3-5), but nevertheless gives a short speech, which is then supplemented by a commentary, of the kind one would give to an oracular statement (e.g., starting with the question: "What does this mean?").

to the entire family of soul-sisters and soul-daughters. Since Plotinus' conception of this relationship points to the most important similarities between intelligible and psychic creativity (or else indicates the extent to which the analysis of intelligible creativity is carried over and guides the analysis at the level of the soul), we may address it at the outset, reserving for the rest of our discussion an examination of the relevant differences.

Even the most cursory review of the relevant material is enough to substantiate the suspicions that may have been already raised in our discussion of intelligible creativity and support the claim that Plotinus subordinates making and acting to thinking and knowing in almost every conceivable way. Given the unanimity of this evidence, our task is essentially reduced to the systematic presentation of these various ways in terms proper to the ontological circumstances of the soul. The principle of this systematisation is in its turn quite simple. Plotinus starts from the complete identity between thought and activity, or contemplation and making, at the level of the Intellect and relaxes it, so to speak, in both directions in order to come up with two weaker, but fully generalized, claims: thought or contemplation is both a necessary condition for making or acting and its general end. On the basis of these claims, Plotinus is then able to present acting and making either as a weaker form of contemplating or as a substitute for it. Let us then examine some of the details of these claims.

The general formulation of the first claim has been already quoted in the previous section: "some wisdom makes all the things which have come into being, whether they are products of art or nature" (πάντα δὴ τὰ γινόμενα, εἴτε τεχνητὰ εἴτε φυσικὰ εἴη, σοφία τις ποιεῖ; V.8.5.1-2). This claim does not appear surprising. Overall, it points to a providential conception of nature in which there is no room for the effective presence of a chance and which Plotinus undoubtedly shares (cf. III.1.3.1-5; III.2.1.1-5; III.8.2.10-15; VI.9.5.1-5). In the case of deliberate and rational creative activity, of the kind we may associate with the figure of a craftsman, it apparently reflects the fact that such a kind of creation is impossible without the prior conception of the object to be created and the knowledge concerning the instrumental means for its actual production (although, as we shall see when we examine the nature of this wisdom, this is not exactly what Plotinus has in mind). In this respect, the only point that needs to be noted is that the attribution of direct causal effectiveness to knowledge, or to the creator qua knower, (something which is of course far from obvious and presupposes a number of assumptions concerning, e.g., the nature of desire or the general motivation of instances of creation) enables Plotinus to situate the relation between knowledge and the end of action (whether praxis or poiesis) within the general schema of the relation between cause and effect. In this way, Plotinus is able to present the relation between creator and creature in terms of the standard inferiority that characterizes the effect with regard to the cause in his metaphysical

system. Thus, when the identity between maker and thing made in the intelligible realm is relaxed, "every original maker must be in itself stronger than that which it makes" (καὶ τὸ πρῶτον ποιοῦν πᾶν καθ' αὑτὸ κρεῖττον εἶναι δεῖ τοῦ ποιουμένου; V.8.1.30-1). As a result, Plotinus is able to carry over from the intelligible realm the claim that creation in general is undertaken from a condition of plenitude and not deficiency. The superiority of the maker (whether of the agent or the original mental conception that guides creation) implies further that making at the level of the soul does not add anything new in the Plotinian universe: after the Intellect "made all things" (πεποίηκε τὰ ὄντα; V.8.4.46), every other creative effort (whether natural or artificial) results, we may say, in the reproduction of inferior copies of these original realities.

Similar, yet rather more radical, conclusions can be reached if we consider in the same formal manner the motivation behind the creative activity at the level of the soul. So far Plotinus has claimed that contemplation of a mental original is a necessary condition for the undertaking of a creative project. To the extent that such a contemplation of an intelligible model actually takes place, the maker or the model can be deemed superior to the object made and contemplating better than making. However, Plotinus wants to claim further that the creative activity itself is fundamentally a form of contemplation, but one which, because of the weakness of the particular contemplator (i.e., the soul) has to acquire the weaker or inferior form of the actual production of its object

(in time, space, and matter): "all activity of soul must be contemplation, but one stage weaker than another" (ἀνάγκη ἀσθενεστέραν μὲν ἑτέραν ἑτέρας εἶναι [ἡ ἐνέργεια], πᾶσαν δὲ θεωρίαν; III.8.5.20-2). The nature of the weakness involved here will be discussed more fully below. For the time being, we merely need to note that this weakness (which amounts to the dissolution of the instant link between conception and creation in the Intellect and the establishment of the ordinary distance between them to be bridged teleologically) transforms effectively the above claim into the weaker claim that all "action is for the sake of contemplation and vision" (ἡ ἄρα πρᾶξις ἕνεκα θεωρίας καὶ θεωρήματος; III.8.6.1). The scope of the implications of this latter claim is quite wide. At a first level, it obviously implies that action and creation are not ends in themselves but aim at knowledge: the agents of action (τοῖς πράττουσιν) create an object neither for the satisfaction of any other desires they may have nor for the satisfaction afforder by creating itself, but so that "they should know and see it present in their soul" (ἵνα γνῶσιν καὶ παρὸν ἴδωσιν ἐν ψυχῇ) as an "object set there for contemplation" (ὅτι κείμενον θεατόν; III.8.6.6-7). However, at a deeper level, the implications are far more radical. Given that the creative activity of each Hypostasis is not exhausted by its proper activity (i.e., thinking-living eternally for the Intellect, thinking-living in time for the soul) but is also responsible for the vertical unfolding of reality, and given that in this case "that which is produced must always be

of the same kind as its producer, but weaker" (ὁμογενὲς γὰρ ἀεὶ δεῖ τὸ γεννώμενον εἶναι, ἀσθενέστερον μήν; III.8.5.23-4), Plotinus is able to present the thesis concerning the priority of contemplation with full ontological force. In this perspective, it is not only that contemplation is prior to action with regard to the proper activity of various already established entities, but also "that all things come from contemplation and are contemplation, both the things which truly exist and the things which come from them when they contemplate and are themselves objects of contemplation" (ὅτι μὲν πάντα τά τε ὡς ἀληθῶς ὄντα ἐκ θεωρίας καὶ θεωρία, καὶ τὰ ἐξ ἐκείνων γενόμενα θεωρούντων ἐκείνων καὶ αὐτὰ θεωρήματα; III.8.7.1-3). This general claim, which encapsulates, in a way that borders on the misleading, all the finer distinctions elucidated in our discussion,[23] is the fundamental assumption under which Plotinus can give a unified account of intelligible and psychic creativity. This claim captures the basic

[23] That Plotinus is occasionally elliptical to an extent that may actually create problems (especially in the treatises against the Gnostics (III.8, V.8, V.5, II.9) from which most of the discussed material is taken) is evident by claims such as "that the realities which have come into existence, which are representations of real beings, show that their makers has as their goal in making, not makings or actions, but the finished object of contemplation" (καὶ αἱ γινόμεναι ὑποστάσεις μιμήσεις ὄντων οὖσαι ποιοῦντα δείκνυσι τέλος ποιούμενα οὐ τὰς ποιήσεις οὐδὲ τὰς πράξεις, ἀλλὰ τὸ ἀποτέλεσμα ἵνα θεωρηθῇ; III.8.7.8-10). It is clear that a proper understanding of this claim needs a number of qualifications: obviously the Intellect does not create the soul as an object of contemplation for it (in the sense that that it may produce its intelligible content), but it is the soul that shapes itself by contemplating the Intellect. In other words, given the ubiquity of contemplation and likeness, we should not lose track neither of the distinction between an 'objective' likeness (the result of a creative process guided by a model) and a 'subjective' likeness (the fact that each creator-contemplator generates, in the complicated way described in the previous section, other creators-contemplators), nor of the distinction between being a subject and being an object of contemplation (a distinction that collapses, at least in the sense that interests us here, only within the Intellect). We may also note that in such contexts (as in the passage quoted in the text below) Plotinus is liable to maximize the ambiguities inherent in a constant oscillation between generation and production as different modes of creation.

similarity between Intellect and soul when they are considered as creators: their thoroughgoing immersion into contemplation, the fact that they come into being as subjects and objects of contemplation and continue to exist exercising an activity that can be understood in terms and kinds and grades of contemplation.[24] The aspects of this similarity that concern the activity of ensouled beings are summed up by Plotinus in the following passage, which should be quoted in full as it provides an excellent starting point for the ensuing discussion of the inevitable differences between Intellect and soul:

> For when living things, too, produce (γεννᾷ), it is the rational principles within (οἱ λόγοι ἔνδον) which move them, and this is an activity of contemplation (ἐνέργεια θεωρίας), the birthpain of creating many forms and many things to contemplate and filling all things with rational principles (πολλὰ ποιεῖν εἴδη καὶ πολλὰ θεωρήματα καὶ λόγων πληρῶσαι πάντα), and a kind of endless contemplation (οἷον ἀεὶ θεωρεῖν), for creation is bringing a form into being, and this is filling all things with contemplation (III.8.7.17-22).

How are we then, in the context created by this passage, to describe the difference between the contemplation-creation of the Intellect and the contemplation-creation of the soul, the difference between ἀεὶ θεωρεῖν and οἷον ἀεὶ θεωρεῖν? With regard to any ordinary creator or actor (any being whose creative activity takes place within space and time and involves the information of matter), Plotinus invokes in this direction the notion of a weakening or infirmity (ἀσθένεια) of the power of contemplation in an

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[24] The last manifestations of this chain of instances of contemplation, lacking themselves the active power of contemplation, would be contemplation only as passive objects of contemplation (τεθεωρημένος), as Plotinus notes in III.3.3.6-8.

almost literal sense. Generally speaking, the people of action "are not able to grasp the vision sufficiently, and therefore are not filled with it, but still long to see it" (III.8.4.33-4) and as a result, "they seek to obtain it by going round about it" (τοῦτο περιπλανώμενοι ἑλεῖν ζητοῦσι; III.8.6.3-4), by actually creating a material version of the object instead of merely contemplating it in its intelligible form. In a more detailed manner, Plotinus designates ordinary creation either as weakening (ἀσθένεια) or as consequence (παρακολούθημα) of contemplation: consequence when the creator had actually contemplated a prior and better intelligible model (and then, presumably, could not sit still or had some other reasons to create); weakening when the creator, like a Platonic artist, had nothing in view beyond the actual object produced (III.8.4.40-45). These remarks apply also to the creative activity of the soul. In a number of contexts, Plotinus envisages approvingly the situation in which a 'strong' soul abstains from any external activity and turns upon itself, contemplating, quietly and confidently, the rational principles that it possesses in full on its own (III.8.6.10-40; V.3.8.28-35, where the ἐναργεστέρα life of the soul is called οὐ γεννητικήν). Even if this contemplation, unlike that of the Intellect, is motivated by a certain deficiency and experiences a certain distance from its object, the mark of the strength of a soul is precisely the extent to which it can negotiate or overcome the lack of familiarity (οἰκείωσις) with its own contents within a purely internal dimension that has no need of the external props provided by its ordinary creative activity.

However, it is clear that, although these remarks point to a possibility within the life of the soul that is especially important for Plotinus in a moral or soteriological perspective, they cannot be the end of the story, since they overlook the distinctive contribution of the soul in the metaphysical hierarchy of Hypostases. Namely, its normal orientation towards the sensible world with all that this implies: the fact that, in contrast to the higher principles which are continually at rest and by themselves, the soul contains also a lower 'part' that "is at rest too, but also in motion, incidentally and in matter" (ἐν τῇ ὕλῃ καὶ κατὰ συμβεβηκὸς κινουμένου; II.3.18.19-20). Hence, we need to approach the issue from a perspective that will take into account the ordinary function and task of the soul and not bypass it immediately in the direction of an ascent toward the Intellect.

If, on the basis of the passage quoted in full above, the core of Plotinus' understanding of creativity is the claim that creation is bringing a form into being, then, in the case of the soul (about which the same claim is repeated in V.3.7.31), this claim has obviously to be qualified in two complementary ways, pointing to an internal and an external dimension. The external dimension relates to the fact that for the most part the creative activity of the soul, in all its various instances from the cosmic soul to nature, is not fully self-contained or self-directed, but presupposes the existence of matter to which it is directed or applied. As Plotinus puts it, "there is a need of matter on which nature [but also all

souls that have descended] can work and which it forms" (ὕλης δὲ δεῖ, ἐφ' ἧς ποιήσει, καὶ ἣν ἐνειδοποιεῖ; III.8.2.2-3).[25] In this sense, the soul does not produce forms, but informs an indefinite material. It would be thus more correct to describe its activity in terms of a process of ordering that does not produce an (intelligible) ordering principle (τὸ τάττον) but rather generates a sensible order (τάξις) through the imposition of an intelligible element on a material substratum, as Plotinus himself does in a variety of occasions (e.g., II.4.15.3-13; IV.4.16.13-21). However, this last point brings us back to the internal dimension of the difference between soul and Intellect considered as creators-contemplators. The fundamental weakness of soul in this respect is not related to the vicissitudes of its external encounter with matter, but rather to its internal incapacity to create unconditionally the principles that guide its own creative activity, which are in fact created (here not meant in any ordinary or external creative sense) by the Intellect. In other words, the fundamental weakness of the soul is that the contemplation that sustains its creative efforts is not a creative immediate positing of the objects of contemplation, but rather a passive appropriation or (internal) apprehension of them: "as for the things which come to it from the Intellect, it observes what one might call their imprints" (καὶ ἐπὶ τῶν ἐκ τοῦ νοῦ ἐφορᾷ οἷον τοὺς τύπους; V.3.2.10). It is precisely because the soul does not generate its own principles of

[25] ἐνειδοποιεῖ is the form printed and translated by Armstrong, on the basis of the conjecture by Henry-Schwyzer; the codices read ἐν εἴδει ποιεῖ.

activity, but receives them as imprinted images 'flowing' from the Intellect (τὸ γὰρ ἀπορρέον ἐκ νοῦ λόγος; III.2.2.17), that the soul itself is nothing more than the image of a creator in comparison to the Intellect (οὐδὲ γὰρ αὐτὴ ἐγέννησεν, ἀλλ' ἔστι καὶ αὕτη εἴδωλον καὶ οἱ λόγοι; V.3.8.9-10).[26]

All the major differences between soul and Intellect in this respect can be derived from this fundamental difference in the way in which the rational creative principles are or become available to each entity as objects of contemplation. The main implication of the fact that the soul does not generate by itself these principles through a process that would guarantee their full and constant intelligibility, but receives them as given from the Intellect, is a certain lack of knowledge: in a dramatic temporal framework, we may say that initially "the soul does not see what it possesses" (ἡ μὲν οὐχ ὁρᾷ ἃ ἔχει; V.3.8.8). Since the soul does not have immediately available the objects contained in it, it must (in the best case) seek for them within itself (in the worst case, the case of incurable souls of action, this ignorance feeds the outward orientation of the soul, since it is

[26] We should note at this point that what we have designated as an internal and an external dimension actually fall back upon each other. This is evident if we consider Plotinus' understanding of ugliness or evil (τὸ αἰσχρόν or τὸ κακόν). Ugliness, which of course does not exist at the level of the Intellect, can be equally attributed both to some failure of soul's contemplation (a distraction from the object of contemplation; ἐκ τοῦ θεωρητοῦ παραφορᾷ; III.8.7.24), a possibility unthinkable in the domain where contemplation means creating instantly the objects of contemplation without reference to prior principles of judgment, and to the recalcitrant presence of matter, which resists the formative efforts of the soul (αἶσχος δὲ ὕλην οὐ κρατηθεῖσαν εἶδει; I.8.5.23-4). Moreover, the failure of the soul is to be accounted by the fact that in certain circumstances the soul "is hindered in its seeing by the passions and by being darkened by matter" (ἐπισκοτεῖσθαι τῇ ὕλῃ; I.8.4.18-20; cf. I.6.5.32-50). Thus, in conformity with the conclusions reached in the previous chapter, matter may be considered as an external dramatization of the limits of the contemplative-creative power of the soul.

construed as implying that the good for the sake of which the soul acts lies outside itself; cf. III.8.6.7-9). Hence, the soul thinks and knows by seeking or inquiring and not by possessing (V.1.4.17), which is another way of saying that it has to rely on a discursive mode of thought or knowledge (τὸ διανοούμενον; V.1.7.42), in contrast to the non-discursive or intuitive kind of thought which, as we have seen, characterizes the activity of the Intellect.[27] In this sense, the normal intellectual experience of the soul originates in a passive condition (πάθος) of lack, perplexity, weakness, care (ἐν ἀπόρῳ ἤδη οὔσης καὶ φροντίδος πληρουμένης καὶ μᾶλλον ἀσθενούσης; IV.3.18.3-4), similar to the one experienced frequently by ordinary craftsmen or lovers, and amounts to an effort to find a way towards what is not ready at hand (διεξοδεύων οὐ προκεχειρισμένα; V.9.7.10-1). In typical Plotinian terms, this means that the soul possesses its intellectual contents "so to speak, unfolded and separated" (οἷον ἀνελιγμένα καὶ οἷον κεχωρισμένα; I.1.8.8-9 in contrast to the ὁμοῦ πάντα of the Intellect), "one thing after another" (ἄλλα καὶ ἄλλα; V.1.4.20; cf. V.3.17.23-4), and has to rely on its power of "combining and dividing them" (συνάγον καὶ διαιροῦν; V.3.2.9; a power similar to the one it uses for the cognitive elaboration of external perceptions or impressions) in order to reconstruct through

[27] A similar way for expressing the same point would be to say that the soul contains the rational formative principles potentially (δυνάμει ἐχούσης ἐν αὑτῇ; IV.3.10.11), a term that should be understood in this context in a double sense: internally, as recoverable objects of contemplation; externally, as blueprints for the ordering of sensible objects.

dialectical weaving the totality of the intelligible realm (νοερῶς πλέκουσα, ἕως ἂν διέλθῃ πᾶν τὸ νοητόν; I.3.4.15-6).

In another perspective, the fact that its objects of contemplation are primarily available to the soul as objects requiring a conceptual or argumentative elaboration points to the fundamental association between the soul and time.[28] The emergence of time in the Plotinian universe is not the result of the unfolding of the external creative activity of the soul (as we have seen, the creation of the sensible world implicates the emergence of space), but can be directly attributed to the "spreading out" (διάστασις) of its internal or mental life in comparison to the life of the Intellect. As this life unfolds and the soul moves from one mental act to another (τὴν ἐνέργειαν αὐτῆς παρεχομένη ἄλλην μετ' ἄλλην), it generates along with its activity the very order of succession (ἐγέννα τε μετὰ τῆς ἐνέργειας τὸ ἐφεξῆς), and hence time emerges as the life "of soul in a movement of passage" (ψυχῆς ἐν κινήσει μεταβατικῇ ζωήν; III.7.35-45). In other words, the existence of time is co-extensive with the attribution to the soul of a life full of "calculations and perplexities and memories, which are proper to one who compares the past with the present and the future" (λογισμοὺς καὶ ἀπορίας καὶ μνήμας συμβάλλοντος τὰ παρεληλυθότα τοῖς παροῦσι καὶ τοῖς μέλλουσιν; IV.4.12.15-17).[29]

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[28] Cf. Chapter 2, n. 32.

[29] Since the mental life of the soul aims generally at the recovery or appropriation of what is already contained in it, Plotinus is able to present its overall temporal aspect in terms of the Platonic notion of recollection. In this respect, see the discussion in IV.4.3-5

We have now reached a position in which we can make a first assessment of the status and the function of the soul as a creator within the hierarchy of the Plotinian creative principles. The picture that emerges is based on three major considerations. First, Plotinus carries over from the intelligible realm the analysis of creation in terms of contemplation, or, else, the specification of ontologically significant creation as creation of form: as a result, and on the basis of the points we have been discussing concerning the ways in which the forms are available to the soul, he ends unavoidably with a general conception of the soul as an inferior creator-contemplator in comparison to the Intellect.[30] Second, Plotinus, as we have noted, keeps open, or rather guarantees through his claim for the existence of a higher 'part' of the soul that "is outside body" (τῆς ἔξω; II.3.9.25) and remains "above and always filled and illuminated by the reality above" (ἄνω πρὸς τὸ ἄνω ἀεὶ πληρούμενον καὶ ἐλλαμπόμενον; III.8.5.10-11),[31] the possibility of a radical change in the

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(where Plotinus elucidates the claim that the soul "in general is and becomes what it remembers" (καὶ ὅλως, ο μνημονεύει, ἐκεῖνό ἐστι καὶ γίνεται; IV.4.3.7-8) in the context of an extensive discussion of memory) or the more concise comments in V.3.2.11-15.

[30] The manner of availability of forms, which of course determines the kind of mental life that each soul lives, can be also used as the fundamental principle for the hierarchical classification of the various kinds and conditions of soul discussed by Plotinus. Whether the issue concerns the difference between plant, animal, and human souls (as in V.2.2.1-11), or the distinctive character of special souls, like the cosmic soul, the souls of the stars, or nature (as in IV.4.11-12; IV.4.6-7; III.8.4.22-28), or a distinction between 'healthy' and 'sick' human souls (as in I.6.5.26-50), or the general differentiation between the higher and lower 'parts' of the soul (as in III.8.5), what is always at stake and defines the order of rank is precisely the way in which the forms are available (or not) to the soul under discussion.

[31] This claim can be considered as equivalent to the soteriological claim that a pure (καθαρή) soul can exist in a disembodied state: "a soul of this kind will be where

orientation of the soul toward a contemplative kind of life. The extent to which such a change of orientation amounts to an ontological assimilation of the soul by the Intellect (as Plotinus seems to imply in I.6.6.13-18 and VI.7.35.4-6) is a question that cannot be discussed here. Despite the obvious importance for Plotinus of this radical way out (διέξοδος), or rather in, of the soul, it is equally obvious that the turn of the gaze of the soul inwards amounts to an obliteration of all its distinctive ontological characteristics. The existence of such a possibility and its presentation in a positive light points undoubtedly to fundamental tensions inherent in the soul or, at least, in Plotinus' conception of it.[32] However, the perspective of our discussion is shaped by an attempt to understand soul's involvement with the sensible world and hence this issue cannot be pursued further.

We come thus to the third major consideration, which concerns the ordinary, external activity of the soul with regard to the sensible world. In this respect, what has been said so far, seems to lead inevitably to a conception of the soul as an executive or auxiliary instance of the Intellect, the instance responsible for all the banausic aspects of the creation and

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substance and reality and the divine are -that is in god" (ο ἐστιν ἡ οὐσία καὶ τὸ ὂν καὶ τὸ θεῖον - ἐν τῷ θεῷ; IV.3.24.25-26).

[32] One needs only to compare Plotinus' account of the emergence of the soul as "a restlessly active (πολυπράγμονος) nature which wanted to control itself and be on its own, and chose to seek for more than its present state, and moved (καὶ τὸ πλέον τοῦ παρόντος ζητεῖν ἐλομένης ἐκινήθη)" (III.7.11.14-16) with the claim that the soul in the vicinity of the One despises even intelligence "because intelligence is a kind of movement, and the soul does not want to move" (ὅτι τὸ νοεῖν κίνησίς τις ἦν, αὕτη δὲ οὐ κινεῖσθαι θέλει; VI.7.35.2-3) in order to gain an appreciation of this fundamental tension.

administration of the sensible world, and one which operates for the most part out of a condition of ignorance or perplexity that adds to the occupational hazards involved in its interaction with matter the necessity of toilsome mental labour: all in all, a rather stark contrast to the "easy life" (V.8.4.1) enjoyed by the master craftsman. Without the embellishments, which can be easily derived from our previous discussion, such a picture seems to be naturally implied by passages like the following:

> And one ... will suppose [the intellect] to be the true maker and craftsman (ποιητὴν ὄντως καὶ δημιουργόν), and will say that the underlying matter receives the forms (τὸ ὑποκείμενον δεξάμενον μορφάς), ... but that these forms come from another: and this other is soul; then again that the soul gives (δοῦναι) to the four elements the form of the universe, but intellect provides it with the forming principles (ταύτῃ δὲ νοῦν χορηγὸν τῶν λόγων γεγονέναι) (V.9.3.26-32).[33]

Similar conclusions regarding the thorough dependence of the soul on the Intellect can be drawn from the examination of a number of other passages (e.g., V.1.7.37-50 or VI.9.5.6-13). Yet, in order to conclude this part of our discussion we need only to make a few comments on a number of passages from a context where the same issue is approached from a slightly different point of view. In IV.8.3.22-23, Plotinus concludes that "the work of the more rational kind of soul is intellection" (ψυχῆς ἔργον τῆς λογικωτέρας νοεῖν), and he immediately qualifies this conclusion by noting

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[33] One wonders about the extent to which the word χορηγὸς retains, in its contrast with the flat δοῦναι, its classical splendour, as the term designating the rich citizens financing the public festivals.

that this cannot be the end of the matter, since, if this were the case, "why would it be different from the Intellect?" (τί γὰρ ἂν καὶ νοῦ διαφέρει;) Plotinus' immediate answer to this question follows lines by now predictable: when the soul "looks to itself it sets in order what comes after it and directs and rules it" (βλέπουσα δὲ ... εἰς ἑαυτὴν τὸ μετ' αὐτὴν κοσμεῖ τε καὶ διοικεῖ καὶ ἄρχει αὐτοῦ). However, in the context of this question, Plotinus brings to the surface the fact that the ordering and administration of the world is not a mere technical problem, but a task that implicates a certain affective dimension that can be variously invoked by terms such as "provident care" (πρόνοια; IV.8.2.25), "care" (ἐπιμέλεια; IV.8.2.27), or "caring" (θεραπεύουσα; IV.8.4.20) (Armstrong's translations). As we have already noted (in Ch.2, n.45), the occurrences of ἐπιμελεῖσθαι and its cognates in Plotinus are limited to a discussion of the soul. In so far as, care appears for the first time in the Plotinian universe at the level of the soul as an aspect of its creative engagement with the world, it would be appropriate to discuss briefly here the origin of this affective element and Plotinus' attitude toward it.

With regard to the latter point, it would be fair to say that Plotinus' attitude toward care is quite ambivalent. As we have already noted, Plotinus is especially concerned (against both materialists and gnostics) to defend a providential conception of the world, in which the universe emerges as the result of a rational and benevolent process of creation. Nevertheless, his conception of the nature of the fundamental creative

instance (namely, the Intellect) as an entirely self-directed and self-contained entity, precludes the possibility of any real exercise of care at this level. Care (both in its technical aspect as anticipation of the future and its affective aspect as concern) is thus attributed to the soul, yet even at this level Plotinus is anxious to protect at least the higher 'part' of the soul from its burdensome aspect with the help of a distinction between two kinds of care:

> the general (τὸ καθόλου), by the inactive command of one setting in order with royal authority (κελεύσει κοσμοῦντος ἀπράγμονι ἐπιστασίᾳ βασιλικῇ), and the particular (τὸ καθέκαστα), which involves actually doing something oneself (αὐτουργῷ) and by contact (συναφῇ) with what is being done infects the doer (τὸ πρᾶττον) with the nature of what is being done (IV.8.2.27-31).

In the context of this passage, the 'royal' kind of care is attributed explicitly to the cosmic soul, but the point seems to apply equally well to the higher 'part' of soul in general, as long as this part is implicated in the creative activity of the soul. Plotinus' motivation for this distinction becomes apparent in a later passage, in which (excessive) care for the sensible world is presented as a pathological condition in the case of a soul which is "applying itself to and caring for things outside and is present and sinks deep into the individual part" (διοικεῖ ἐφαπτομένη ἤδη καὶ θεραπεύουσα τὰ ἔξωθεν καὶ παροῦσα καὶ δῦσα αὐτοῦ πολὺ εἰς τὸ εἴσω; IV.8.4.19-22). This possibility, together with our earlier comments on the relation between soul and time, sheds some light on the question of the origin of care. Care, as a fundamental existential possibility, is co-

extensive with the ontological emergence of time and amounts to the affective aspect under which soul experiences its life in time, the mental disposition and emotional quality of soul's experience of the order of succession. Moreover, soul acquires its orientation and expression toward the sensible world precisely through the varying degrees of intimacy that it establishes with this world in the pursuit of its creative tasks.[34] On this basis, Plotinus' ambivalence is of course easily explainable.

The Sages of Old

The grim picture of the soul that has emerged in the previous section, depicting a creative life in which the lack of originality is matched only by the hardship of labour and the depth of perplexity only by the burden of care, stands obviously in need of some correction. The rest of our discussion should be then understood as a palinode in search of a more balanced position. The focus will be the rather mysterious sages of old, who make their appearance at the very beginning of Chapter 11 as creators of statues and temples. In approximately seven lines of text, Plotinus introduces us to their activity with the following account:

> And I think (μοι δοκοῦσιν) that the sages of old (οἱ πάλαι σοφοί), those who wanted the gods to be present to them (ὅσοι ἐβουλήθησαν θεοὺς

[34] This intimacy is finely illustrated in the context of another metaphor drawn from the life of the craftsman. Although Plotinus is willing to explore the analogy between sense organs and tools (in IV.4.23.38-44), he also notes explicitly the limits of this analogy: "now if soul uses body as a tool it does not have to admit the affections (παθήματα) which come through the body; craftsmen are not affected by the affections of their tools" (I.1.3.3-6). No wonder that the soul cares for the body more than any craftsman ever cares for his tools.

> αὐτοῖς παρεῖναι), created temples and statues (ἱερὰ καὶ ἀγάλματα) by looking back at the nature of the All (εἰς τὴν τοῦ παντὸς φύσιν ἀπιδόντες), having in mind that the nature of the soul is in all possible directions ductile [πανταχοῦ μὲν εὐάγωγον], but it (the nature of soul) would be the easiest thing to receive (or retain) [δέξασθαι], if one were to make something attractive [προσπαθές] to it that would be able to receive [ὑποδέξασθαι] a share of it (11.1-7).

