

ARISTOTLE AND PLOTINUS ON BEING AND UNITY

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## **DEDICATION**

*For my parents, who taught me, and continue to teach me about kindness, decency, hard work, and respect. Without their support I could not have done this. Without their love it means nothing.*



## ABSTRACT

This dissertation discusses how being and unity are related in the metaphysical systems of Aristotle and Plotinus. I suggest that Aristotle's metaphysical position contrasts with what I call the Platonic metaphysical hierarchy, a general trend in Platonism to place being in a dependent relationship to unity, and particular things in a dependent relationship to being. Aristotle, by contrast, sees being and unity as dependent on particulars. Understanding Aristotle against the backdrop of the Platonic metaphysical hierarchy is of some assistance in understanding his critique of Plato, and his own position in the *Metaphysics* regarding substance, cosmology and first principles. Aristotle's Unmoved Mover is substance *par excellence*, and stands as an exemplary cause for the First Moved Mover, guaranteeing the motion necessary for the generation of other particulars, but it does not provide them with being and unity. This is because being and unity are dependent on, and logically posterior to, particulars. I also examine some of the difficulties in Aristotle's system which Plotinus takes up in the *Enneads*. Plotinus, in trying to remain true to his understanding Platonism, rejects Aristotelianism, and posits instead, a revised version of the Platonic metaphysical hierarchy. In addition to examining Plotinus' critique of Aristotle, I examine some of Plotinus' other influences. These include Parmenides, Plato, Albinus and Numenius, in order to provide some grounding in understanding Plotinus' own philosophy. I conclude with an examination of Plotinus' metaphysics that shows its consistency with the general direction of Platonism, if in a different, hypostatic system. Plotinus' first principle, the One, is a synergy of negative and positive theology, grounded in the belief that being and thinking are extensionally the same in his second principle, Nous. That being and thinking are multiple necessitates the positing of a principle of unity which is "ἐπικείνᾳ τῆς οὐσίας," (beyond being) a phrase which Plotinus takes over from Plato's *Republic* in the service of his own philosophy.

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**PART I - ARISTOTLE**

## CHAPTER I - The Platonic Metaphysical Hierarchy

### 1. *Introduction*

In this first chapter, I want to look at some of the comments Aristotle makes in his criticism of Plato, primarily in Book A of the *Metaphysics*, but also in N. I will attempt first to identify and explain what I call the "Platonic metaphysical hierarchy" that conceptual scheme which Aristotle seems to attribute to the Platonists.<sup>1</sup> This "metaphysical hierarchy" places being in a dependent relation to unity, and particulars in a dependent relation to being. From there I identify three main concerns: 1) first principles (the order of the kosmos), 2) metaphysics (being and the unity of

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<sup>1</sup>Given the cumbersome nature of the investigation, it is more efficient for my purposes to refer to the object of Aristotle's critique as "Platonism," instead of distinguishing between Plato and the Platonists. Aristotle does make distinctions between the two; he talks about an "original theory of forms," meaning presumably Plato, and he refers to Speusippus and Xenocrates, and "the Platonists." Since I am dealing with conceptual schemes, the distinctions are (for the most part) less important than they might otherwise be. To my mind, Aristotle's conceptual scheme is incommensurate with all of these people or positions, and all of these people or positions are, to a greater or lesser degree thinking in terms of the Platonic metaphysical hierarchy.

particulars) and 3) physics (motion and change). These concerns are significant for my project of identifying Aristotle's own metaphysical scheme, which I call loosely "convertibility." In Aristotle's scheme, being and unity are on equal metaphysical footing (i.e. they do not stand in a hierarchical relation to one another), and both stand in a dependent relationship to particulars.

Of the three concerns which I identify, the first deals directly with the implications of the Platonic metaphysical hierarchy, and the second two deal with the separation ( $\chi\omega\rho\iota\sigma\mu\omicron\varsigma$ )<sup>1</sup> that the Platonic metaphysical hierarchy involves, and the necessity of participation ( $\mu\epsilon\theta\epsilon\chi\iota\varsigma$ ) as a way of "connecting" what has been "separated". Participation raises ontological concerns for concrete particulars, and further concerns with regard to motion and change. The way Aristotle frames all three of these concerns (first principles, metaphysics and physics) points to his conception of substance as an antidote. My contention is that the Platonic metaphysical

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<sup>1</sup>Given the analysis of the Platonic metaphysical hierarchy which follows, by separation I mean the separation of being and unity and the separation of Forms and particulars.

hierarchy appears to avoid the position that Parmenides is thought to hold, namely that all things are one. This metaphysical conception of 'all things being one,' I refer to throughout the thesis as "Parmenideanism".<sup>1</sup> Because Aristotle does not accept the Platonic metaphysical hierarchy, and in fact thinks that it does not fully escape Parmenideanism, the challenge of his doctrine of substance will be to avoid both the Platonic metaphysical hierarchy, and Parmenideanism. My primary aim in this chapter is to see how the concerns over the Platonic metaphysical hierarchy set, or at least conform to the agenda that Aristotle must follow if he is to

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<sup>1</sup>What I think Parmenides is actually saying in his poem "On Nature" is a little more complicated. I think that Parmenides is suggesting that in order to understand the unity of the cosmos, we must not think of particular things, nor can we give an inventory of particular things and account for the totality of the cosmos. In other words, I think Parmenides is asserting an epistemic claim about the unity of the cosmos, while not denying that there are many things, or motion or change. I believe that those who came after him (Plato, Aristotle) thought that this was an impossible conceptual scheme; what is unitary epistemically ought to be unitary in reality. My understanding of Parmenides, is somewhat peripheral to my concerns here. When I refer to Parmenideanism in this thesis, I simply mean a conceptual scheme in which "all things are one." This may be a gross misrepresentation or misunderstanding of what the Eleatic was attempting to say, but in so far as Aristotle treats him that way, it is a useful way to refer to the conceptual scheme.

reject what he presents as a core belief of Platonism,<sup>1</sup> namely a metaphysical hierarchy where unity is prior to being and being is prior to particulars.

## 2. *The Hierarchy*

When we examine Aristotle's critique of Platonism, it often seems cryptic or unusual. This may be due, in part, to variant interpretations of Plato's more obscure later dialogues, or to the so-called "unwritten doctrines" of Plato. A common claim is that Aristotle imposes his own notion of substance upon the Platonic theory of Forms, and then shows why this is inconsistent.<sup>2</sup> I do not attempt to address to any great degree whether Aristotle is just to the Platonists in his account, nor whether his criticisms of the Platonists are just. As I see it, Aristotle saw the world a particular way, a way that was moulded in part by his exposure to Platonic philosophy, but which took on a life of its own

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<sup>1</sup>. This rejection of the Platonic metaphysical hierarchy is, I believe, a constant that runs through Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, and hence it is of great importance in deciding upon Aristotle's understanding of forms, universals and substances throughout the patchwork of arguments that make up the *Metaphysics*.

<sup>2</sup>i.e., one of Cherniss' main themes.



in terms of his own conceptual scheme. Aristotle had a particular understanding of the Platonists that he cast in terms of the way he saw the world, and tried to show how certain Platonic positions were inconsistent with his own perspective. Aristotle may appear unjust or unfair in some of the execution of this task, but in so far as we too unavoidably cast the positions of other philosophers in our own terms to varying degrees, we all follow this procedure. It is enough for my purposes that Aristotle is willing to maintain that he is putting forth an interpretation of Platonism. It is not merely for eristic motives that Aristotle formulates Platonism philosophy in the way that he does; I believe an important aspect of his critique is that he chooses to cast this school in a certain light regarding the relation of being and unity. Further, it is significant that when we examine the philosophy of Plotinus, he appears to accept, and attempts to revise, the Platonic metaphysical hierarchy that Aristotle rejects.

Many of Aristotle's complaints about Platonism surround the issue of Platonic Forms, their separation<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Within the metaphysics of Plato, there are many reasons  
(continued...)

from sensible particulars, and the participation of sensible particulars in Forms. My thinking is that many of these complaints can best be understood in terms of what I shall attempt to explain in this section. It is something which finds expression in several places in the *Metaphysics*: the Platonic metaphysical hierarchy. When I refer to the Platonic metaphysical hierarchy I mean specifically a particular characterisation which Aristotle gives to Platonic metaphysics.<sup>1</sup> On Aristotle's account, the Platonists make unity prior to being, and being or Forms prior to particulars.<sup>2</sup>

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(...continued)

to maintain separation: the flux of sensibles, the use of the form as a paradigm, the non-spatial or non-temporal nature of forms or *anamnesis*. cp Fine, pp 31-3. My supposition is that Aristotle's notion of the separation of being and unity in Platonism appears to avoid Parmenideanism. It will be one of Aristotle's important challenges in attempting to "reintegrate" being and unity, not to fall into the trap of Parmenideanism.

<sup>1</sup>I make no claim as to the accuracy of the specific details of the Formulation; The Platonic metaphysical hierarchy is Aristotle's formulation; however, it does seem to make some sense in light of the Platonic χωρισμος, and in terms of the difficulties of Heraclitean flux that Aristotle posits as a reason for the reification of Socrates' definitions (987a32ff). Moreover, the hierarchy makes a great deal of sense in terms of what an attempt to avoid Parmenideanism might look like, and it does seem to be adopted by the Middle Platonists and Neoplatonists in various guises.

<sup>2</sup>Throughout the thesis, I identify "being" in Aristotle's Plato with the collection or "world" of Forms, e.g. the set of  
(continued...)

This does not necessarily mean that the Platonic "Good," or the "One" is "beyond being in the sense that it is non-existent."<sup>1</sup> However this is suggested in the *Republic* at 509b,<sup>2</sup> and is significant enough to arouse the discomfort of Glaucon, whose response is very evocative. When presented with the idea that the Good is "επεκεινα της ουσιας," Glaucon says: "Απολλων. . .δαιμονιας υπερβολης!" (509c) The first word, Απολλων, an exclamation meaning perhaps "Good heavens," or "By Apollo!" makes reference to the god by whose name the Pythagoreans are reputed to have indicated an ineffable "One". Απολλων was

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(...continued)

all forms taken as a collective representation of "what is".

<sup>1</sup>Hitchcock offers a valuable extended treatment of the status of the Good in the *Republic*, and offers, independently of the "unwritten doctrines" and later dialogues, an analysis of the Good as the Form of Unity.(pg 73).

<sup>2</sup>"The sun, I presume you will say, not only furnishes to visibles the power [δυναμιν] of visibility but it also provides for their generation [γενεσιν] and growth and nurture though it is not itself generation...In like manner, then, you are to say that the objects of knowledge not only receive from the presence of the good [του αγαθου] their being known, but their very essence and existence [και το ειναι τε και την ουσιαν] is derived to them from it. The good itself is not essence [ουκ ουσιας του αγαθου] but still transcends essence [επικεινα της ουσιας] in dignity and surpassing power [δυναμει υπερεχοντος]." *Republic* 509b

used to indicate that the principle was α-πολλος (not multiple).<sup>1</sup> Some six hundred years later, and in a context not intended to explicate this passage, Plotinus calls upon this very fact to explain his apophasis.<sup>2</sup> Plotinus certainly thinks that a "One beyond being" is implicit in Plato's philosophy and continually cites the phrase "επεκεινα της ουσιας"<sup>3</sup> from *Republic* 509b in support

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<sup>1</sup>Plutarch, *Isis and Osiris*, 381ff.