There are many striking elements in this passage, which, according to A. Grabar, can be considered as a very condensed programmatic statement of Plotinus' expectations concerning a work of art.[35] The fascination that this rather cryptic account may exert on the reader is not only due to the views contained in it, but also to the rather peculiar and dramatic manner of their presentation. Instead of using some normal way of introducing an issue or a claim (say, with the help of such familiar impersonal expressions as "the truth is as follows", "the logos wants", or it "is being said"), Plotinus turns here to a double, and in a certain sense contradictory, literary device.[36] On the one hand, the passage under discussion is one of the three passages in the Enneads in which the mysterious sages of old make their appearance.[37] Whether we understand this allusion to ancient wisdom and authority in terms of reverence or irony, the gesture itself seems to be a distancing device, relegating the

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[35] Grabar, "Plotin et les origines de l'esthétique médiévale", 17.

[36] For a discussion on the significance of Plotinus' use of such expressions, see Heiser, Logos and Language, Chapter 1.

[37] The other two instances are III.6.19.26-41 (where the sages of old (οἱ πάλαι σοφοί) are brought in to support an allegorical interpretation of the ithyphallic Hermes and the eunuchs who attend the Great Mother in terms of the generative power of the intellect and the sterility of matter) and V.8.6 (where the use by "wise men of Egypt" (οἱ Αἰγυπτίων σοφοί) of ideogrammatic symbols is offered as an indication of the non-discursive nature of the thinking of the intellect).

responsibility or the authority for what is being said to some distant and nebulous past figures. As if to counter this implication, Plotinus introduces the account of the activity of the sages of old (or, rather, his interpretation of it) in the first person, another rare gesture in the Plotinian corpus, which nevertheless occurs in all the appearances of the sages of old.[38] Evidently, this is Plotinus at his most literary, replicating openly, in its bare essentials, the fundamental gesture of every artist: to present what in the end can be justified only as a subjective experience or point of view with the help of an objective fiction, without assuming for it the kind of responsibility normally expected from a philosopher with regard to his views and claims. We are entitled to assume the placement of a certain emphasis in what follows.

In view of our previous analysis of creation in terms of wisdom and with regard to the extremely privileged status of the artifacts produced by the sages of old, we would be provisionally justified in regarding them as instances of an exemplary or extraordinary creativity within the reach of human beings, something, for instance, like the Plotinian equivalent of the modern notion of genius. This assumption lends some initial plausibility to the decision to structure a palinode as a case study of the activity of the sages of old. The hope is that the examination of this activity (its model,

[38] First person personal pronouns are used by Plotinus in a personal sense in I.6.8.11 (the account of the myth of Narcissus) and 19 (a bit of Homeric allegory); III.7.6.4; IV.8.1.9 (the celebrated passage describing his 'mystical' experience) and 34; V.5.10.1; V.8.1.6 and 22; VI.8.1.22. All other uses of personal pronouns in the first person are intended in an impersonal way, that is, they either refer to some person in general, or are used in the context of personifications of certain forces or elements (e.g., the world in III.3.3.21).

its manner, its aims, its results) will offer an alternative to the two possibilities tearing apart the life of the soul according to the analysis of the previous section, namely the toilsome and unrewarding involvement with the sensible world and the radical abandonment of the world in pursuit of an internal Intellect-like contemplative existence.

According to the passage quoted above, the sages of old create by looking back at the nature of the All, presumably in order to imitate its manner of work. Thus, in order to approach the question of their activity, let us repeat their gesture and return once more to the creative activity of the cosmic soul. Plotinus himself follows the same route, since the account of the sages of old is followed immediately by this brief passage on the activity of the cosmic soul, which, we recall, was discussed extensively in IV.3.9-10:

> And the nature of the All created everything skilfully in imitation of those beings whose rational principles it had (πάντα εὐμηχάνως ποιησαμένη εἰς μίμησιν ὧν εἶχε τοὺς λόγους). Because each thing became in such a way logos in matter, logos which had been formed in accordance with the logos which was prior to matter, it was joined together with that God, in accordance with whom it had been created and to whom the soul looked and whom the soul had while she was creating (καθ' ὃν ἐγίνετο καὶ εἰς ὃν εἶδε ἡ ψυχὴ καὶ εἶχε ποιοῦσα). For it was not possible for the thing made to be left without a share (ἄμοιρον) in the God, and likewise not possible for the God to descend to the logos in matter (11.8-14).

This passage forces us to qualify the analysis of the previous section in a direction already indicated by our discussion of the creation of the world in Chapter 2: the cosmic soul, at least, does not create in the manner of an ordinary human craftsman, or in the manner entailed by the

characteristics of the soul outlined in the previous section. Undoubtedly, the above passage is fully congruent with one of the major claims concerning the status of the soul as a creator: the cosmic soul does not create itself the principles of its creative activity, but has to receive them from their creator, namely the Intellect. However, the emphasis of Plotinus' position is altered by his insistence that the cosmic soul imitates the Intellect not only in an 'objective' sense (i.e., by creating objects that 'look like' the intelligible models contained in the Intellect), but also 'subjectively', by acting in a manner similar to the way in which intelligible beings accomplish their creative projects. This insistence shapes thoroughly the language of the passage. The cosmic soul did not search for the principles that guide its activity out of a condition of lack or perplexity, but "had" them already; moreover, it created after in some way it "saw" and "had" not only these principles but also the intelligible entities responsible for their creation, or the intelligible entities generated through them, or the intelligible entities of whose these principles are the expression.[39] The net result is an Intellect-like mode of creation

[39] Given the circular nature of intelligible creativity, the precise interpretation of the distinction drawn here between gods and logoi is a rather problematic task. The problem is that if we consider provisionally that the gods are the intelligibles qua thinkers and the logoi are the intelligibles qua thoughts, the genitive in the clause "those beings whose rational principles it had (ὧν εἶχε τοὺς λόγους)" is both subjective and objective, since thinker and thought is co-posited in the original creative activity of the Intellect. In this context, it would be perhaps better to understand gods and logoi in terms of a slightly different distinction between two different views one can have of the intelligibles. The intelligibles-gods may be the mental entities in their distinct and intuitively comprehensible existence available to the Intellect itself, the really existent beautiful "statues" (ἀγάλματα; V.8.4.43-51; 5.23-25) not to be confused with theorems or collections of propositions; correspondingly, the intelligibles-logoi would be the

characterised by plenitude and spontaneity; hence, the only reminder of the executive function of the soul is the laudatory term "skilfully" that hides the toil behind its effort under the dexterity manifested presumably in the beauty or the order of the finished products of its creative activity.

In other words, the cosmic soul "makes, not according to a purpose brought in from outside, nor waiting upon planning and consideration" (ποιεῖ οὐκ ἐπακτῷ γνώμῃ οὐδὲ βουλὴν ἢ σκέψιν ἀναμείνασα; IV.3.10.15-6). Of course, one could argue that this fact, which runs contrary to the claims of the previous section concerning the mental life of the soul, is a result of the privileged status of the cosmic soul within the whole of individual souls that provide the extension, so to speak, of the Hypostasis-soul. After all, "the soul of the all would always remain transcendent (ἀεὶ ὑπερέχειν) because it would have nothing to do with coming down (τὸ κατελθεῖν)", in contrast to "our souls" (τὰς δ' ἡμετέρας), which "would come down because they would have their part marked off for them in this sphere, and by the turning to them of that which needs their care (τῇ

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conceptual definitions or expressions that determine these entities as these entities become available to the soul. "Since soul has potentially in it, and throughout the whole of it, the power to set in order according to logoi; just as the logoi in seeds mould and shape living beings like little ordered universes" (IV.3.10.11-13; cf. V.9.6.20-27; V.9.9.9-16), this distinction should be understood in a thoroughly genetic sense: the logoi are not set of instructions to be consciously followed, but rather genetic dispositions to shape things in a certain way. Overall, if we may use an example, Plotinus' statement seems to amount to the claim that the cosmic soul does not only contain the 'seed' to shape a tree, but also has contemplated directly the intelligible 'tree': in this sense, the process of the generation of a tree recovers, to some extent and by imitation, the original relation between creation and contemplation that characterizes the life of the Intellect.

ἐπιστροφῇ τοῦ προσδεομένου φροντίσεως)" (IV.3.4.22-26).[40] Setting aside for a while the case of "our souls", we should note, however, that this manner of creating is not exclusive to the cosmic soul. Even nature qua immanent soul, the "lowest part of the soul of the all" (τοῦ κατωτάτω τῆς ψυχῆς τοῦ παντός; IV.3.4.28), and, hence, the assistant-executive of the lowest rank that "does not have the contemplation that comes from reasoning (τὴν μὲν δὴ ἐκ λόγου οὐκ ἔχει)", possesses a non-discursive contemplation and "just because it possesses, it also makes (καὶ διὰ τοῦτο ὅτι ἔχει καὶ ποιεῖ)" (III.3.3.13-17).

Given this substantial continuity between the creative activity of the Intellect, the cosmic soul, and nature qua lower soul (a continuity that, as we saw, refers both to the content and the manner of this creative activity; cf. V.8.3.1-10), we may say that Plotinus' claims amount overall to the articulation of a notion of a natural mode of creation (where, of course, 'natural' does not refer exclusively to the immanent lower soul, but should be understood in the wide sense of natura naturans). This natural mode of creation and administration of the sensible world is described extensively by Plotinus in V.8.7, in terms that by now would cause no surprise and actually summarise everything we have said so far.[41] In this context, Plotinus asserts once again that the creative activity of the cosmic

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[40] Cf. II.9.7.5-40 for an extensive discussion of the superior power and status of the cosmic soul in comparison to other individual souls

[41] The most extensive discussion of this issue in the Plotinian corpus, which, however, does not add anything substantial to the picture presented here, is IV.4.11-13; cf. also II.9.12.12-24.

soul is not guided by a mental planning of an ordinary kind: there is no internal (παρ' αὑτῷ) conception (ἐπινοῆσαι) and arrangement (διατεθέντα) of the elements of the world prior to the execution of the work (ἐπιχειρεῖν τῷ ἔργῳ; V.8.7.3-9). The impossibility of such a planning (ἐπίνοια) is linked directly to the creative limitations of the cosmic soul. Since the cosmic soul lacks what we may call a radical imagination (the power of the unconditioned creation or self-positing of form characterizing the Intellect), it cannot generate and organize by itself the principles of its activity. Two options remain, then, open: either a reproductive elaboration of these principles – but then, "where could the ideas of all these things come from to one who had never seen them?" (πόθεν γὰρ ἐπῆλθεν οὐπώποτε ἑωρακότι; V.8.7.10), or an internal reception of these principles from the Intellect. Even in this case, however, the creative effort of the cosmic soul remains extraordinary in that it does not rely on instrumental means of accomplishment: the cosmic soul "could not carry [the principles] out as craftsmen do now, using their hands and tools; for hand and feet came later" (ὅπως νῦν οἱ δημιουργοὶ ποιοῦσι χερσὶ καὶ ὀργάνοις χρώμενοι· ὕστερον γὰρ χεῖρες καὶ πόδες; V.8.7.11-12). In other words, if the creative activity of the Intellect is extraordinary because it amounts to the creation of the creative principles that guide every further creation, the creative activity of 'natural' soul is analogically extraordinary because it amounts to the creation of the means of further creation through an

immanent "making done without noise and fuss" (ἐποιεῖτο δὲ ἀψοφητί; V.8.7.24). We may recall here the metaphor of persuasion in its ontological aspect, discussed in the previous chapter, which provides a possible specification of this almost magical kind of creative activity that for us corresponds to the operation of the physical laws of nature.

The elaboration of this natural mode of creation may be construed as a kind of promotion of the role and status of the soul, since the creative activity of at least the 'natural' souls (i.e., the cosmic soul and nature) seems to imitate in a number of important ways that of the Intellect. However, Plotinus continues his analysis of the natural mode of creation in V.8.7 with a claim that seems to literally minimise the status of the soul:

> The only possibility that remains, then, is that all things exist in something else, and, since there is nothing between (οὐδενὸς δὲ μεταξὺ ὄντος), because of their closeness (τῇ γειτονείᾳ) to something else in the realm of real being something like an imprint and image (ἴνδαλμα καὶ εἰκόνα) of that other suddenly appears (οἷον ἐξαίφνης ἀναφαίνεται), either by its direct action or through the assistance of soul (εἴτε αὐτόθεν εἴτε ψυχῆς διακονησαμένης) -this makes no difference for the present discussion- or of a particular soul (V.8.7.12-17).

We return, thus, to an issue already noted in the previous chapter (see n.26), the metaphorical description of the soul as a semi-permeable membrane through which the intelligible element can be spontaneously transmitted, which can be now appreciated within a much wider and richer context. The 'success' of the creative activity of the 'natural' soul (or, else, the extent to which its creative activity resembles that of the

Intellect), being reflected directly in the beauty of the sensible world and measured by the thorough 'proximity' of the intelligible and the material within the composite of the sensible, or by the 'naturalness' with which form masters matter so thoroughly that "matter, too, is a sort of ultimate form" (καὶ αὕτη εἶδός τι ἔσχατον; V.8.7.24), seems to be directly proportional to the degree to which the soul and the toil of its activity can be effaced from the finished picture of the world.[42] In other words, if the beauty of the work requires that in principle there must be no unmotivated index or trace of its materiality left in it, then there must be nothing between the form and the material to obstruct the imposition of the former to the latter, even if what lies originally in between is the soul, which, providing neither the form nor the matter, is nevertheless responsible for the very execution of the work.

The reason for returning to this issue is that Plotinus concludes IV.3.11 with a general discussion of soul in precisely this respect and his elaboration of this theme there is important for the understanding of the activity of the sages of old. Plotinus starts this elaboration with the metaphorical designation of the Intellect as the sun of the divine realm and adds:

> This soul gives the edges (πέρατα) of itself that border on the sun to it [the sun], and creates by means of itself a connection to the sun there [the Intellect], by becoming, so to speak, an interpreter (καὶ

[42] And, of course, every object created by soul is a composite: "we certainly see that all the things that are said to exist are compounds (σύνθετα), and not a single one of them is simple; [this applies to] each and every work of art, and all things compounded by nature" (V.9.3.9-1).

> ποιεῖ διὰ μέσου αὐτῆς κἀκεῖ συνῆφθαι οἷον ἑρμηνευτικὴ γενομένη) of what comes from this sun to that sun and from that sun to this sun, insofar as this sun can reach the other through soul. Because nothing is far away or remote from anything (οὐ γὰρ μακρὰν οὐδὲ πόρρω οὐδενὸς οὐδέν); for we can understand distance as difference and not mixture (καὶ αὖ πόρρω τῇ διαφορᾷ καὶ μὴ μίξει), since the sun there is by itself and is with this sun but without being it.(ἀλλ' εἶναι ἐφ' ἑαυτοῦ καὶ συνεῖναι χωρὶς ὄν) (IV.3.11.17-24).

It is clear that this passage, which may derive ultimately from the Stoic distinction between thought and utterance and its metaphorical use by Plotinus in an earlier treatise in order to designate the soul as the "expressed thought" of the Intellect (οἷον λόγος ὁ ἐν προφορᾷ λόγου τοῦ ἐν ψυχῇ, οὕτω τοι καὶ αὐτὴ λόγος νοῦ; V.1.3.8-9), contains an important elaboration of the theme of soul qua (in)dispensable membrane with the help of an extremely apt metaphor within this context.[43] By turning the

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[43] Although the metaphor of ἑρμηνευτικὴ should be understood primarily in an ontological sense, since the 'interpretation' of the soul amounts to the ordering of the sensible world in accordance to the intelligible logoi, we should note here that there is also an almost literal aspect in Plotinus' claims. In V.8.6, Plotinus praises the "wise men of Egypt" because they "manifested the non-discursiveness of the intelligible world, that is, that every image (ἄγαλμα) [drawn by them] is a kind of knowledge and wisdom and is a subject of statements, all together in one, and not discourse or deliberation" (V.8.6.6-9). In this context, he contrasts their wisdom with those (interpreters) who "afterwards discovered, starting from it [i.e., the image] in its concentrated unity, a representation in something else, already unfolded and speaking it discursively and giving the reasons why things are like this" (9-11). However, in a number of contexts where Plotinus talks about the great ἄγαλμα of the world (τὸ πᾶν), his position with regard to 'interpretations' of it that acquire the discursive form prescribed by the nature of soul is more complicated. In such contexts (III.2.3.1-9; V.8.7.37-48; VI.8.17.1-12), Plotinus asserts again his basic position that the creation of the world (and, hence, its order) cannot be really grasped in discursive terms: the world "exists of necessity and not as a result of reasoning" (ἐξ ἀνάγκης ὄντος αὐτοῦ καὶ οὐκ ἐκ λογισμοῦ γενομένου; III.2.3.4-5), its parts "were not planned like this because it was necessary for them to be like this, but because things there are disposed as they are" (διότι οὕτως ἐχρῆν, διά τοῦτο οὕτω βεβούλευται, ἀλλ' ὅτι οὕτως ἔχει ὡς ἔστι; V.8.7.39-40) and "transcend providence and transcend free choice" (ἐπέκεινα προνοίας τἀκεῖ εἶναι καὶ ἐπέκεινα προαιρέσεως; VI.8.17.7.8). However, Plotinus not only recognises the possibility of discursive explanations ("you can explain why the earth is in the middle, and round, and why the ecliptic slants as it does"; V.8.7.37-8), but, starting

soul-membrane into a soul-interpreter, Plotinus retains the basic point of the initial metaphor, namely the demand that the mediation of the soul should be self-effacing: its interpretative work should not obstruct in any way the spontaneous flow of logos, nor add anything external to its content in the form of some contribution of its own. In addition, however, he manages to clarify two major points that remained obscure in the initial metaphor. First, his new formulation is more just with regard to the function and work of soul: while the philosophical temptation to eliminate a mere membrane, a pure boundary or edge, in order to return to a Platonic universe articulated exclusively around the dichotomy between sensible and intelligible, may be quite strong, it is harder to be tempted to eliminate an interpreter or overlook their toil on the grounds that their interpretation does not contain any personal contributions. Second, this new elaboration offers a much better way of understanding Plotinus' claim that "nothing is far away or remote from anything": the vicinity established by the presence and activity of souls as the in-between-creatures who "become, one might say, amphibious, compelled to

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from a reflective consideration of the finished product ("a whole, all beautiful and self-sufficient and friends with itself and with its parts"; III.2.3.8-9), he concludes that the world "is as (ὡς) it would have been if the free choice of its maker had willed it, and its state is as if this maker proceeding regularly with his calculations with foresight had made it according to his providence" (VI.8.17.2-5). This claim amounts obviously to a general principle of judgment, licensing all kinds of ordinary teleological explanations of aspects of the world. The similarity with the distinction between reflective and determinant judgment articulated by Kant in the Critique of Judgement (Introduction, §iv) is striking: in both cases, teleological explanations do not determine the actual mode of emergence of what is to be explained, proceed from a reflective examination of the object, and reflect cognitive requirements attributed to the nature of the mental powers of the subject that judges. In any case, judgments of this kind can be considered as literal instances of the ἑρμηνευτικὴ of the soul.

live by turns the life there and the life here" (γίγνονται οὖν οἷον ἀμφίβιοι ἐξ ἀνάγκης τόν τε ἐκεῖ βίον τόν τε ἐνταῦθα παρὰ μέρος βιοῦσαι; IV.8.4.32-33) is ultimately neither a matter of spatial contiguity nor of genetic resemblance, but rather a matter of establishing the ever-presence of ever-proximity of meaning through a constant activity of interpretation. We should keep these two points in mind, as we turn now to the case of the sages of old.

How can we situate, then, the activity of the sages of old within this new set of considerations concerning the nature of the creative activity of the soul? Before we proceed to a detailed examination of the manner and objective of their work, we should note a number of general points that condition from the outset any interpretation of this work. First and foremost, however legendary, the sages of old are evidently human beings like us, and hence their creative activity shares the fundamental limitations characterizing all human beings in this respect. Their work has to be accomplished through "toil" (πόνων) and has to be oriented (at least, initially) from within the perspective of a particular point of view, since the descent of the individual human soul amounts to the abandonment of the universal creative point of view occupied by the cosmic soul (ἀπέστη γὰρ τοῦ εἶναι τὸ πᾶν νῦν ἄνθρωπος γενόμενος; V.8.7.33-34). Moreover, whatever else we may say about these sages, it is clear that their activity is not part of some spontaneous natural process, but consists in the deliberate exercise of some kind of art. As such, it falls

within the scope of the general hierarchy between art and nature established in claims like the following:

> For art is posterior (ὑστέρα) to it [the soul qua 'natural' soul], and imitates it by making dim and weak imitations (ἀμυδρὰ καὶ ἀσθενῆ ποιούσα μιμήματα), little toys of little value, using a variety of devices to create an image of nature (μηχαναῖς πολλαῖς εἰς εἴδωλον φύσεως προσχρωμένη). (IV.3.10.17-20)[44]

The nature of the posteriority and the implied inferiority of art in comparison to nature need some clarification. Understood in a superficial manner, the above passage suggests a condemnation of art along standard Platonic lines, in which art, artisans, and artists are criticized for merely copying the objects of the sensible world, strengthened, perhaps, by Plotinus' own assertion of the superiority of spontaneous natural activity over any deliberate or planned creative effort. However, such a reading runs counter to the well-known Plotinian claims concerning the direct and independent of the senses availability to the artist of the intelligible models that guide, consciously or unconsciously, the workings of nature:

> But if anyone despises the arts because they produce their works by imitating nature (φύσιν), we must tell him, first, that natural things are imitations too. Then he must know that the arts do not simply imitate what they see, but they run back up to the forming principles (ἀνατρέχουσιν ἐπὶ τοὺς λόγους) from which nature derives (ἐξ ὧν ἡ φύσις). (V.8.1.33-36)[45]

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[44] Cf. III.8.5.6-10: "it is like the way in which art produces; when a particular art is complete, it produces a kind of another little art in a toy which possesses a trace of everything in it. But, all the same, these visions, these objects of contemplation, are dim and helpless sorts of things."

[45] Cf. III.8.2.10-13: "even with those who practise crafts of this kind there must be something in themselves, something which stays unmoved, according to which they will make their work with their hands" and V.8.5.23-25: "but all the forms we speak about

The categorical formulation of these two passages indicates that what is at stake here is not a distinction concerning the difference between bad and good artists. Rather, Plotinus seems to be working here with a general distinction between natura naturans and natura naturata, claiming that artistic creation is not limited to the imitation of natura naturata, but may proceed from the same starting point occupied by natura naturans: the soul of the artist is capable of 'running back' to the nature from which nature derives. If this is the case and artistic creation can be considered, so to speak, as a second chance for the creation of the world on the basis of the same intelligible models, we can explain why exceptionally good art is able to correct or beautify natura naturata by contributing elements of its own that make up for natural deficiencies (V.8.1.37-38). However, these deficiencies and the corresponding artistic efforts for their correction are always local, falling within the power and jurisdiction, so to speak, of particular souls (cf. II.3.13.32-47). When the individual soul's creative activity is compared to the global ordering of the sensible world by the cosmic soul, it has inevitably to be judged as inferior, as when one compares "the tribe of potters or smiths" (τὸ τῶν χυτρέων ἢ χαλκέων γένος) with the "whole of a well-ordered city" (πόλει εὖ οἰκουμένῃ τὴν ἅπασαν; II.9.7.6-7) in Plotinus' eloquent formulation that reflects the heritage of the

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are beautiful images in that world, of the kind which someone imagined to exist in the soul of the wise man (σοφοῦ ἀνδρός), images not painted but real". This last claim supports the identification (in this context) between wise man and good artist that underlies our discussion. For a more general discussion concerning the arts that are included in the intelligible realm, see V.9.11.

classical city. If we add to this point the apparently obvious remark (to which we shall return) that no artist qua artist can fully imitate natura naturans in the sense of 'naturally' bringing about a living being, we can see why artistic works can be generally considered as weaker imitations of the gods, "little toys of little value".

The conclusions drawn from my examination of the general relation between art and nature cohere fully with the only thing we have asserted so far about the details of the activity of the sages of old, namely the fact that they started their endeavour "by looking back at the nature of the All" (εἰς τὴν τοῦ παντὸς φύσιν ἀπιδόντες). In the context created by our discussion, this gesture can be appreciated in two ways. On the one hand, it indicates the inferior position of the sages with regard to the cosmic soul, since it implies that the sages get their creative bearings by appropriating through reflection the contents of a superior creative instance (in the same way that soul in general has to look back upon the Intellect). On the other hand, since the sages of old are presented as highly competent creators, and hence equally strong contemplators, we may assume that this gesture of appropriation or recovery is successful in a multiplicity of ways. As they look back at the nature of the all, the sages, at a first level, recognise, in the language of our passage, the statues and temples that the cosmic soul created within the universal point of view entailed in its creation. Yet, this means, at a second level, that they also gain a view of the way in which the cosmic soul proceeded

with its creative activity, something that amounts to a direct insight into the origin of the nature of the all. The sages realise, that is, that the statues and temples are imitations of the gods and that the cosmic soul created them as imitation of the gods. At a third level, however, the sages recognise reflectively their fundamental similarity with this creator, the fact that they are also souls capable of bypassing the soul's creations and imitating directly the same intelligible originals to which the cosmic soul looked upon, since "the same vision is in every soul" (III.8.5.32). In other words, the fact that they can indeed identify soul's activity and the statues and temples as imitations reveals to them that they are themselves souls. This realisation triggers their creative activity (which, at the same time, is the actualisation of their soul potential) and determines provisionally its purpose and manner: to make the gods present by imitating the cosmic soul and build their own temples and statues.

The claim for the successful outcome of the project of recovery undertaken by the sages of old (or, else, for the substantial similarity between the sages and the cosmic soul) can be supported by an examination of the similarity of Plotinus' language in the two cases, an examination that may also clarify the nature of the objects produced by the sages. A few lines before the passage concerning the sages of old, Plotinus describes the result of the activity of the cosmic soul in the following terms:

> But soul has constructed (κατασκευάσατο) in the world statues (ἀγάλματα) of gods, dwellings (οἰκήματα) of men, and other places for other creatures (IV.3.10.27-29).

This claim has to be understood in a triply metaphorical sense. Obviously, Plotinus is not referring to buildings of any kind, but to bodies, of stars, human beings, and animals, in which the relevant intelligible entities (that can be also collectively designated as 'gods') can be 'present' in matter. Moreover, this 'presence' cannot be a matter of spatio-temporal determinations, since, as we saw in the previous chapter, Plotinus does not consider the body as a receptacle containing the intelligible realities, including the soul. Finally, taking also into account that this 'presence', however metaphorically conceived, can never be complete, since the intelligible entities remain always transcendent, we may conclude that, in literal language, the accomplishment of the cosmic soul is the shaping or the ordering of the natural world in a way that reflects its intelligible origin, something that, for Plotinus, is co-extensive with its animation.

Similarly, the statues and temples created by the sages should not be understood merely as material constructions that would be filled with the gods or soul like vessels: after all, the sages did not wish that the gods should be present <u>in</u> their artefacts, but rather that the gods should be present <u>to</u> them, i.e., the sages, presumably in the vicinity of this artefacts. We may then consider their creations as works of some sort of religious art, and note further that the distinction between statues and temples, or images for that matter, is not significant, since all these

objects should be seen as serving the same symbolic and spiritual purposes in the context of Egyptian religious practice.[46]

The examination of the precise manner in which the sages of old tried to make the gods present to them has to start from some considerations on the peculiar term 'προσπαθές', which appears only once in the Enneads in the present context. According to the Lexicon Plotinianum, 'προσπαθές' should be understood as 'capable of being acted upon', 'impressionable'. Liddell and Scott translate the noun 'προσπάθεια' as 'passionate attachment', but they too suggest 'impressionable' as the appropriate translation for the adjectival form appearing in IV.3.11.6.[47] Finally, Plotinus glosses 'προσπαθές', in lines 7-9 of our passage, as "that which imitates in any way whatever, like a mirror which is able to capture a form" (προσπαθὲς δὲ τὸ ὁπωσοῦν μιμηθέν, ὥσπερ κάτοπτρον ἁρπάσαι εἶδός τι δυνάμενον).

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[46] According to E. de Keyser, the temples in ancient Egypt were not just constructions for utility purposes, but works comparable to statues or reliefs that had the same significance as other religious works of art. See, La signification de l'art dans les Ennéades de Plotin, 56-62 (which includes also a discussion of the practice of the "wise men of Egypt" in V.8.6). That Plotinus may be alluding here to a specific Egyptian tradition of ritually animating statues (as Armstrong notes ad loc.) does not change the philosophical parameters of the issue (except for the fact that such an allusion would make even more forcefully the claim that a work of art enjoys some sort of life that needs to be differentiated from ordinary life): obviously the lessons to be learned by the sages of old are not particular to some religion form and do not concern the rituals that were employed for these animations.

[47] In the philosophical literature, 'προσπάθεια' as 'passionate attachment' has been considered as a "kind of incontinence" (πρός τι γένος ἀκρασίας; Liddell and Scott refer to the Peripatetic Dicaearchus, but the Descriptio Graeciae that contains this remark (I.10) is attributed now to the periegete Heraclides) and as "enslaved desire" (ἐπθυμία δεδουλωμένη; [Pseudo-]Andronicus Rhodius, De passionibus, ed. Glibert-Thirry, 233). In later authors (as in Marcus Aurelius (12.3) and Porphyry (Sententiarum, 28-9), the term refers to the clinging of the soul to the body and its passions.

The term should be obviously understood within the semantic field of the word συμπάθεια and its cognates, but in a rather contrastive sense.[48] In IV.3, the word συμπάθεια had appeared in an earlier chapter, in order to designate the "community of feeling" enjoyed by all individual souls (including the cosmic soul) as a result of their common origin in the Hypostasis-soul (ἐκ γὰρ τῆς αὐτῆς πᾶσαι οὖσαι, ἐξ ἧς καὶ ἡ τοῦ ὅλου, συμπαθεῖς; IV.3.8.2-3). Elsewhere in the Enneads, the term retains the sense of a community of feeling or affection, but is applied to all sorts of entities that apparently share such a community.[49] However, all these various attributions reflect fundamentally the fact that the universe is συμπαθές to itself as one complete animal (συμπαθὲς δὴ πᾶν τοῦτο τὸ ἕν, καὶ ὡς ζῷον ἕν; IV.4.32.13-14), a fact that in its turn is grounded on the 'self-sympathy' enjoyed by all soul as one soul (ψυχὴ δὲ αὐτῇ συμπαθής; IV.7.3.4).

Within this context, two things should be noted with regard to προσπαθές. First, προσπάθεια (like συμπάθεια and other terms) describes a state between two entities in which it may be very difficult to separate the

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[48] In this sense, Armstrong's translation of 'προσπαθές' as 'sympathetic', although understandable, misses the finer points implied.

[49] συμπάθεια is paradigmatically invoked in discussions of the community of affection between the parts of a body (e.g., II.3.12.31) or between stars (e.g., IV.4.8.56), of the influence exercised by heaven on the sublunary realm (e.g., III.1.5.8; IV.4.34.11), of the ground of effectiveness of magic (e.g., IV.4.26.4; IV.4.40.1), and of the relation between sensory organs and objects of perception (e.g., IV.4.23.21 or IV.5.1-3 passim). There is only one instance in which Plotinus describes directly the relation between body and soul in terms of συμπάθεια, but only in passing. In II.3.13.41-3, he notes that something can make another thing worse "either by giving it bodily infirmity, or by becoming responsible for an incidental badness in the soul which is in sympathy with it (τῇ ψυχῇ τῇ συμπαθεῖ)".

active from the passive side or identify the side taking the initiative for the establishment of this state.[50] In other words, as Plotinus' reference to a mirror indicates, the establishment of προσπάθεια follows a specular logic: A (the soul) projects an image of itself to B (the object); B is impressionable in the sense that it can receive this image; B reflects this image back to A; as a result, A becomes 'impressed' by B (i.e., attracted to B because it recognises itself in it). In this sense, and as required by the logic of our passage, προσπαθές falls equally and necessarily between 'impressive' and 'impressionable': impressive to the soul precisely to the extent that is impressionable with regard to it. Second, 'προσπαθές' (this time in contrast to 'συμπαθές') is a term that does not denote achievement, the enjoyment of a state existing or reached, but rather a condition of motion or effort (as such it would be generally appropriate for designating the ordinary relation between individual souls and bodies). As indicated by the two different prepositions ('πρός' and 'σύν'), the πάθος under discussion, despite its specular unfolding, is not presented as reciprocally suffered or shared. This lack of an achieved reciprocity obeys the requirements of our passage: after all, it is the soul that must be eventually attracted by the object and not vice versa. However, with regard to the activity of the sages that initiates this commerce between the soul and the object, the word indicates also the necessity of intentional

[50] For a detailed analysis of the logic of such terms (with reference to πείθειν and its cognates), see Mourelatos, The Route of Parmenides, 136-144.

effort. The sages cannot rely on an established sympathy between the object and soul (of the kind shared by natural bodies), but have to shape their temples and statues through a concentrated effort that takes them as objects of a passionate attachment, in the hope of the eventual establishment of a certain bond of affinity between soul and these objects.

There is one more word in our passage (occupying, in a sense, a symmetrical place) requiring some brief comments, namely the word 'εὐάγωγος', the characteristic of the soul that makes possible, or at least facilitates, the work of the sages. The meaning of this adjective derived from the verb 'ἄγειν' (lead, carry) is not in doubt: the primary sense is 'easily carried' or 'easily led', 'ductile', and its connotations include 'docile', 'easily managed', 'easily trained', 'well educated'. However, this entirely passive meaning has to be supplement by paying some attention to the echoes of a number of much more active assertions concerning the soul made by Plotinus in this context. We have already noted that in the last part of Chapter 11 Plotinus claims that the soul "creates by means of itself a connection" between the intelligible and the sensible realm. In this sense, the soul acts as an ἀγωγός, a leader or conductor that mediates the unobstructed coming of the gods to the sensible world. This sense of 'ἄγειν' is obviously required within the logic of our passage. The purpose of the sages is to attract the soul so that the gods will become present: this would not be possible if the soul were not, so to speak, a good conductor of the gods. Moreover, two more relevant instances of 'ἄγειν' should be

taken into account. In IV.3.10.20-21, Plotinus notes that "soul is by its essential power in control of bodies, so that they come to be and are in the state to which soul leads them (ὡς αὐτὴ ἄγει)"; a few lines later, he approaches soul's activity from another point of view, claiming that its purpose (common to the activity of everything) is to "lead things to a likeness with itself" (εἰς ὁμοίωσιν ἑαυτῷ ἄγειν; IV.3.10.36). In sum, the claim that the nature of the soul is everywhere 'easily led' should be appreciated in the context of the assertions that the soul also leads things to what they are by leading the gods to them in order to lead them into a likeness of itself.

In light of these remarks, we can appreciate now the activity of the sages of old in all its complexity. The sages, themselves souls, have in front of them, let us say, a piece of marble, a material already preformed to some extent through the activity of the cosmic soul. The sages have already looked around and seen the statues of the gods made by the cosmic soul, living beings of all sorts; they have also looked in and acquired a direct vision of the intelligible statues of which the natural sensible statues are imitations. They want, to the extent that this is possible for them, to create the world again, to act in a way that will create a new passage through which the gods will be present to them and for them. Faced with the unformed piece of marble, they know that they cannot merely rely on the sympathy already established between all parts of the universe through the operation of the cosmic soul: the marble is a

soulless thing, and this means (in a thoroughly ensouled universe) that the part of its soul which remains within it (τὸ ἐν αὐτῇ) lies asleep (οἷον εὕδει) in it, while the part of its soul which goes out to form something else (τὸ δὲ ἐξ αὐτῆς εἰς ἄλλο) would merely turn, if this were possible, the rest of the world into marble (IV.3.10.33-36). They know, however, that, as souls, they have the power (although, since they are particular souls, this would require passionate effort) to lead the piece of marble into a statue, waking, so to speak, the soul that lies asleep within it (leading it thus into a likeness of themselves as souls) and, at the same time, establishing a passage (the soul of the very work) through which the gods can be once more present to them. Yet, this waking cannot be accomplished directly as it requires two steps that have to be differentiated, even if in reality they can be easily conflated. What the sages can do is to turn the piece of marble into something 'impressionable', capable of receiving form, a potential likeness of the soul. This is not already waking: the soul of the marble wakes by receiving a share of soul, when soul (the creator's soul or some other soul), easily attracted by images of itself as we shall see in the next chapter, becomes actually 'impressed' by this 'impressionable' piece of work, recognises itself in its creation. This is why the sages in this case cannot make the gods present to them directly and in way that can be in principle guaranteed (like the presence gained through the self-transformation resulting from internal contemplation), but have first to

undertake the uncertain endeavour of attracting soul through the creation of a beautiful work.

What is thus implicated in the innocuous difference between συμπαθές and προσπαθές is the specificity of a new creative possibility for the soul: let us call it artistic creation. As the second part of the composite προσπαθές suggests, this possibility is a matter of affection, and hence, is firmly situated within the sensible world: the aim is to make the gods present to us in the statues of this world, and not to visit them, by working contemplatively and unceasingly on our own internal statue of I.6.9.14, in the intelligible temples and sanctuaries of V.1.6.9-16 or VI.9.11. As the first part of the composite προσπαθές suggests, this possibility has also to be differentiated from the natural activity of the soul, whether particular of universal: the reciprocal bonds of συμπάθεια, the chain of one living being after another carrying, in grades but qualitatively intact, the creative power of the soul has been disrupted or reached a final point, to be replaced by the πρὸς of the effort of the creator and the πρὸς of the attraction of the spectator toward the work. Since the aim of the present discussion, in accordance with the content of the text that provides it with its focus, is to identify the fundamental creative possibilities of the soul without treating them exhaustively, let us conclude with a few remarks limited to one central question that will help us to locate more precisely this new possibility: How can we express in this context the difference between a work of art and a living thing, or else

specify the peculiar kind of life, grasped above in the metaphorical terms of a waking of its soul, that a work of art enjoys?

Plotinus was, of course, aware of the difference between works of art and living things, as the following passage indicates:

> If one is talking about the image made by a painter, we shall affirm that it is not the original (ἀρχέτυπον) that made (πεποιηκέναι) the image but the painter, since even if some painter makes a self portrait, it is not an image of himself (οὐκ οὖσαν αὐτοῦ εἰκόνα οὐδ' εἰ αὐτόν τις γράφει); for what made (τὸ γράφον) the painting was not the body (σῶμα) of the painter or the form (εἶδος) which was imitated (μεμιμημένον). (VI.4.10.5-10)

This passage is actually taken from a literal discussion of the way various images are formed, but it is clear that the difference that interests us can be easily expressed through a metaphorical transposition of it along standard Plotinian lines. If the painter, instead of drawing a self-portrait, had a child, then we could indeed assert that the maker is not the painter, but the form which is being imitated, in the form of the spermatic logoi transmitted from the maker to the made and responsible for the shaping and the growth of the child: in this sense and taking the ancient Greek views on procreation into account, the child would be an image of the father. In strict ontological terms, the difference between the self-portrait and the child can be described with the help of the following remark that recalls our analysis of creation in terms of contemplation:

> In every rational principle, its last and lowest manifestation springs from contemplation, and is contemplation in the sense of being contemplated (ὁ μὲν ἔσχατος ἐκ θεωρίας καὶ θεωρία οὕτως ὡς τεθεωρημένος). (III.8.3.6-7)

However, in Plotinus' language, for something to be contemplation in the sense of being contemplated, without possessing itself the power to contemplate, is another way of saying that it is soulless or dead. Are we, then, to conclude not only that "an uglier living man is more beautiful than the beautiful man in a statue, since the living is more desirable because it has soul" (VI.7.22.31-32), but also that the beautiful statue, despite the artist's care and the spectator's joy, is ontologically at the same level with the piece of marble to which the effort of the artist was originally applied?

In a fundamental ontological perspective, the answer to this question has to be affirmative, however strange the assertion that ontologically Pheidias' Zeus is merely worth its gold and ivory may be. Moreover, there is nothing surprising in this conclusion, since there is no fundamental ontology (at least, say, up to Nietzsche) that could incorporate directly in its terms whatever privileged status the work of art may enjoy in comparison to other objects. Of course, in Plotinian terms, one may argue that a statue is mastered more thoroughly by form, or is mastered by a more complex form, in comparison to the marble. The argument, however, will be both dubious and futile. Dubious, because, on the one hand, it is evident that the mastery of the form of marble over the marble far exceeds anything that an artist may even imagine in this respect; and, on the other, it is far from evident how the complexity of a form is to be measured. Futile, because, it fails to address the decisive

issue, at least in a Plotinian context: the fact that the work of art, like any other inanimate object, occupies indeed the last position in the great chain of being, the position of the entities which do not have the power to contemplate.

Are we, then, to take back the assertion for a new creative possibility for the soul? Not necessarily, because the strict ontological perspective is not the only point of view from which the world can be seen. Let us, then, abandon this perspective and reformulate our question in a more precise and promising manner: Why is artistic creation a distinct creative possibility for the soul and what is the kind of life enjoyed by the work of art within the perspective of the soul? In order to answer this question, let us raise two more, even larger, questions: What is the function of the soul? What is the function of a work of art?

These questions may be large, but on the basis of our discussion the answers can be surprisingly short. The function of the soul, let us recall, is to become an "interpreter of what comes from this sun to that sun and from that sun to this sun" (IV.3.11.20-21): it is an amphibious creature which, whether we are moving in a downward or an upward direction, has to eventually disappear in order to discharge its fundamental ontological function, which is to guarantee that "nothing is a long way off or far from anything else" (IV.3.11.22-23). The function of the work of art is to provide a passage through which the gods will be present to us. Its success in this respect is co-extensive with its ability to attract the soul,

and hence, even if everything created by the soul is created for the sake of contemplation and knowledge, the distinctive mark of the work of art is that it is the only object expressly and primarily made by the soul in order to attract the soul, to please it most so that it will receive it more easily.

The homology between these two answers provides us with the clue for the answer to our initial question. In the simplest terms possible, the privileged status of the work of art within the perspective of the soul is that it is an object made deliberately and primarily for the enjoyment of the soul. But the most important point is that if the function of the work of art is to provide a passage through which the gods will be present to us, then the work of art is the inanimate counterpart of soul itself, the sensible proof that indeed "nothing is a long way off or far from anything else". If an analogy with the Intellect is not far fetched here, we may say that the work of art is the proper object of soul: as the Intellect creates the intelligibles in order to live its proper life as a thinker thinking them, the soul creates the works of art in order to live its proper life as an interpreter interpreting them (and this is, of course, the life that the work of art lives). Yet, if this is far fetched, a more modest claim will do: the works of art, as sensible passages of the gods, are these objects in which the soul recognises its own peculiar predicament and drama, which ultimately is not its involvement with matter, but precisely its amphibious and self-effacing task.

CHAPTER 4

Self-creation: The Individuation of Soul

In the narrative of Plotinus' cosmogony, we have now reached the dramatic point where a multiplicity of individual souls is about to descend to the world that has already emerged through the creative activity of the cosmic soul in order to become embodied and inhabit it. Plotinus introduces the issue at the beginning of Chapter 12 with an extended metaphorical image (12.1-12) that aims precisely to capture and illustrate the nature and particular characteristics of this descent. At the core of Plotinus' image, we encounter a reference to the well-known myth of Dionysus, which, within the Orphic tradition, sets the mythological context for the elaboration of the Orphic views on the origin of mankind. Plotinus makes clear his intention to discuss the problem of the descent of individual souls in a context shaped by allusions to these traditional religious views already from the first line of our text, which reads: "but the souls of men, seeing the images of themselves like Dionysus in a mirror, came to be there"(ἀνθρώπων δὲ ψυχαὶ εἴδωλα αὑτῶν ἰδοῦσαι οἷον Διονύσου ἐν κατόπτρῳ ἐκεῖ ἐγένοντο).

Although the division of soul into distinct individual souls does not concern solely human beings, but every individual member of Plotinus' ensouled universe, this introductory paragraph sets the framework in which Chapters 12 and 13 should be read. Hence our primary philosophical concern will be the emergence and adventures of individual human souls although, as Plotinus remarks, his account could and should be extended in order to include other non-human animals, and even plants (12.39). In Chapter 13 in particular, Plotinus insists that the way in which the soul descends to human bodies and guides the overall development and behaviour of human beings is determined by principles that apply equally to every living form of the universe and can be thus firmly situated within the general context of the cycle of natural processes (13.12-17). In this sense, Plotinus' decision to address the issue of the subsequent descent of soul into bodies and to tackle the most salient features of this process in terms of human individuation places at the centre of our discussion problems which properly belong to the area of a philosophical anthropology elaborated within the context of Plotinus' natural psychology: What is the precise manner in which the soul of a human being acquires, and becomes aware of, its distinct identity?

We may thus say that, in general terms, the issues to be discussed in this chapter concern the question of the unity and multiplicity of the soul. However, in this chapter we shall not be concerned with the vertical unity of soul considered as a hypostasis, or, in other words, with the way

in which soul hangs together as one, 'extending' between intellect and matter. Rather, the focus of our discussion will be another vertical dimension, a certain 'extension' of every individual soul in its 'descent' to a body that is implicated in the very process of its individuation and can be considered as its internal dimension or perspective.[1] In other words: after the soul has been 'divided' among a multitude of (human) individuals at the same ontological level, we have to examine both the way in which every individual soul acquires its unity and identity and the way in which it remains related to the whole of soul, so that this whole would retain its hypostatic unity after its fragmentation.

The examination of these issues will be conducted in two sections. The first and larger section starts with an elucidation of the meaning and the philosophical implications of an important metaphor employed by Plotinus in his discussion of the individuation of souls, namely, the presentation of the descent of souls in terms of a process of reflection. After identifying the reflective character of the 'depth' to which every individual soul travels, I examine in detail the way in which every soul occupies this space, retaining its relation to the whole of soul. In the final section, I pursue essentially the same issues, but this time in the context of the much-discussed problem of the existence of forms of individuals.

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[1] The point can be also made in the temporal terms of Plotinus' account: we are not concerned any more (as we were in Chapter 2) with the original extension of the soul, which corresponds to the emergence of the proper activity of the hypostasis of the soul and the simultaneous creation of the sensible world, but with the significance that this extension (considered now as given) has for the constitution of individual souls.

My claim is that the detailed examination of Plotinus' views contained in the passage under discussion has much to contribute to this long-standing debate in Plotinian scholarship, in particular because it enables us to think the problem of the individuation of the soul in terms that transcend the traditional alternatives (which locate the individuation of the soul either at the level of the intellect or the level of matter) and bring to the foreground the importance in this respect of the self-activity of the soul.

The Myth of Dionysus: Reflection and Depth

Before we proceed to an examination of Plotinus' philosophical views, we should first familiarise ourselves with the mythological background to which Plotinus appeals. Although the myth of Dionysus has reached us in many variants, for the purposes of our discussion it would suffice to offer here only a brief account of its central theme.[2] Dionysus was the illegitimate son of Zeus and Kore (Persephone), and, in accordance with his father's will, was destined to rule over all the other gods. The Titans grew jealous of the infant, and decided to kill him. With the assistance of Hera, Zeus' legitimate wife, they offered him certain toys,

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[2] Armstrong (ad loc.) regards Plotinus' reference to Dionysus to be to Dionysus Zagreus. However, M. L. West (The Orphic Poems, 153) has drawn attention to the fact that there is no real use of the name Zagreus in the Orphic Hymns or in the Neoplatonic texts. In relation to the general study of the Orphic tradition though, such an identification is not ungrounded. For a detailed exploration of the origin and different versions of the myth see W.K.C. Guthrie, Orpheus and Greek Religion, 82-4, 107-9, 130ff, 153-55, 209, 227. In some cases, Dionysus or Backhos is identified with the chthonian deity of Zeus Zagreus worshipped in Crete (ibid., 112-13).

among them a mirror, with the intention to lead him away from the royal palace into the woods and kill him.[3] Dionysus, because of his youth and innocence, was seduced by the toys, and led himself into the woods, where the Titans tore him to pieces, shared the parts of his body between them, and tasted his flesh. When Zeus discovered the awful crime committed against his son, in great sorrow and anger, he decided to avenge it. He thus tortured the Titans, and eventually burned them with his thunderbolts. Out of their ashes, mankind came into existence, whereas the remains of Dionysus were brought to Delphi by Apollo where Zeus, out of the still living heart that Athena presented to him, brought Dionysus back to life.

There are many interesting features in the myth of Dionysus that could justify the attention it received by the Neoplatonists[4]. For Plotinus, the most prominent element of the myth appears to be the seduction of the infant Dionysus by the mirror. In fact, in the present context (which contains the only reference to the myth of Dionysus in the Plotinian corpus), almost all other details or events of the myth are omitted, and Plotinus concentrates emphatically on the theme of seduction through

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[3] There is a disagreement as to whether the gifts should be regarded as religious symbols or simple toys; moreover, the ancient texts are not consistent with regard to the gifts themselves. However, the mirror is one of the objects (rattles, puppets, a lump of wool, tops, a ball, golden apples) more frequently mentioned and, according to Nonnus, Dionysus' most favourite toy (see, e.g., Clement, Protrepticus 2.17.2-18.1; Orph. Fr. 34; Nonnus, Dionysiaca, VI, 172-173 and VI, 206-207; Proclus, In Platonis Timaeum, 33b). Further discussion and references in Guthrie, Orpheus, 121-22, and J. Pépin, "Plotin et le miroir de Dionysus", 304-320 and "Plotin et les mythes", 20.

[4] For an extensive exposition of the various (naturalistic, cosmological, metaphysical, and spiritual) interpretations of the myth of Dionysus, see J. Pépin, "Plotin et le miroir de Dionysus".

reflection[5]. Plotinus' selective attitude towards this myth is not surprising, to the extent that it is common practice for him to record only those elements of a myth that he considers to be of particular philosophical significance and direct relevance to the issue he is discussing. However, we should also take into account the fact that in most cases, including presumably the case of Dionysus' myth, Plotinus' audience was familiar with the story, and thus they, as well as the contemporary readers, are assumed to be able to make the necessary connections and relate Plotinus' selective remarks to the other events of the story, without Plotinus having to recount them explicitly. Now that we have established some basic understanding of the myth, we may turn to our text in order to elucidate the significance of this mythological account in the philosophical context of the present chapters.

The opening paragraph of Chapter 12 reads:

> But the souls of men seeing the images of themselves like Dionysus in a mirror, having been set in motion from above they come to be there (ἐκεῖ) without being cut off, not even these, from the principle of themselves and from Nous. For although they did not come with the Nous, they nevertheless, reached as far as earth, yet their head was firmly set beyond the heaven. It happened to them to come down more, in as much their middle rank was obliged to take care of that which they reached which needed care. Father Zeus having pitied them for being in pain, makes their bonds mortal, the bonds

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[5] As we shall see, Plotinus makes a reference to Zeus in line 8, which possibly alludes to the role of Zeus in the traditional myth. In this connection, we could claim that souls, like Dionysus, 'die' upon entering bodies and are brought back to life by Zeus, when he liberates them from their fetters. Note the reversal: the 'life' of soul (in time or in body) is from another perspective the 'death' of soul. A similar view is found in Ficino: "The divine Plato thinks that the celestial and immortal Soul dies in a certain sense when it enters the earthly and mortal body and returns to life when it leaves the body". The reference is apparently to the Phaedo (67D; see Kristeller, The Philosophy of Marsilio Ficino, 222). We shall return to this issue later in the present chapter.

> in respect of which they are in pain, in times giving them intervals/pauses, making them free of bodies, in order to coming to be there (ἐκεῖ), where the soul of the All always is without turning towards any of the things here (τὰ τῇδε) (12.1-12).[6]

The most prominent element of this metaphorical account, obvious and puzzling at the same time, is that Plotinus presents the descent of the individual souls to the world (their embodiment or the animation of their bodies) as a reflective gaze of them at the image of themselves: when souls fix their gaze at their image, they are attracted by it and, like Dionysus when looking at his image in the mirror, they are seduced and carried away from their 'palace' to the sensible world. At first sight, this image seems to presuppose a rather peculiar situation of gazing in a mirror, but

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[6] The translation I am offering differs from Armstrong's in the Loeb edition at least in respect of two points which I consider particularly important for the interpretation I shall be suggesting. First, Armstrong takes the genitive "Διονύσου" to refer to the mirror. He translates: "But the soul of men see their images as if in the mirror of Dionysus..." However, following J. Pépin, I take it to refer to the image rather than the mirror. Pépin ("Plotin et le miroir de Dionysus", 315), translates: "Quant aux ames humaines, ayant vu leurs images comme Dionysos avait vu la sienne dans le mirroir..." I think that this reading is to be preferred because it makes the analogy much clearer: the souls are seduced by their reflection in the same way that Dionysus was seduced by his reflection in the mirror. In this sense, I think that Plotinus is not trying to draw attention to the mirror of Dionysus, which would have led us to conceive of this particular mirror as some sort of special and unique object with magical qualities, but rather to the process of soul's descent. The soul's descent is thus presented as a seduction precisely because what the souls see, in analogy to Dionysus, is merely a deceptive image, a reflection similar to all the images formed in mirrors or other objects which have this capacity. The second difference in my translation, is that I prefer to translate "ἐκεῖ" in both its occurrences (in line 2 and line 11) as "there". In this way, I intend to underline and preserve the ambiguity in the use of the word which is present in the text. In line 11, it seems clear that Plotinus uses "ἐκεῖ" to refer to the 'Intelligible world' as opposed to "τὰ τῇδε", the 'things in physical world'. In line 2 however, the meaning of "ἐκεῖ" is less certain; it could mean: (a) in the physical world, (b) in the Intelligible world, or (c) in the mirror. In his attempt to differentiate the two "ἐκεῖ", Armstrong translates the one in line 2, as "on that level", whereas he translates "there" in the second case. His choice, apart from implicitly introducing a notion of levels which to some extent might obscure rather than clarify the text, does not seem to resolve the difficulty in understanding where the "ἐκεῖ" of line 2 actually should be taken to be. Pépin, on the other hand, is more determined to specify its meaning and thus translates it as "in the mirror".

one that is appropriate to the mythical background. Plotinus' story makes sense only when someone is looking at a mirror that is set at a fixed distance from him or her.[7] In these circumstances, any attempt to approach the image – which would normally (as in the case of Narcissus)[8] lead the observer closer to the mirror – results in the forward motion of the entire system: as the observer moves from his or her initial position, the mirror, and consequently the image which appears in it, moves simultaneously further along. In what other way would a mirror, even a masterpiece created by the unparalleled skill of Hephaestus, induce Dionysus to leave the palace and go to the wood?[9] However, Plotinus immediately corrects the image in a manner that, after our discussion of other Plotinian images, should not be surprising. It is not actually the case that the souls move in any transitional sense; their head remains fixed 'above in heaven' (κάρα δὲ αὐταῖς ἐστήρικται ὑπεράνω τοῦ οὐρανοῦ), and at most we may say that they 'stretch out to earth' (ἔφθασαν μὲν μέχρι γῆς).

It is evident that this metaphorical elaboration of the already metaphorical notion of a descent of the soul (where locomotion is replaced by elastic extension and the soul acquires suddenly an extended

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7 One could suppose that the Titans were actually holding the mirror and moving backwards. This is in fact the case in a 5th century AD pyxis, in the Museo Civico Archeologico of Bologna, which depicts the scene (see West, The Orphic Poems, n. 51, 156). In our context, where the Titans are not mentioned, one may say that the gaze determines itself a fixed length, from the observer to the mirror or the image.

8 At I.6.9.9-16, Narcissus drowns as a result of running to his image on the water in order to seize it. We shall return to Plotinus' treatment of the myth of Narcissus later in this section.

9 Orph. Fr. 209.

multiplicity of parts on the model of the human body) implicates an issue that we have already encountered in many guises within our discussion: the sense in which the soul (or, a certain part of it) remains separate from body, even 'after' the emergence of the sensible world. This is an issue to which we shall return later in this chapter, after our presentation of Plotinus' image. For the time being, in order to understand better what Plotinus is trying to depict here, it would be helpful to recall some elementary principles of reflection, widely accessible already at Plotinus' time. We could consider all the movements and distances described by Plotinus in the simple terms of the geometrical optics, expounded, for instance, by Ptolemy in Book III of his Optics. According to Ptolemy's analysis, the rays incident upon a mirror, instead of penetrating the mirror as the observer is misled to believe, rebound, and are reflected back to the observer. Thus, although in reality the ray from the eye reaches only as far as the surface of the mirror and from that point it is reflected from the mirror to the object, the object appears as if located 'out there' in a place other than its real one, a place which we perceive as being inside the mirror, situated on the extension of the perpendicular drawn from the object to the surface of the mirror.[10] In other words, then,

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[10] According to Ptolemy, there are three basic principles for the understanding of reflection on mirrors: "(1) objects seen in mirrors are seen in the direction of the visual ray which is reflected from the mirror to the object, depending on the position of the eye; (2) images in mirrors appear to be on the perpendicular drawn from the object to the surface of the mirror, and produced; (3) the position of the reflected ray, from the eye to the mirror and from the mirror to the object, is such that each of the two parts contains the point of reflection and makes equal angles with the perpendicular to the mirror at that point." (Ptolemy, Optics III, 60.23-64.28 (Govi), quoted from Cohen and Drabkin

although we look at the mirror, we actually see the object which is outside the mirror, and we perceive it as being in the mirror.

However, before we proceed to a more detailed analysis of the significance of the theme of reflection, we need to face the following question: How are we to understand exactly the nature and function of the most important object of this metaphor, namely the mirror? In his study on the mirror of Dionysus, J. Pépin has adduced much evidence for the most obvious option: the direct association of the mirror with matter. The analogy was already established within the Platonic tradition: objects appear in matter in a way similar to the way in which images appear in a mirror.[11] Through a parallel examination of passages where Plotinus discusses matter in relation to mirrors, as well as water or reflective surfaces in general, Pépin brings to light the particular similarities that establish a strong connection between the two.[12] The most characteristic example that offers support to Pépin's claim is to be found in the following

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(eds.), A Source Book in Greek Science, 269). In geometrical terms, if AB is the line symbolising the mirror, C is the object, C' the image, CG the perpendicular to the mirror, E the eye of the observer, D the point at which the ray from the eye reaches the mirror and FD the perpendicular from that point to the mirror, then according to the above mentioned principles, C' lies on ED, C' lies on CG and the angles FDE and FDC are equal. In relation to Plotinus' reference to the mirror where the observer is also the reflected object, $\angle FDE = \angle FDC = 90°$. For a concise yet very informative account of the theories of vision in the Antiquity, see D. C. Lindberg, Theories of Vision from Al-Kindi to Kepler, esp. Chapter 1.

[11] The tradition goes back ultimately to Plato's discussion of chora in the Timaeus (49A-53C) (to which Plotinus alludes in the passage quoted below) and implicates obviously the issue of the relation between chora and matter. In this connection, we should note that Plato himself never likens chora to a mirror; for a discussion of the reasons, see Kung, "Why the Receptacle is not a Mirror".