<sup>2</sup>*Enneads*, V.5.6, 27

<sup>3</sup>Hitchcock, (pg. 90, n.56) maintains that Plato's qualification of "επεκεινα της ουσιας," at *Republic* 509b is crucial: "Plato does not mean that the good is beyond being in the sense that it is a principle which transcends the realm of what exists, but only that it is a Form more dignified and more powerful than being which he presumably thinks of here as a Form." This does not explain why Glaucon is incredulous, or why the Good is ineffable, or why Socrates is hesitant to try and articulate the Good. A Form of unity does not seem to be all that ineffable or odd; if one grants Forms of other things, nor does the idea of a "superior" Form. The notion of "being as a Form" is in part premised (by Hitchcock) on *Republic* 478e1; however, in that passage, we are looking for that which partakes (μετεχειν) of "to be" (τὸ εἶναι) and "to not be" (μὴ εἶναι). If being here is a Form, (presumably in virtue of something's participation in it) then not-being is equally a form. But not being is that which ignorance is "set over" whereas being is that which knowledge is set over. (478c) And Plato suggests that "surely that which is not [μὴ οὐ] could not be designated as some one thing [οὐχ ἐν τι] but most rightly as nothing at all." (478c) Hitchcock himself maintains that Forms are unities or 'one things.' (pg 73) It seems to make more sense in this context to treat "μετεχειν" in a not technical sense to refer to things in the realm of becoming, lest we become entangled in the Form of "not-being." Whether or not  
(continued...)

of his own philosophy.<sup>1</sup> If the idea of a one beyond being was implicit in Plato, it seems clear that his successor at the Academy, Speusippus, explicitly posited a one beyond intellect.<sup>2</sup> Since, for Plato, Forms are the proper objects of intellectual knowledge, that which the power of knowing is "set over",<sup>3</sup> the general drift of a "one beyond nous" suggests the priority of unity to being. For our purposes of evincing that Aristotle attributes The hierarchy of "Unity-Being-particulars" to The Platonists, it is useful to look at one passage where he deals with Speusippus:

Nor is a certain thinker [Speusippus]<sup>4</sup> right in his assumption when he likens the principles of the universe to that of animals and plants, on the ground that the more perfect forms are always produced from those which are indeterminate and imperfect, and is led by this to assert that this is true also of the ultimate

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(...continued)

the Good is a "Form of unity", where Form indicates "being" is peripheral to my discussion, however, since all that I want to suggest is that there is a tendency in Platonic metaphysics to give priority to unity as a ground.

<sup>1</sup>cp. *Enneads* V.5.6,11; V.6.6,30; V.4.1,10; V.1.88.

<sup>2</sup>cp. Dillon (1977), pg 18.

<sup>3</sup>*Republic*, 478c

<sup>4</sup>cp Tredennick, *Metaphysics* N, pg 290,n.a; Taran, pp. 33 ff.

principles; so that not even unity itself  
 is a real thing [ὥστε μήδε οὐ τι εἶναι τὸ ἐν αὐτο].  
 (1092a12-15)

Taran correctly points out<sup>1</sup> that Aristotle does not mean that Speusippus' One is "beyond being." According to him, interpretations which say this are based on a misunderstanding of the syntax, and consequently the argument. Taran's initial argument for this is extremely useful for what I am about to argue, and so I will quote him at length:

Aristotle's argument here [1092a12-15], being a *reductio ad absurdum*, implies that Speusippus probably would not have been prepared to accept the necessary consequence of his doctrine as Aristotle sees it. For the latter contends that, if the principles were indefinite and imperfect, The One itself would not even be an entity. But in every other passage about Speusippus' One Aristotle consistently takes it to be just that.<sup>2</sup>

I agree with Taran's analysis, but it must be pointed out that the question of attributing a conceptual scheme like the Platonic metaphysical hierarchy has more to do with the *implications* of Platonism, and less to do with the actual positions they hold. For my purposes, it is

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<sup>1</sup>Taran, pg 33.

<sup>2</sup>*ibid*, pg 34

enough to show that Aristotle conceptualises Platonism in this manner. I think he sees, in the Platonism of the early Academy, a predilection for a larger conceptual scheme (Unity-Being-particulars). It is also a general tendency in Plato's philosophy to see the Forms as belonging to the realm of "being", to which particulars stand in a dependent relationship.<sup>1</sup> That the Good or the One<sup>2</sup> functions as a principle of unity for the Forms also seems evident. It is not crucial to see the "One" or "Good" as "beyond being"; it is crucial to see that its role is somewhat different from that of the "other"

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<sup>1</sup>At *Republic* 477a Plato says that "knowledge pertains to that which is," ("ἐπι μὲν τῷ ὄντι γῶσις ἦν") cp 477b. He also says (478a) that ἐπιστήμη is a power set over that which is ("ἐπι τῷ ὄντι τὸ ὄν γινώμει ὡς ἐστὶν") And what we have knowledge of are the forms, which truly are: "We predicate 'to be' of many beautiful things and many good things saying of them severally that they are [εἶναι], and so define them in our speech...And again we speak of a self-beautiful [καλὸν καὶ αὐτό] and of a good that is only and merely good, and so, in the case of all things that we then posited as many, we turn about and posit each as a single idea [ἰδέαν]...assuming it to be a unity [ὡς μίας οὐσης] and call it that which really is [οὐ ἐστίν]." (*Republic* 507b)

<sup>2</sup>At times both Aristotle and Plotinus treat these indifferently. cp. *Metaphysics* 988a14-5, 988b10-15; 1075a35-8; *Enneads* VI.9, entitled by Porphyry *On The Good or The One*. For the identification of the two in modern literature see Hitchcock, Azor, Kramer, Findlay, Dodds.

Forms, in so far as it is a principle of unity which grounds them.

Aristotle seems to think that this whole conceptual scheme is flawed. He represents the Platonic metaphysical hierarchy at two specific places in *Metaphysics* A, and I propose now to look at these two texts. The first passage I am about to cite is the conclusion of a discussion regarding the nature and number of the causes of Aristotle's predecessors. Platonism is found to have employed formal and material causes, and to have perhaps intimated, but not explained satisfactorily a "οὐ ἐνὲκ" or final cause. At A7, he says:

[The proponents of the Forms] adduce the Forms as the essential nature [τοῦ ἡννεῖναι] of all other things, and the One as that of the Forms. (988b4-5)

That an "essence is prior to its "participant" is a commonplace in Platonism. Hence it follows that this passage places the One as prior to Forms, and Forms as prior to particulars. This formulation of what I want to call the Platonic metaphysical hierarchy also draws on a claim made by Aristotle in the previous chapter (A6). Plato, it is said,



employed only two causes [δυοιναιτιαιν], that of the essence [τι εστι], and the material cause [την υλην]; for the Forms [ειδη] are the cause of the essence in everything else, and the One [το εν] is the cause of it in the Forms. [Plato] also tells us what the material substrate [η υλη η υποκειμενη] is of which the Forms are predicated [λεγεται] in the case of sensible things, and the One in that of the Forms - that this is duality, The Great and The Small [το μεγα και το μικρον]. 988a10-14

There are two relations in this account and they are parallel relations. There is the relation of the One to the Forms, and there is the relation of the Forms to sensible particulars. The relationship between the two levels is the same, "the cause of an essence"; the One is the cause of the essence of the Forms (being) and the Forms are the cause of the essence of sensible particulars.<sup>1</sup> The Forms are said to be predicated of a material principle (the Indefinite Dyad or The Great and The Small) in the case of material things, and the One is said to be predicated of the Dyad in the case of the Forms.

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<sup>1</sup>I leave out here τα μαθηματικά, and "parts of particulars" which is no doubt what Aristotle means by "everything else". For my purposes here it is enough to realise The general conceptual scheme: Unity-Being(Forms)-Particulars.

It should be noted that Aristotle does not employ what one might expect to be the proper "Platonic" terminology. He does not say that the Forms "participate" in the One, or that The sensible particulars "participate" in the Forms. Instead, Aristotle says that the One is *predicated* of the Dyad so as to produce Forms, and that the Forms are *predicated* of the Dyad so as to produce sensible particulars. This is important, as it reflects a belief of Aristotle's, that what the Platonists account for by "participation" is better understood in terms of predication.<sup>1</sup> The hierarchy entails the separation of Forms from their instances, and (given the participation of Forms in a prior Unity) of being from unity. As a compliment to this χωρισμος, participation of particulars in Forms, or Forms in a prior Unity is required. At least it is required from the Platonist's point of view; from Aristotle's point of view, predication is required.

Aristotle complains often that the notion of the Forms causing "essences" of particulars, or the One

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<sup>1</sup>cp. G.E.R. Lloyd, pg 44. I will return to The substitution of predication for participation in a later section.

causing the essences of the Forms is worked out in terms of participation; he claims that participation is a mere metaphor which has no meaning or is left unexplained.<sup>1</sup> Consequently he identifies what Plato sees as "participation" with predication. He has already imposed this revisionist language in the passage just cited (988a10-14). This notion of predication is applied to the One and the Forms, just as much as the Forms are said by Aristotle to be predicated of their sensible counterparts. That is, the unity of the One is predicated of the Form (once produced out of the Dyad) just as the nature of the Form is predicated of the sensible particular (once produced out of the Dyad).<sup>2</sup> This will come to have important consequences for Aristotle's claim that Plato's metaphysics may collapse into Parmenideanism.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>991a19-23; 987b13-4

<sup>2</sup>Owens points out that when Aristotle speaks of the "Forms of being" at 1003b19-22, he is referring to those primary kinds derived in the *Parmenides* and *Sophist*, and that in general the One and plurality serve as a basis for all. (pg. 160 & n 55.)

<sup>3</sup>See Chapter II, Section 3.

An important thing to note about the hierarchy is that the One stands in relation to the Form *in the same way* as the Forms stand in relation to those sensible things that imitate them. We see unity prior to being, (which participates in it) and being as prior to particulars (which participate in it). This is the paradigm of Platonism, the Platonic metaphysical hierarchy which Aristotle wants to reject, and which Plotinus (in a revised way) wants to resurrect. The Aristotelian doctrine of substance yields a markedly different picture. Being and unity are dependent upon particulars and are convertible terms. Plotinus, as we shall see, in opposing Aristotle's account of the relation of being and unity, reasserts in a new way the Platonic metaphysical hierarchy: "Unity-Being-particulars."

### 3. *The Contrariety of First Principles*

The Platonic metaphysical hierarchy has two levels, the level of being in relation to unity, and the level of particulars in relation to forms. Unity is prior to being, and being is prior to particulars. By contrast,

Aristotle's conception of "convertibility" entails that sensible things are capable of independent existence, and are seen as *combinations* of matter and form. The combination of matter and form is dependent upon, and posterior to, substance. The two (material principle, formal principle) must co-exist, and it is in virtue of this co-existence that there is being and unity. At the "higher" of the two levels of the Platonic metaphysical hierarchy, being and unity are, in Aristotle's own system, predicated of a prior, particular substance.<sup>1</sup> Substance does not participate in an ontologically prior, substantial or particular being and unity - Plato has got it backwards.

An examination of Aristotle's criticisms of Platonism in *Metaphysics* N1<sup>2</sup> reveals a concern with the "One" and the "Dyad" serving as first principles of the Plato's cosmology. This account of Platonism conceives of the "One" as an immaterial principle of unity or limit which interacts with a contrary, material, unlimited, or indefinite "Dyad." The interaction between the One and

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<sup>1</sup>cp 1087b33-1088a2

<sup>2</sup>N1 appears to be another draft of the Introduction to the *Metaphysics*.

the Dyad yields both the multiple "formal" world and the multiple "material" world.

In N1 Aristotle suggests that all of all of his predecessors have seen the first principles of things as a set of contraries.<sup>1</sup> After making this statement Aristotle remarks that the first principle of things must be prior to all else and have no contrary, since contraries must be predicated of something which is prior:

But since there cannot be anything prior to the first principle of all things, the principle cannot be the principle and yet an attribute of something else. (1087a31-3)

This opposition to the contrariety of two first principles is consistent with Aristotle's assertion that a single, "Unmoved Mover" is a first principle in his system.<sup>2</sup> If a first principle is to be really first, it cannot be posterior to anything; hence it cannot be predicated of anything. If the One has a contrary, it is not the first principle.

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<sup>1</sup>1087a30

<sup>2</sup>This of course involves many complicated issues which I will take up in due course. In Chapter V (Theology or Ontology) I address why I think that the first principle is substance "par excellence".

all things which are generated from their contraries [ἐναντίας] involve an underlying subject [υποκειμένου τινος] a subject then must be present in the case of contraries, if anywhere. All contraries, then, are always predicable of a subject, and none can exist apart [χωριστον], but just as appearances suggest that there is nothing contrary to substance, argument confirms this. No contrary then, is the first principle [κυριωζ αρχη] of all things in the full sense; the first principle is something different. (1087a37-b4)

Anything which is "predicated" must be predicated of some substance. The Platonic system of the contrariety of One and Dyad is incoherent, without something in which the contraries inhere.