[12] Pépin, "Plotin et le miroir de Dionysus". His interpretation relies on III.6.7.23-27 and 40-42; II.3.17.5; VI.5.8.16-17 (supported further by III.6.9.16-19; 13.34-52; 14.1-2 and 31-32).

passage, where the comparison between matter and mirror is developed in considerable detail:

> It [matter] always presents opposite appearances on its surface, small and great, less and more, deficient and superabundant, a phantom which does not remain and cannot get away either, for it has no strength for this, since it has not received strength from intellect but is lacking in all being. Whatever announcement it makes, therefore, is a lie, and if it appears great, it is small, if more, it is less; its apparent being is not real, but a sort of fleeting frivolity; hence the things which seem to be in it are frivolities, nothing but phantoms in a phantom, like something in a mirror which really exists in one place but is reflected in another; it seems to be filled, and holds nothing; it is all seeming. Imitations of real beings pass into and out of it, ghosts into a formless ghost, visible because of its formlessness. They seem to act on it, but do nothing ... they go through without making a cut, as if through water, or as if someone in a way projected shapes in the void people talk about ... Certainly, then, since it is weak and false, and falling into falsity, like things in a dream or water or a mirror, it necessarily leaves matter unaffected; though in the examples just mentioned there is a likeness between the things seen [in water, etc.], and the things which are the causes of the appearances (III.6.7.14-42).

The views expressed in the above passage, which may be easily supported in this respect by other passages throughout the Enneads, contain a number of salient features for an analogy between mirrors and matter that strikes a rather familiar chord. The fundamental point is, of course, that sensible objects, like reflections in a mirror, appear in matter as images that are other than the real objects mirrored by them. Moreover, the objects seen in matter, like the reflections seen in mirrors, have no substantive reality of their own (and acquire none from the medium in which they appear), but last for as long as the objects casting them are present: when the real objects depart (in the absence of the

formative influence of the intelligible realities), the reflections disappear.[13] Further, these objects appear to be in a place (or realm of reality) which is not only different from the place they really are, but illusory in a fundamental sense: as in the case of mirrors, matter appears to 'contain' all sensible objects (or the forms embodied in them), but it actually 'contains' nothing. To the ontologically deceptive and 'weak' nature of both mirrors and matter, we may add a final point: their common impassivity (ἀπάθεια), that is, the fact that any image that "comes to" them (προσελθόντος) does not affect in any way their "composition" (σύστασιν, III.6.11.16-19).

The fact that Plotinus relies heavily on an analogy of this sort is widely recognised by his interpreters. Ferwerda, for example, discussing the history of the mirror analogy in Antiquity, remarks that Plotinus more than any of his predecessors uses this image consistently in order to stress the illusory or misleading aspect of reflection.[14] R. Mortley, following a similar interpretative line, presses the analogy even further, suggesting that the mirror itself (and not just the way in which things appear in it) should be understood directly as a symbol for matter.[15] Mortley notes that imaging, at every level of Plotinus' ontological

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13 "For the image in a mirror must also be called an activity: that which is reflected in it acts on what is capable of being affected without flowing into it; but if the object reflected is there, the reflection too appears in the mirror and it exists as an image of a coloured surface shaped in a particular way; and if the object goes away, the mirror surface no-longer has what it had before, when the object seen in it offered itself to it for its activity" (IV.5.7.44-49).

14 Ferwerda, La Signification des Images et des Metaphores, 9-23.

15 Mortley,"The Face and Image in Plotinus".

hierarchy, requires a medium which is of a different nature to that which is imaged; since in the case of soul this medium is matter, the mirror itself should be undoubtedly regarded as its symbolic expression. Overall then, one could argue that the symbolic links between matter and mirror are uniquely intensified in Plotinus.

However, it has also been noted that Plotinus, apart from bringing to our attention the similarities between matter and mirrors, is also especially concerned with underlining their differences. Ferwerda draws particular attention to the fact that nowhere in Plotinus do we find mirrors mentioned as the exact metaphorical equivalent of matter[16]. On the contrary, he argues, the two terms appear together as part of a comparison which is very carefully articulated in elaborate metaphorical accounts. Plotinus, more often than not, takes particular care to prevent us from interpreting the relation between matter and mirrors as a straightforward identification. In order to fully understand the force of this comparison, we should bring out the textual and philosophical subtleties in the passages where Plotinus employs this metaphor, attending simultaneously to other relevant passages that are devoted to the exploration of the nature of matter and mirrors independently from each other.

To begin with, we need to recall some of Plotinus' standard views about matter. Matter is emphatically described, even in passages where

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16 Ferwerda, La Signification des Images et des Metaphores, 22.

the metaphor of reflection is explicitly or implicitly present, as that which is "altogether obscure" (παντάπασι ἀμυδρόν, 10.10), as something which is "invisible in itself and escapes any attempt to see it" (ἀόρατον καθ' αὑτὸ καὶ φεῦγον τὸ βουλόμενον ἰδεῖν), as pure "unlimitedness" (ἀπειρία), which is "neither soul, nor intellect, nor life, nor form, nor rational formative principle, nor limit, ... nor power" (οὔτε δὲ ψυχὴ οὖσα οὔτε νοῦς οὔτε ζωὴ οὔτε εἶδος οὔτε λόγος οὔτε πέρας ... οὔτε δύναμις). Moreover, matter is totally resistant and absolutely unable to participate in the rational or creative force: the reason for which it has no strength, is that "it has not received strength from intellect but is lacking in all being" (μὴ ἰσχὺν παρὰ νοῦ λαβόν, ἀλλ' ἐν ἐλλείψει τοῦ ὄντος παντὸς γενόμενον).[17] On the other hand, mirrors, like all other reflective surfaces, are able to reflect, precisely because they are bright, smooth, and transparent: as Plotinus knew from the Timaeus, reflection occurs through the "combination of the inner and outer fire, each time that they unite on the smooth surface" (περὶ τὴν λειότητα) or "on the smooth and bright surface" (περὶ τὸ λεῖον καὶ λαμπρόν) of the mirror.[18] On the face of this evidence, it seems that there is certainly a tension in the metaphorical identification between mirrors and matter. Something like matter, which (at least in contexts in which the

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[17] All these claims come from III.6.7.7-20, a passage overlapping with III.6.7.14-42, quoted above as the strongest evidence for a Plotinian metaphorical identification of matter with mirrors. The unlimitdness and obscurity of matter are of course stressed throughout the Enneads; see, e.g., I.8.9.17; I.8.10.11; II.4.10.22; II.4.15.9.

[18] Timaeus, 46B. For the transparency of mirrors, see III.6.9.16-17: τὰ κάτοπτρα λέγοι καὶ ὅλως τὰ διαφανῆ.

soul is not present) can be only linked metaphorically to absolute darkness or complete opacity can be hardly identified with something like a mirror, an object especially made to allow the reception, combination, and deflection of light. From this point of view, it is worth recalling from the previous chapter that when Plotinus uses explicitly the simile of the mirror, the reference is not to matter as such, but to the sympathetic nature of the soul and, by extension, to the nature of objects that, like a mirror, are carefully constructed in a way that makes them "able to capture a form" (ὥσπερ κάτοπτρον ἁρπάσαι εἴδός τι δυνάμενον; 11.7-8).

A similar point can be made in slightly different terms, of which Plotinus himself was fully aware. An important and obvious difference between a mirror and matter is that we continue to see the mirror even when the reflected objects are no longer there, while matter as such is not visible. The point is formulated in the following passage, where Plotinus writes:

> Here certainly, the mirror itself is seen, for it, too, is a form; but in the case of matter, since it is in no way a form, it is not itself seen... So in this way the images in mirrors are not believed or are less believed to be real, because that in which they are is seen, and it remains but they go away; but in matter, it itself is not seen either when it has the images or without them (III.6.13.39-46).

This passage makes clear that the implicated visibility should be understood in terms that for us are also metaphorical (although not for Plotinus). The visibility of the mirror after the images have been removed is a result of the fact that a mirror has (or is) a form, and this fact

differentiates it sharply from matter.[19] Even if one were to suggest that the mirror mentioned in the above passage is just the physical object that we encounter in the world around us (ἐνταῦθα), and as such should be distinguished from the intended metaphorical object (in the sense in which, say, the scales of justice are not made from any actual material), the problem that Plotinus raises still remains clear. What makes a mirror what it is, is not obviously its visibility as a material object in the natural world. Rather, the fact that a mirror is a specific object with certain distinctive characteristics that can be perceived (in a sense which obviously goes beyond mere sensation), and then literally described or metaphorically employed for the presentation of other realities, is the result of the presence of form, which makes every object a qualified object, raising it ipso facto above its sheer materiality. In this sense, not only mirrors, but also any distinct object (anything beyond mere indeterminate darkness or opacity) would be a fully unmotivated symbol for the

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[19] A few lines earlier (33-36) Plotinus writes: Ἆρα οὖν ψευδῶς εἰς ψεῦδος ἔρχεται καί παραπλήσιον γίνεται οἷον καὶ εἰς το κάτοπτρον, εἰ ὁρῷτο τά εἴδωλα τῶν ἐνορωμένων καὶ ἕως ἐνορᾷ ἐκεῖνα. As Armstrong points out ad loc, this passage is very obscure and his translation offers just a possible way of understanding its uncertain meaning. Armstrong translates: "Does it then come falsely into falsehood, and is what happens very much like the way in which the images of the faces seen in a mirror are perceived there as long as people look into it?" Mackenna offers a rather different translation: "Is this a pseudo-entry into a pseudo-entity - something merely brought near, as faces enter the mirror, there to remain just as long as the people look into it". I think that Mackenna's version is better, to the extent that he takes παραπλήσιον to mean "near"instead of "very much like the way"(that is, as a qualification of the comparison introduced by οἷον). This notion of proximity is central to Plotinus' understanding of the function of a mirror: if one were able to look from a different perspective, then one would have seen that the object has not really entered the mirror but is just near its surface.

presentation of matter.[20] Thus, although Plotinus occasionally picks up a relevant characteristic of mirrors and tries to present the corresponding characteristic (or, rather, lack of characteristic) of matter with the help of a vocabulary of intensification (as in III.6.9.19, where matter in comparison to mirrors is called "ἀπαθέστερον"), he is also fully aware of the peculiar limits of the effectiveness of metaphorical presentation in this case. As he puts it, matter is that which is "altogether unmeasured and so altogether unlike" (πάντη ἄμετρον ὕλη ὂν πάντη ἀνωμοίωται; I.2.2.21) anything else which could be used for its presentation.

The problems we have been discussing for a metaphorical identification between mirrors and matter are also evident in the context of a final point. In the long passage from III.6.7 quoted earlier, where Plotinus suggests and explores this comparison at great length, he nevertheless states that there is a certain degree or type of similarity between objects and their reflection in mirrors (or other reflective surfaces) which does not exist in the case of appearances in matter and the corresponding intelligible objects. The point is elucidated further in VI.5.8. In this context, although it is acknowledged that a comparison between mirrors and matter may be natural and to a certain extent useful,

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[20] One is reminded here of Kant's analysis of the sublime: "For what is sublime, in the proper meaning of the term, cannot be contained in any sensible form but concerns only ideas of reason, which, though they cannot be exhibited adequately, are aroused and called to mind by this very inadequacy, which can be exhibited in sensibility" (Critique of Judgement, §23). The situation is exactly reverse from the one envisaged in V.8.3.12-13, where Plotinus notes that any image (εἰκόνα) of the Intellect "will drawn from something worse" (ἐκ χείρονος), i.e., from some definite sensible thing or situation.

the conclusion is that in the end it has to be abandoned. Plotinus claims that if one is to speak in more precise terms (ἀκριβέστερον), one should not assume that:

> the Form is spatially separate and then the Idea is reflected in matter as if in water, but that matter, from every side grasping (and again not grasping) the Idea, receives from the Form, over the whole of itself, by its drawing near to it all that it can receive, with nothing between (VI.5.8.16-21).

Once again, we can see Plotinus struggling with his own metaphors: while the metaphor of reflection is flatly denied at the outset, some of the subsequent corrections occur within the same metaphorical framework (as when he insists that there is nothing -no medium, no distance- between form and matter), and some others point directly to the inadequacy of any metaphorical framework derived from experience (as when he suggests that matter touches and does not touch the form).

The conclusion of this examination of the mirror-matter analogy is primarily negative, or rather, cautionary. Although this comparison may be employed on various occasions as a useful guide for the understanding of the nature of the relation between sensible and intelligible realities, it is neither as trouble-free as one would have been inclined to assume, nor should be taken as a stable and unambiguous interpretative given in any possible context. At the very least, some sensitivity is required with regard to what is actually the relevant aspect of such a comparison in any specific context: even if, for example, there is an analogy between the ways things appear in matter and in a mirror, this does not mean necessarily

that matter itself is to be metaphorically identified with a mirror, or, a fortiori, that every time a mirror or a reflective surface is mentioned it should always be linked metaphorically to matter.

Returning now to the immediate context of our discussion, namely Chapter 12, we should first note that the mirror seems indeed to provide the symbolism for the threshold between the intelligible and the sensible world. Moreover, to the extent that Plotinus does talk here about the corporeal existence of human beings, one would have been seriously tempted to regard the mirror as a metaphorical substitute for matter. However, since the analogy with mirrors and reflection in this context is intended by Plotinus to provide, in metaphorical terms, an explanation for the descent and the individuation of souls, the assumption that the mirror represents matter would have created a number of great difficulties. At a first level, such a view would have attributed to matter characteristics and powers completely incompatible with Plotinus' general claims about its nature: in the simplest terms possible, matter does not seem able to seduce or bring anything closer to it. Even if one were willing to suggest that a mirror is not actually causally effective with regard to actions generated by the images it reflects, the fact remains that, in accordance with our entire discussion so far, matter cannot perform any reflective function without the prior operation of the soul itself. Any suggestion to the contrary would have been inconsistent with the general principle of Plotinian metaphysics according to which the procession to a lower degree

of reality occurs by means of a 'likeness', the emergence of which is caused by the operation of the higher principle on the lower.[21] We have, therefore, to conclude that the mirror of Dionysus should not be conceived as a symbol for matter, but rather, with all the relevant qualifications that pertain to the function of soul, as the very transformation of soul itself. To put it simply, in the course of Plotinus' narrative the mirror of Dionysus symbolises the ensouled world itself. This conclusion is consistent with the fact that Plotinus never mentions matter explicitly in this context, passing over in silence the issue of when and in what way it enters the picture. In this sense, we may say that Plotinus continues the same strategy we have outlined in detail in Chapter 2: once again, the aim seems to be an account of the relationship between soul and body which, in an almost provocative manner, would exclude matter altogether. This strategy may generate various problems, but we should note, at least, its rather strange consistency: Is it not the case that the best way to talk about the non-existent is precisely by not talking about it?[22]

We are thus forced to examine the relevance of the metaphor of mirrors and reflection in the context of the activity of the soul itself. However, we should note at the outset and with regard to the most

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[21] See, e.g., III.6.18. 30-35. For a discussion of procession and decline in this respect, see Lloyd, The Anatomy of Neoplatonism, 98-122.

[22] Given the structural symmetry between matter and the One as the two edges of the Plotinian system, it is not strange that similar difficulties emerge also with reference to the One. In the present case, every attempt to talk about matter seems to end up referring to soul; in that case, any attempt to "talk about" the One brings us to the level of Nous. On this issue, see Schroeder, "Saying and Having in Plotinus", 75-84, or the more extended version in Form and Transformation, 66-90.

obvious possibility, that the soul as such cannot be considered as a mirror in the sense in which the mirror is used metaphorically for the way in which the intelligible realities are reflected in matter. As Plotinus notes in a passage in which the metaphor of the mirror is implied precisely in order to differentiate the ways in which the intelligible realities are present in soul and in matter, "and matter too, is not able to harbour (εἰσοικίσασθαι) all things gathered together, as soul is; if it could, it would belong to the higher world; it must certainly receive (δέξασθαι) all things, but not receive them undivided" (III.6.18.35). One point that this passage indicates clearly is that the soul contains or holds or receives the forms in a substantial way, a fact which is exactly what the metaphor of the mirror is supposed to exclude in the case of matter.[23] On the other hand, we saw in the previous chapters of our discussion that Plotinus thinks of the creative activity of the soul (its capacity to create or order or inform the sensible world) in terms of a spontaneous process, and, within the context of this assertion, he sometimes considers soul itself as a membrane which mediates between the intelligible and the sensible world in the simplest sense of the term: as a medium that brings the two realms close enough so that the sensible world emerges automatically as an imprint or image of

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[23] The same comparison is made in III.6.18; there, Plotinus claims unambiguously that, "the soul which holds the forms of real beings, and is itself, too, a form, holds them all gathered together" (24-5). These passages indicate that a full discussion of the issue under examination would actually involve the elucidation of three issues: (a) the way in which forms are present in soul; (b) the way soul is present in body or matter; and (c) the way in which forms are present in matter. For the problem in these terms, see Emilsson, Plotinus on Sense Perception, 34-5.

the intelligible world. To the extent that a mirror is indeed a thin surface, the mirror of Dionysus can be considered, in the same metaphorical framework, as another expression for the boundary between the intelligible and the sensible world (which is the soul, but, in metaphorical terms, a soul that is not exclusively oriented upwards but looks at the same time in both directions). Our question then can be reduced to a very simple formulation: What is to be gained by the metaphorical transformation of a membrane into a mirror?

With regard to the soul's function as a transmitter of intelligibility or order, viewed, so to speak, externally, this change in the metaphors merely makes evident something that was already implied in the previous context: namely, that the function of the membrane is to generate a certain (very problematic) similarity between the two realms which it simultaneously separates and brings into contact. Yet, with regard to the activity of the soul considered internally, or else, the life of the soul, this change makes all the difference: in fact, it is only on the basis of this metaphorical change that we may speak about an internal dimension of the soul, an internal point of view proper to each soul. In this respect, the following points should be particularly noted, all of which would not be possible under an understanding of the soul in the metaphorical terms of a membrane.

First, let us return to the elementary facts about reflection summarised above, which provide us with a way to understand soul's

motion and the distance it covers in the specific context of our image. If the soul merely gazes at the mirror without moving in any way, 'the earth' or 'that which' it reaches (ἐκεῖ) is merely the point inside the mirror in which its image is formed for it qua observer: the Dionysian wood lies in the other side of the mirror, in which the soul is seduced without actually going anywhere.[24] Thus, although "ἐκεῖ" refers to the interior of the mirror, in fact, it only seems to be therein (from a certain point of view, that of the soul-observer), while, strictly speaking, it is nowhere other than where the soul properly always (already) is. What the individual soul sees as being in the mirror is in fact an object outside the mirror, this object being soul's own individualised self. Moreover, it follows that the reflective distance between the object (identical with the observer in this case) and the image on the mirror is in a certain sense the distance of an interior or internal gaze: what the metaphor of the Dionysian mirror allows in this context is the presentation of this internal gaze of the soul to itself in an 'objective', external manner. Thus, although in what follows we will continue to refer to the mirror as something distinct from the soul, we shall have to keep in mind that the mirror refers neither to some external reality (e.g., matter) nor even primarily to a relation between the soul and some external reality (e.g., the relation between Nous or matter and soul),

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[24] The same 'illusion' takes place in relation to a sound when it is echoed: "like an echo from smooth flat surfaces; because it [the sound] does not stay there, by this very fact the illusion is created that it is there and comes from there" (III.6.14.24-26).

but rather to an internal activity of the soul associated with its inherent capacity to, so to speak, reflectively duplicate itself.

However, soul's reflection operates simultaneously in two opposite directions and in two different senses. On the one hand, the soul projects (in the natural, spontaneous sense) an image of itself to the mirror, which makes the soul appear as within the mirror and not in its proper place (and, if one wants to use this vocabulary, it is through this projection that matter becomes quasi-visible as ensouled body at the illusory side of the mirror). This aspect of reflection corresponds to the descent of the soul into bodies, but constitutes only one part of the process of soul's dispersion and individuation. On the other hand, the image is projected back from the mirror to the soul and this second projection can be associated with two different processes that go beyond the optical facts of reflection and point to self-conscious instances of specular recognition (or misrecognition). At a first stage, the soul sees the image of itself and (mis)recognises itself in it. To the extent that this recognition is 'true' (i.e., to the extent that the image is indeed the image of this soul), this moment can be associated both with the individuation of the soul, its constitution as an individual entity, and with the establishment of an extensive unity between the soul and its image: in sum, on the basis of this recognition, every soul can conceive itself as this individual, but extended thing. To the extent that this recognition is 'false' (i.e., to the extent that this recognition involves the constitutive illusion of an imaginary displacement

of the soul), this same moment can be associated with the dispersion or fragmentation of the soul, soul's lack of self-awareness about its real place and origin.

At this point, a number of additional issues should be particularly stressed. First, there is a sense in which the reflective distance is always illusory: in the very implication that, displacement or not, there is a distance. The difference between the metaphors of the membrane and the mirror can be now precisely formulated in the following terms. Although, as Plotinus insists throughout, there is really (from an external point of view) no 'distance' between the intelligible and the sensible world (a claim that, as we have seen, seems to amount to a certain devaluation of the ontological function of the soul), only to the extent that the membrane becomes a mirror (a surface that receives an image and projects it back to the viewer) there may be a 'distance' in which the soul can acquire an internal depth in which to understand and recognise itself from an internal point of view. The fact that this distance, misrecognitions and misunderstandings apart, is fundamentally illusory (if judged by the criteria associated with the self-containing unity of Nous), is, of course, a direct result (or indication) of the inferior ontological status of the soul with regard to the Nous.

However, in relation to the soul itself and the conditions of its individuation, this distance acquires particular importance. It is precisely in this sense that Plotinus invited us, in an earlier chapter of the present

treatise, to understand the extension of individual souls other than the cosmic soul in terms of a fall into the "depths" (βάθος): "the particular souls themselves go to the things. So they have departed to the depths" (3.6.24-5). In the context of Chapter 12 this notion is elaborated further. Plotinus asserts that the 'lower' part of each individual soul "stretches out" (κάτεισι) to different points in the depths, i.e., to different kinds (genera, species) of body and to different bodies of the same kind:

> But the [individual soul] does not always come down (κάτεισι) the same distance, but sometimes more, sometimes less, even if it comes to be to the same species (of body] (γένος)(12.35-7; cf. 3.6.26-8).

By including in his account of the individual soul the dimension of depth, Plotinus is pointing to the intensity and variety of both the inner morphology and the 'content' of the soul: everything that pertains to the life of the soul qua embodied (powers such as sensation, memory, or discursive reasoning and their contents), as well as all kinds of generic, specific, and individual differences between particular souls, are to be correlated metaphorically with the metrics of this descent to the depths. It is important to note, however, that the Plotinian depth or inner dimension of each soul does not refer to a distance between an already formed or existent subject and its inner depths, in the sense this metaphor acquires, for example, in the modern notion of a subject endowed with unconscious psychological states and processes. Instead, the depth here corresponds to the reflective distance between the object and its mirror image, what we

might call the real and deceptive self of the soul, in their initial interaction. It is in the context of this interaction that the soul, in loss of its unity, gains its distinct individual existence.

The dangers inherent in the fundamentally illusory character of the distance between the upper ('real self') and the lower ('deceptive self') part of the soul become apparent in the context of Plotinus' rather fleeting treatment of another well-known myth, that of Narcissus.[25] The similarities between the two myths are evident: both stories amount to variations on the theme of seduction through reflection and in both cases the interest is directed to the ensuing consequences suffered by the dramatic character.[26] In the common understanding of the story, Narcissus commits his fatal 'mistake' when, instead of looking 'outside' in order to experience the beauty of some object external to him and direct his love to it, he admires (or falls in love with) 'himself'; therefore, he finds himself entrapped in his reflection and eventually he is drowned.[27] In a reading of the myth in a (neo)platonic context, the 'external' would correspond to the intelligible beauty or reality, which in an attenuated way is reflected in the water; on the other hand, the reflection on the water, or

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[25] The locus classicus for the myth of Narcissus is of course Ovid, Metamorphoses III, 339-510. For a brief presentation of the myth with further references to ancient sources, see Forbes Irvin, Metamorphosis in Greek Myths, 282.

[26] The strong connection between the two myths is quite old, to the extent that, for instance, Ficino even confuses the two mythological personalities (see, Marsilio Ficino, Comment. In Plat. Conuiu., VI, 17= Fgt. 362 Kern, 344: "Hinc crudelissimum illud apud Orpheum Narcissi fatum", and Pépin, "Plotin et le mirroir de Dionysos", 320, for further references).

[27] This is the case, for example, with Freud, who, in his monograph on Leonardo, notes: "[The boy] finds the objects of his love along the path of narcissism, as we say; for Narcissus, according to the Greek legend, was a youth who preferred his own reflection to everything else" ("Leonardo da Vinci and a Memory of his Childhood", 191-2).

the 'internal', would correspond to the material appearance of reality. The (wrong) choice of Narcissus would be then construed as one between the material and the intelligible. Although of course, in a sense, this distinction is also followed by Plotinus, the allegorical meaning he attributes to it acquires a much greater philosophical subtlety. Instead of reading the myth in terms of a general distinction between sensible and intelligible reality, Plotinus understands the myth in terms of a distinction between two aspects of the same entity (Narcissus): one aspect (that of his appearance in the water) is his material existence presented to him as coming from the outside, while the other is the aspect of himself which generates this appearance and lies within. Narcissus' lack of awareness amounts to the ignorance of this distinction: in Plotinus' interpretation, the fatal mistake of Narcissus (as also of Dionysus) was that he did not know that the image he saw reflected in the waters was actually an image of himself. Narcissus was ignorant or confused about the nature of what lies within, of the nature of the real self, and he was excited by something that he mistakenly thought to be a 'beauty' or a 'reality' lying 'out there'. Plotinus urges us to understand that reality is not something external (for you need something internal to measure it against), but it comes from within and depends on the soul and not matter:

> But certainly nature which produces such beautiful works is far before them in beauty, but we because we are not accustomed to see any of the things within and do not know them, pursue the external and do not know that it is that within which moves us: as if someone looking at his image and not knowing where it came from should pursue it. (V.8.2.31-35)

In his attempt to capture the image, Narcissus drowns, but we should pay attention to the special force of Plotinus' remark that Narcissus will not sink with his body, but with his soul (bodies don't have depth; therefore, they have nowhere to go apart from within soul). The fate of Dionysus, or a human soul, could be like Narcissus' in circumstances similar to:

> a man [who] runs to the image and wants to seize it as if it was the reality (like a beautiful reflection playing on the water, which some story somewhere, I think, said riddlingly a man wanted to catch and sank down into the stream and disappeared); then this man who clings to beautiful bodies and will not let them go, will like the man in the story, but in soul, not in body, sink down into the dark depths where intellect has no delight and stay blind in Hades, consorting with shadows there and here. (I.6.8.8-16)

Overall, we may thus say that Plotinus' interpretation of the myth of Narcissus amounts to a certain reversal, or at least revision, of the cautionary moral implied by the old tale. If the original story can be conceived as a pointer to what has been identified as a central problem, or even 'drama', of the ancient world, namely, its inability to comprehend, internalise, and therefore effect the self, or else its fear of looking at and drawing in the unknown self,[28] the situation is completely reshaped by Plotinus. This reshaping has a double aspect. At a first level, if Narcissus' error is to pursue the external image of himself through mistaking it for the internal original, then, Plotinus' interpretation legitimises the internal gaze, or else turns the road to the intelligible inwards: Narcissus is urged to direct his attention to the inside in order to pursue the beauty and

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[28] See Snell, The Discovery of the Mind, Introduction, vi.

reality he attributes to the image. At a second level, Plotinus' interpretation amounts also to a justification of the image or the external gaze directed towards the image: after all, the image (which in the context of our discussion corresponds to the 'lower' part of the soul) is the only way in which the soul can initially recognise itself, and indeed as something beautiful.

Despite all the possible dangers, the reflective distance between soul and its image, illusory or not, is thus the fundamental condition of all the original capacities of the soul, and especially of those that concern its own self-constitution. If the metaphor of the membrane allows us to understand the external creative capacities and activities of the soul with regard to the sensible world, the metaphor of the mirror is indispensable if we are to understand the way in which this membrane (understood here as an entity fully engaged in its proper activity and not as a mere overflow of Nous) emerges, not, of course, because somebody else places it there, but through an act of self-constitution.

A comparison with Nous may be useful here. In its full working condition, Nous exists by positing itself in thinking itself (all terms being essentially equivalent in one and undivided activity). In the case of the soul, the spatio-temporal framework implied by reflection leads to the differentiation of the various aspects of its activity, which, despite the corresponding loss in creative power, remains in a fundamental sense self-moved or self-oriented. Any individual soul projects an image of itself in

front of itself (causes a reflection in the mirror). This projection is an essential moment in the unfolding of the proper activity of the soul: the soul would not have moved unless the image was there to attract it, since, according to Plotinus, the soul had no wish or intention to 'depart' prior to its being set in motion by its own reflection (ἴασιν δὲ οὔτε ἑκοῦσαι οὔτε πεμφθεῖσαι, 13.17). However, this self-creative act is not immediately complete: it must be completed with the subsequent recognition of this image as a likeness of "the original choice and disposition" (εἴδωλον προαιρέσεως καὶ διαθέσεως ἀρχετύπου, 13.3) of that soul, the act through which the soul comes to know itself with the kind of self-knowledge that is appropriate to the soul. Finally, this very recognition is at the same time the act of seduction through which the soul leaves its proper place in order to descend in the world and assume its external creative task of ordering the sensible world.[29]

This 'process' is elucidated by the example of the myth of Narcissus. To begin with, it is the sight of the image that causes Narcissus to move towards it (ἐπιδράμοι λαβεῖν βουλόμενος ὡς ἀληθινόν; I.6.8.8-9). Second, the pursuit of the image by Narcissus is actually caused by a movement within: some kind of internal change or transformation, the nature of

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[29] One of the most comprehensive accounts of this process is offered by a passage in III.9.3.7ff. Plotinus there is distinguishing between these three, so to speak, movements: soul wishing to be directed towards itself, makes (or rather becomes) an image of itself "τὸ μὴ ὄν","οἷον κενεμβατοῦσα καὶ ἀοριστοτέρα γινομένη". Up to this moment (εἰς δὲ τὸ μεταξύ) it is in its own world, but when it looks at the image again (οἷον δευτέρα προσβολῇ), forms the image and goes into it rejoicing (ἡσθεῖσα ἔρχεται εἰς αὐτό).

which Narcissus (or Dionysus) fails to understand (ἀγνοοῦντες, ὅτι τὸ ἔνδον κινεῖ)[30]. Third, the recognition that this image was in fact generated by Narcissus, would have saved Narcissus from drowning and would have generated a further transformation in the form of a subsequent creation or self-creation of the soul which undergoes the experience (τεκταίνων τὸ σὸν ἄγαλμα; I.6.9.13).[31] It is important to notice however, that Plotinus presents the stages of this process as the irreducible aspects of the same phenomenon: the way in which soul acquires a distinct identity.