The "ultimate" contraries may be taken as One and Dyad. Given the two levels of the Platonic metaphysical hierarchy, there is an "intermediate level" of contrariety, between matter and Form. It is the relation of matter and Form that accounts for particulars. If matter and form are contraries, they certainly cannot be first principles for the same reason that the One and Dyad are unsatisfactory. A first principle cannot have a

contrary because this would require a prior substratum in which the contrary is to "inhere".<sup>1</sup>

To make the contraries "matter and Form," (at the intermediate level) or "Dyad and One," (at the ultimate level) is susceptible to many derivative difficulties. In the first place, says Aristotle, what are thought to be components of the Dyad are accidents of numbers or magnitude (e.g. great and small), and not the substrata of accidents or magnitudes.<sup>2</sup> Second, "The Great and The Small" must be relative to something. One gets a sense of this in the following passage.

but what is relative is least of all things a kind of entity [φύσις] or substance [οὐσία], and is posterior to quality and quantity; and the relative is an accident of quantity...not its matter, since something with a distinct nature of its own must serve as matter [ύλη] both to the relative in general and to its parts and kinds. (1088a20-35)

The relative must be posterior to quality and quantity which are dependent upon (Aristotle's conception of) substance. Substance, at least in the case of a concrete particular, implies the existence of matter already (or

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<sup>1</sup>cp. Scaltsas, pg 217.

<sup>2</sup>1088a17-20



acts as a sort of matter, e.g. a υποκειμενον). Since relative terms like great and small are posterior to substance, Plato's "great-and-small" cannot serve as a material *principle* of substance.<sup>1</sup> In this sense it seems correct to Aristotle to deny the types of contrariety he sees Platonism embracing.<sup>2</sup>

The third difficulty that contrariety engenders involves act-potency relationships. I introduce it here because it is useful to see how Aristotle's formulation of the problem anticipates his concept of substance. The matter of substance must be in potency to some actual substance, but Aristotle says that the relative is neither *potential* nor *actual* substance:

And the matter of each thing, and therefore  
of substance, must be that which is

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<sup>1</sup>Cherniss, pg. 123.

<sup>2</sup>Cherniss, (pp 85 ff) notes that it does become difficult, once the assessment of matter and form as contraries is accomplished, to see how matter and form "co-operate" in so far as contraries ought to seek each other's destruction. Later on pg. 95, Cherniss says, in a characteristic remark, that Aristotle "insists upon the essential unity of the Platonic matter in order to find in the Platonic system form and matter used as contraries; but if he had not been able to assume that the formal principle was a unit, his reduction of matter to a single principle would not have forwarded his purpose." Aristotle's solution is to see the material principle as playing part of the role of substrate and privation. cp. *Physics* 187-92ff.

potentially of the nature in question; but the relative is neither potentially nor actually substance. 1088b1-4

The Great and The Small as *relative* cannot be the matter of anything, but must be predicated of something. It makes no sense to make that which is not substance an element in, and prior to substance, since those things which are *predicated* of substance are posterior to it. What Aristotle will need to make his theory of substance work is a distinction between actual and potential substance. An actual substance cannot be a part of another substance; a substance is not composed of other actual substances but only of potential substances. That is why Aristotle is careful to note that the relative cannot be potential or actual substance, since it will be part of Aristotle's reintegration of form and matter in substance, to insist that the matter stands in potency to a form; a similar relation exists between potential substance(s) and actual substance. Hence the necessity of denying both potential and actual substantiality to the Dyad or relative.

This section deals with some of the difficulties in Plato's system with regard to cosmological first

principles. What is interesting is that the concerns raised all point to substance as a type of solution. The first principle must be one thing, one substance, and not a set of contraries. This will only be possible if Aristotle's own conceptual scheme is different from the Platonic metaphysical hierarchy. By making being and unity convertible, Aristotle achieves successful integration of the two levels of contrariety that separation engenders. If particulars are grounded in Forms, they must be separate, and being must work on matter to cause the essence of the particular. If Forms are grounded in unity, they must be separate, and the One must work on the Dyad to cause the essence of the Forms. If, however, being and unity are somehow posterior to particulars, no such set of contrary principles is needed. One thing, *substance*, grounds the other relations.

#### 4. *Separation (Χωρισμος)*

The notion of *χωρισμος* in Aristotle's version of Platonism can be seen as a function of the Platonic metaphysical hierarchy. Unity is separate from being in

the same way that Forms are separate from their particular instances. Aristotle's explicit account of how Plato came to posit separate Forms comes in a sort of "historical account". The theory of Forms came about as Plato sought to give ontological status to Socratic definitions, a solution to epistemic and ontological concerns raised by the Heraclitean doctrine of flux:

having in his youth become familiar with Cratylus and with the Heraclitean doctrines (that all sensible things are ever in a state of flux and there is no knowledge about them), these views he held even in later years. Socrates, however was busying himself about ethical matters and neglecting the world of nature as a whole but seeking the universal [καθολου] in these ethical matters, and fixed thought for the first time on definitions; Plato accepted his teaching, but held that the problem applied not to sensible things but to entities of another kind - for this reason, that the common definition could not be a definition of any sensible thing, as they were always changing. These of this other sort, then, he called Ideas [ιδεας] and sensible things, he said were all named after these, and in virtue of a relation to these; for the many existed by participation [μεθεξιν] in the Ideas that have the same name as they. 987a32-b10

Aristotle may very well be correct in maintaining the Heraclitean influence on Plato's reification of Socratic definitions. He does not, however, mention that the

χωρισμός of Forms and sensibles, or of being and unity, stands in a very distinctive relation to another major presocratic figure, Parmenides. Plato names a dialogue after Parmenides and examines the relations of being and unity there. His conclusions are beyond the scope of my current project, which is primarily concerned with Aristotle's representations of the Platonists. However, it is useful to see that the Platonic metaphysical hierarchy (whatever life it had outside of the *Metaphysics*) solves, ostensibly at least, the problem of Parmenideanism.

One way to read Parmenides' philosophy is to see the Eleatic as suggesting that being and unity refer to the same thing, with the rather unfortunate consequence that all that exists (being) is somehow one. This is interesting, for the very idea of participation, as impractical as it may seem, does at least seem to solve the difficulty of Parmenideanism. The separation of being and unity into different realms allows Plato to escape the problem while at the same time giving the "Heraclitean flux" a source of stability and unity via participation. By separating being and unity, by giving

them "separate lives," so to speak, one avoids saying that all being is one. One says instead (in this case) that being *depends* on unity, and the very fact that there is this dependent relation is incommensurate with the *identity* of being and unity that some take to be Parmenides' problem.

I should point out that Aristotle accuses Platonism of falling into the trap of Parmenideanism in virtue of participation and separation, or more generally, in virtue of the Platonic metaphysical hierarchy that separation and its complement, participation, entails. I shall have more to say on this in the next chapter. I point it out here because it helps us to see that there is a continuity of concern with exactly what to do with being and unity in metaphysical conceptual schemes that in very important ways begins with Parmenides. Parmenides says that being and unity are both identical and convertible, and the Platonists separate them. Aristotle wants to reintegrate being and unity, in light of the difficulties he sees with the Platonic metaphysical hierarchy. In order to do so he has to avoid the difficult problem of Parmenideanism, as well

as the consequences of the Platonic metaphysical hierarchy. Something like this sense of continuity has been suggested by Jeannot:

Whereas Plato negotiates Parmenides' obstacle by retaining a univocal conception of Unity but separating being from it, Aristotle follows Parmenides in that he regards being and unity as convertible, but he undermines their univocity.<sup>1</sup>

In the next two sections of this chapter, I discuss the vehicle of participation. The first of these sections deals with metaphysical questions, and the second deals with physical questions. I propose to examine what Aristotle sees to be some of the key difficulties that arise out of participation in the "separated" Platonic metaphysical hierarchy, and how these difficulties point in the direction of his own concept of substance.<sup>2</sup> My primary aim throughout this chapter is to point out the types of pitfalls that Aristotle wants to avoid, and to suggest that a number of these surround the relation of

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<sup>1</sup>Jeannot, pg. 417. cp. Owens, pg 99: "The challenge of Parmenides could be met only by finding unity and unchangeableness in some way within sensible things."

<sup>2</sup>One might want to object that Aristotle is "loading the dice" in favour of substance. This will not have any great effect on the outcome of my discussion of being and unity. It may actually indicate that I am understanding him correctly.

being and unity in the Platonic system. This I think will be seen more clearly when we come to examine the more explicit discussions of being and unity that Aristotle sees as deleterious to the Platonic metaphysical hierarchy (Chapter 2).

### 5. *Participation (Μεθεξις) and Metaphysics*

Participation is entailed both by the Platonic metaphysical hierarchy and by the χωρισμος that it engenders. As I have already suggested, Aristotle sees this μεθεξις as a vacuous metaphor.<sup>1</sup>

all other things cannot come from the Forms in any of the usual sense of 'from'. And to say that they are patterns [παραδειγματα] and the other things share [μετεχειν] in them is to use empty words and poetical metaphors [μεταφορας λεγειν ποιητικας]. For what is it that works [εργαζομενον], looking [αποβλεπον] to the forms? (991a19-23)<sup>2</sup>

Aristotle maintains that the Pythagoreans have an equally untenable theory of participation, and that all Plato did was change the name from μιμησις to μεθεξις, whereas "what

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<sup>1</sup>cp. 1075b20

<sup>2</sup>cp. 1075b17-20



the *μιμησις* or *μεθεξις* of the Forms could be they left an open question."<sup>1</sup>

At A9, Aristotle raises an odd objection to the Forms, complaining that, "Forms are practically equal to - or not fewer than - the things, in trying to explain which these thinkers produced them from the Forms." (990b4-6). The reason he gives is that for each thing there is an entity of the same name which exists apart from the substances (sensible particulars), and this is true as well in the case of the one over many, whether the many are eternal or in this world.<sup>2</sup> Plato might have resisted such an interpretation, in so far as the whole notion of the "one over many" ought to be seen as *limiting* the number of Forms. For example if there are one billion men, there ought to be only one Form of man, and not one billion. What does Aristotle have in mind here? In one sense, he could mean that each particular ought to participate in a number of Forms:

there will be several patterns of the same thing; e.g. 'animal' and 'biped' will be

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<sup>1</sup>987b13-4.

<sup>2</sup>990b6-8

patterns of 'man' and so will the Idea of man (αυτοανθρωπος). (991a28-9;1079b31-3)

This may speak to the difficulty of how "part" or "attributes" of men are combined in one man, among other things. In another sense, Aristotle's point could be that given the doctrine of flux, where each particular needs a form that stands apart from the particular, each sensible thing requires its own Form to sustain it.<sup>1</sup> In other words, if the Form is the essence of the thing in question, and each thing needs an essence, the number of Forms and the number of instantiations ought to be equivalent. This interpretation is consistent with Aristotle's suggestion that a concrete particular is identical to its essence in Z6:

The absurdity of separation would appear also if one were to assign a name to each of the essences [των τι ην ειναι]; for there would be yet another essence besides the original one, e.g. to the essence of horse there will belong a second essence. Yet why should not some things be their essences from the start, since essence [το τι ην ειναι] is substance [ουσια]? (1031b28-33)

On either explanation, ("combination" or "essence") the primary metaphysical issue surrounding participation for

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<sup>1</sup>cp. Cherniss, pp. 188-9;

Aristotle seems to be that the separate Forms fail to account for the unity of the particular, either in terms of its parts, or in terms of the οὐσία and the τοτιηνεῖναι. Participation involves the notion of a sensible particular existing somehow apart from its essence. We also get an inkling of how Aristotle's conceptual scheme contrasts with the Platonic metaphysical hierarchy. He will identify, in some fashion, the particular with its substance and essence.

The project of understanding what it is for something to be, how a concrete particular and its parts are unified, are questions of substance which must be understood in virtue of being qua being, the comprehension of which, is the project of metaphysics. Again, when we come to examine the relation of being and unity in the next chapter, it will be important to keep in mind that Aristotle 's conceptual scheme is incommensurate with both the Platonic metaphysical hierarchy (being and unity are separate), and Parmenideanism (being and unity are identical).