Obviously, the distinction between these three moments in the activity of the soul is purely analytical, and aims to capture the contrast with the activity of the Nous, in which there are no corresponding distinctions and the entire activity is undivided. The fundamental similarity between Nous and soul in this respect is that both activities are self-determined: in the same way in which nobody determines externally the thoughts of Nous, "there is no need for anyone to send [a soul] or bring it into body at a particular time", since it moves "as if of its own accord" (αὐτομάτως; 13.6-7). The differences are many. Apart from the obvious fact that the soul's division into many individual souls is much sharper than the division of Nous into Intelligibles (to the extent that Nous remains

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30 V.8.2.33-4. Cf. here, "In our bodies too, when our soul is moved (κινουμένης) in a different way from the body -by joy for instance, and by something which appears good to it- then there is a spatial movement (ἡ κίνησις καὶ τοπική) of the body as well"(II.2.3.12-15)

31 Afterall, as Plotinus states in III.3.7.3-5: "one should not blame the worse when one finds it in the better, but approve (ἀποδεκτέον) the better because it has given itself (ἑαυτοῦ) to the worse".

always one, cognitively identified with its members),[32] two more clusters of issues should be noted here. First, the distinction between different moments in the activity of the soul with regard to itself, the fact that the soul has to encounter itself within its constitutive internal distance, is essentially another way to say that the soul, although self-constituted in the sense outlined above, is not self-transparent: every distance and every time interval identified above corresponds to possibilities of misrecognition and misunderstanding, points of deception and opacity in soul's self-constituting gaze. Second, the very fact that the soul is initially obliged to recognise, think, or understand itself (and then move itself) in the form of a projection of itself within the sensible world, underlies the extremely close ties that the soul establishes and retains with what comes after it in Plotinus' ontological hierarchy. These ties, often described in a particularly negative way, are stronger than the ties that, say, link the Nous to the soul: while the soul looks and consequently acts upon what is (or seems to be) outside, Nous does not act towards anything outside itself. This last point is also related to the fragmented individuation of the soul, and perhaps can be best made in linguistic terms: it is exactly this 'weakness' of the soul that authorises the possibility of using the locution 'soul of x' (soul of All, soul of Socrates, soul of a plant), where 'x' stands for

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32 The most celebrated formulation of Plotinus' views on the unity of Nous and its members is to be found in V.8.4.5-11: "for all things there are transparent, and there is nothing dark or opaque; everything and all things are clear to the inmost part to everything; for light is transparent to light. Each there has everything in itself and sees all things in every other, so that all are everywhere and each and every one is all and the glory is unbounded... the sun there is all the stars, and each star is the sun and all the others. A different kind of being stands out in each, but in each all are manifest."

something of a lower ontological status than soul. In the case of Nous, "Intellect is not the intellect of one individual (οὐχ ἑνός τινος νοῦς), but is universal (πᾶς); and being universal, is the Intellect of All things (πάντων)" (III.8.8.41-42).[33]

From the point of view of the individual soul, this difference between Nous and Soul manifests itself in the form of a 'split' which, instead of disappearing after the initial moment of interaction, is rooted within the individual and as such forms an irreducible fact of the condition of its existence: "every man is double (διττὸς γὰρ ἕκαστος), one of him is the compound being (συναμφότερον) and one of him is himself (αὐτός)" (II.3.9.30-1). This idea was revived in modern psychoanalytic writings by J. Lacan, who introduced the 'mirror stage' as a necessary stage in the development of the human infant. According to Lacan, through a process similar to that which we find in Plotinus, the infant, when looking itself in the mirror, is misled to believe that the reflection which is formed in the mirror and is thus projected to it, is its real self. The fact that the infant through the 'mirror stage' acquires a sense of an individual self originating from the 'outside', causes for Lacan a crucial split within the individual, between its real self and its 'false' or deceiving self, which thereafter cannot possibly be overcome.

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33 Certainly Plotinus uses expressions like "Nous of Socrates", or "Nous of Soul" yet, in these cases we are referring to the noetic faculty present in these entities, which is always imperfect in comparison to Nous itself. As Gerson puts it: "Intellect as an ἀρχή, stands apart from all noetic individuals... but also as ἀρχή is the starting point for explaining all cognitive activity, which imperfectly represents the activity of Intellect"(Gerson, Plotinus, 57).

Although the distance between Lacan and Plotinus is undoubtedly too great to be crossed solely on the grounds of this notion, the similarities in their central theme are striking and clear: the identification of the subject with the image it sees reflected in the mirror, takes the form of a real change within the subject, "a transformation in the subject when he assumes an image "which" will always remain irreducible for the individual alone, or rather which will only rejoin the coming-into-being of the subject asymptotically, whatever the success of the dialectical syntheses by which he must resolve as I his discordance with his own reality"[34]. The experience identified by Lacan can be considered as a reformulation of the following explicit statement by Plotinus:

> But we who are we (ἡμεῖς δέ - τίνες δὲ ἡμεῖς)? Are we that which draws near and come to be in time? No even before this coming to be came to be we were there, men who were different, and some of us even gods, pure souls and intellect united with the whole of reality; we were parts of the intelligible, not marked off or cut off but belonging to the whole; and we are not cut off even now. But now, another man, wishing to exist approached that man; and when he found us -for we were not outside the All- he wound himself round us and attached himself to that man who was then each one of us: and we have come to be the pair of them, not the one which we were before- and some times just the one which we added on afterwards, when that prior one is inactive and in another way not present (VI.4.14.16-31).

Thus, according to Plotinus, a human being should be properly conceived as "ἡμεῖς", a "we" and not as a singular "I" ("ἐγώ", which can be said to form only one part, the best or higher part of it). The human being will always be double to the extent that although its soul shares the same

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[34] J. Lacan, "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience", in The Continental Philosophy Reader, 330-5.

'place' with matter (it is in matter, or matter is in soul) it can never be completely united (ἑνωθῆναι) with matter.[35]

However, as we have already noted, soul's reflection can be also understood in another sense. In the context of Plotinus' story, the image of the soul is not an inert thing, a mere object, but a kind of soul (i.e., embodied soul), which is itself capable of seeing and recognising. Hence, we may envisage the possibility (at least) of another recognition that would correspond to an 'ascent' of the soul: the image's recognition of its original (which would correspond to the image's awareness of its image status). This ascent, which has to start from the image itself, corresponds to the full recovery of soul's unity with regard to itself, to its principle and Nous (τῆς ἑαυτῶν ἀρχῆς τε καὶ νοῦ), and amounts to soul's liberation from its dependence on its bodily existence: in such a case, the soul is set free "in order to coming to be there, where the soul of the All always is without turning towards any of the things here" (ἵν' ἔχοιεν ἐκεῖ καὶ α ται γίνεσθαι, ἡ τοῦ παντὸς ψυχὴ ἀεὶ οὐδὲν τὰ τῇδε ἐπιστρεφομένη) (12.10-12). Plotinus' advice (to Narcissus, Dionysus, and human beings in general) is to turn away from what presents itself as material beauty to the reality that generates it (φεύγειν πρὸς ἐκεῖνο ο ταῦτα εἰκόνες), to awaken a different way of looking at things by going back to one's self (οἷον μύσαντα ὄψιν ἄλλην ἀλλάξασθαι καὶ ἀνεγεῖραι): in these circumstances, we may say that one has ascended (ἐνταῦθα ἤδη ἀναβεβηκὼς), has become sight (ὄψις ἤδη

[35] The reference is to I.8.14.30-1.

γενόμενος), and can finally trust oneself (θαρσήσας).[36] Yet, although the possibility of ascent is always there, and the individual human being can indeed reach this kind of self-knowledge, the ascent itself should not be seen as a state that can be fully and permanently achieved. In other words, the ascent consists in the possibility for the individual to view oneself as another, seeing, as it were, oneself from the perspective of Nous, and not in being completely identified with Nous. The individual, for as long as it is an individual, it is essentially double:

> So that the man who knows himself is double, one knowing the nature of the reasoning which belongs to the soul, and one up above this man, who knows himself according to Intellect because he has become that Intellect (V.3.4).[37]

These last remarks complete our discussion on the metaphorical function of reflection in the context of the activity of the soul. However, in order to complete our discussion of Plotinus' views on the individuation of soul in Chapters 12 and 13, we should consider one more issue of particular relevance. First, let us note that in 12.10-12 quoted above, Plotinus brings to the foreground the distinction between the soul of the All (ἡ τοῦ παντὸς ψυχὴ, 12.11) and the souls of human beings. Given that Plotinus does not seem to be particularly committed to a consistent use of terminology, at least with regard to soul, it is uncertain whether the term

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[36] I.6.8.6-8; 24-6; 9.22-26.

[37] Cf. V.8.7.31. For a discussion of these passages see O'Daly, Plotinus' Philosophy of the Self. O'Daly uses these passages in order to support the notion of the continuity of the self of the individual in all its levels. Although O'Daly uses the notion of "self" in a much more explicit and forceful sense than I have in the present discussion, I nevertheless agree with his claim that it can properly be said about it that it is "like, but does not become nous"(58).

"ἡ τοῦ παντὸς ψυχὴ" refers to the cosmic soul or the soul as such.[38] This problem lies obviously at the very centre of the issue regarding the nature and the necessity of Soul as a separate hypostasis in Plotinus' ontology, and is particularly related to the already noted duality or multiplicity that characterises the soul in its extended descent. Within the scope of our discussion we cannot, of course, pursue in an exhaustive and systematic way the issue of the consistency of the relevant Plotinian terminology in all its detail and throughout the corpus (especially when a survey is enough to show that it may not be possible to specify exactly and univocally the meanings of the various terms Plotinus reserves for the soul). Therefore, I shall merely limit myself to a few remarks on the nature of soul considered as a hypostasis that are necessary for the understanding of the term "τοῦ παντὸς ψυχὴ" as it occurs in the Chapters we are examining within the context of the problem of the individuation of soul.[39]

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[38] Helleman- Elgersma in general, prefers the translation "the soul of the entire world"to "the universal soul", "all-soul"or "soul of the All", occasionally favoured by others (such as Armstrong). She argues that since "τὸ πᾶν" usually corresponds to the bodily entity of the visible world, it would be natural to take "τοῦ παντὸς ψυχὴ"to refer to the cosmic soul which was responsible for the ensoulment of the world in its entirety, "without any reference to a principle of unity according to which the totality might be said to cohere as a sympathetic unity"(Soul-Sisters, 138). My reservations with adopting this translation in the present context concern the claim that τοῦ παντὸς ψυχὴ does not turn towards the things here (ἀεὶ οὐδὲν τὰ τῇδε ἐπιστρεφομένη), together with the qualification, provided by the clause which immediately follows in the text, that this soul "has the All (τὸ πᾶν) already complete and is and will be sufficient (αὔταρκες) to itself". To the extent that Plotinus earlier (e.g. in 9.32 and 10.27) has insisted that the cosmic soul is the benevolent creator of the world, it is hard to see how the above claim could be understood to refer to this soul without the qualifications we shall offer below.

[39] After all, as Helleman-Elgersma notes (ibid., 132) in agreement with Rist ("Integration and the Undescended Soul"), the meaning of a particular philosophical term may depend heavily upon the context where it is to be found.

If we set aside for the time being the conclusions drawn earlier from the comparison between Nous and soul in the context of reflection and turn to the examination of Plotinus' views with regard to the soul itself, we can identify immediately a fundamental duality in soul. The clearest manifestation of the double nature of the soul concerns the distinction between particularised or individual soul and soul which is not 'soul of'. In Chapter 2 of the present treatise, Plotinus had claimed that both the cosmic soul and the human souls are to be distinguished from soul as such. Plotinus explains this difference by making use of the Aristotelian distinction between essence and accident:

> it is no longer the soul of this or that but is not itself the soul of anything, either of the universe or of anything else, but makes that which is soul both of the Universe and of anything ensouled. And it is correct that not all of soul belongs to anything, since of course it is an <u>essence</u>.

Whereas,

> all those which do belong to anything become souls of things <u>occasionally</u> and <u>accidentally</u> (2.6-12).

Alternatively, Plotinus conveys the same idea by frequently distinguishing between a 'higher' and a 'lower' part or power of the soul, which are usually also presented as corresponding to an 'inside' and an 'outside'. For instance, in 10.33-4 he writes:

> But one power belongs to soul which remains within it, and another which goes out to something else.[40]

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[40] Cf. also II.3.9.31-4; V.1.3.7-11; II.6.3.14-20; and V.4.2.27-34.

In light of passages like the above, we are led to conceive of the hypostasis soul as being two-part or bifocal (διττῆς δὲ φύσεως ταύτης οὔσης): the higher 'part' of the hypostasis soul is that which never turns to the world, but abides always looking at its intelligible origin (looking backwards, as it were); in contrast, the lower 'part' is the one 'that went away' and, by looking 'forwards', faces the world (11.26-7).[41]

However, we should note, second, that from another point of view (and precisely since neither of these parts or powers or aspects of soul can be properly called 'parts', or be regarded as independent or separate), the differences between cosmic soul and soul-essence seem to disappear. A passage from 3.6 illuminates this point:

> But it is better to say that [the soul of the All has made the world] because it was more closely dependent on the beings above it; the beings that incline this way have greater power. For they keep themselves in a place of safety, and so make with the greatest ease; for it is a mark of great power not to be affected in what it makes; and power comes from abiding above (20-24).

Plotinus' insistence on unity as an essential characteristic of soul becomes especially evident in such contexts in his claim that the cosmic soul, which hypostatically belongs to the lower part of soul, did not separate itself from the whole soul (οὐκ ἀπέστη τῆς ὅλης 6.12), but made the world in such a way as to put the world in it:

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[41] The Greek is from IV.8.7.1. Since this particular duality belongs to (or even constitutes) the nature of soul, it also determines the twofold way in which soul approaches the Good: "ζωὴ τοίνυν, ὅτῳ τὸ ζῆν, τὸ ἀγαθόν, καὶ νοῦς, ὅτῳ νοῦ μέτεστιν· ὥστε ὅτῳ ζωὴ μετὰ νοῦ, διχῶς καὶ ἐπ'αὐτό"(I.7.2.9-11).

> the soul of the All, then, abiding in itself makes, and the things which it makes come to it (6. 24-25).[42]

Overall then, the hypostasis soul is both 'one and many', primarily in the following sense: it is a unit, which has a double nature or function. Therefore, it is proper (and necessary) to say both that it is abiding (without ever 'turning towards the things here'), and that it is departing (since its face is precisely 'turned towards the things here').[43] Moreover, nothing can be said to be 'outside' the soul: whatever there is, as it is formed already by the soul of the All, lies 'inside'.[44]

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[42] Plotinus in the early treatise On the Movement of Heaven expresses the same view through a notably inspiring and dramatic image: "So the lower soul, as the higher encircles it, inclines and tends towards it, and its tendency carries around the body with which it is interwoven" (II.2.3.8-10).

[43] As Plotinus has said earlier in this treatise: "Unless one made the one stand by itself without falling into body, and then said that all the souls, the Soul of the All and the others, came from that one, living together with each other, so to speak, down to a certain level and being one soul by belonging to no particular thing; and that, being fastened [to the one] by their edges on their upper side, they strike down this way and that, like the light which, just when it reaches earth, divides itself among houses and is not divided, but is one nonetheless" (IV.3.4.14-21). The notion that a part of Soul (either as a whole or as individual) remains undescendent is central to Plotinus' descriptions of the hypostasis Soul and has generated considerable difficulties to his interpreters. Other Neoplatonists, such as Iamblichus and Proclus, strongly objected to this notion. For Proclus the most important problem in Plotinus' account was the postulation of a single substance, namely soul, which would consist of a part that always thinks and also with another that only sometime thinks (Elements of Theology, 211 and In Parmenides 948.18-38). See further, H.J. Blumenthal, Aristotle and Neoplatomism in Late Antiquity: Interpretations of the De Anima, 151-177. Related to this issue, there is of course the question whether this undescendent part is to be located strictly in the Soul or in Nous. Armstrong and Blumenthal suggest that Plotinus in the early treatises held the view that this higher part of soul is actually in Nous, an idea that they see no longer present in the later treatises V.3[49] and I.1[53]. However, it has been argued that careful analysis of these texts does not provide sufficient evidence for sustaining the claim that Plotinus had indeed changed his views on this issue. (See especially P.S. Mamo, "Forms of Individuals in Plotinus", H.J. Blumenthal, "Did Plotinus believe in Ideas of Individuals?" and A.H. Armstrong "Salvation, Plotinian and Christian").

[44] In other words, in order to account properly for both soul's duality or multiplicity and unity, one would have to constantly be able to shift perspectives: when one concentrates on its abiding or contemplative aspect, soul is an essence and the origin of individual souls. When the attention is directed to the creative or changing aspect, soul is particularised or individualised. Both, however, are intrinsically interrelated as aspects of one thing, which is and can only be as one in many.

The views that we have just outlined indicate that we may continue under the hypothesis that the reference of τοῦ παντὸς ψυχὴ in line 11 is to the hypostasis soul (or to soul in general) and it would make no difference whether Plotinus had in mind here the hypostasis considered from the point of view of its lower part or its higher part.[45] At any rate, since Plotinus in the present chapters has embarked on a discussion of the souls of human beings, to concentrate on the details of the relationship between the cosmic soul and the soul-essence, would have diverted our attention from the more important problem of the relation between this pair and the other individual souls (especially since the other individual souls are not regarded by Plotinus as parts of a collective individual soul, but as individual souls themselves). Indeed, as we shall now see, the picture we may have formed from what has been said so far, already very difficult to grasp as it may be, becomes more complicated with the introduction of more individual souls.

We may approach this issue by first considering a very puzzling image that we encounter in a similar metaphorical context:

> So therefore when we look outside that on which we depend we do not know that we are one, like faces which are many on the outside but have one head inside.[46]

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[45] Another such case is for example Plotinus' account of the duality of the world presented in II.3.9.31-4: "And the whole universe is, one part the composite of body, and one the soul of the All (παντὸς ψυχὴ) which is not in body but makes a trace of itself shine on that which is in body".

[46] ἔξω μὲν οὖν ὁρῶντες ἢ ὅθεν ἐξήμμεθα ἀγνοοῦμεν ἓν ὄντες, οἷον πρόσωπα [πολλὰ] εἰς το ἔξω πολλά, κορυφὴν ἔχοντα εἰς τὸ εἴσω μίαν (VI.5.7.10-11). Cf. also, VI.7.1.2. A similar equally impressive image, that of the root of a plant and its flowers, is also used to illustrate the generation of multiple things out of a common principle: "And the individual things come

With the help of this metaphor, with which we are guided to visualise the hypostasis Soul as a 'head' which has not one but many 'faces', Plotinus' claim that all souls are essentially one is further developed and elucidated. On the one hand, the upper/lower or inner/outer distinction does not apply only to the cosmic soul, but also to the individual souls: every individual member of the hypostasis soul maintains the same relationship with the 'upper'/'inner' part which never descends to the physical world.[47] On the other hand, and appealing again to the same metaphor, one should not fail to notice that each of these 'faces' claims for its own (albeit in a reflective or retrospective manner) the distinctive unity with the 'head', in its attempt to become one thing.[48] In other words, each individual has, or strives towards acquiring, a complete soul, although one part of it (the 'head') will always be common (or be 'shared') with all the other individual souls.[49] Therefore, the unity in multiplicity postulated for the level of soul is in this way similar to that of the Intellect:

> The souls spring from one, and the souls springing from one are many in the same way as Intellect, divided and not divided; and the soul which abides is a single expression of Intellect, and from it spring partial expressions which are also immaterial. (IV. 3. 5. 15)

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from this principle while it remains within, they come from it as from a single root (ἐκ ῥίζης) which remains static in itself, but they flower out (ἐξήνθησεν) into a divided multiplicity" (III.3.7.10-2)

[47] It is in this sense that Plotinus claims that the soul is divisible in relation to bodies, but indivisible in relation to itself. See, IV.1.1.33-4; 62.

[48] "What about men then? In so far as he derives from the All, man is a part, in so far as men are themselves, each is a private universe (οἰκεῖον ὅλον)"(II.2.2.3-5)

[49] In other, less metaphorical contexts, Plotinus refers to this common part of all souls as their "ἀρχή". See for example, IV.9.1.22;4.3;IV.8.5.15. Also, as we saw, at the beginning of Chapter 12, Plotinus presented the souls as departing towards their images but without being cut off from "τῶν ἑαυτῶν ἀρχῆς" (line 3).

However, bearing in mind our previous comments about the cosmic soul and the fact that it exists in closer connection than any other soul both with its upper undescendent part and with the Intellect, as well as the world, we may now see the ways in which the individual souls are bound to be different. As we noted above, the cosmic soul extended its gaze towards the 'outside', which in an almost automatic way, was thereafter founded within Soul. Consequently, all other individual souls, when they extend their gaze to the 'outside', are bound to find themselves (or rather their images) within that which the first individual soul is always looking at (or the first individual soul's image). In other words, the other individual souls' descent consists primarily in the identification of particular bodies (or dwellings, οἰκήσεις), within the body of the world (οἶκος) that was already formed by the initial interaction of the cosmic soul with matter. Earlier in the treatise Plotinus had claimed:

> The individual souls, since body exists already, received their allotted parts when their sister soul, as we may say, was already ruling, as if it had already prepared their dwellings for them (6.13-15).[50]

The same view reappears in Chapter 12:

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50 Plotinus often supplements the vocabulary of body or bodies with words deriving from the context of building or preparing a house. In the present treatise, we saw him referring to the body of the world as "οἶκος"(9.29), while this is explicitly described as ensouled in IV.4.36.10-15: "For it did not have to come to be an ordered universe like a soulless house ... but it exists, all awake and alive differently in different parts, and nothing can exist which does not exist to it". Cf. also II.9.18.14-15 ("while we have bodies we must stay in our houses, which have been built for us by a good sister soul which has great power to work without any toil and trouble"); 3.4.20 (in the context of a comparison between soul and light) and 3.10.28.

> each soul comes down to a body made ready for it according to its resemblance to the soul's disposition. It is carried there to that to which it is made like, one soul to a human being and others to different kinds of animals (12.37-39).[51]

On the strength of the claims expressed above, the mirror-image, examined in detail earlier, indicates that the images of the human souls will inevitably lie within or appear in the mirror of the cosmic soul: no individual soul can surpass the area already mapped out by the cosmic soul while each one of them "does not always come down the same distance, but sometimes more, some times less, even if it comes to the same species" (12.35-37). This unavoidable limitation has further important consequences for the function and character of the other individual souls. First, although, by being essentially or ontologically equivalent to the cosmic soul, the individual souls experience the same type of reflective distance between the common ἀρχή and their distinct lower parts, they nevertheless do so in greater and varying degree: the greater the distance, the dimmer the view the individual soul has both of

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[51] We should note, however, that although the cosmic soul has prepared the body of the world so that these souls will inhabit it, Plotinus does not endorse the view that in the already existent world the particular bodies to be occupied by particular souls are pre-determined. The reason each soul becomes a human being or any other animal is to be attributed to the internal tendency or disposition of this soul rather that the characteristics of a pre-existent particular body: "καὶ ἔστιν ἐκεῖνο πᾶν ψυχῆς εἶδος ἐκείνου πλησίον, πρὸς ὃ τὴν διάθεσιν τὴν ἐν αὑτῇ ἔχει, καὶ τοῦ τοτε πέμποντος καὶ εἰσάγοντος οὐ δεῖ, ἵνα ἔλθῃ εἰς σῶμα τοτε οὔτε εἰς τοδί"(13.5-7). An additional passage makes this claim particularly clear: "So when the living thing came to be, which had soul present to it from what [really] exists, and was linked by that soul to all reality, but also had a body which is not empty or without a share in soul, which did not lie in the soulless even before, it drew nearer (ἐγγὺς) still, one might say, by its adaptability and became no longer merely a body, but also a living body; and by what one might call its neighbourhood (γειτονείᾳ) it gained a trace of soul, not a part of it, but something like a heating or illumination coming from it" (VI.4.15.8-16).

the common origin and its projected image. We have thus second, to think of this reflective distance as pre-establishing a certain type of disposition in each individual soul, according to which souls divide themselves into various species (human beings, animals, or even plants). Third, to a much greater degree than the cosmic soul, each one of the other individual souls should be properly understood as always displaying the condition of its constitution: its individuality is founded upon the 'split' between the real and the projected self which is indispensable if each soul is to remain, not only member of a species, but also this particular individual soul.

In this section we examined in detail the various aspects and philosophical implications of Plotinus' views elaborated in Chapters 12 and 13 regarding human individuality. According to Plotinus' account offered in these chapters, the individuation of soul into human beings has to be understood as a reflective process that occurs on the level of soul. However, if we set aside the immediate context of our discussion, and address the question of human individuality in more general terms, we find ourselves facing a controversial issue in Plotinian scholarship: Did Plotinus believe in the existence of Forms of individuals? We shall examine this issue in the second section of the present chapter.

Individual Souls or Forms of Individuals?

The issue of human individuality has been traditionally linked with the existence of Forms of individuals. This connection relies heavily upon the identification between the question concerning the existence of individual human souls and that concerning the existence of Forms of individual human beings. It has been argued that in order to grant proper individuality to the human being, to account for the individual existence of its soul, on the level of soul, might not be enough: if, say, Socrates is to be regarded as a proper individual, it could be the case that formal individuality has to be postulated, that is, there has to be a Form of Socrates within the Hypostasis Nous. This Form, the Form of Socrates, would then account for the special characteristics that differentiate Socrates not only numerically, but also qualitatively, from other individual human beings. Whether Plotinus actually held this view is still an issue under dispute.

Plotinian scholars have been generally divided between those that believe Plotinus to have firmly introduced the existence of Forms of individuals, in particular human individuals, and those that support the notion that Plotinus is in fact inconsistent in his claims and are therefore reluctant to endorse any conclusive view.[52] Plotinus is charged with

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52 In the first group we should include J. M. Rist, whose article "Forms of Individuals in Plotinus" initiated the whole debate, A.H. Armstrong ("Form, Individual and Person in Plotinus"), Mamo ("Forms of Individuals in the Enneads") and most recently P. Kalligas ("Forms of Individuals in Plotinus: A Re-Examination"). H.Blumenthal in his article "Did Plotinus believe in Ideas of Individuals?" (re-printed in Plotinus' Psychology ch. 9) was the first to challenge Rist's firm conclusions in favour of the Forms of Individuals, by bringing to attention opposing evidence emerging from his cross examination of various extracts from the Enneads. Blumenthal's criticism was taken into account by all of the above

inconsistency to the extent that while some texts support the existence of Forms of individuals, others are ambiguous or clearly against such a notion. We should note that the possibility of treating the apparently contradictory texts as representing successive stages in the development of Plotinus' thought does not seem very promising. In addition to the fact that there is really no strong argument in favour of a development in Plotinus' thought, the passages supporting the existence of Forms of individuals, as it has already been noted by Blumenthal, are "inconveniently sandwiched between two denials".[53] Therefore, it cannot be assumed that in later treatises Plotinus revised an initial positive inclination towards the existence of Forms of individuals. As a result, the scholarly interest has been concentrated on the attempt to overcome the apparent inconsistencies through a re-examination of the relevant texts in the light of other passages found in the Enneads, and has led to the publication of a series of articles notably in favour of the existence of Forms of individuals.

I shall be arguing that although Plotinus is particularly concerned with human individuality, and does in fact tackle the issue of the existence of individual human beings in an unprecedented and philosophically unique way, he does not support the notion of the existence of Forms of individual human beings. It should be noted at the

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mentioned interpreters starting with Rist who composed an article in reply to Blumenthal entitled "Ideas of Individuals in Plotinus. A Reply to Dr.Blumenthal".

[53] Blumenthal, "Did Plotinus believe in Ideas of Individuals?", 62.

outset that, from what we have said so far, it has become clear that Plotinus rules out any possibility of matter being the explanatory cause for Individuality. In this sense, I shall further agree with the view shared by Plotinus' interpreters that Plotinus in other contexts, turns also more specifically against the Aristotelian alternative according to which matter is responsible for the differences between members of the same species. However, I intend to show that the very process of soul's individuation described in terms of reflection, not only makes it unnecessary to introduce Forms of individual human beings, but offers a much more dynamic understanding of individuation which would have been entirely missed if we agreed on the existence of Forms of individuals. In what follows, instead of attempting to justify Plotinus' negative statements regarding the existence of Forms of individuals presented in some passages, I shall draw attention to the ambiguities entailed in those that are seemingly affirmative, and attempt to show that, in fact, there is no text in the Enneads in which Plotinus indisputably argues in favour of such a notion.

I shall proceed by a close examination of the two arguments that are considered to offer an affirmation of the existence of Forms of individuals, both to be found in the early treatise: "On the Question Whether There are Ideas of Particulars" (V.7(18)).[54] In fact, as we shall see, these two

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[54] For example, Rist presents a synoptic account of these two arguments ("Forms of Individuals in Plotinus", 224) and he then proceeds to discuss them in more detail. Mamo

arguments are not independent from each other, but form a connected argumentative unit based on certain assumptions, the number and content of which will become immediately apparent in what follows. The first argument is elaborated in the introductory paragraph of this treatise, which remains the sole passage undeniably regarded as in favour of the existence of such Forms:

> Is there an idea (ἰδέα) of each particular (καθέκαστον) thing? Yes, if I (ἐγὼ) and each one of us (ἕκαστος) have a way of ascent and return to the intelligible, the principle (ἀρχὴ) of each of us (ἑκάστου) is there. If Socrates, that is the soul of Socrates (καὶ ψυχὴ Σωκράτους), always exists, there will be an absolute Socrates (Αὐτοσωκράτης) in the sense that, in so far as they are soul, individuals are also said to exist in this way in the intelligible world (ᾗ ψυχὴ καθέκαστα καὶ ‹ὡς λέγεται› ἐκεῖ [ὡς λέγεται ἐκεῖ]). (V.7.1.1-5)

Unanimously, this piece of text has been read as saying that if Socrates is eternal, it is due to the existence of a correspondent individual Form of Socrates (marked in the text as "Αὐτοσωκράτης") in the Nous, to which the historical being Socrates owes its existence.[55] This interpretation depends on two assumptions:

(1) The νοητὸν in line 2 is taken to refer explicitly to the second hypostasis, the Nous, as clearly marked off from the third hypostasis, namely, the Soul.

("Forms of Individuals in Plotinus", 84), also quotes the same passage from Rist but then, he presents us with a much improved interpretation.

[55] Blumenthal for instance summarises the argument as follows: "If each individual can be traced back to the Intelligible, the principle of his existence must be there too. So, if there is always a Socrates, and a soul of Socrates, there will be a Form of Socrates too." ("Did Plotinus believe in Ideas of Individuals?", 64). Cf. Rist, "Forms of Individuals in Plotinus", 224 and Mamo, "Forms of Individuals in Plotinus", 84.

(2) The καὶ in line 3 has to be understood not merely as explanatory, but as establishing a simple (as in the case of Mamo) or not so simple (as in the case of Armstrong) identity between Socrates and his soul, which, together with the overall premise that for whatever is eternal there has to be a Form, leads immediately to a further identification with the individual Form of Socrates.[56]

However, neither of these assumptions is entirely justified by the above text. First, following Armstrong here, we should bear in mind that Plotinus believed Soul to be eternal, a fact, which firmly establishes Soul as a part of the νοητόν, and second, that the boundaries between the two hypostases are not as clear as one would have been inclined to assume.[57]

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[56] See for example, Mamo ("Forms of Individuals in Plotinus", 86): "taking the καὶ to mean 'that is to say' leads to an interpretation which renders the argument worthless". Following the Henry-Schwyzer apparatus which reads the καὶ as etiam and ψυχή as the predicate of the missing ἔστι, Mamo suggests that καὶ "stresses the identity of Socrates and his soul" and concludes that "if Socrates is eternally his soul there will be a Form of Socrates". On the other hand Armstrong, is more cautious and thinks that the identity between "higher self and Form of Individual Socrates" is not so straightforward ("Form, Individual and Person in Plotinus", 57).

[57] Armstrong, "Form, Individual and Person in Plotinus", 52; Plotinus often uses "νοητόν" in a wider sense than that of Nous as to include the Soul in order to distinguish the 'intelligible world' from the 'material world' (see for instance, II.4.4.8;II.4.5.13;II.9.4.30;V.8.13.23, cf. Blumenthal, "Did Plotinus believe in Ideas of Individuals?", 73 and Kalligas, "Forms of Individuals in Plotinus: A Re-Examination", 209). A clear example can be found in V.1, a treatise devoted to the exposition of the three principles of Plotinus' metaphysical system. In this context, Plotinus describes the soul as being the last among the principles or Hypostases (or "τὰ θεῖα"): "And the offspring of Intellect (νοῦ) is a rational form (λόγος) and an existing being (ὑπόστασις), that which thinks discursively (τὸ διανοούμενον)...This is as far as the divine realities (τὰ θεῖα) extend". Moreover, in relation to the immediate context of our present discussion, i.e., chapters 12 and 13, after Plotinus, as we saw, explicitly stated that the soul is divided into individual souls at the level of soul (through his reference to the myth of Dionysus) in the first line of chapter 15 of the same treatise, introduces the subsequent movement of soul towards the material world (which involves souls "putting on body") as a "peeping out of the intelligible world"(ἐκκύψασαι τοῦ νοητοῦ). Cf. Blumenthal, "Did Plotinus believe in Ideas of Individuals?", 73.

Therefore, even if Socrates in this context were to be identified with his soul, this would not necessarily mean that there is a Form (or soul-form, in Kalligas' coinage) of Socrates that exists as a member of Nous, as asserted by the second assumption. In this sense, as Armstrong remarks: "on Plotinus' normal view, Socrates would not cease to exist when he reached the highest, even if there was no individual form of Socrates".

Realising that without these two assumptions, V.7.1.1-5 could simply state that the soul of Socrates is eternal, without indisputably asserting the existence of the individual Form of Socrates, those in favour of the Forms of individuals have searched for the 'hidden premises' of this argument elsewhere in Plotinus' texts where Plotinus is supposed to introduce them. The most significant of these texts, belongs also to V.7.1 and is regarded as containing the second Plotinian argument in favour of the existence of the Form of Socrates. To this text we shall now turn.

After, as it were, Plotinus has given an affirmative answer to whether there is an Idea of each one of us, he presents us with a possible objection: if Socrates' soul is not eternal, (or eternally Socrates') but became Pythagoras, then it would not be the case that each one of us is in the Intelligible. Plotinus then proceeds to answer this objection with a twofold argument. He first says:

> if the soul of each individual possesses the rational forming principles of all the individuals which it animates in succession (εἰ ἡ ψυχὴ ἑκάστου ὧν διεξέρχεται τοὺς λόγους ἔχει πάντων), then again on this assumption all will exist there (πάντες αὖ ἐκεῖ); and we do say

> that each soul possesses all the forming principles of the universe (ὅσους ὁ κόσμος ἔχει λόγους, καὶ ἑκάστη ψυχὴ ἔχει). (V.7.1.7-10)

Plotinus then completes the argument by saying that even if one were to argue that there is a limit to the infinity of the logoi, to the extent that the universe could repeat itself (ἀνακάπτει περιόδοις), allowing that is, the possibility of the recurrence of a soul as Socrates in one period and Pythagoras in another, the individual Form corresponding to these human beings could not be only one, say, the Form of Man. The postulation of the Form of Man would not have been sufficient to account for the many differences between men:

> No, there cannot be the same forming principle (λόγον) for different individuals, and one man will not serve as a model for several men (οὐδὲ ἀρκεῖ ἄνθρωπος πρὸς παράδειγμα τῶν τινῶν ἀνθρώπων) differing from each other not only by reason of their matter but with a vast number of special differences of Form (διαφερόντων ἀλλήλων οὐ τῇ ὕλῃ μόνον, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἰδικαῖς διαφοραῖς μυρίαις). (V.7.1.19-21)

In order for the conclusion of this argument to be that in addition to the 'Form of Man' there are Forms of individual human beings, which would offer an explanation for the individual differences between men, the proponents of this view had again to rely upon a further major assumption which I should treat as the third assumption in my overall reconstruction of both arguments expressed in V.7.1. That is,

(3) the term "λόγοι" mentioned throughout this paragraph, although in the text at least, is to be distinguished from the term "τοῦ καθέκαστον ἰδέα" (which Plotinus used in the opening question of the treatise), in their

reading was treated as synonymous to it and was thus identified with the Forms of individual human beings.[58] In this assumption each "λόγος" = "καθέκαστον ἰδέα" is responsible for the "ἰδικαῖς διαφορὲς μυρίαις" that is, for what differentiates one human being from another.

Let us follow the reasoning that lies behind this assumption. To begin with, what has been presented by Plotinus as a possible objection to the existence of Forms of individuals (lines 5-7), which obviously alludes to the well-know notion of Platonic origin, regarding the transmigration of soul, has been interpreted in two ways. On the one hand, if it is assumed that Plotinus' objection indicates that he personally ascribed to the reincarnation theory, Plotinus' claim could be that although a soul could become Socrates or Pythagoras this might not entail that there is no form of individual "x" to which these entities correspond. Blumenthal's interpretation, for instance, is that, although human beings could be infinite, the forms of these individuals could be nevertheless finite with a

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[58] We should note that the term "ἰδέα" does not appear at all in the remainder of the chapter or the whole treatise; instead, "λόγος" appears 22 times! On the other hand, the word "εἶδος", which appears three times in the treatise, is never said to be "καθέκαστον". This issue has not been mentioned at all by any of the commentators, although it has been widely recognised that the notion of "λόγος" in Plotinus is particularly complex and it is strictly speaking not to be identified either with "ἰδέα" or "εἶδος". For instance, Rist (The Road to Reality, 95), claims that "λόγος tends to be used to refer to the soul especially when it is a matter of conveying the "εἴδη" of Nous into material objects". Bearing in mind this distinction between "λόγος" and "ἰδέα", if we treat the latter as synonimus to "εἶδος", then we could argue that Plotinus in this treatise does not affirm the existence of Forms of Individuals but rather the existence of individual souls. Such conclusion is affirmed by the use of the word "εἶδος", in the last two chapters of the treatise.

group of different souls corresponding to the same individual form.[59] That is, both Socrates and Pythagoras could (in different periods) correspond to the same individual Form x as opposed to the individual Form y.

On the other hand, it has been argued that although some texts might suggest the opposite, Plotinus did not share the same beliefs with Plato and did not hold a consistent view on reincarnation. Mamo correctly remarks, that the reincarnation theory would have been incompatible with the Forms of individuals. A belief in reincarnation would run counter to a notion of individuals retaining eternally their identity, which is precisely what Plotinus would have been interested in preserving by the postulation of such Forms. Being himself reluctant to attribute to Plotinus a dogma of reincarnation of soul (and sharing, as it were, anachronistically, the worry expressed by Kalligas to attribute to Plotinus the serious claim that one individual Form could be responsible for two human beings as different as the "famously beautiful Pythagoras and the notoriously ugly Socrates"[60]), he suggests that "although Socrates might not always exist as such, if his soul contains all logoi, then these logoi should be in the intelligible".[61] Therefore, as Mamo concludes, if Plotinus did not actually believe that Socrates can become Pythagoras, then we should understand the soul

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59 Blumenthal supports this interpretation by reference to IV.3.5.8-11. He reads this sentence as saying that "each nous produces a group of souls, rather than that each nous has a single dependent soul" ("Did Plotinus believe in Ideas of Individuals?", 69). However, there is a third, and I think better, way of reading it: Plotinus might be saying that soul depends (ἐξηρτημέναι) on each and every one of the Intelligibles. Such a claim would be in agreement with our comments above (see previous footnote).

60 Kalligas, "Forms of Individuals in Plotinus: A Re-Examination", 212.

61 Mamo, "Forms of Individuals in Plotinus", 86

(which, indeed, appears in the text to contain all "λόγοι") and consequently Nous, as always containing the "καθέκαστον ἰδέα" or Form of Socrates, the Form of Pythagoras, and of every other human being that might have existed or will exist.[62] In this reading, each and every one of these Forms of individuals would have to correspond to each and every individual human being and their number should thus be infinite.[63]

In both of these readings however, it becomes evident that the "ἰδικαῖς διαφορὲς μυρίαις" to which Plotinus refers in line 21, is interpreted as referring to formal differences, explicitly to be accounted for in terms of these distinct Forms of individual human beings.

Although this is, so to speak, the last step in this argument, it is nevertheless the most crucial one. Not only does it firmly establish the third assumption, but also justifies the first two and is thus indispensable

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[62] Mamo, "Forms of Individuals in Plotinus", writes: "We must, then, conclude that, even though Socrates becomes Pythagoras, we must posit both a Form of Socrates and a Form of Pythagoras, since Pythagoras differs from Socrates by a thousand differences of form...Hence, whether we say that Socrates becomes Pythagoras or that Socrates dies and Pythagoras is born, we must posit two distinct forms to account for the existence of the two distinct (in this case formally as well as numerically) entities" (93). He then argues however, that in the end, the notion of reincarnation cannot be retained together with the Forms of Individuals, that is, Socrates cannot really become Pythagoras, for that would have meant "the end of Socrates as a conscious self" (95).

[63] We should note that the notion of infinity in Nous, although as shown by Mamo, might be necessary for there to be Forms of Individuals, cannot easily be attributed to Plotinus. Although there are some passages which indicate that Plotinus might have been entertaining this thought, we cannot ignore a number of other passages in which he presents various objections to a possible infinity in Nous. See, for example VI.5.8.39-42: "For it would be absurd (γελοῖον) to introduce many Ideas (πολλὰς ἰδέας) of fire in order that each individual fire (ἕκαστον πῦρ) might be formed by a different one (ἑκάστης ἄλλης); for in this way the Ideas will be infinite in number (ἄπειροι)". Armstrong's remarks ad loc, that all Platonists (with the exception of Amelius), held a consistent view against infinity in Nous (cf. Armstrong, "Form, Individual and Person", 64. A brief account offered by Blumenthal, "Did Plotinus believe in Ideas of Individuals?", 65-66, shows that modern interpreters are nevertheless divided on this issue: while Zeller, Armstrong and Blumenthal think that Plotinus was firmly against a finite number of Forms, Brehier , Harder, and Cilento are more sympathetic .

for the arguments in favour of the existence of Forms of individuals to be valid: if, and only if, Plotinus regards the differences between members of the species 'human being' to be formal (and by this he means that not only there is a Form of Man, but also a Form of each man, say Socrates, in the Nous) then the fact that Socrates ascends to the Intelligible, as being identified with his soul which contains all these Forms, necessarily entails the existence of the Form of Socrates.

Again, however, the evidence offered by the text we are examining, as in the case of the two previous assumptions, is not enough in order to justify its introduction and thus to prove that V.7.1 clearly asserts the existence of Forms of individuals. The place where Plotinian scholars turned in order to recover the last and most important of these three 'missing premises' was V.9.12.4-9. The relevant passage reads:

> But if the Form of man is there, and of rational and artistic man, and the arts which are products of Intellect, then one must say that the Forms (εἴδη) of universals (καθόλου) are there not of Socrates but of man. But we must enquire about man whether the form of the individual (ὃ ὁ καθέκαστα) is there; there is individuality (καθέκαστον), because the same [individual feature] is different in different people: for instance because one man has a snub nose and the other an aquiline nose, one must assume aquilinity (γρυπότητα) and snubness (σιμότητα) to be specific differences in the form of man (διαφορὰς ἐν εἴδη θετέον ἀνθρώπου), just as there are different species of animal; but one must also assume that the fact that one man has one kind of aquiline nose and one another comes from their matter (1-9).[64]

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[64] I have chosen Armstrong's translation here because it is closer to the Greek text that most of the interpreters follow. However, the ὃ in line 4 is an emendation to the manuscripts suggested by Blumenthal. It has been argued by Igal, and further supported by Kalligas, that this is misleading. If, as they claim, we read ὁ instead of ὃ, then chapter 12 seems to follow naturally in the course of the argument elaborated in Chapters 10-12,

According to this passage, although some differences may be attributed to matter (i.e., not all aquiline noses are exactly the same), "γρυπότητα" or "σιμότητα" are to be regarded as formal differences. What exactly it is that Plotinus means by these formal differences, has created a serious disagreement between his interpreters. On the one hand, Blumenthal takes "γρυπότητα" and "σιμότητα" to be essential qualities or differentiae in the Form of Man and to the extent that Plotinus at the beginning of the passage claims that there are only forms of universals (καθόλου), considers this passage as negating the existence of Forms of individual men.[65] On the other hand, Mamo argues that if, in line with the text, we take "γρυπότητα" and "σιμότητα" to be differentiae of 'man', then 'man' is being treated as a genus to which forms of individual men will belong as species (the same way such formal differences mark the different species in animals (ὥσπερ ζῴου διαφοραί εἰσιν)). Mamo's conclusion is that characteristics such as "γρυπότης" or "σιμότης" should be included in the Form of each individual human being. Therefore, the passage has to be understood as affirmative and, moreover, as completing the arguments advanced in V.7.1.[66] It is in this way that Mamo justifies

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regarding Plotinus' views on the members of Nous. In this case, the translation of the clause would be: "But we must enquire whether the individual (and not the Form of Individual) is there". See Kalligas, "Forms of Individuals in Plotinus: A Re-Examination", 209-10.

65 Blumenthal, "Did Plotinus believe in Ideas of Individuals?", 70.

66 Mamo, "Forms of Individuals in Plotinus", 81, thinks that his interpretation holds regardless whether the meaning of "καθέκαστον" is "εἶδος" or 'individuality', (i.e.,

the third assumption outlined above in that he considers this text to establish "that being Socrates entails certain formal principles that cannot be reduced to matter"[67] and which have therefore to be included in the individual Form of Socrates. Without the support of V.9.12, Mamo is right to insist, V.7.1 could simply grant immortality to Socrates' soul without directly attesting to the existence of the Form of Socrates or any other human being.

However, is the evidence from V.9.12 sufficient to sustain Mamo's interpretation? Even if we were to agree with Mamo that Plotinus' claims should not be read in the specific Aristotelian context that Blumenthal, and to this extent also Rist (who unlike Blumenthal considers V.9.12 to be in favour of the Forms of individuals), wish to situate them, it is still not entirely convincing that "γρυπότης" and "σιμότης" each belong to different Forms of human beings. A different interpretation seems to be plausible. If in V.9.12, Plotinus simply says that "γρυπότης" and "σιμότης" are formal characteristics, then, what Plotinus might have in mind might not be a distinction between Form and matter, but between substance and quality.

Such a view could be supported by a relative passage in the short treatise "On Substance or on Quality" (II.6(17)) which, it should be noted, immediately precedes V.7(18) in the order of composition. In II.6, Plotinus among other examples, refers also to 'snubnosedness' (σιμὸν II.6.2.11), in

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'individual Form', or 'Form of Individuality' as such). It seems to me however, that if we read it as 'Form of Individuality', the passage cannot be interpreted as attesting to the Forms of Individuals.

[67] Mamo, "Forms of Individuals in Plotinus", 85.

order to advance the view that although certain characteristics might appear as qualities in the material spatio-temporal existence of entities, these qualities whether essential (as in the case of the white in the lead) or accidental (as in the case of white or snub nose of a human being) are in fact substances in Nous. As Plotinus puts it:

> But, then, one might say rather that the rational formative principles which made them (λόγους τοὺς ποιήσαντας) are altogether substantial (οὐσιώδεις ὅλους), but that the things produced by them (ἀποτελέσματα) have here and now what in the intelligible world is 'something' (τι), but here below qualitative and not 'something' (ποιά οὐ τί) (II.6.1.40-42).

Plotinus, in this context, turns against the Aristotelian view according to which a separate Category is postulated for quality, by claiming that in the Intelligible world everything is substance (Ἡ οὐ ποιότης, ἀλλὰ λόγος τὸ εἶδος) and therefore, what appears as qualities in matter are activities of those Intelligible substances (τὰ δὲ ἀρχέτυπα αὐτῶν... ἐνεργείας ἐκεῖνων)[68]:

> In the intelligible world all qualities, as we call them, must be assumed to be activities (ἐνεργείας), taking their qualitativeness (ποιὸν) from the way we think about them, because each one of them is an individual characteristic (ἰδιότητα), that is, they mark off (διοριζούσας) the substances in relation to each other and have their own individual character (χαρακτήρα) in relation to themselves (II.6.3.2-6).

Surprisingly, II.6 has not received much attention in bibliography although it could help elucidate the ambiguities entailed in the passages from V.9.12 and V.7.1 that we examined earlier. The passages from II.6 quoted above offer a clear formulation of the view that what appears to be

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[68] II.6.2.15;3.23-4.

a characteristic in material existence is not to be explained in terms of the matter of the various entities, but in terms of the Forms such as "σιμότης" or "γρυπότης" (or "λευκὸν", white). Moreover, it makes clear that each of these ideas is also marked off from the others and should thus be considered as a distinct substance. We should note that Plotinus in II.6 does not in the least imply that in addition to these Forms, other Forms of (all?) the possible combinations of the former should be postulated. If Plotinus, as this treatise in its entirety suggests, is mostly concerned with establishing the differences between beings, animate and inanimate (including humans) alike, as formal differences and is thus depriving matter of any such explanatory role, then, in this sense, this must also be the point of V.9.12. Namely, that there is a Form of "σιμότης", as distinct from the Form of "γρυπότης" and not that there is a Form of Socrates, which is needed in order to account for Socrates' having a snub nose. This point should be safely placed in the immediate philosophical background of the consecutive treatise V.7, where Plotinus seems to continue the same enquiry by asking whether there is need for the postulation of a Form of each one of us, to the extent that the ascent to the Intelligible is possible. In the light of II.6 and V.9.12, Plotinus' answer to this question should be understood as negative. If the "thousand differences" between human beings mentioned in V.7, are Forms like "σιμότης" or "γρυπότης", then what this passage makes clear is that neither matter is to be thought as the cause of human individuality nor just one Form, the Form of man,

would suffice. Plotinus, in this context, is communicating the view that each individual human being should be understood as displaying a particular combination of these forms and not one Form (exclusively or in addition to them) that somehow combines them. In conclusion, as in the case of all the other passages, V.7.1 does not contain an indisputable proof for the existence of Forms of individuals but allows the ascent to the 'νοητὸν' simply by granting immortality to Socrates' soul.

However, the relationship between individual human beings and the Forms requires further qualification. It should be noted that those in favour of the existence of Forms of individuals explained this relation in terms of a participation of the human being, both in the Form of Man (which makes him a human being) and in the Form of Socrates (which makes him this particular human being).[69] If, there is no Form of Socrates, and participation in the Form of Man is not enough to explain Socrates' individual existence, then one may suggest that our proposed analysis offers a way to overcome this problem: Socrates is Socrates, not only by participating in the Form of Man but also in (at least a set of) others, such as, "σιμότης", "λευκὸν", and so on. Yet, although this might be correct, it may still not be entirely what Plotinus had in mind. For, if Socrates is human by participation in the Idea of Man, then a model of participation, albeit in more than one Form, might not be sufficient to

[69] See for example Rist, "Ideas of Individuals in Plotinus. A Reply to Dr Blumenthal", 303.

account for the fact that Socrates is to be distinguished as a separate individual from Pythagoras.[70]

In fact, Plotinus does draw attention to this problem by claiming in the very context of V.7.1 that the relationship between Socrates and Form (either the Form of Man or Form in general) is not to be understood as that between the portraits of Socrates and Socrates (οὐ γὰρ ὡς αἱ εἰκόνες Σωκράτους πρὸς τὸ ἀρχέτυπον).[71] Obviously, we should not interpret this claim as implying that all difficulties entailed in such notion would have been removed by the addition of one more Form in which Socrates would have participated in that way (i.e., as in a model-copy relation). Instead, it is more likely that Plotinus through this claim expresses his strong reservations for accounts that would provide an explanation for the individuality of Socrates as a relationship of likeness similar to those between copies and their archetype.[72]

Plotinus seems to be saying that there is indeed a difference (or a likeness) between Socrates and the Form of Man, which is not the same as that between a portrait and its original. Or, differently put, that there is a difference (or likeness) between human beings and the Form of Man (or

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[70] Plotinus clearly states that Socrates is human by participation to the Form of human being: "μεταλήψει γὰρ ἀνθρώπου ὁ τὶς ἄνθρωπος" (and not that a human being is what it is by participation to Socrates) in VI.3.9. 29-30.

[71] V.7.1.21-22. Cf., VI.3.15.31ff.

[72] Rist, although reaches the conclusion that there are Forms of Individuals in Plotinus, nevertheless has identified this particular problem. For him the most problematic aspect of an image/ model relationship is that it allows for more than one 'copy' for each 'original' and thus makes impossible the "mystical continuity" between Socrates and the Form of Socrates. Rist sees this continuity preserved, and the problems eliminated, if we postulate one-to-one correspondence between a human being and its Form ("Forms of Individuals in Plotinus", especially 83 and 95).

even "εἶδος" in general), other than that between inanimate beings and the Forms corresponding to them. The most important difference, of course, is that the former are ensouled beings, with a life of their own, which is par excellence what their soul communicates to their body. This interpretation certainly echoes Plotinus' well-known scepticism regarding portraiture. As it has been argued by S. Stern-Gillet in a fairly recent article, Plotinus' disapproval of portraits, and even his refusal to have his own made, is not to be seen as an idiosyncratic dislike, but as an integral part of his philosophy on various levels (metaphysics, aesthetics and ethics). Starting from the premise that a living face is more beautiful than a dead one, Plotinus claims that a portrait is more beautiful the more it is lifelike (ζωτικώτερα), but it is, nevertheless, (like a dead face) less beautiful than the ugliest living person. According to Plotinus, the reason that a living being is more beautiful or attractive than a portrait is precisely that it has soul (ὅτι ψυχὴν ἔχει).[73] Portraits and painters, to borrow a phrase from Stern-Gillet, are "unable to render the grace of life".[74]

The inadequacy of the model of participation to Form (as in copy/model relation) to account for the individuality of a human being is further justified by Plotinus' remarks in respect of fire, according to which

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[73] VI.7.22.26-33
[74] S.Stern-Gillet, "Plotinus and his Portrait", 219.

an individual fire has to be understood as different from an individual human being. Plotinus writes:

> For it would be absurd to introduce many ideas of fire in order that each individual fire might be formed by a different one (VI.5.8.40-42).

Plotinus' interpreters were right to connect this passage to the issue of individuality. However, they did so only in so far as it contains a denial for the existence of Forms of individual inanimate objects. As Rist explains, there is no individual Form of fires because "fire is a continuum ... and if two fires are brought together they are totally indistinguishable, having one character, i.e., fire, and one only".[75] Yet even if each piece of fire is assumed to be identical with the others, in a way that human beings obviously are not, we still need to provide a reason for it. That is, we should need to explain why it is different to talk about the individual Socrates and the individual fire. One way of course, is to assume that this passage implicitly affirms the existence of a Form of Socrates, which would account for the difference. Another way, however, is to concentrate on the obvious difference, namely, the fact that Socrates is an ensouled being, and consider the particular nature of its relation to individuality. In this sense, the above passage should be read as part of Plotinus' attempt to draw attention to the fact that the question of individuality relates explicitly to soul and should thus be properly addressed and dealt with on the level of Soul and not Nous. It is Plotinus' consistent view that souls,

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[75] Rist, "Ideas of Individuals in Plotinus. A Reply to Dr Blumenthal", 300.

unlike fires or possibly other objects, cannot be considered as 'parts' of a collective soul, and therefore cannot be accounted for as members of a class, like objects. Therefore, although a model of participation would probably suffice to explain the existence of distinct fires in terms of participation in the Form of Fire, this cannot be the case with human beings.

In the light of these remarks, it seems that in order to account for human individuality and the relationship between an individual human being and the Forms in Nous we have to articulate a different model than that of participation of sensible objects in Form or Forms.

We should first consider a solution offered by Kalligas, who anticipates most of the difficulties entailed by the model of participation and suggests a way round them, by allowing for Forms of individuals which, however, resemble more the Aristotelian forms-in-matter than the separate Platonic Forms; for this reason, Kalligas calls these entities soul-forms.[76] The issue of whether Plotinus' conception of Forms of individuals, or Forms in general, is closer to Aristotle's than it is to Plato's, or even whether Aristotle himself was in favour of Forms of particulars, cannot of course be raised here. For the purposes of our discussion, it suffices to make a few brief remarks. First, Plotinus' claim examined earlier, according to which each soul contains all the Forms as logoi, makes impossible a strict identification between soul and its contents: this

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[76] Kalligas, "Forms of Individuals in Plotinus: A Re-Examination", 221.

identity can only be granted to Nous.[77] Second, as we have already shown in the previous chapter, the Forms in Nous have to be distinguished from the Soul (either soul as such or individual souls), in so far as Nous creates Forms in a way radically different from the way it creates Souls. Kalligas proposes a way to alleviate this difficulty by suggesting that the soul-forms should not be regarded as permanent (or actual) tenants of Nous.[78] If this is the case, the notion of a soul-form should be understood, in view of our previous remarks, as referring to a soul-entity rather than a Form-entity, and we may overall conclude that Plotinus' position amounts to a claim concerning the existence of individual souls rather than Forms of individuals.

We have thus reached a point in our discussion where we need to re-examine the question animating the debate on the existence of Forms of individuals (i.e., in what way could we explain the existence of Socrates as a distinct individual), in the perspective of our previous analysis of Plotinus' views on the individuality of soul in terms of reflection. At the outset, we should note that the differences between Socrates and other human beings cannot, of course, be confined or reduced to physical characteristics, such as those exclusively discussed in the passages directly associated with our concerns so far. People who do belong to the same race, and therefore share identical formal characteristics, still lead

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[77] This claim is also made by C.D'Ancona Costa: "Neither the individual nor the cosmic soul coincides with the forming principles with which it provides the matter" ("Separation and the Forms: A Plotinian Approach", 377).
[78] Kalligas, "Forms of Individuals in Plotinus: A Re-Examination", 223.

separate (individual) lives and thus differ also in respect of their characters and actions.

To begin with, if all the Forms are contained as logoi in the soul, then each individual soul should be responsible for the particular combination of these Forms that brings about Socrates, Pythagoras and every other human being. According to Plotinus, each soul should be understood as one "λόγος": a partial expression of Intellect, or an interpretation (ἑρμηνεία) of the "ποικίλον εἶδος" which is the content of Nous (IV.3.5.15; 11.19; II.4.9.9). In this sense, although the soul contains in a certain sense all the Forms, it nevertheless has (or rather is) a particular point of view, from the perspective of which it looks at Nous. In other words, each soul attends to certain Forms more than to others, in a way that generates qualitative differences between souls. As a result, each soul informs a particular body with certain characteristics by actualising the view that it and only it has of the Intelligibles. In this sense, no two identical individuals can exist in the same period, or ever exist even if the universe were to repeat itself.