## 6. *Participation and Physics*

Another important (and oft repeated) criticism of participation is that it does not offer a coherent account of motion, change, generation or corruption. Besides saying that the 'substance' and that of which it is the substance should not exist apart from one another,<sup>1</sup> Aristotle also expresses a very interesting concern with movement:

when the Forms exist, still the things that share in them do not come into being, unless there is something to originate movement [το κινησον]. (991b4-6)<sup>2</sup>

This is very important for Aristotle's agenda. There is no necessity, or immediately evident ontological or kinetic efficacy entailed by the purported existence of Forms, even if we grant the existence of "separate substances." Plato's separate substances do not in and of themselves account for generation, corruption, or movement.

In A7, a criticism regarding the final cause (ou ενεκα) of motion arises by way of a comment that none of

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<sup>1</sup>991b1-3

<sup>2</sup>cp. 1075b28-9.

Aristotle's predecessors has expressed the notion of essence (το τι ην ειναι) or substantial reality (ουσια) clearly.<sup>1</sup> The Platonists hinted at something like "essence" with their notion of Forms as principles; in contradistinction to presocratic theories, the Platonic "principles" are not the matter of existing things, nor are they a *source of movement*. Instead, "[the Platonists] furnish the Forms as the essence [το τι ην ειναι] of every other thing, and the One as the essence of the Forms."<sup>2</sup> What is not explained in this theory of "essences," is what Aristotle identifies as the final cause (ουερεκα) of change and motion. Why do things change, and why do they move? For the sake of what do things come to be, pass away, and engage in any kind of activity whatever?

The One, says Aristotle, seems to be a final cause of a sort, but only incidentally.<sup>3</sup> There is nothing in the *nature* of the One which makes it the final cause:

those who say that the One or the existent  
is the good, say that it is the cause of

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<sup>1</sup>988a34ff

<sup>2</sup>988b5 (the Platonic metaphysical hierarchy)

<sup>3</sup>988b6-15

substance [ουσιᾶς αἰτιον], but not that substance either is [εἶναι] or comes to be [γίγνεσθαι] for the sake of [ἐνεκα] this. (988b11-13)

This is important to keep in mind, because it speaks to the larger issue of Plato's failure (in Aristotle's eyes), to present a coherent account of motion and change either in terms of an ultimate cause, or in terms of motion and change in the individual.<sup>1</sup>

After levelling the charge outlined in the passage above from A7, Aristotle goes on in A8 to take up the difficulties of various presocratic positions, and those of the Pythagoreans. In A9 he dispenses with the Pythagoreans and takes up the Platonic position. When Aristotle continues his critique of Forms in A9, he offers this protest:

Above all one might discuss the question what on earth the Forms contribute to sensible things, either to those that are eternal or to those that come into being and cease to be. For they cause neither movement [κινήσεως] nor change [μεταβολῆς] in them... (991a8-12)

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<sup>1</sup>Again I point out that the resolution of this problem has to do with how I ultimately see the relation of metaphysics and theology (Chapter IV).

Again we see an attack on the lack of explanatory value regarding motion or change in eternal or corruptible things. Aristotle's account of Platonism suggests that these alterations, generations or corruptions are accounted for by participation, which is not an acceptable explanation of physics.<sup>1</sup>

What Aristotle objects to is the absence any adequate account of key physical questions, such as "what causes motion?" or "what causes change?" He also finds wanting any coherent account of key metaphysical questions, "what accounts for being?", "what accounts for the unity of a substance?" A further challenge to his own theory of substance, beyond merely avoiding the Platonic metaphysical hierarchy in general, will be to have a theory that can answer these questions, as well as the questions that the Platonic metaphysical hierarchy raises regarding first principles.

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<sup>1</sup>Suggests G.E.R. Lloyd, 'Plato himself would no doubt have answered that what originated movement, in his cosmological system, was the world-soul or Craftsman who is described in the *Timaeus* as bringing the world out of disorder into order and as creating things after the pattern of the eternal Forms...Aristotle's objection has this much point that the Forms themselves provide no answer to the question of the origin of movement.' (pg. 46)

## 7. Conclusion

In Aristotle's eyes Plato leaves many fundamental questions unanswered. How are being and unity related? How are Forms and particulars related? How is motion accounted for? How is the unity of the concrete particular accounted for? How are matter and form related? I am suggesting that it is useful to frame Plato's inability to answer these questions to Aristotle's satisfaction in terms of the Platonic metaphysical hierarchy. Many of these problems have to do with the separation that the Platonic hierarchy involves. The question of the ontological efficacy of Forms is called into question; when Aristotle reintegrates matter and form, being and unity, he at least solves this difficulty.

I am also suggesting that Aristotle's own conceptual scheme of the convertibility of being and unity stands in contrast to Platonism in a very fundamental way. For Aristotle's Platonist, Unity is prior to being, and being is prior to particulars. For Aristotle, particulars come first, and being and unity are "convertible terms," which stand in a non-



hierarchical relationship to one another, and are dependent on particular substances. We shall see that this has implications for the type of first principle(s) that Aristotle believes must head his cosmology, and for the types of things that his doctrine of substance entails.

What I hope to show in later chapters is that Plotinus' critique of convertibility in Aristotle suggests that he, Plotinus, sees the importance of remaining true to, and revising the Platonic metaphysical hierarchy.

## CHAPTER II - Being And Unity

### 1. *Introduction*

In the first chapter, I suggested that Aristotle had some primary concerns with the Platonic metaphysical hierarchy. In this chapter I attempt to look at some specifics of being and unity in the Aristotelian system. I am primarily concerned with casting Aristotle's conceptual scheme of convertibility in contrast to the Platonic metaphysical hierarchy. In keeping with the idea that Aristotle's own conceptual scheme is in key ways incommensurate with Platonism, what I hope to distil from Aristotle's critique of it in this section is a delimiting of the way in which we must understand Aristotle. I have in mind particularly his conceptions of substance, form, and universal in the central books of the *Metaphysics*.<sup>1</sup> It cannot be stated too strongly that

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<sup>1</sup>It is telling that Lewis (1991) suggests the following, "The dichotomy between substances and universals is a continuing feature of Aristotle's metaphysics. It also forms one of his major criticisms of Plato's theory of ideas, that  
(continued...)"

if Aristotle finds the Platonic relations of being and unity (as he understands them) unacceptable, his own concept of substance, and of first principles, must avoid these relations. Hence this chapter and the last are meant to lay the groundwork for understanding substance and first principles in the *Metaphysics*.

In Section 2, I start by examining the texts where Aristotle suggests that being and unity are convertible terms. The Platonic metaphysical hierarchy, in "separating" being and unity, is incommensurate with Aristotle's ontological and epistemic distinctions about forms. Plato needed Forms to be both (epistemic) universals and (ontological) particulars. Aristotle says that the same thing cannot be both.

In section 3, the claim that no universal can be a substance helps to show that if universals are substances, then the Platonic metaphysical hierarchy implies the Parmenideanism it might be thought to avoid. Parmenideanism can be avoided by means of a substratum

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(...continued)

Platonic forms combine the incompatible characteristics of being both universals and substances. From the very start there is work to be done to show why this criticism of Plato cannot be turned against Aristotle's own metaphysical theories." (pg. 309)

for being and unity, which Aristotle takes to be substance.

In section 4 I examine some further criticisms of Plato's theory of Forms that suggest that Aristotle sees substances as the "bearers" or υποκειμενα of being and unity.

In section 5 I attempt to show that Aristotle's conception of being and unity as convertible helps us to better understand what certain claims he makes about forms, substances and universals mean. I do this by offering a solution to a contradiction that some scholars have attributed to Aristotle. The solution involves a distinction (discussed in section 2 of this chapter) regarding the ontological role played by forms as distinguished from their epistemic role. Aristotle denies that Plato's Forms should have an ontological role; by contrast, he employs a different, "substantial" form to effect the unity and being of a concrete particular.

In section 6 I maintain that the implication of my solution is that concrete particulars are to be regarded as unions of matter and substantial form where the

substantial form, and not matter, is the individuating principle of particulars.

## 2. Convertibility

Aristotle wants to assert that being and unity are convertible. To make them convertible suggests that anything that "exists" or has being also has unity. It also means that being and unity do not stand in a hierarchical relationship to one another - this is the Platonic metaphysical hierarchy Aristotle finds unacceptable. To say that being and unity are convertible places them on equal metaphysical footing. In saying that "x is," you imply that "x is one," just as saying that "x is one" implies that "x is". Both being and unity are predicates of, and are logically posterior to, substance; and substance is that which, we might say, corresponds to the "x" which is or is one. A good example of Aristotle's idea of convertibility in accordance with *pros hen* equivocity comes at Metaphysics  $\Gamma^1$ :

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<sup>1</sup>This notion of *pros hen* equivocity is central to Joseph Owens' thinking, and is reiterated by Gerson (1994) pg 92. The idea of the *pros hen* plays an important part of Patzig's thinking, but he casts the concept in terms of paronymy. In his later work, Patzig suggests that G.E.L. Owen's idea of "focal meaning" grasps Aristotle's intention better. Ideally, what the *pros hen* equivocal aims at is an understanding of many different senses of a word that have their significance in relation to a primary sense. For example, a doctor, an apple and a walk are all healthy, but their healthiness stands in relation to health proper, which is not manifest in a Platonic form, but rather is manifest in a healthy person, or  
(continued...)

Now if being and unity [το ον και το εν] are the same [ταυτον], i.e. a single nature in the sense that they are associated as a principle [αρχη] and a cause [αιτιον] are, and not as being denoted by the same definition [ενι λογω] (although it makes no difference but rather helps our argument if we understand them in the same sense)...and unity is nothing distinct [ουδενετερον] from being; and further if the substance [ουσια] is one in no accidental sense, and similarly is of its very nature something which is - then there are just as many species of being as there are of unity. (1003b24-35)

My thinking is that Aristotle wants to maintain this kind of conceptual scheme avoids both Parmenideanism and the Platonic metaphysical hierarchy.<sup>1</sup> If the χωρισμος of being and unity in the Platonic metaphysical hierarchy is thought of as a way out Parmenideanism, then any attempt to reintegrate being and unity must be careful not to engender Parmenideanism. To say that being and unity are

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(...continued)

arguably, in the mind of the ιατρος in a manner similar to the product of an art being present in the mind of a τεκτων. I take it that Owens and Gerson want to make the *pros hen* relationship apply metaphysically as well as epistemologically. In other words, they want to make the Unmoved Mover an ontological primary that all things ought to be metaphysically related to. I think that Aristotle has only the epistemological sense in mind.

<sup>1</sup>cp. Gerson, (1994) pg 92.

*predicated* of substances allows Aristotle to reunite a thing with its unity, and with its being. By making being and unity convertible predicates, he avoids placing them in a hierarchy; by making them dependent upon something prior (substance), he avoids Parmenideanism. Because they are predicated of substance, convertibility does not result in all things being one as it would in the absence of a *υποκειμενον*.<sup>1</sup>

In an interesting passage in H, Aristotle suggests that the integration of matter and form is similar to the integration of being and unity. These two integrations, one may note, correspond to the two levels of the Platonic metaphysical hierarchy:

Owing to the difficulty about unity some speak about 'participation,' and raise the question what is the cause of participation and what is it to participate...The reason is that people look for a unifying formula and a difference between potency and complete reality. But, as has been said, the proximate matter and the form are one and the same thing, the one potentially and the other actually. Therefore it is like asking what in general is the cause of unity and of a thing's being one; for each thing is a unity, and the potential and the actual are somehow one. Therefore there is no other cause here unless there is

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<sup>1</sup>cp *Physics*, I,1, 185a3ff; I,3 186a23ff



something which caused the movement  
 [κίνησιν] from potency into actuality. And  
 all the things which have no matter are  
 without qualification essentially unities.  
 (1045b7-25)

There are a number of things to note in this passage. Aristotle is saying that certain material items are by their very nature commensurate with certain formal items. There is nothing over and above the bare fact of this union; substance simply works this way.<sup>1</sup> The other thing to note in this passage is that there is a suggestion of an agency that will cause the move from potency to actuality. This refers to an external physical cause that brings, say, the menstrual fluid and the seed in contact, i.e. the father. This should tell us something about the nature of the cause of unity in general. Ultimately, the unity of concrete particulars requires *motion* in order to effect the union of form and matter, and motion is guaranteed (via the Physics) by the continuity of motion in the system that is guaranteed (in

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<sup>1</sup>cp. Scaltsas, pg. 215. Kosman (1984) (pg 144) remarks, "Aristotle compares asking for an explanation of why potentiality and actuality are one with asking for an explanation of why anything is one. No answer is needed...because the explanation of the thing is at the same time an explanation of its being one." This is the consequence of making being and unity convertible terms.

the final analysis) by the Unmoved Mover. Hence there is a causal relationship, albeit a remote one, between the Unmoved Mover and the unity and being of the concrete particular.