The notion of a point of view, however, implicates necessarily a notion of a certain distance between Nous and each soul. This distance is the reflective distance we examined in the previous section. As we saw there in detail, Plotinus conceives of it as a reflective internal distance within the soul itself that has three important characteristics. First, it is the distance that the image of a soul travels before it animates a particular

body; second, it is the distance, now conceived as depth, which separates (or unites) the upper part of each soul with its lower part; finally, it is the retrospective distance that the soul has to cover in order to know itself. In the context of these claims, our principal point would be that the individuality of a human being (conceived now in the unified sense made possible by the mediation of soul, which shapes equally the external and the internal characteristics of any human being) should be understood in terms of this distance, which can be considered both externally (i.e., as marking an objective degree of separation from Nous) and internally (i.e., as indicating the space in which the life of each soul with its fundamental possibilities for self-expression and self-knowledge takes place).

In a certain sense, this claim can be considered as a suggestion for the replacement of a model of participation with a model of reflection. Given the close connection between these models (after all, the model of reflection is a standard metaphorical model of participation), one may raise the issue of the difference that such a replacement would make. It would be indeed correct to say that the introduction of a notion of an interactive reflection like the one presented in the previous section amounts to nothing more than an interpretation (or specification) of the notion of participation in this context.[79] However, the fundamental

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[79] The claim that "the participant is to be thought of as somehow active in participation" in terms of a certain 'striving' or 'longing' is, of course, as old as Plato (Strange, "Plotinus' Account of Participation", 495, where the Platonic and Aristotelian references can be found). Moreover, as we saw in the previous chapter, this is the case in all kinds of Plotinian participation (i.e., in all the cases where the lower hypostasis 'participates' in the higher one).

advance to be gained through this specification is the explicit internalisation of the distance between original and image. The soul acquires a life of its own (a life proper to soul in general and a life that is individual for each soul) in that it ceases merely to strive after something external to it; its identity is shaped now internally in the upward and downward movement along the distance defined between its upper and its lower 'part'. In other words, what Socrates, the one and only, really is is not contained in the intellect in the form of an Idea defined once and for all towards which Socrates strives. Rather, Socrates is a unique point of view on the intellect, a unique way of approaching the intellect, a unique way of living in a unique distance from the intellect, and the existence of the upper 'part' of his soul makes sure that all these perspectives and distances are internal to the soul of Socrates. In this sense, to recall V.7.1 with which this section began, Socrates' ascent to the "νοητὸν", consists in a particular, distinct, <u>way</u> of returning to the "ἀρχὴ", the upper part of his soul (Αὐτοσωκράτης): it is an intermittent unification with something which is nevertheless common to all. This means that "each one of us" is eternal and individual in so far as one leads a particular life, defined by the dynamic interaction of opposing tensions within one's soul. Depending on the focus of their attention, individuals, experience or achieve different degrees of separation or unification, freedom, and moral excellency. This, however, will be the theme of the concluding chapter.

CHAPTER 5

Denouement

> Indeed, this having happened (τούτων δὴ γινομένων), this cosmos has many lights and is illuminated by its souls and is further adorned over and above the former cosmos and has other cosmos brought into it each from a different source, both from the gods there and from the other intellects that give souls (IV.3.14.1-5).

In these first few lines of Chapter 14, Plotinus presents us with a snapshot of the outcome of the descent of soul, which has been unfolded gradually in Chapters 9-13 of the present treatise. The question that was raised in Chapter 9 and animated the entire discussion "how soul comes to be in body" (πῶς ἐγγίγνεται σώματι ψυχή; 9.1), seems to have been finally answered. We recall that Plotinus' interest was explicitly directed towards an account of the genesis and order of the sensible world, through a discussion of the nature and creative activity of its origin. This process of generation, conceived metaphorically as a descent of the soul into bodies, is now complete in its basic aspects, and stands, so to speak, as a given 'fact' (τούτων δὴ γινομένων) for what is about to follow. What we have now in display is an overwhelming overview of the world itself: bathed in the light and beauty of the souls that brought it into existence and inhabit it, the world lives and radiates to the beholder

the glory of its origin through its multiple, yet ordered, constitution. The unity of the object we have in view, namely the world, has been very carefully established by Plotinus' concentrated efforts to present its generation by the soul as the result of a continuous interplay between two complementary aspects of soul's creative activity. On the one hand, we saw Plotinus adopting the familiar Platonic model of creation, as it was originally elaborated in the context of the Timaeus. However, as we also saw, Plotinus' account of creation differs from that particular model as much as it resembles it, and may be overall appreciated as a more effective and appropriate reconstruction of a model that in many respects could be (or has been) considered as philosophically problematical or misleading. Nevertheless, any such model articulated around the notion of the activity of a creator who brings about a creature either through generation or production, introduces undoubtedly, even after all the necessary adjustments and qualifications, a sense of exteriority or differentiation between them, which calls for particular attention when the unity of the world is in question. Whether we talk about the cosmic soul or other individual souls, the creative activity of the soul results inevitably in the increase of the degree of multiplicity or fragmentation of the entire system; in relation to its origin, the world is clearly less unified, a fact that manifests itself in terms of a distance between the world (in general, or of each of its constituent members) and its origin.

On the other hand, however, the fact that the world, both at a

macroscopic and a microscopic level, was presented by Plotinus as being not only 'outside' but also (or rather) 'inside' soul provided the whole account with the internal and unifying dimension which is normally missing in an ordinary creation model. This dimension should be associated with the general conclusion of the previous chapter, namely the fact that the creative capacity of the soul is also expressed in its ability to determine itself through a reflective process; in this sense, soul experiences within itself, although in a different way, the split between a creative and a created instance. This notion of reflective self-creation supplemented the already modified Platonic model of creation with what may be called a 'metamorphosis' model, in which the creator is transformed so as to become the object of its creation and the notion of the descent of soul refers inextricably both to the creation of the sensible world by the soul and the internal, reflective self-articulation of the soul.

In the context of these two models, the demand for the unity of this given multiplicity was constantly present in similar forms throughout the elaboration of the successive stages. Initially, it was expressed as a demand for the unity between the soul and the body of the world in the episode of their original encounter or interaction. Then, with the introduction of more individual souls into the system, there was a demand for internal unity between the particular souls and their intelligible source. Finally, and this is an aspect that we cannot explore in the present discussion, there was a demand for the 'external' unity of

the multiple particular souls (or the corresponding particular bodies and parts of the world), a demand that Plotinus addresses with the elaboration of a notion of universal sympathy. In this sense, the unity of the world (or of its 'image') involves a high degree of complexity, which can be analysed in a series of distinctions between horizontal and vertical dimensions that interweave in order to produce a unified multiple structure. In the pursuit of these various demands for unity, which is ultimately guaranteed by the origin of the world, the 'dialectical' account offered by Plotinus in terms of the two models outlined above was undertaken precisely from the point of view of this origin and followed, as it were, the gaze of the soul in its movement 'downwards'. The synoptic point of view reconstructed in this way is obviously prominent, and can certainly be considered as the most suitable for the appropriate satisfaction of the various demands for unity. However, it is a universal point of view that remains external to other possible points of view located at particular points within the composite structure itself. We can see a problem emerging here: it may be true, for instance, that one may have a unified view of the earth when standing on the moon; yet, how unified does it look to those who actually live on it?

At this point, we should bring to the fore some of the remarks made in Chapter 2 of the thesis, regarding the form and the particular characteristics of Plotinus' account. We saw there that Plotinus was fully aware that any account of the descent of soul which is composed by and

for ensouled human beings has ultimately to meet an additional requirement: it has to be persuasive. Moreover, he gave us ample guidelines for appreciating his own attempt in this respect, and drew particular attention to the difficulties entailed by any literal or metaphorical account that would aim to render comprehensible the nature of a composite structure such as the world. He warned us, for instance, that although we may need to compose a narrative which presents events in some order of succession, we should always be aware that, in fact, there is no spatio-temporal determination of these events, but only an ontological order of priority or significance, which has to be understood in the context of the requirements imposed by the peculiar nature of this philosophical endeavour. In such a context, an account that succeeds in presenting the acts of creation in terms of 'necessity', no matter how close to the 'truth' it may be, may still be lacking in persuasive force. Such a requirement involves at the outset a qualified use of language and an increased sensitivity towards the problems associated with literal or metaphorical expositions. However, the issue is not merely rhetorical; it involves both epistemological and ontological considerations, since it concerns a kind of knowledge that is specified in ways that reflect the nature of soul itself (and consequently its descent) at least in two respects. First, Plotinus has argued that there is within soul an irreducible duality between its intelligible and sensible aspect, or between its higher and lower part, that inevitably reflects on the way soul

'thinks' or 'understands' its own contents, which is different from that of Intellect. Second, the fact that each soul, or each ensouled member of the cosmos, encounters in some way the obscurity of matter leads soul to experience a lack of transparency that results further in some kind of confusion or uncertainty with relation to soul's own activity or knowledge.

In this sense, Plotinus' account may have so far succeeded in describing the overall creative activity of the soul in a way that renders comprehensible the underlying necessity for the emergence of the world as a unified composite structure. However, this account cannot be considered complete without the elucidation of the way in which the reconstruction of this unity is also possible from the point of view of each of these composite and individual members (or units). In relation to other metaphysical points of view (the One, Nous or the soul-ἀρχή), such a point of view is certainly more fragmented or limited. Therefore, the final challenge which Plotinus sets for his or any similar account is to explore the way in which this unified picture of the world, presented in the opening paragraph of Chapter 14, could be reconstructed and experienced by each human being in the course of their otherwise fragmented or restricted life. Such a reconstruction is in a certain sense a more difficult task, since a particular perspective is characterised by particularly acute limitations, in so far as a human life necessarily implicates a here and now and a corresponding awareness to it.

However, without the satisfaction of this final requirement, not only may Plotinus' account fail to persuade the soul-subjects, but also the position of the individual human beings and their life in the economy of the world will remain, in their eyes, a merely contingent or ineffectual fact.

Thus, the issue that concerns us here relates to the ways in which a particular soul, or an individual human being, may orient itself within the totality of the universe created by the cosmic soul, and the ways an individual may act in order to enjoy a good and meaningful life. We should keep these introductory remarks in mind as we turn to the remainder of Chapter 14, where Plotinus, following the practice established in the previous chapters, introduces this issue through an extended mythological account, which provides a rather unique exposition of a particularly appealing and controversial myth, the myth of Pandora.

The Myth of Pandora and the Role of Heracles

Plotinus introduces the myth of Pandora by explicitly announcing his intention to use what has been said so far in order to reveal its hidden meaning: "it is reasonable that the myth has this hidden meaning" (οἷον εἰκὸς καὶ τὸν μῦθον αἰνίττεσθαι; 14.5-6). This way of introduction indicates clearly that this myth will not help us to appreciate the truth or the validity of Plotinus' assertions about the origin of the world expounded in the course of his cosmogony: the myth

will be used neither to support Plotinus' account nor to elucidate any difficulties entailed by it. Moreover, there is no indication that the myth will be used as a vehicle for the expression of views that Plotinus was not able to communicate so far, in other (possibly more literal) ways. As a matter of fact, Plotinus seems to be interested here in exactly the opposite task: everything that has already been established (through the peculiar synthesis of argumentative and metaphorical discourse elaborated in the previous chapters) with regard to the origin of the world (τὸ ἀναγκαῖον) will serve as a hypothesis or guide for the explanation and understanding of the myth of Pandora (τὸ εἰκός). In other words, the interest at the outset is hermeneutical (i.e., insight into the meaning of the myth in the established context of Plotinus' account), and not expository (i.e., insight into the nature of the object of Plotinus' account with the help of the myth). However, the primacy of the hermeneutical dimension does not imply that the discussion of the myth has no expository function whatsoever. The interpretation of the myth from this particular perspective may indeed elucidate certain aspects of the object under discussion, namely the world itself, but we must be already alert to the possibility that this elucidation takes place from within a different, let us say more 'subjective', point of view. In any case, what is immediately evident is the fact that the mythological narrative elaborated in Chapter 14 is once again particularly selective and condensed.

With this aim in view we may follow the rest of Plotinus' story:

> when Prometheus had created (πλάσαντος) the woman the other gods adorned her further (ἐπεκόσμησαν). He mixed earth with water, and put in her human voice, and made her like the Goddesses in form (θεαῖς δ' ὁμοίαν τὸ εἶδος), and Aphrodite gave something to her as did the Graces, and each [god] gave a different gift (δῶρον) and they named her after the gift and after all the givers (ἐκ τοῦ δώρου καὶ πάντων τῶν δεδωκότων). For all gave gifts to the creature (πλάσματι) which was brought into being by a certain forethought (προμηθείας). But what can be the meaning of Epimetheus refusing to give her a gift (or refusing to accept her as a gift, ἀποποιούμενος τὸ δῶρον αὐτοῦ), other than that the choice of the preferable being in the Intelligible world is [a] better [choice]?

Before we attempt an exploration of the philosophical merits of this mythological account, we should note that the myth of Pandora has been one of the most attractive myths in the history of literature and art, a fact which makes it very difficult to identify a unified and well-established traditional version to which Plotinus' story could be directly compared.[1] However, a generally accepted point of reference is provided by the Hesiodic corpus, and in particular the two treatments of the myth in the Works and Days (57-101) and the Theogony (570-590), of which I shall now attempt a brief reconstruction.

Zeus ordered Hephaestus to create Pandora in order to destroy mankind; this was to be his punishment or revenge upon Prometheus who had repeatedly deceived him.[2] Pandora was a woman of

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1 For a detailed exposition and analysis of the myth of Pandora and its reception through the ages, see the excellent monograph by Dora and Erwin Panofsky, Pandora's Box.

2 According to the Works and Days (57-8) Zeus said: "But I will give men as the price for fire (ἀντὶ πυρὸς) an evil thing (κακὸν) in which they may all be glad of heart (τέρπωνται κατὰ θυμὸν), while they embrace (ἀμφαγαπῶντες) their own destruction (ἐὸν κακὸν)"; see also the Theogony (570): "Forthwith he made an evil thing (κακὸν) for men

unparalleled beauty, glamour, and abilities. She had human voice and strength (ἀνθρώπου θέμεν αὐδὴν καὶ σθένος) and the appearance of a goddess (ἀθανάτῃς δὲ θεῇς εἰς ὦπα εἰσκειν παρθενικῆς καλὸν εἶδος ἐπήρατον). Moreover, she was adorned (κόσμησε) by the most exquisite jewellery: a silver raiment (ἀργυφέῃ ἐσθῆτι), a broidered veil (καλύπτρην δαιδαλέην), lovely garlands of fresh flowers (στεφάνους νεοθηλέος ἄνθεα ποίης), and a wonderful golden crown (στεφάνην χρυσέην θαυμάσια) made especially by Hephaestus with decorations resembling living beings with voices (ζῴ οισιν ἐοικότα φωνήεσσιν). She was a marvel to behold, radiating great beauty and grace (χάρις δ' ἀπελάμπετο πολλή). Yet, this creature was also particularly dangerous: she had "a shameless mind" (κύνεόν τε νόον) and "a deceitful nature" (ἐπίπλοκον ἦθος). Having taken her name from the gifts and the givers,[3] she was destined herself to become a gift, a gift of evil (Pandora was thus a "καλόν κακόν") for humanity. She was thus sent to earth, where Epimetheus, dazzled like the other mortals by her charms, disobeyed his wise brother Prometheus, who had warned him never to accept a gift from Zeus, and married her.[4] As expected, the result of Epimetheus' act was disastrous for all human beings. All sorts

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(ἀνθρώποισιν) for the price of fire (ἀντὶ πυρὸς). Prometheus deceived Zeus not only in the circumstances of the transmission of fire, but also by dividing an ox in such a way as to give Zeus an inferior portion, which he had disguised so as to make it seem particularly generous (Theogony 535-55).

3 "And he called this woman Pandora, because all those who dwelt on Olympus gave each a gift (δῶρον ἐδώρησαν), a plague to men who eat bread" (Works and Days, 80-2).

4 Epimetheus "took the gift (δεξάμενος), and afterwards, when the evil thing was already his, he understood (ἐνόησεν)".

of evils and illnesses (μυρία λυγρά) contained in Pandora, or in a vessel that was supposed to accompany her, were once and for all released in the world of mortals (only hope remained within the vessel).[5]

If we compare this account to the version offered by Plotinus, there are at least three striking differences that call for further consideration. The first difference concerns the nature and importance of the relationship between Pandora and Prometheus, which, at any rate, is presented differently in various renderings of the story.[6] In Plotinus' case, this relationship is particularly intensified and highlighted in a number of ways. First, he follows, as it were, the earliest (pre-Hesiodic) tradition of the myth, by crediting Prometheus, and not Hephaestus, with the role of the creator of Pandora.[7] He thus brings the two characters into a direct relationship, that between a creator and his creature. Second, as we have already noted in the discussion concerning Dionysus, when Plotinus introduces a myth, his account or interpretation is guided by certain connections with other myths that form part of a widely recognised mythological background with which his

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5 Although we may tend to think of hope as a virtue, or in the mythological terms of our discussion as a boon for human beings, it is clear that the myth has a point in considering it as the last, and in this sense most deceptive, gift of Zeus. Aeschylus, for instance, calls hope 'blind' in Prometheus Bound (250), marking, presumably, its ambiguous status in view of the overall hardship or the inevitable end of mortal life.

6 See Panofsky, Pandora's Box, 7.

7 If there were such a tradition, its only remaining trace would be the version of Pandora's myth presented by Babrius (Fables, 58), a version that in any case is much more coherent than the one presented by Hesiod. With regard to Plotinus, we should note that in another context, where he may allude indirectly to the myth of Pandora, Hephaestus is indeed presented as the creator of a beautiful 'statue': οἷον ἀγάλματος μεγάλου καὶ καλοῦ εἴτε ἐμψύχου εἴτε καὶ τέχνῃ Ἡφαίστου γενομένου (III.2.14.26-8).

audience is expected to be familiar. The function of this background also seems to be required in the present case, in order to better understand some of the most important characteristics of the relationship between Prometheus and Pandora. It is well known, for instance, that Prometheus is often portrayed as the creator of mankind, or, in more general terms, as a benefactor to human beings. However, Prometheus is also commonly regarded as responsible for the sufferings and misfortunes of mortals, a role which is of course par excellence reserved for Pandora. In this sense, there seems to be an underlying similarity between Prometheus and Pandora, which partly determines the nature of their interaction. Third, we should note that although Plotinus makes clear that his story refers to the myth of Pandora by saying, for instance, that she received her name from the gifts and all the givers (ὀνομάσαι ἐκ τοῦ δώρου καὶ πάντων τῶν δεδωκότων), he carefully avoids the explicit mention of her name. Instead, Plotinus chooses to refer to her as 'the woman' (τὴν γυναῖκα), or 'the creature' (τῷ πλάσματι), or 'the gift' (τὸ δῶρον). In this sense, the relationship between Prometheus and Pandora acquires particular significance, to the extent that it does not refer exclusively to these particular mythological characters but provides the symbolism for the creator-creature relationship as such.

The second difference between Plotinus' version and the traditional accounts of the myth summarised above, concerns the fact that in Plotinus' account there is no mention of evil, at least not explicitly, either

with regard to the intentions of Zeus and the other gods in creating Pandora, or with regard to Pandora herself. Not only does there seem to be no malevolent motive attributed to the gods, but also there is no sign of any explicit or implicit, good or bad, intention associated with Prometheus. According to Plotinus, the 'creature' (πλάσματι) was brought into existence as an act of giving (ἔδοσαν) of the Gods which was guided by a certain 'forethought' or 'providence' (προμηθείας). The first thing to notice is, once again, how Plotinus maximises the intelligibility of his narrative account, this time by selecting the word "προμήθεια", an hapax in the Plotinian corpus, instead of the common word "πρόνοια", consistently used throughout the Enneads in order to convey the same meaning. Plotinus, by means of this rhetorical device, leads us to identify the character of the creator, Prometheus (Προμηθεῦς), with the nature and outcome of his action.

Turning to Pandora, we should note that Plotinus' reshaping of the story seems to be exceptionally sympathetic to her, at least ex silentio. Even in the most favourable mythological descriptions of Pandora, in which her vessel contains only virtues and no vices, it is her irresistible female curiosity that makes her open the vessel's lid: as a result, its contents disappear and are no longer available to human beings.[8] In

8 See Panofsky, Pandora's Box, 8. In this version (which is the one noted above and recorded by Babrius), the release of the virtues contained in the vessel make them 'fly' back to the divine realm and disappear from earth. In a quite charming way, Macedonius Consul (Anthologia Graeca, 10.71) claims that although Pandora is

Plotinus' version, there is no explicit blame of any kind directed against Pandora. The first indication that she may be associated with some kind of danger or evil is provided by the text only in connection to Epimetheus, who is praised by Plotinus for having exhibited a certain cautious or negative attitude towards her.[9]

The role assigned to Epimetheus marks the third difference of Plotinus' account in relation to the version offered by Hesiod; moreover, it is totally incompatible with what we know from other sources. Plotinus introduces Epimetheus in line 12 of the text by raising the question of the significance of his act. This act, an exception to what Prometheus and the other gods did, is described by Plotinus with the clause "ἀποποιούμενος τὸ δῶρον αὐτοῦ". The text leaves room for two alternative readings. In one version, the above phrase is read as saying that Epimetheus "rejected the gift of what had been formed" (that is, he rejected Pandora); in the other, the clause is taken to mean that he

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responsible for opening the lid, it is not her who should be blamed (οὐδὲ γυναῖκα μέμφομαι), but the virtues themselves, since they have wings (αὐτῶν τὰ πτερὰ τῶν ἀγαθῶν) and do not fall to earth as they should (πίπτειν καὶ κατὰ γῆν ὄφελον). Poor Pandora, when she realised what she had done, grew pale and lost her glamour and charm. Thus human life "has suffered two losses: woman has grown old and her vessel has nothing in it".

9 Plotinus elsewhere states explicitly that the 'evil' is to be associated with the created object itself, and to be explained in terms of its incapacity (due to its matter) to receive 'everything that was given to it'. If we think matters in that way, Plotinus argues that: "the difficulties would be solved (λύοιντο ἂν ἤδη αἱ ἀπορίαι), that about the gift of evil coming from the gods by the consideration that it is not their deliberate choices (προαιρέσεις) which are effective but what comes from above happens by natural necessity... and that though the gifts of the individual heavenly bodies are not evil, something else comes about in their mixture (ἄλλο τι)... and that the underlying nature (ἡ ὑποκείμενη φύση) receives one thing but experiences another, and is unable to master what is given" (IV.4.39.23-32).

"refused to give her a gift". The first version is adopted by Armstrong and shared by most of Plotinus' translators or commentators. Yet the second version, appearing in Ficino's translation of the Enneads, is also grammatically plausible.[10]

Let us then examine our alternatives in relation to the mythological and textual context. The first seems to be closer to the mythological facts. As we have already seen in the context of the Hesiodic texts, Zeus intended Pandora to be a gift for Epimetheus, who was consequently presented with a choice: either to accept Pandora, and thus submit to the strong attraction that he experienced for her, or to follow Prometheus' warnings never to accept a gift from Zeus as this could threaten the welfare of mankind.[11]

However, the problem with adopting this translation is that there is no other evidence in any traditional rendering of the story that Epimetheus rejected Pandora, which would offer support to Plotinus' claim. On the contrary, all ancient authors clearly tell us that Epimetheus disobeyed his brother and accepted Pandora as his wife. In order to make sense of Plotinus' remarks many of the interpreters who adopt the first translation wish to substitute in the text 'Epimetheus' with 'Prometheus'. In their reading, Plotinus seems to be saying that, although Prometheus initially created Pandora (and in this sense

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10 "And if Epimetheus never gave her any gift, what does this signify if not that the acceptance and choice of an Intelligible boon is to be preferred?" (Plotini opera Marcilio Ficino interprete, fol. Bb IIII r.; quoted and discussed in Panofsky, Pandora's Box, 135).
11 Hesiod, Works and Days, 85-89.

conceded to her and to whatever she stood for), he eventually rejected her. According to Dora and Erwin Panofsky, for example, if it was Prometheus who rejected Pandora, then this should be understood as a change in Prometheus' initial disposition towards Pandora, probably caused by the transformation of Pandora by the other gods.[12] The assumption is that with the intervention of the other gods, Pandora ceased to be as harmless and pure as she was when Prometheus originally created her. There are, however, two serious difficulties in correcting the text in order to read 'Prometheus'. First, the manuscripts are unevenly divided against the textual emendation: only three prefer 'Prometheus' while the majority has 'Epimetheus'.[13] Second, as we have already noted, there is nothing in the Plotinian text implying that the gods were conspiring against the human beings and intended to make Pandora harmful; moreover, there is not even an indication of some careless or accidental alteration of the original nature of Pandora during the process of her divine shaping.

However, if we turn to the other alternative, we face similar problems to the extent that no ancient source mentions Epimetheus' refusal to provide Pandora with his contribution; in fact, there is no mention of any circumstances in which Epimetheus has a choice between giving and refusing to give her a gift. However, one may attempt to defend this reading through an appeal to Protagoras' story presented

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12 Pandoras' Box, 132-6.
13 Pandoras' Box, especially n.61.

by Plato in the Protagoras. According to Protagoras, Zeus entrusted Prometheus and his brother Epimetheus with the task of distributing certain powers or gifts among the animate beings of this world for their protection and survival. Prometheus, convinced by Epimetheus, allowed his brother to proceed alone with the distribution of the gifts. Epimetheus, however, failed to meet his brother's expectations, because he reserved nothing for the human beings, who were left totally powerless and defenceless (γυμνὸν τε καὶ ἀνυπόδητον καὶ ἄστρωτον καὶ ἄοπλον; Protagoras 321c5-6). Prometheus, having realised the injustice committed against human beings, decided to steal the fire (and the skills and arts related to it) from Olympus; this act marked the beginning of his (and mankind's) long sufferings and, as we saw, led Zeus to order the creation of Pandora.[14] Against this background, Plotinus' claim in connection to Epimetheus may be considered as a simple adjustment of this story to the context of the myth of Pandora, who, as we have already noted, could be viewed as a personification for the whole of mankind.

In any case, neither of these interpretations seems to offer any clear explanation or justification for the second part of Plotinus' statement about Epimetheus, where Plotinus praises him for his choice. Whatever it is that, according to Plotinus, Epimetheus actually did

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[14] In the Protagoras the story has a different, rather 'happy', ending. After Prometheus gave the fire to human beings, they began to develop their skills and eventually gathered into cities, which in order to prosper required that human beings would learn how to run them justly. Zeus decided to teach men "the art of politics" (πολιτικὴν τέχνη), that is, how to order (κόσμοι) their cities and to develop "bonds of friendship" (δεσμοὶ φιλίας) on the principles of "conscience" (αἰδῶ) and "justice" (δίκην) (322b5-d6).

(whether he rejected Pandora or did not provide for her), his action certainly indicates a negative attitude towards Pandora. This attitude is immediately interpreted by Plotinus: it is to be understood as a conscious choice exemplifying the claim that the "choice of the intelligible is better" (τὴν τοῦ ἐν νοητῷ μᾶλλον αἵρεσιν ἀμείνω εἶναι). We definitely encounter here a reversal of the traditional picture, in which Epimetheus can hardly be regarded as wise, or as making wise choices. As attested by his name, which means afterthought, Epimetheus is lacking in providence or forethought, a virtue coextensive with wisdom, which is exclusively attributed to his brother. If Epimetheus, in agreement with all other versions, were to accept Pandora as a gift, his choice would have resulted from a certain weakness of will expressed by his inability to resist the seductive attraction of Pandora, and would have been thus considered as the affirmation of the life of the senses.[15] However, to the extent that in Plotinus' version Epimetheus stands opposed to Pandora, he is portrayed as being aware that even the most exquisite embodied beauty is inferior to the everlasting beauty of the Intelligible world. Epimetheus' awareness is precisely the manifestation of knowledge,

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15 It is worth noting here that in a small work attributed to the alchemist Zosimos Prometheus and Epimetheus are presented as the two sides of a single person, with Prometheus corresponding to the soul and Epimetheus to the body. In this sense, Epimetheus', by disobeying his brother, submits to the desires of his body, and fails to provide for his soul. When the human being concentrates on an 'image' of the body, then we may say that the Epimethean side prevails; in turn, the Promethean side prevails when the human being concentrates on the 'image' of soul or nous (Περὶ ὀργάνων καὶ καμίνων γνήσια ὑπομνήματα περὶ τοῦ ω στοιχείου, 231, ed. Berthelot & Ruelle). A similar idea seems to be guiding Plotinus' narrative here, although the roles of the characters are in a sense reversed.

which is apparently a virtue that Prometheus does not possess in this context.

How are we to understand Plotinus' choices in the presentation and interpretation of this myth? At a first level, these choices are evidently guided by an attempt to refine or condense the structure of the myth, as if Plotinus was engaged in a structuralistic presentation of the myth of Pandora. We may note, for instance, the removal of any additional characters that might have unnecessarily complicated the dramatic plot (e.g., the disappearance of Hephaestus', merely auxiliary, role), or Plotinus' disregard for the particular details of any single mythological narrative, in a concentrated effort to draw attention only to those elements of the story which reveal the basic structure of the metaphorical logic underlying the myth (e.g., the uncertainty over the exact content of Epimetheus' act; in all versions of the myth, Epimetheus is regarded as doing the opposite to Prometheus and this is the main point of his action). In sum, the significance of the elements that are retained or added against the background of the possibilities offered by the mythological tradition should be appreciated in relation to Plotinus' intention to deliver an account that would make as visible as possible the meaning embedded in the myth. Further, by limiting the myth to its bare essentials, and by playing down the dramatic effect which rests on the details of the characters' actions, Plotinus is aiming apparently at the construction of a very clear analogy between Pandora and the world (in a

number of relevant respects: their manner of creation; the nature of the forces that brought them about; their own nature, qualities, and life). This expository analogy is intended to illustrate in a metaphorical way the nature of the world, or, one would be tempted to say, the meaning of the world, since what is at stake here is primarily the affective value of the sensible world for human beings, and not any fact or theory concerning its constitution. In the way in which "the man who has understood them [the myths] puts together (συναιρεῖν) that which they have separated",[16] it would seem provisionally that the meaning of the myth of Pandora is precisely the meaning of the world, if by this term we understand the ambivalent status of this world in the eyes of the mortal beings that inhabit it and are in turns dazzled by its beauty and dismayed by its cruelty or vanity.