Aristotle goes on to suggest that things which have no matter are without qualification, being essential unities: "ὅσα δὲ μὴ ἔχει ὑλὴν πάντα ἀπλῶς ὡς ἐν τι."<sup>1</sup> This suggests something about the nature of substance itself, namely that the "formal" side of substance is a source or cause of unity in particular beings. If you think about a sensible particular abstractly, the form or essence is doing the work of unification, and the matter is that which is potentially unified by the form. The fact that the potency is what the matter is, just as the actuality is what the substantial form is, and these are a union, does not detract from the fact that if you *could* "remove" the matter (ontologically, not epistemically), you would have an essential unity. In other words substance, in various ways and at various levels, including the level

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<sup>1</sup>1045b25

of the Unmoved Mover or ultimate final cause,<sup>1</sup> conveys unity; given the convertibility of being and unity, one may say that it conveys being as well.

Another expression of convertibility in the *Metaphysics* comes in a certain passage in I2, where it is said that there is no real distinction between "man" and "a man," only a distinction in thought:<sup>2</sup>

That in a sense unity means the same as being [ταυτο σημαίνει πως το εν και το ον] is clear from the fact that its meanings correspond to the categories one to one, and it is not comprised within any category. . . but is related to them exactly as being is, that in 'one man' nothing more is predicated than in 'man' (just as being is nothing apart from substance [το τι] or quality or quantity); and that to be one is just to be a particular thing [τω το ενι ειναι το εκαστω ειναι]. (1054a13-19)<sup>3</sup>

It is not *ontologically* possible to separate "man" from "a man". It is possible to separate "man" from "a man" in abstraction, e.g. a separation of a universal concept of

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<sup>1</sup>cp Frede, pg. 175: "It is obvious that a final answer to the question what is it to be a substance will have to be one which also fits immaterial substances."

<sup>2</sup>This passage is important, since Plotinus appears to be responding specifically to this text in the *Enneads*. See Chapter VII.

<sup>3</sup>cp. IV, 2, 1003b23ff.

man from a particular man, but this is an epistemic, and not an ontological separation. In Platonism, clearly, the ontological separation of "Man" (Form) and "a man" (instance) is a central tenet.

However, the Platonic doctrine of separate Forms implies that for (Aristotle's) Platonist, unity and being have to play the role of both substances (an ontological role) and universals (an epistemic role). They have to play the ontological role of substances because they have separate independent existence and ground particulars (unity grounds particular forms, forms ground concrete particulars in flux); they have to play the epistemic role of universals because the Platonic metaphysical hierarchy, unity makes forms conceivable, and forms make particulars conceivable.

In Aristotle, the convertible nature of being and unity has important consequences for how forms, substances and universals are understood. Aristotle needs some kind distinction between ontological forms and epistemic ones - between "substantial" forms and universals. I will take up this question in Section 5. Before I do this however, I want to show why Aristotle

thinks that the Platonic metaphysical hierarchy leads to Parmenideanism.

### 3. *Plato and Parmenideanism*

For Aristotle, being and unity are posterior to, and predicated of, substances. The fact that Aristotle casts "participation" as predication means neither Forms (being), nor unity (the One), are themselves substances - on the contrary, they are universals which are predicated of all substances.<sup>1</sup> This is clear enough when we reflect that if Unity is prior to Forms, and Forms are prior to particulars, then particulars participate in Being and Unity. From Aristotle's perspective of predication, unity and being are predicated of particulars. In the Aristotelian conceptual scheme, unity and being are convertible, and both are logically dependant upon substance.<sup>2</sup> He uses this perspective to undermine Plato's position,<sup>3</sup> and to suggest that Forms cannot be individual

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<sup>1</sup> e.g. at *De Interpretatione* 17a39-40, "by universal I mean that which by its nature is predicated of many things."

<sup>2</sup> Jeannot, pg. 413.

<sup>3</sup> As I suggested in the first chapter, this may be slightly circular, but the circularity is not vicious.

substances and universals at the same time. In order to see how we should first see why no universal term can be a substance. At Metaphysics Z, Aristotle says:

it seems impossible that any universal term [καθολου λεγομενων] should be a substance [ουσιαν]. For firstly the substance of each thing is that which is peculiar to it, which does not belong to anything else; but the universal is common, since that is called universal which is such as to belong to more than one thing. Of which individual then will this [i.e. the καθολου] be the substance? Either of all or none; but it cannot be the substance of all; while if it is to be the substance of one, the rest will also be that one; because things whose substance is one have also one essence [το τι ην ειναι] and are themselves one. Again, substance means that which is not predicated of [λεγεται] a subject, whereas the universal is always predicated of some subject. (1038b8-17)<sup>1</sup>

Unlike a universal, a substance is never predicated of anything else. Since unity and being are predicated of everything, unity cannot be a substance nor can being. But if they are not substantial, then they cannot be separate in the way that the Platonic metaphysical

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<sup>1</sup>In its context, this passage sets up the topic we shall examine directly, namely that the Platonic metaphysical hierarchy implies Parmenideanism.

hierarchy requires. The question of substantiality is addressed at I2:

If then no universal can be a substance [ουσιαν], as has been said in our discussion of substance and being [οντος], and if being itself cannot be a substance in the sense of a one apart from the many [εντι παρα τα πολλά] (for it is common to the many), but is only a predicate, clearly unity also cannot be a substance; for being [το ον] and unity [το εν] are the most universal of all predicates. (1053b 16-20)

Aristotle thinks that Plato makes being and unity independently existing αρχαι.<sup>1</sup> In virtue of their independent existence, they are considered substances. But, says Aristotle, being and unity are not substances; they are the most universal of predicates.

In Z16, this time from his own notion that unity and being are convertible, Aristotle concludes that neither unity nor being can be the primary reality of things.<sup>2</sup> In this case, it is suggested that the Platonic metaphysical hierarchy, when understood in terms of predication results in Parmenideanism:

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<sup>1</sup>cp. 1038b9; 988a8ff; 992a25ff

<sup>2</sup>cp Cherniss pp 318 ff.

since the term 'unity' [τὸ ἐν] is used like the term 'being,' [τὸ οὖν] and the substance [οὐσία] of that which is one is one, and things whose substance is numerically one [μιαριθμῶ] are numerically one [ἐναριθμῶ], evidently neither unity nor being [οὐτε τὸ ἐν οὐτε τὸ οὖν] can be the substance [οὐσίαν] of things. (1040b16-18)

If Forms (being) participate in the One, (e.g. if the One is, a la Aristotle, predicated of being) anything that is or is numerically distinct will have unity as its substance. To have the same substance as everything else is to be numerically indistinct from everything else, and hence the logical outcome of the Platonic metaphysical hierarchy is that there is only one thing. The same goes for being. This is the Parmenideanism that the Platonic hierarchy seemed to avoid. This becomes a little clearer when we take up Aristotle's deliberations on the same topic at *Metaphysics B*.

In B3,<sup>1</sup> Aristotle asks whether being and unity are the substances of things. Plato and the Pythagoreans, says Aristotle, understood being and unity as independent essences that did not require a substratum. He goes on to say that if neither being nor unity is a substance, then

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<sup>1</sup>1001a4ff



no other universal is a substance; the assumption, oddly enough, is that these are the most universal and thus ought to be the most qualified candidates for substance on the account in question.<sup>1</sup> However, the most interesting difficulty, the one that resonates with the passage above from Z16 (1040b16-18), is the consideration that if being and unity are substances, it will be impossible to make ontological distinctions, which places one back in the Parmenidean dilemma of concluding that all things are one:<sup>2</sup>

If there is a unity itself and a being itself [τι αὐτο ἐν καὶ οὐ], their substance [οὐσίαν] must be unity and being; for no other term is predicated universally of unity and being, but only these terms themselves [ἀλλὰ ταῦτα αὐτά]. Again if there is to be a being itself and a unity itself, it is hard to see how there can be anything else besides these; I mean how things can be more than one. For that which is other than what is, is not, and so by Parmenides' argument it must follow that all things are one, i.e. being. (1001a27-1001b1)

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<sup>1</sup>1001a19-25

<sup>2</sup>1001a33-5. Gerson (1994) suggests, "being cannot be a genus because the differentiae within a genus must have being and so must become species of being as well as differentiae." (pg 92)

Again, this contention makes it incumbent upon Aristotle, who wants to reintegrate being and unity, to show how they can be convertible, but not identical. He must show how being and unity are always predicated of substance without making all substance "one being". In effect, Aristotle must say that being and unity are always predicated of substance, and that the substance must be prior. This conception of being and unity as dependent upon substance is implicit in yet another critique of Plato's theory of Forms. It is to this critique that I turn in the next section.

#### *4. The Bearers of Unity*

Aristotle's approach to the Platonists suggests that the χωρισμος is impossible, that participation is merely predication. We should also remember that in the *Physics*, Aristotle suggests that what Parmenides needed was a υποκειμενον.<sup>1</sup> The fact that there are beings and unities, that things are and are one, suggests that a rejection of "separation" ( i.e. in Platonism) and the

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<sup>1</sup>*Physics*, 186a25-33.

assertion of the need for a substratum (i.e. *pace* Parmenideanism) points in the direction of Aristotle's substance as an antidote. In other words, in putting being and unity "back together" (contra Platonism) without identifying them (contra Parmenideanism), Aristotle employs substance as a substratum.<sup>1</sup> This I think, is borne out by the way he treats Plato's Forms in certain passages of *Metaphysics A*.

In one such criticism, Aristotle suggests that Forms must be what he understands as substances:

if Forms can be shared in there must be Ideas of substances only. For they are not shared in incidentally, but a thing must share in its Form as in something not predicated of a subject...Therefore the Forms will be substance; but the same terms indicate substance in this and the ideal world (or what will be the meaning of saying that there is something apart from the particulars, the one over the many?) (990b29-991a2)<sup>2</sup>

If Forms can be "shared in" there must be Ideas of substances only. This is because the hallmark of substance for Aristotle is that it is not predicated of

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<sup>1</sup>This is interesting, since it places Parmenides in the thick of Greek metaphysical debate, a place that has been denied to him by many, e.g. Burnet, Owens and Zeller, to name just a few.

<sup>2</sup>cp Z,16, 1040b26ff

anything. Tredennick sums up the explicit sense of the passage nicely:

Ideas are substances. The common name which an Idea shares with its particulars must mean the same of both; otherwise "participation" is merely homonymy. But as applied to the Ideas it denotes substance; therefore particulars must be substances.<sup>1</sup>

Forms taken (wrongly by Plato in Aristotle's eyes) as substances, and particulars taken (rightly by Aristotle in his own eyes) as substances meet in this passage as Aristotle expresses out his understanding of the one over the many. The interesting thing in the passage just cited, however, is not explicit. What is interesting is the reference to the "one over many," and what we need to focus on is not the "one," but the "many." We should not forget that the "one" in the "one over the many" refers to the universal, but we should also not forget that the one is distinct from the many, and that Aristotle is treating the universal as a substance. This has very important implications and warrants a little further consideration, and some terminological distinctions.

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<sup>1</sup>Tredennick, Vol 1, pg. 66 n. d

If we assume (neutrally, apart from Aristotle) that what sets a thing apart from all others, including those things that belong to the same group is its *individuality*,<sup>1</sup> we may ask whether the "one" which is "over the many" differs *specifically*, *generically* or *individually*. To differ *generically* is to differ *essentially* from something else, and the same applies to *specific* difference.<sup>2</sup> But Aristotle regards the "one" and the "many" to be similar in *essence*, in so far as he thinks that the "essential predicate" of the "one" and the "many" are the same. This is clear from the fact that he denies the separation of form and particular that Platonism represents. If then, there is no *essential* difference between the one and the many, we cannot say that the one differs from the many (in Aristotle's eyes) *specifically* or *generically*. Rather, we ought to say that it differs *individually*, that there is something about the "one", and each member of the "many" that individuate them.<sup>3</sup> We must conclude that Aristotle conceives of the

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<sup>1</sup>cp. Gracia, pg 3

<sup>2</sup>*ibid.*

<sup>3</sup>We must here keep in mind that Aristotle thinks the  
(continued...)

"one" as a substance among other similar substances, differentiated or individuated by substantiality.

If there is a thing (the Form) which is apart from its many instantiations, it must itself be distinguishable from the many. Since a Form is immaterial, it cannot be that its matter distinguishes it from the many. But something distinguishes it; one might suggest that the matter of the "many" distinguishes the (material) many from the (immaterial) "one", does not address the further question of how it is that Platonic Forms, as Aristotle conceives of and represents them, are distinguished from one another.

The ability to distinguish must also apply to each member of the "many". For each member of the set of instantiations of the Form must be individual within the set (e.g. if there is a many).<sup>1</sup> If we understand the difference between a Form and its instantiation in the same way as we understand the distinction of an

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(...continued)

account of the one and many doesn't work, since on his critique of Forms suggests there is no good reason to separate Form and instantiation.

<sup>1</sup>I deal with the question of matter as a principle of individuation later in the chapter.

instantiation from another instantiation, matter cannot be the principle of individuation. This is the consequence of treating both the Forms and the concrete particular as substances. The "many" indicates many distinct particulars, which suggests that a thing is particular or a unity because it has substance, or is a substance. What this means is that for Aristotle, individuation is dependant upon substance. *But to be individual is to be one being.* Since unity and being are convertible, a thing has being *and* unity because it has substance.<sup>1</sup>

The reason why a substance cannot be composed of substances also sheds light on the unitary nature of substance. Says Aristotle:

A substance cannot consist of substances present in it in complete reality; for things that are thus in complete reality two are never in complete

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<sup>1</sup>Note here that I say a *thing* has being or unity because it has substance. This is true in the case of things, i.e. concrete particulars. But (in accordance with *pros hen* equivocity) accidents may be said to be because of a substance, and in reference to the being of a substance, both in terms of dependency and meaning. Hence at Γ, "...being is used in various senses but always with reference to one principle [προς μίαν αρχήν]. For some things are said to be because they are substances, others because they are modifications of substance; others because they are a process towards substance, or destructions or privations or qualities of substance..." (1003b5-8)

reality one, though if they are potentially two, they can be one...(1039a3-6)

The point here is that given any substance, if we are to identify it as a substance, it must be delimited as one thing. If the parts of the substance were themselves distinct unities, then we would not be dealing with one substance but many. Hence substantiality implies unity and existence, since (given convertibility) to be a substance is both "to be," and "to be one".<sup>1</sup> Aristotle suggests as much at Z 16. Here it is remarked that many things which are thought to be unities are merely potencies, including the parts of animals and the elements:<sup>2</sup>

for none of them is a unity, but as it were a mere heap, till they are worked up and some unity is made out of them.(1040b8-10)

This notion of "working up" might sound as vacuous as the Platonic *μεθεξις*, but Aristotle is describing is one of actuality and potency, which is also his way of reuniting form and matter in the particular. In this case the

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<sup>1</sup>cp. Cherniss, pp. 255 ff.

<sup>2</sup>i.e., the traditional elements; earth fire and water are mentioned, but air is not. I do not attach any significance to its absence.



"unity" into which the components are "worked up" is an actuality to which the components stand in potency. The components or potencies are posterior to the actuality and dependent on it. What this suggests is that Aristotle needs a form which has the ontological efficacy or actuality. But this does not mean that the "working up" is external to the substance. Concrete particulars are act-potency unions which come to be when substantial form conveys unity and being on commensurate matter. This must be understood as internal and not external in its efficacy. Says Aristotle at Z9:

For as the brazen sphere comes to be, but not the sphere or the brass, and so too in the case of brass itself, if it comes to be, it is its concrete unity that comes to be (for the matter and the form must always exist before), so it is both in the case of substance and in that of quality and quantity and the other categories likewise; for the quality does not come to be, but the wood of that quality, and the quantity does not come to be but the wood or the animal of that size. 1034b10-15

What we see here is that what comes to be is the concrete particular, and with it the inherence of qualities. This "coming to be" is a process of unification of sorts, the working up into a unity of what was a "mere heap".

## 5. A Contradiction

Being and unity are "said of" substances; they are not themselves substances. Being and unity are also ontologically inextricable from substances. The idea of predication, or "λεγεσθαι" implies an exclusively epistemic assertion. To "say something" of a substance is to make epistemic distinctions about something that is ontologically unitary. The act of distinguishing the unity or being of a concrete particular from the concrete particular is an epistemic act, not an ontological one. The Platonic χωρισμος effected an ontological wedge between particular, being, and unity, connected by participation where what was really necessary was a wedge between the epistemic and the ontological, connected by predication. The upshot of saying this is that Aristotle thinks that (Plato's) Forms are epistemic abstractions, not ontological particulars.

The unity and being of the concrete particular must be dependent upon another type of form, one which is not ontologically separable from the particular. This "substantial form" unifies the concrete particular, but the substantial form is not the same as the Platonic

form, the Platonic One, or the Aristotelian universal. The substantial form is unique to its concrete particular. Further, the ontological efficacy of the substantial form is only manifest in the concrete particular. The Platonic Form, which Aristotle thinks is a *καθολου* and an abstraction,<sup>1</sup> has no ontological

<sup>1</sup>Hence I think it is misleading to maintain that Aristotle is a realist with regard to universals. Those who hold to such a view seem, for the most part, to rely on the *Categories*, and not as much on the *Metaphysics*. On my account, it is wrong, for example to maintain as Zeller (1962), pg. 329-31, does that Aristotle wants to put the Platonic form back in the universal. Others who hold to realism, Brakas (1988), pg 15, or Leshner, discussed in this chapter do not adequately explain what it means to call universals "genuine οντα". Sellars (1957), pg. 691, on the other hand is more correct to say, 'if anything is clear about an Aristotelian form it is that its primary mode of being is to be a *this*. Certainly the form of a materiate substance [concrete particular] is not a *universal*, for as Aristotle reiterates, the form is 'the substance of' the composite, the substance of a *this* must be of the nature of a *this* and never of a *universal*.' Interestingly, Brakas, pg. 15, who claims that Sellars is contradicted by texts in the *Organon*, nonetheless concedes that, "Although Aristotle may have modified his view of the nature of the universal more than once over the course of his career, he never at any point gave up his belief in their existence. Nevertheless it is true that there are powerful currents in his thought moving in that direction." My own thinking, that if universals exist, they exist in thought, is similar to the view of Cresswell, and Fuller. Fuller suggests: "In short the universal has no concrete existence of its own. It is not a subject but a predicate, not a thing but an attribute of or truth about a thing. It is not then a power, and it is not suited for the role of a first principle." (pg. 39).

It is also instructive that one of Plotinus' revisions of Plato is to place Forms in a *Nous*, and to identify that *Nous* with Aristotle's Unmoved Mover, who presumably is at one with thoughts of universals and not of particulars. On this point,  
(continued...)

*efficacy, no causality, cannot account for motion or change, has no substantiality.* To suggest that universal abstractions like being and unity are substances engenders Parmenideanism, or commits one to separate forms which are "looking" to be united with some matter, and matter "seeking" union with form as an *external relation* that effects the cohesion of parts of a substance.

Once we have the Aristotelian relation of being and unity to particulars in place, and we are cognisant of the epistemic/ontological distinction, we are able to make some headway in understanding what Aristotle's conception of substance should look like. I think a lot of the confusion over this issue arises because of a conflation of Platonic Forms (Aristotelian universals) and Aristotelian substantial forms. We have to remember that a universal cannot be a substance, and a substantial

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(...continued)

Brakas maintains that the Unmoved Mover does not think universals, on the grounds that universals are not actual (pg. 16); only perceptible forms are actual says Brakas. However, the Unmoved Mover must be completely actual, and to suggest that Aristotle thought the Unmoved Mover could have potential thoughts is incoherent. Hence I see no difficulty with asserting that the Unmoved Mover thinks universals actually. Again, Plotinus will assert, contra Aristotle, that thinking implies potency, which may speak to Brakas' concern, but not to Aristotle's intention.

form only belongs to one concrete particular, giving that particular being and unity. It is important to keep this clear, since some thinkers maintain that Aristotle is guilty of a contradiction by making the three following claims:<sup>1</sup>

- (1) No universal can be a substance.<sup>2</sup>
- (2) The form is a universal.<sup>3</sup>
- (3) The form is that which is most truly substance.<sup>4</sup>

My own thinking is that if we remain clear on the way being and unity function in the Aristotelian system,

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<sup>1</sup>I use Lesher's formulation, pg. 169. cp. Skyes, pp. 326-8. Lewis (1991), pg. 310. ff. wants to rectify the difficulty, as do I; the difference is that Lewis takes a "realist" approach to universals, (i.e. that they have some kind of (to my mind nebulous) independent ontological status) whereas I think it makes more sense to take a realist approach to substantial forms (since these clearly do have independent ontological status).

<sup>2</sup>1038b8-9

<sup>3</sup>Lesher claims (pg. 169,n.2)that Aristotle does not explicitly say this, but that he is committed to it. Socrates and Callias are different individuals, "but the same in form; for their form is indivisible." (1034a5-8) and Aristotle refers to both individuals in the same species.(De Gen An 730bb35)Socrates and Callias possess a common specific form (De Part An 644a25), and that that which is common to many things is a universal (1038b11-12) and man is a universal (Cat 17a40b1). I do not deny that Aristotle has universals, nor that universals are forms. I suggest, in what follows in this chapter, that there are "universal forms" and "substantial forms" in Aristotle's system, and that the form which is universal is different from the form that is most truly substance.

<sup>4</sup>1032b1-2; 1033b7; 1037a27ff; 1041b6; 1050b2

no contradiction arises. What follows in this section is an attempt to explain why.

The context in which (1) (no universal can be a substance) is raised, is that of Platonism,<sup>1</sup> and the force of (1) is that the Platonic Form cannot both have separate existence (substantiality) and be predicated of many things (universality), just as being and unity cannot. This rejection of universal-as-substance necessitates maintaining in its stead the dependence of being and unity on substance,<sup>2</sup> and denies the independent existence of Forms.

Aristotle never actually says (2) (the form is a universal) directly, although it has been maintained that it is a consequence of his notion of universals, in so far as Forms as *universals* are predicated of many particulars.<sup>3</sup> But Aristotle certainly cannot mean by (2), in whatever sense it can be said of the *Metaphysics*, that

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<sup>1</sup>Both in the passage cited above, and at 1038b8-9.

<sup>2</sup>It so necessitates because in the absence of transcendent one and a transcendent being, on which particulars depend, being and unity become predicates of particulars and predicates stand in a dependent relation to particulars.

<sup>3</sup>Leshner, pg. 169 n2.

the form, as a particular *substantial form* combined with matter in a concrete particular is common to many things. Hence the "form" in (2), and the universal "form" implied by (1) (no universal can be a substance) must be different. Universals (Forms/forms)<sup>1</sup> as abstractions of particular substantial forms may be epistemic generalisations, but it is substantial forms that have independent ontological status and causal efficacy.<sup>2</sup>

If the foregoing is correct, then the contradictory sense of (3) (the form is that which is most truly substance) is lost, since the form which is most truly substance is a *substantial form* in a concrete particular, and not a separate Form as both universal and substance, that understanding of Plato which motivates Aristotle to posit (1). No *independently existing* form is a universal, that is no *substantial form* is a universal, and it is the substantial form that is most truly substance. This deflates the notion of "form as universal-substance" in (2) necessary to make (3)

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<sup>1</sup>Forms=Plato; forms=Aristotle

<sup>2</sup>Matthen, pg. 156.

contradictory.<sup>1</sup> The contradiction is resolved by getting clear on the senses of "form" open to Aristotle once we see that he rejects the Platonic metaphysical hierarchy.

Let's look at our original three statements again:

- (1) No universal can be a substance
- (2) The form is a universal
- (3) The form is that which is most truly substance.

Once we are clear on the senses of "form" in each, we may reformulate thus:

(1) No universal can be a substance, because universals are predicated of many things, and substances are never predicated of anything.<sup>2</sup>

(2) The Platonic Form (or abstract form) is a universal, it *is* predicated of many things.