Therefore, Plotinus' treatment of the myth of Pandora, which is characteristic of his general attitude towards myths, harmonises with the overall Platonic view that one should not concentrate on the dramatic or narrative details of a mythical narrative, but should attempt to understand what the myth means.[17] This approach toward myths, aiming at the recognition of the truths illustrated by them, and not at the reconciliation of every possible detail in the context of complex or contradictory versions of one particular myth, does not necessarily indicate how "little seriously he took this sort of thing", or "how little real

16 III.5.9.27-9; cf. also Chapter 2 where this passage in discussed in detail.
17 See, for example, Phaedrus, 275b-c.

importance Plotinus attached to the interpretation of myths"; on the contrary it suggests a certain intellectual respect with regard to myths, their relevance, and their interpretation.[18] For one thing, to state the obvious, if Plotinus did not attribute much significance to the interpretation of myths, he would not be alluding to them as often as he does in his work. Most importantly, however, he would not have been as careful as he is in re-constructing them in such a way that they would appear philosophically intelligible and coherent, going sometimes to the lengths indicated in the present cases by his treatment of Epimetheus, which contradicts all the other ancient sources.[19]

On the other hand, Plotinus' interpretative decisions should be also appreciated in the context of a number of typical remarks that accompany his presentation of mythical material, remarks like the following: "it is reasonable that the myth has this hidden meaning (οἷον εἰκὸς καὶ τὸν μῦθον αἰνίττεσθαι)" (line 5); "these matters are however one wishes to think of them (ταῦτα μὲν οὖν ὅπῃ τις δοξάζει)" (line 17); "some story somewhere, I think (δοκῶ μοι), said riddlingly" (I.6.8.10-1; cf. 19).

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18 Armstrong ad loc, 14, n.1, and n.4 in III.5.8, in relation to the myth of Aphrodite's birth. Regardless of the extent to which Plotinus' interpretations seem relevant or successful today, after psychoanalysis and structuralism, one has to recognise the similarity between Plotinus' efforts to reduce any given myth to its bare and significant essentials and the corresponding efforts of any serious mythical hermeneutics. In theoretical contexts, reduction of complexity is an index of intellectual respect towards mythical material (things are of course different in the case of the literary exploitation of mythical material).

19 As Armstrong remarks in relation to the passage from III.5.8 quoted earlier, "Plotinus is prepared to apply this penetrating observation of the closeness of metaphysical and mythical discourses (λόγοι and μῦθοι) to each other to his own metaphysical discussions" (n.1).

All these remarks indicate that although Plotinus offers an interpretation which aims at displaying the 'hidden' meaning of the myth, he is fully aware (and also wants to draw our attention to it) that his interpretation (however plausible or personally satisfying to him) is only one of the many possible ways in which the same result could be achieved and this meaning made visible. The puzzles or ambiguities associated with myths do not concern solely the difficulty in identifying their disguised meaning, but inevitably reflect also the fact that myths may receive various, and in many cases contradictory, interpretations. In this sense, with his remark that "ταῦτα μὲν οὖν ὅπῃ τις δοξάζει", Plotinus warns the readers that one should treat myths as conveying indisputable proof neither for the truth of their content nor for the content of their truth, but as containing a truth which is open to several interpretations. Consequently, Plotinus makes clear that he does not intend to articulate a single correct interpretation of a myth, one that would invite exegetical arguments on the correctness of the interpretation or dogmatic arguments on the correctness of the content of the myth. Rather, by identifying the limitations entailed by an interpretation of a myth, he recognises that all interpretations are subjective and admit revision or further qualification. Even if such an attitude towards myths entails that every possible interpretation would be in some provisional sense equally justified, it may still be the case that some interpretations might be better than others. However, the important point is that in order to

decide which of these interpretations is better, one should avoid thinking that myths contain a single, objective truth, which this or that interpretation may indisputably establish. Instead, to the extent that we may understand a myth in many different ways, an interpretation should be evaluated in terms of the insight it allows into the situations that guide this particular interpretation of the myth. Having argued this, one should be cautious not to attribute to Plotinus the view that images in general are of no intrinsic value. On the contrary, it is quite obvious that Plotinus does admit that there is meaning or truth in myths or images, which makes them much more than 'illusory' misconceptions of the reality they intend to represent.[20]

In this sense, Plotinus' remarks concerning the limitations or merits of his interpretation require particular attention, as they seem to underline the significance of introducing a mythological account in a philosophical context from a specific, well-defined point of view. In this particular case, this point of view is established by three principal factors. First, by a certain hypothesis concerning the facts, so to speak, that should guide our attempt to interpret the myth (indicated in the text by the statement "τούτων δὴ γινομένων", line 1); second, by a concentrated interest in the meaning of the myth (the exisyence of which is postulated; "αἰνίττεσθαι", line 5; "σημαίνει", line 12; "ἐμφαίνει", line 17); and third, by the explicit concern to achieve a certain accordance of that

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20 For a discussion on this issue, see Ernst Cassirer, Language and Myth.

meaning with the circumstances of the particular situation in which the myth is invoked ("προσέδει τοῖς λεγομένοις", lines 18-9). Plotinus is reshaping and interpreting the myth of Pandora in a 'personal' way that has probably failed our notice or may seem idiosyncratic to us; the insight we gain from this reshaping does not concern primarily the actual content of the myth, but has an exemplary dimension related to the way in which we (a philosopher or a human being in general) should view or appreciate particular myths. In other words, the insight we gain is that "the profound truths that myths express in a symbolic form"[21] are always available to a particular here and now, and communicated through subjective interpretations that involve, and to a certain extent display, the specific point of view from which they were made.

This point can be formulated in more general terms. A myth is a literary image belonging to a wider group of 'images', either in the literary sense, in which metaphors, similes, or examples are verbal 'images', or in the metaphysical sense, in which the world is an image of the soul, or the soul an image of the Intellect.[22] In a Plotinian context, these 'images' are differentiated from their originals on the basis of the structural complexity or multiplicity that characterises them qua images and functions as an index of their 'distance' from these originals. Given this complexity, images may be 'like' the truths or logoi that they contain, but

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21 Armstrong ad loc, 14, n.1.

22 A unified understanding of 'images' is particularly relevant also in the case of understanding the function of rhetorical or literary 'images' within the Platonic context. See, Pender, Images of Persons Unseen, especially Chapter 2.

their interpretations, or, in the case of myths, their meaning in a particular context and for a particular human being, cannot be like these truths in all possible respects: each interpretation is only one expression which makes 'truth' appear from a certain perspective. As Plotinus remarks elsewhere, intelligible realities or everlasting pure truths and the images that depict them cannot be completely identified, since the subject approaching them is a human being:

> "the likeness would keep in conformity with the reality (σώζει δὲ τὸ ἀνάλογον ἡ εἰκών), if it was not a mortal who encountered [it] (εἰ μὴ ἄνθρωπος εἴη ὁ ἐπιστὰς)" (VI.7.35.16-7).

In this sense, the presence of myths in the Plotinian context can be considered as a concrete expression of a general philosophical principle. This principle would amount to the assertion that the recognition or the identification of the 'intelligible' element within the complexity that characterises the sensible world or the human life cannot take place outside a context of multiple, partial, or even contradictory interpretations, in so far as the meaning 'immanent' in human life (in contrast to whatever may be available through a process of 'non-wordly' contemplation) cannot be understood simply, directly, and univocally in the circumstances of ontological complexity that characterise both the subject and the object of such an attempt.[23] Consider, for example, the

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23 For a discussion on the notion that the one objective truth (if there is any) is essentially incomprehensible to human beings, and that human beings can only have partial (and thus often incompatible), correspondent 'images' or glimpses of this truth, see Clark, From Athens to Jerusalem , Chapter 9. As Clark notes, it is part of the

case of the beauty of the sensible world. This beauty can be actually experienced only in particular circumstances (say, in this or that landscape) and can be generally described or accounted for only with the help of particular images (say, by the gifts given to Pandora by Aphrodite or the Graces). Obviously, Plotinus thinks that another (intellectual and much simpler) experience of beauty is possible, but, equally obviously, this would be neither an experience of the beauty of this world, nor an experience of the presence of the intelligible element within this world. Plotinus' treatment of myths points to the fact that, although our point of view is limited and this limitation is part of our human condition qua souls, there is always the possibility of a 'translation' or an 'interpretation' (to recall the analysis of Chapter 3) with the help of which the universal and simple 'truths' could be approached and understood through their particular and complex 'images'.

After these general remarks, let us return to the myth of Pandora. In its Plotinian version, the structure of this myth is determined by two equally important relations or bonds established between two pairs of mythological characters. The first pair to which Plotinus draws attention is Prometheus and Pandora. To the extent that Prometheus is explicitly presented as the creator of Pandora, he assumes the role of the creative force assigned in Plotinus' cosmogony to the cosmic soul. Likewise, Pandora may be understood as a symbol of the world inhabited by

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human condition to "believe both that every perspective is as good as every other, and that some perspectives are indubitably better" (182).

mankind or any particular human being, displaying by her overwhelming appearance the splendour and order (φῶτα, κόσμους) of the sensible world. Nevertheless, Pandora's beauty, when compared to the beauty of the divine realities that contributed to her creation, is in some sense inferior (Pandora is 'like' the gods: θεαῖς δ' ὁμοίαν τὸ εἶδος, not identical with them). The creator-creature relationship presented here involves the two opposite yet necessary sides identified in our discussion of the relation between the cosmic soul and its creation (see esp. Ch.2). On the one hand, Prometheus is the person or acting force which brings into existence a beautiful being, and in this sense, the bond between them should be understood as having positive value: in the sense that, say, "it was not lawful (θεμιτὸν) for that which borders on soul (γειτονοῦν τι) to be without its share in the formative principle (λόγου ἄμοιρον εἶναι), as far as that was capable of receiving it (ἐδέχετο)" (IV.3.9.27-8). On the other hand, in so far as the act of the creator or the existence of the creature bring about a series of undesirable consequences, either for the creator,[24] or for the creature,[25] their bond consists in "an addition (προσθήκη) which takes place in the process of coming to be (ἐν τῇ

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24 This after all is the 'fall' of the soul: "when we understand the cause of the fall (πτώματος) of the soul more clearly, and as it ought (προσήκει) to be understood, what we are looking for, the soul's weakness (ἀσθένεια), will be obvious (καταφανὲς)" (I.8.14.44-5).

25 Pandora is of a human nature, which involves compositeness and mortality: although human beings occupy on earth a "place which is better than that of other living things (μοῖραν ἔχει τῶν ἄλλων ζῴων ὅσα ἐπὶ γῆς βελτόνα)", overall they "are not the best of living creatures (ζῷον οὐκ ἄριστον)" (III.2.9.20- 30).

γενέσει)" (I.1.12.20),[26] and exhibits thus a negative aspect.

The second pair consists of the two brothers, Prometheus and Epimetheus, who relate to each other as two opposing forces interacting in a way that seems to form an inseparable unit. To the extent that Prometheus and Epimetheus are mythologically related to the origin of mankind and are responsible for the qualities, powers, and limitations of human nature, the two counter-forces that they personify remain present and co-existent within the human beings and their world. The fore-thinker (at least in the context of the distinctive Plotinian notion of natural creativity that we have explored at length) creates with no intention, planning, or consideration: 'providence' and 'care' for what is being created are to be attributed to necessity rather than the deliberate intentions of Prometheus (see n.9). At any rate, "if everything was providence and nothing but providence then providence would not exist (πάντα δὲ οὔσης προνοίας καὶ μόνης αὐτῆς οὐδ' ἂν εἴη)" because it would have nothing to provide for (τίνος γὰρ ἂν ἔτι εἴη) (III.2.9.2-3). Consequently, Pandora is not only the outcome of Prometheus' creative activity, but also a condition for him to be what his name represents, namely 'providence'. Like any soul, Prometheus is also essentially unable to foresee the consequences of his actions and acts out of a spontaneous impulse similar to the one described in the following passage:

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26 Cf. Here, IV.7.10.11-2.

> The souls go neither willingly (ἑκοῦσαι) nor because they are sent (πεμφθεῖσαι), nor is the voluntary element in their going like deliberate choice (ἑκούσιον), but like a natural spontaneous jumping (τὸ πηδᾶν κατὰ φύσιν) or a passionate natural desire of sexual union (πρὸς γάμων φυσικὰς προθυμίας) or as some men are moved unreasonably (οὐ λογισμῷ κινουμένοι) to noble deeds. (III.1.3.17-20)

And it is precisely because of this that Prometheus will be punished in the end, in some sense at least: "although everything which goes to the worse does so unwillingly, since it goes by its own motion it is said to be punished for what is did (τὴν ἐφ' οἷς ἔπραξε δίκην)" (IV.8.5.7-10).

On the other hand, the after-thinker, that is, the spectator who is faced with the outcome of the process of creation, becomes 'wiser' in so far as he obtains knowledge which seems to involve consideration and speculation, and which has to come after the creation is complete. In this sense, the two brothers symbolise the internal division of soul itself between the upper and lower part, or between the movement of soul downwards and upwards. The movement from the upper to the lower part is the 'Promethean' side of the soul, from the point of which creation is a spontaneous longing, "a birth pang (ὠδῖνα) of desire (προθυμίαν) to come there where the law within them as it were calls them to come" (IV.3.13.31-2), which marks soul's departure from (or denial of) the intelligible life. The opposite movement represents the 'Epimethean' side of the soul, the contemplative side, from which creation appears as a fall and the world as the point of departure for soul's ascent. This ascent,

which takes the form of a unification or restoration of the disturbed unity of the soul, may be accomplished first, through the realisation that the descent of the soul is a manifestation of the way (ὃν τρόπον) in which the soul "cares for all that is soulless (ψυχὴ παντὸς επιμελεῖται ἡ ὅλη τοῦ ἀψύχου)" (II.9.18.39-40); second, through concentrated awareness and knowledge of the superiority of the intelligible life to the life of the senses (τὴν τοῦ ἐν νοητῷ μᾶλλον αἵρεσιν ἀμείνω εἶναι). In this sense, the Epimethean side expresses a certain denial or rejection of the physical world (ἀποποιούμενος).

These two relationships weave the dramatic fabric in which we may search for the meaning of the myth, or the meaning of the world as presented by this myth. What brings them together, by literally circulating between them and every other character mentioned or implied in the myth, and thus constitutes the focal point of the narrative, is Pandora, characterised by her multiple and complex associations with the notions of giving and gift. In this sense, Plotinus' conclusion that the story "clarifies the things that pertain to the giving of (or to) the world in its order (ἐμφαίνει τὰ τῆς εἰς τὸν κόσμον δόσεως)" (17-8) is fully justified; conversely, the distinctive insight that the myth offers with regard to the nature or the origin of the world lies precisely in its injunction to view it as a gift. Like Pandora, the world is something which has emerged through multiple acts of 'giving', donations of qualities and virtues apart

from which it has no other existence;[27] moreover, it was created not as an object to be possessed, but with the expressed aim to be also offered as a gift, and hence become an object of acceptance or rejection.

At this point, it may be helpful to recall again, as we did in Chapter 2, Aristotle's analysis of tragedy in the Poetics. If we consider everything we have said so far about the myth of Pandora in this perspective, it would seem that the myth defines a set of 'complications' that correspond to a particular situation of the kind that in a tragedy is usually established before the stage action begins. In other words, the existence and actions of Prometheus, Epimetheus, and Pandora, the bonds established between them in the circumstances of the creation of the world, determine a complex situation in which various possibilities are available and can be subsequently pursued. From this point of view, what seems to be missing from Plotinus' narrative, if the myth is to turn into a drama, is the most important element of all: the acting agent, the person whose passage from 'adventure' (περιπέτεια) to 'recognition' (ἀναγνώρισις) will lead to the desired clarification of the entire situation. What is now required, that is, is a 'denouement' (λύσις) of the already existent 'complication' (δέσις), and the hero who will undertake it. This

[27] The world is a composite of form and matter; with respect to its materiality, it lives "a borrowed" life (ἐπακτῷ ζωῇ) in comparison to its "provider" (χορηγοῦσα) soul (or the Intelligibles), which "has a life of its own" (παρ' ἑαυτῆς ἔχουσα) (IV.7.9.6-10); cf. IV.8.6.20-3.

requirement is clearly expressed in Chapter 14, and even the vocabulary employed by Plotinus is quite similar to that of Aristotle. Plotinus writes:

> And the creator is bound (δέδεται δὲ καὶ αὐτὸς ὁ ποιήσας) in the sense that he is in contact (ἐφάπτεται) with that which was made by him, and this type of bond comes from the outside (καὶ τοιοῦτος ὁ δεσμὸς ἔξωθεν). And the solution (λύσις) given by Heracles means that he has the power to have also been released in this way (ὅτι δύναμις ἐστιν αὐτῷ ὥστε καὶ ὧς λελύσθαι) (13-17).

This sudden introduction of Heracles at the very end of Plotinus' narrative (which apparently relates to another aspect of the mythical background, namely the liberation of Prometheus by Heracles) turns the simplified myth into a simplified drama at least in a single but very important respect. From the original domain of the divine creation of the world, we are suddenly transported into a human (or, at least, heroic) domain, since it is Heracles, a human hero, who will undertake the solution of the ties created by the Titan (or rather the gods in general, if we take "ποιήσας" as referring collectively to all the gods who endowed Pandora with her gifts). In this sense, the dramatic attention shifts now to Heracles and his actions, and the reader experiences a corresponding shift in the perspective through which the problem may be viewed and the world appreciated. The issues associated with the 'giving of the world' are posed now from within the perspective of the human hero, defined by the context of his life and action, a particular and limited perspective with which an individual human being may identify.

The first thing to note about the passage quoted above is the

difference between the nature of the ties binding creator with creature and the provenance of the power responsible for their solution. While the bond is external, coming from the outside (ἔξωθεν), the solution is effected by a power that lies within Heracles (αὐτῷ). From the point of view of the Poetics, this is not a paradox. The constituent elements of a play have to display a certain necessity in the articulation of the initial hamartia that will maximise the effect of the unexpected result (μεταβολή) contained in the action itself; in this sense, they have to be conceived as lying 'outside' the play and the power of its characters.[28] Although Heracles is a hero, he is nevertheless a human individual like us, and the content of the 'play' reflects his human condition and the possibilities of action inherent in it.[29] What is expected from the hero is not to change the way things are when viewed from an external or universal point of view ('that which has already happened' when the original bond between Prometheus/Epimetheus and Pandora was established and this world came into existence), but to change the circumstances of his own life and fortune, or even merely to understand them in a deeper way. A change in the course of events that brought about the world would mean presumably that the world would cease to exist, or that a better world could be created. Apart from the fact that these options are beyond the power of an individual, Plotinus would have

[28] For a discussion on this issue, see Halliwell, Aristotle's Poetics, esp. Chapter 7 and the very enlightening study of the Poetics by S. Ramphos, Μίμησις ἐναντίον μορφῆς, esp. Chapter 18.

[29] Cf. Poetics 50a16-39.

philosophical problems with them: for him, the world comes about by necessity, and is the best possible world.[30]

Although the capacities of Heracles are limited, his particular choices and his actions, the attitude or attention that he will exhibit towards the puzzle he is faced with, will obviously make all the difference. The hero may not be able to change the way the world is, but he may still change the way the world is for him, or his orientation within it. Moreover, we should note that the dilemma with which Heracles is faced, like puzzles faced by a hero of a tragedy, is a dilemma that involves his very being and nature. Externally, Heracles is being presented with the gift of the world and is called to resolve the issue of its acceptance or rejection; internally, Heracles is a part of this world (or, in the terms of our narrative, he is part of the 'bond' which he has to resolve). He thus faces a difficult issue, which may be formulated here with the help of a question raised by J. Derrida in another, but not altogether different, context: "Why exactly would one desire the gift and why desire to interrupt the circulation of the circle? Why wish to get out of it? Why wish to get through it?"[31]

To follow our desires, and accept the gift, would hold us back from the best and most penetrating view we could have of the world and of

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[30] See, for example, V.8.7.39-40; III.2.3.4-5

[31] J. Derrida, Given Time: I. Counterfeit Money, 8.

ourselves.[32] On the other hand, to reject the gift, to set ourselves free in order to get through the circle and reach the other side, entails that Heracles, or a human being, should denounce completely the sensible world in the attempt to gain an experience of the intelligible reality. Yet, this is clearly not the possibility that Plotinus is trying to elucidate here. For one thing, Heracles is a hero and not a sage; he is "an active (πρακτικὸς) and not a contemplative person (θεωρητικὸς)" (I.1.12.37), and heroes are human beings who are "moved unreasonably to noble deeds (πράξεις τινὲς καλῶν οὐ λογισμῷ κινουμένοι)" (IV.3.13.20). Although knowledge and reasoning are necessary elements of the ascent towards the intelligible realities that determine all being, they are nevertheless not enough. As Plotinus notes:

> We are taught about it by comparisons (ἀναλογίαι) and negations (ἀφαιρέσεις) and knowledge (γνώσεις) of the things which come form it and certain methods of ascent by degrees (ἀναβασμοί τινες), but we are put on the way to it by purifications (καθάρσεις) and virtues (ἀρεταὶ) and adornings (κοσμήσεις) and by gaining footholds (ἐπιβάσεις) in the intelligible and settling ourselves firmly there (ἱδρύσεις) and feasting its contents (ἑστιάσεις) (VI.7.36.6-10).

Heracles is a composite and 'divided' being: although a part of him

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[32] This desire, however, is indeed strong and part of its nature: "For to things without soul the gift of the good (δόσις τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ) comes from another, but for that which has soul it is the desire (ἔφεσις) which brings about the pursuit (δίωξιν), just as when bodies have become corpses they are tended and prepared (ἐπιμέλεια καὶ ἡ κήδευσις) for burial by the living, but the living take thought for themselves (παρ'αὑτῶν ἡ πρόνοια)" (VI.7.26.7-12). Also, as Plotinus notes in I.8.: "But because of the power and nature of good, evil is not only evil; since it must necessarily appear, it is bound in a sort of beautiful fetters (δεσμοῖς τισι καλοῖς), as some prisoners are in chains of gold (οἷα δεσμῶταί τινες χρυσῷ), and hidden by them, so that it may not appear in its charmlessness to the gods, and men may be able not always to look at evil, but even when they do look at it, may be in company with images of beauty (εἰδώλοις τοῦ καλοῦ) to remind them" (23-8).

is 'above' in the intelligible realm, another part is here below, within his body. Thus, although his deeds place him in the rank of the best human beings, he is only a semi-god in comparison to the pure intelligible beings. Referring to the incident of Heracles' visit in Hades, recorded in the Odyssey (11.601-2), Plotinus writes:

> The poet seems to be separating (χωρίζειν) the image with regard to Heracles when he says that his shade is in Hades and that he himself among the gods. He was bound to keep with both stories, that he is in Hades and that he dwells among the gods, so he divided him (ἐμέρισεν). But perhaps this is the most plausible explanation of the story (τάχα δ'ἂν οὕτω πιθανὸς ὁ λόγος εἴη): because Heracles had this active virtue (πρακτικὴν ἀρετὴν) and in view of his noble character (ἀξιωθεὶς διὰ καλοκἀγαθίαν) was deemed worthy to be called a god - because he was an active and not a contemplative person (in which case he would have been altogether in that intelligible world), he is above, but there is a part of him below (ἵνα ἂν ὅλος ἐκεῖ ἄνω τέ ἐστί τι αὐτοῦ καὶ κάτω) (I. 1. 12. 31-9).

During his earthly life, Heracles will have to oscillate between his phenomenal self, the image which "dwells in Hades" (εἴδωλον ἐν Ἄιδου) and which "remembers all that it did in his life (μνημονεύειν πάντων κατὰ τὸν βίον)", and his real self, the "Heracles without the shade (Ἡρακλῆς αὐτὸς ὁ ἄνευ τοῦ εἰδώλου)" which "thinks these of little account and has migrated to a holier place, and has been stronger than Heracles in the context in which the wise compete (ὁ δὲ καὶ ταῦτα σμικρὰ ἡγούμενος καὶ μετατεθεῖς εἰς ἁγιώτερον τόπον καὶ ὑπὲρ τὸν Ἡρακλέα ἰσχύσας τοῖς ἄθλοις, οἷα ἀθλεύουσι σοφοί)".[33] This internal movement from one self to the other

[33] The quotations come from IV.3.27.7;8-9;12-3 and 32.24-7. For a brief discussion of Heracles in the context of Plotinus views about the soul and its division between real

is determined by the object of his attention in each case. To recall here the discussion of the myth of Dionysus in the previous chapter, if one concentrates at the image formed in the mirror, one moves further away; when the attention is directed, so to speak, backwards, one ascends and re-unites with one's origin and real self.

Human beings aspiring to achieve the excellency of Heracles have to give their own solution to the 'bond' (λύσιν τῶν δεσμῶν), and travel for themselves the soul's journey to the intelligible (πρὸς τὴν νοητὸν πορείαν)" (IV.8.1.35-36). No matter how limited their lives and abilities may be, this is still possible, and in fact this is the only way in which, according to Plotinus, the fragmented unity of the world and ourselves may be restored:

> But it is not lawful for those who have become wicked (κακοὺς) to demand others to be their saviours (αὐτῶν σωτῆρας) and to sacrifice themselves (τοὺς ἑαυτοὺς προεμένους) in answer to their prayers, nor furthermore, to require gods to direct their affairs in detail, laying aside their own life, or, for that matter, good men (ἄνδρας τοὺς ἀγαθούς), who live another life better than human rule, to be their rulers (ἄρχοντας) ... more people would have become good if they have made the good their leaders (προστάτας) (III.2.9.10-19).

However, the answer to our problem, the breaking of the bondage, does not consist in the denouncement of the world from a distance. While we live in a body we should care about it and about our life within it; "we must stay in our houses" and should not "revile the structure and

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and imaginary self, see O'Daly, Plotinus' Philosophy of the Self, 26-28. The reader interested in the role of Heracles in neoplatonic contexts may refer to Pépin, "Héraclès et son reflet dans le Néoplatonism".

the builder", or "pretend that we are discontented with the house while having a secret affection for the beauty of the stones" (II.9.18.5-17). On the contrary we should admire "what is within because of the varied splendour of the outside and admire what the doer is because it does these fine things" (IV.8.5.36-8).

Leaving Heracles and the other members of the mythological cast of Chapter 14 behind, let us concentrate on the content of the life and action that Plotinus envisages for human beings. If, as Plotinus insists, "the other soul by which we are mostly ourselves, does not determine our being but our well-being" (ἡ γὰρ ἄλλη ψυχή, καθ' ἣν ἡμεῖς, τοῦ εὖ εἶναι, οὐ τοῦ εἶναι αἰτία; II.1.5.20-21), then a discussion of the origin and nature of the world has to be conducted in such a way as to provide human beings with a persuasive account of the manner in which they may acquire a good life. To use here a familiar comparison, we are all actors in the cosmic drama (cf. III.2.15.22-3), and the hamartia is already there:

> although the gifts of the individual heavenly bodies are not evil, something else comes about in their mixture and the life of the universe does not serve the purposes of each individual but of the whole, and the underlying nature receives one thing but experiences another, and is unable to master what is given (μηδὲ δύνασθαι κρατῆσε τοῦ δοθέντος) (IV.4.39.28-32).

However, the real sin of the soul, that which would make the view of the intelligible element remote or inaccessible, would be to preoccupy ourselves constantly with mundane things and be unable to take a distance from the deceitful external reality in order to turn to that which

lies within (cf. IV.8.4.13-22). It is a fact that in the duration of our lives our attention is drawn to the accomplishment of certain aims; we have many, even contradictory, roles to perform, and many demands to meet: we are part of a society, a family, a working environment. At times we may be creative or inventive or more 'alive'. At other times, however, we despair, we experience injustice or adverse circumstances, we betray our own values and expectations, and eventually, of course, we die. To provide a unifying account of ourselves is rarely possible; most often we experience confusion about our identity, our purposes in life, or even our accomplishments.

An essential dimension of the solution to the problems we are faced with is the awareness of the very nature of our condition. Human beings should not "pass their lives asleep (ζῆν κοιμωμένους) (III.2.9.24)", but should participate in the giving and taking of the world by being aware of the time and of the things they will have to let go:

> But for the good man his acts of taking (λήψεις) and giving (δόσεις) and his transferences (μεταθέσεις) are different, since [all things] are transferred by pulls of nature as if they were drawn by lines. ... the bad man (φαῦλος) understands nothing of it, but is taken without knowing (ἄγεται δὲ οὐκ εἰδὼς) it to the place in the All to which he is destined to be carried; but the good man both knows and departs where he must, and knows before he departs where it is necessary for him to come and dwell (ἀγαθὸς οἶδε, καὶ ο δεῖ ἀπεισι καὶ γιγνώσκει πρὶν ἀπιέναι ο ἀνάγκη αὐτῷ ἐλθόντι οἰκεῖν), and has the good hope (εὔελπις ἐστιν) that he will be with the gods (IV.4.45.24-33).

This awareness will eventually lead to a reconciliation: the human being accepts the fact of having to live within a world of contradictions,

while managing through action, purification, and contemplation, to hold a view of both the divine and everlasting beauty of the 'heaven' and of the beauty of the humblest little thing. In this sense, where the solution comes, is where the action begins:

> There will be time, there will be time
> To prepare a face to meet the faces that you meet;
> There will be time to murder and create,
> And time for all the works and days of hands
> That lift and drop a question on your plate;
> Time for you and time for me,
> And time yet for a hundred indecisions
> And for a hundred visions and revisions
> Before the taking of toast and tea.[34]

[34] T.S. Eliot, "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock".

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