(3) The *substantial* form is that which is most truly substance.

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<sup>1</sup>This, or something like this is what I think Lacey (pp 54-69) would maintain in the face of this problem. To maintain (as Leshner would, pp. 177) that it is not Aristotle's intention to reject a universal as a *kind* of substance is unreasonable, because this would allow the Platonist to say that the Forms are just a different kind of substance. Aristotle has other types of substance as separately existing things, i.e. concrete particulars and movers, but he does not count universals among them.

<sup>2</sup>Lewis (1991) reformulates: "(1') If an entity is universal to many things then it is not the substance of any of them." (pg. 311). He does so on the grounds that Aristotle proves (1') and not(1) in Z13. However Lewis' solution to the puzzle seems to entail a *universalia in rebus* or *realist* approach to universals, in so far as he wants to assert that things can be both primary substances and universal. (pp. 311-2)



If we cash this out, it means that while you and I may have the same universal form, the substantial forms which we possess as concrete particulars are different. Each substantial form always exists in one and only one concrete particular. Aristotle suggests as much in the following passage:

The causes and elements of things in the same species [εἶδει] are different, not in species but because the cause of particulars is different - your matter [ὕλη] and form [εἶδος] and moving cause [κίνησαν] and mine - but they are the same in universal account [καθολου δε λογω ταυτα]. (1071a27-9)<sup>1</sup>

We each have our own (substantial) "form" but we may refer to "ανθρωπος" in the abstract, understanding that form considered in "universal account," or in terms of that which is predicated of many ανθρωποι. And predication is epistemic. At the same time, however, we

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<sup>1</sup>Gill (1994) notes that this passage is often cited as proof of particular forms; I hold in part to this view, but I hold it because I believe that the particularity of a substantial form is accounted for by the fact that it always exists in a concrete particular. Hence Gill's view coincides with my own perspective; "this passage appears to support a notion of proprietary matter and form - matter and form individuated with reference to the objects whose matter and form they are. Here physical objects are treated as basic particulars." (pg. 69)

must not confuse my (substantial) form with anyone else's; the substantial form is ontologically inextricable from the concrete particular. We do not predicate my substantial form of both you and me. The form which is "most truly substance" is substantial form,<sup>1</sup> whereas the form which is a universal is an epistemic abstraction. And we have noted already that this is a way of suggesting that Platonic Forms are not particular substances but universals.

#### 6. *Implications of the Solution*

I have been suggesting that substance, and more specifically substantial form, is the bearer of being, unity and distinctness, both in the discussion of "the one over the many" and in the resolution of the "contradiction". The implications of this suggestion can perhaps be made clearer by examining the following consideration from A.C. Lloyd. If we had different forms, says Lloyd,

We should have to have known what it was  
for your form to be numerically different

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<sup>1</sup>The substantial form, because it is *ontologically* inextricable from the concrete particular, is the concrete particular.

from mine in order to have used the fact,  
if it had been one, to explain what it is  
for you to be numerically different from  
me.<sup>1</sup>

Lloyd's point about numerical difference does not square with a sense of the dependence of being and unity on substance, or substantial form. The implication of what Lloyd is saying denies numerical difference in the presence of substantial form. Given that being and unity are dependent upon, and in fact ontologically inextricable from substance, we have grounds for asserting the numerical difference of my form from yours.<sup>2</sup> Lloyd's point is that a form is not a principle of differentiation in individuals of a kind, but only of kinds. Lloyd asserts the common view that *matter* is the principle of individuation within a kind; matter imposes specificity on a particular of a kind as its potency.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Lloyd, pg. 523 This approach is representative of those who would maintain a realist approach to universals, e.g. Brakas, Lewis, Zeller, etc, all of whom are susceptible to the idea of a *universale in rebus*, which, I am arguing, engenders the Platonic metaphysical hierarchy Aristotle rejects.

<sup>2</sup>The case is different, however, when we come to non-material particulars, since while matter is not the *primary* αἰτία of individuation, it is nonetheless an αἰτία.

<sup>3</sup>Gill (1994) raises two problems with individuation: "either the account of particularity is explanatory but applies to all particulars indifferently without illuminating  
(continued...)

However, this imposes a false dichotomy on matter and form, for the two only exist in conjunction with one another in discussions of concrete particular substances such as (in Lloyd's example) "you and me".<sup>1</sup> For

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(...continued)

the difference, or the account differentiates the particulars but is not explanatory, because it presupposes the very thing it is meant to explain." (pg. 59.) One might suggest a solution such as weak individuation, whereby one particular is individuated by another, but this ultimately requires an indexed notion of time which Aristotle does not have. (pg. 66) Time is a measure of change, and hence any time could be established as "enclosing" the destruction and regeneration of the same entity (e.g. melting down and remoulding a statue). Such a difficulty discounts temporal continuity as adequate to account for individuation. Traditional accounts of matter as a principle of individuation (i.e. Lloyd *op cit*) fall prey to related difficulties. At *Metaphysics* 1034a5-8, given two individuals, Aristotle says that the matter is different but the form is the same. (I suggest that here Aristotle conceives of  $\epsilon\iota\delta\omicron\varsigma$  as a universal form, conceived "as if" it were placed in matter, but only "as if". If this appeals to a qualitative difference in the matter, one is left with the difficulty of two identical objects that have only a spatial difference. If the appeal to the matter is based on continuity, we can distinguish but not explain the particularity, even if we reduce the individual to particular elemental components or prime matter (Gill, pg. 60-1) To appeal to spatio-temporal distinction begs the question of how these differences are distinguishable without an appeal to space or time (pg. 62), given that Aristotle differentiates place with reference to bodies, and likewise time. (*Physics*, 212a5-6) In the end I side with Gill's analysis that existing physical objects, or concrete particulars are ontologically basic. What this means for me, although I am not sure Gill would take the point so far, is that the concrete particular, as a unity of matter and form, is in virtue of that unity individuated from other such particulars.

<sup>1</sup>In  $\Theta$ , the compound is used to illuminate the act-potency union. About  $\Theta$  (pp. 93-4) Charles says, "The relevant potentiality in a unified [concrete particular] is one which  
(continued...)"

Aristotle, "matter is potential because it would proceed to the form; and once it is actual, then it is included in the form."<sup>1</sup> The potency of matter to a (substantial) form implies that it relies on the form; in an act-potency (matter-form) union, such as you or I, the two are *ontologically* inextricable, although they may be *epistemically* distinguishable. In one passage in Z, Aristotle says something that may appear to support Lloyd's claim:

the living thing which generates is sufficient to produce, and to be the cause of the form in the matter [του ειδους αιτιον ειναι εν τη υλη] .The completed whole, such-and-such a form [το τοιυνδε ειδος] induced in this flesh and these bones, is Callias and Socrates. And it is different from that which generated it, because the matter is different; but identical in form [ταυτο δε τω ειδει], because the form is indivisible. (1034a4-9)

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(...continued)

stands to its actuality as matter stands to its composite...The notion of a unified composite substance is taken as basic. Matter is conceived as the potential to be (or become) a unified composite. Form (if present at all) must also be an abstraction derived from the unified composite. No account of either matter or form is offered except in terms of their role in a unified substance."

<sup>1</sup>1050a15-6

We must be careful here. The first thing suggested is that the concrete particular (implying not a *παράδειγμα*, but a father), passes on a form, i.e. the form of "man". The 'completed whole' is a distinct concrete particular and is thought of as different from the father, because they are different as concrete particulars, i.e. different unions of matter and form. The form, "man" is the same, e.g. the universal in abstraction from the concrete particular is indivisible, but this epistemic notion is posterior to and abstracted from the father of Socrates, Socrates, Callias, his father, and so on. I think Aristotle is perhaps speaking loosely here about universals, which are seen as "induced" in matter, or particular is "instantiations" of man, which are concrete particulars. That he would speak this way in the process of denying and Platonic *παράδειγμα* seems reasonable, since it would be untenable to say that both Socrates and Callias possess the same *substantial* form. It is acceptable to say that the same universal form, "man" is predicated of both Socrates, and Callias and their fathers.

Lloyd is correct to maintain that there is a numerical difference between (universal) forms only universally (i.e. definitionally), or across kinds. Socrates the man is different from Cerberus the dog (to use Lloyd's example),<sup>1</sup> or the (universal) form of a man is different from the (universal) form of a dog, and these are individuated by a *λογος*. However, denying a real numerical difference between "my (substantial) form and your (substantial) form" suggests that my (substantial) form and your (substantial) form are like separate *instances* of the abstract *ανθρωπος*. This places unity or distinctness in the hands of the (universal) form, not the (substantial) form. In doing so, one fails to distinguish between (substantial) form and universal ((universal) form) in the sense that leads to the previously discussed contradiction, and this throws you back into the Platonism which Aristotle is trying to reject.<sup>2</sup> A (substantial) form exists in a subject, a universal ((universal) form) in abstraction, and

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<sup>1</sup>Lloyd, pg. 521-2

<sup>2</sup>i.e., it makes the unity of the particular dependent on a prior substantial unity.

Aristotle's objection to Plato is that he called (universal) forms substances. A man is not an *ontological instance* of the (universal) form of man for Aristotle. One *might* be tempted to say that the (substantial) form of a man is a *definitional* instance of the universal, but to assert a similar *ontological* relation is to put the cart before the horse: we only arrive at the universal based on abstraction from the particular. Lloyd himself says,

to avoid the return to Platonism involved in distinguishing forms from their instances in particulars instead of universals from forms, Aristotle insists in his logic that although white is in Socrates, man is not in them at all; man is what each is.<sup>1</sup>

This goes to the heart of Aristotle's position on unity, namely that in a very important ontological sense substantial form is a concrete particular, as much as matter is; the combination of matter and form in an act-potency union is that on which unity and being depend.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Lloyd, pg 522.

<sup>2</sup>I should point out that, since Aristotle's concept of individuation is developed in terms of a material concrete particular, it relies on both substantial form and its commensurate matter together. This will cause problems when Aristotle has to distinguish between multiple immaterial  
(continued...)



When you approach something from the point of view of language, or definition, you speak primarily not of the substance, but of the universal. The universal epistemically abstracts an *idea* of the substantial form, but not the substantial form *itself*, because the substantial form cannot be ontologically abstracted from the concrete particular. A universal such as "man" can be said of many things, for example "that is a man," and "that too is a man," and "Socrates is a man," and "Callicles is a man." This act of predication requires a concrete particular man to exist before the act of predicating can be true or useful, or rational.<sup>1</sup> If a form and not the universal was predicated of *matter*, one would have to ask "of what matter is form predicated?" and the answer would have to be "the matter of that man," for in the case of concrete particulars, matter never exists without form, and form never exists without matter.<sup>2</sup> There cannot be a "that matter" on its own,

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(...continued)  
substances.

<sup>1</sup>cp Owens, pg. 174

<sup>2</sup>"The universal which is predicated of the singular thing is ...not immediately the form as such, but the composite  
(continued...)"

because matter on its own is indeterminate - it is pure potency. To say that the form "man" is predicated of "that matter," or "the matter of that man," presupposes the existence of "that man" - the concrete particular which is inseparable from the matter-form union. But "that man" is his substance or substantial form, and hence predication (the saying) is not the manipulation of the substantial form "man", but of the universal "man". Aristotle suggests this at Z 11, in discussing the relation of soul (the form of the body) and the body (its matter):

It is clear also that the soul is the primary substance [ουσια η πρωτη], and the body matter; and "man" or "animal" is the combination of both taken universally [ως καθολου]. (1037a6-7).<sup>1</sup>

The unavoidable conclusion of Aristotle's rejection of separation (and of his identifying Plato's participation with predication) is that you do not

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(...continued)

taken universally." Owens, pg. 204.

<sup>1</sup>"The form is Entity [substance]. It is the primary instance of Entity [substance] within the sensible thing. The universal, which is not Entity [substance] is predicated of the singular composite [concrete particular]." Owens, pg 204. Square brackets [] indicate that Owens calls "Entity" what I call "substance".

predicate a substantial form of a concrete particular, since a substantial form *is* its particular. The sense of this can also be seen in Aristotle's denial of being and unity as substances (as discussed in the previous chapter), for they are predicated of everything, and hence are universals. In the case of concrete particulars, there is never a particular "being" that is not (busy) being "something" nor is there a "one" which is not a "one something." Hence you can say a concrete particular "is" or that it "is one," but to do so is already presumed by the fact that it is a concrete particular. That is why I have called being and unity convertible, and predicates of substance, for they are inseparable from substance as much as matter and form are.

It may be correct to say that a concrete particular substance is epistemologically dependant upon the universal, and the claim that the substantial form is similarly dependent, but this is epistemological dependence, not ontological dependence. That the universal exists only in abstraction suggests that there would be no universals at all if there was not a concrete

particular with a substantial form which gave rise to the abstract idea (universal) in the first place.

The substantial form is the substance of the concrete particular, conveying unity and being by its presence. I say that it conveys unity and being because in a concrete particular the existence of potency or matter is recalcitrant to *absolute* unity and being. The relationship, however is reciprocal, for to the extent that a substance is amenable to a potency, it lacks of itself that much unity and being.<sup>1</sup> The upshot of this section is that for Aristotle, form is the proprietor of (a particular's) unity and being, as it was for Plato, but now the proprietor and the appropriated are the same thing, *natura naturata* and *natura naturans*.

## 7. Conclusion (I & II)

In Chapters I & II I have been examining some of Aristotle's criticisms of Plato. I have structured his

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<sup>1</sup>There may be seem to be a tension here between the fact that I say that matter and form are integrated and that matter is recalcitrant to form. However, the fact that matter resists the absolute unity that form without restriction conveys in immaterial substances does not rule out the fact that matter and form are co-extensive; it simply means that the impose limits on one another as a result of that integration or commensurability.

critique in terms of what I call the Platonic metaphysical hierarchy, that Aristotelian account of Plato's metaphysics that places unity prior to being and being prior to particulars. The Platonic metaphysical hierarchy itself seems to contrast with another conceptual scheme, Parmenideanism. The separation and prioritisation of being and unity in Plato may seem to avoid the problem which Parmenides has, but Aristotle seems to think it does not. Aristotle must avoid both the Platonic hierarchy and Parmenideanism. I have tried to show how understanding the relations of being and unity that Aristotle is rejecting help us to understand what he must say about formal reality himself if he is to avoid the difficulties he sees in Plato and Parmenides.

As Aristotle understands Plato, unity and being are separate. Unity is prior to being, and being is dependant on unity. A physical thing "exists" by participating in a Form which exists by participating in the One. As Aristotle understands substance, it is capable of separate existence and is not predicable of anything. But for (Aristotle's) Plato, Being and Unity are capable of separate existence and are predicated of

everything. Aristotle argues that substances cannot be universals, and hence Plato's project of χωρισμος fails. Again Aristotle's complaint is that Unity is separate from Being (Forms) and Forms are separate from their instances (concrete particulars).

Aristotle's solution is to reintegrate form and matter, without succumbing to Parmenideanism. The "double role" played by Plato's Forms as universals and substances is unacceptable. Two different conceptions of "form" are needed - one is epistemic and universal, the other is ontological and particular. In a concrete particular, unity and being are functions of substantial form and actuality. Again, substantial form, is responsible for being and unity in a concrete particular. That is to say that a thing both is, is what it is and is one, because of the substantial form. Further, a concrete particular is ontologically inseparable from and co-extensive with its substantial form. By "co-extensive" I mean that you never find a concrete particular without its substantial form and vice versa. It does not rule out the co-extensivity of matter with the sensible concrete particular, or the co-extensivity of matter and form in

the sensible concrete particular. Ontologically, a concrete particular is its substance, whereas epistemologically, one may draw distinctions between the form, the matter and the concrete particular. In order to understand how this is true, we must understand the nature of substance, or the nature of being *qua* being, which is the project of the *Metaphysics*.<sup>1</sup>

What I am suggesting is that Aristotle sees in the Platonic metaphysical hierarchy two parallel relations or levels, one of unity and being, and the other of matter and form. Unity and being are separate and matter and form are separate. Aristotle wants to effect a reintegration of these levels: 1) Matter (potency) and form (actuality) are reintegrated. A concrete particular and its substantial form are the same thing. 2) Unity and

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<sup>1</sup>It is useful to note that Frede points out quite rightly that, "Aristotle thinks that there is no such thing as being, one general feature shared by all things which are, and that hence there is also no single answer to the question what is it to be a being." (pg. 174) Of course there are basic beings, or concrete particulars, and the fact that other things count as beings only in so far as they are related to these primary beings in some way or other, is the notion of the *pros hen* equivocity of being in Aristotle. cp. Kosman (1994), Owens, Gerson (1990), Hadot.

Being are reintegrated in the concrete particular, in so far as substantial form conveys being and unity.<sup>1</sup>

These reintegrations are the result of the concept of substance that emerges in relation to the difficulties engendered by the Platonic metaphysical hierarchy. A substance in the primary sense is the substantial form of a thing, and that substantial form is its actuality. In a concrete particular, which is a union of matter and form, the matter represents the potency, and the substantial form the actuality. The substantial form or actuality and the matter or potency of a concrete particular are two interdependent components of the same

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<sup>1</sup>Kosman (1994), maintains that " An instance of a substance is...both a *this* and a *what* and its being a *what* is a condition of its being a *this*." (pg. 197) We must be careful how we understand this, however. For if we mean to say that a thing's unity ("thisness") is the condition of its being ("whatness"), we ignore the convertibility of being and unity and their reliance on substance. This is to fall back into Platonism, where being depends on unity. Hence such dichotomies as the following by Kosman (1994) can be oversimplified: "the matter of a cloak is that which is the cloak, the form that by virtue of which that which is the cloak is the cloak." (pg. 197) Not any matter can be a cloak, but only *the* matter of *the particular* cloak. Surely not any form can be the form of a cloak -this is restricted to *the substantial* form of *the particular* cloak. Both the matter and form are inextricable ontological components of the cloak, and the being and unity of the cloak depends on the ability of the form to convey being and unity.



thing.<sup>1</sup> The result of the reintegration is that what were for Plato two things, a form and its material instantiation, are no longer separated.

Aristotle thinks that the Platonic metaphysical hierarchy has a number of difficulties; I have dealt with some of the metaphysical or substantial questions in this Chapter II. What emerge from Aristotle's discussion of substance are answers to other physical problems raised in our discussion in Chapter I. Given that Aristotle's answer to the question of motion and change is ultimately resolved in terms of notions like act and potency, and questions of movers, in the next chapter, I take up some questions surrounding motion and actuality in the realm of first movers. The discussion of the Movers of the system, culminating in the Unmoved Mover, represents Aristotle's attempt to assert, in response to the reaction of a duality of first principles, that there is one and only one cosmological first principle.

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<sup>1</sup>cp Frede, pg. 175. Note further that they are not merely related components. Says Scaltsas (1994), "the unity of a substance is not achieved by relating its components to one another; rather unity is achieved by *dissolving the distinctness* of each of the substances components." (pg. 107)

I think that examining Aristotle's criticisms of Plato is extremely valuable in understanding what he has to say about substance for at least four reasons: 1) Seeing the Platonic and Parmenidean relations of being and unity that Aristotle criticises helps us to see what he can and cannot assert - it delimits what we can take him to be saying about substance, forms, universals, principles, and the task of metaphysics, among other things. 2) If the *Metaphysics* is to be consistent, it must at the very least be consistent in its rejection of the Platonic metaphysical hierarchy. This allows us to establish a thematic continuity in the *Metaphysics* itself, one which transcends questions of dating various parts of the *Metaphysics*, or of establishing relations within the patchwork of arguments of which it is composed. 3) Seeing Aristotle cast the Platonic metaphysical hierarchy in terms of Parmenides suggests a continuity of metaphysical concern that extends at least from the Eleatic to (as we shall see in Part II) Plotinus. Finally, 4) understanding Plotinus is easier when we see that his response to Aristotle is motivated in part by an allegiance to the Platonic metaphysical

hierarchy, and in part by a recognition of the incoherence of Middle Platonist attempts to "Aristotelianise" Plato.

### Chapter III - Movers

#### 1. Introduction

This chapter deals with some of the other issues related to Aristotle's critique of the Platonic metaphysical hierarchy, specifically the physical and the cosmological. There are two different types of cosmological questions raised by substance, one physical, or having to do with motion and change, and the other metaphysical, or having to do with the unity of substance.

The chapter proceeds as follows: In Section 2 I discuss an important sense of the "priority of the actual" in *Metaphysics* Θ, namely that the eternal is prior to the perishable in substantiality. This leads to a discussion of a necessary first principle of motion as a guarantor of motion, a *First Moved Mover* or first heaven.<sup>1</sup> The continuity of motion required to guarantee

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<sup>1</sup>I say here that the First Moved Mover is a guarantor of motion because the eternity of its motion ensures the  
(continued...)

motion in the cosmos, necessitates the positing of something that is always in motion, and this is the role played by the First Moved Mover. This mover itself needs a guarantor, the *Unmoved Mover*.

In Section 3, I discuss further the need to assert cosmologically the priority of the actual, given the nature of potency as ambivalent. Since the motion of the spheres is itself a *material* motion, and matter is potency, the First Moved Mover, as a first *physical* mover, requires something *completely* actual as its guarantor. This complete actuality is the Unmoved Mover. I also suggest that the "kinetic" actuality and "substantial" actuality of the First Moved Mover are extensionally the same; its *ενεργεια* is *κίνησις*. This helps to explain how the Unmoved Mover causes the First Moved Mover to move - I suggest that it acts as an exemplary

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(...continued)  
 continuity and eternity of motion of within the physical continuity that is the cosmos. Georgiadis (pg 11) describes the circular movement of the First Mover succinctly: "It is the movement of the First Heaven, i.e. of the sphere of the fixed stars. This is a movement which as circular has no absolute end point but can go on eternally and in an identical manner."

cause which is imitated (in a mundane, non-Platonic sense) by the First Moved Mover.

The fact that the Unmoved Mover is an exemplary cause coincides with my contention that substances are the bearers of being and unity, in so far as their being and unity is not caused (a la Plato) by an imitation of, or participation in, the unity or being of the Unmoved Mover. Rather their being and unity is caused by their substantiality, which is guaranteed by the motion of the First Moved Mover, whose motion is in turn guaranteed by the exemplary actuality of the Unmoved Mover.

Section 4 attempts to show how the considerations of the previous sections speak against interpreting a certain passage in *Metaphysics*  $\alpha$  as indicating that Aristotle once held a notion of the "gradable univocity" of being.

## 2. *Matter, Motion, and Potency*

Towards the end of his discussion of act and potency in Book  $\Theta$ , Aristotle suggests that the notion of the priority of the actual has a deeper sense:

But actuality is prior in a higher sense also [Αλλά μην και κυριωτεως]; for eternal things are prior in substance [τα μεν γαρ αιδια προτερα τη ουσια] to perishable things, and no eternal thing exists potentially [ουθεν δυναμει αιδιου]. 1050b6-8<sup>1</sup>

This notion of "substantial priority" moves us closer to Aristotle's discussion of the Unmoved Mover as the guarantor of the motion of the First Moved Mover. For Aristotle, every potential is at the same time potential for its opposite. Anything and everything which is potential may, by the very nature of its potency, fail to be actualised. Hence that which is "capable" (δυναμις) of being may either be or not be.<sup>2</sup> Aristotle's truncated

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<sup>2</sup>Trans Barnes.

<sup>2</sup>This is also the notion of a contingent being implying the existence of a necessary being that finds its way into Aquinas' proofs for God's existence at the beginning of the *Summa*. cp. Ross, pg. 179 who calls it a type of "cosmological argument." Additionally, it should be noted that unity is also manifest in the case of the non-material particular, with the difference that its unity is devoid of potency; for matter is the cause or source of potency. As a result of this lack of potency, non-material entities are not contingent, for what is contingent is the combination of matter and form, but form is not corruptible (nor is matter). Again, "form" on its own is an essential unity. In a concrete particular, form is the principle of unity, and knowing as we do that unity and being are convertible terms, we can say that non-material instances of *substantial being* are non-contingent.

formulation of the argument from contingency in the *Metaphysics* reads:

Nor can anything which is of necessity be potential, and yet (καίτοι) these things [necessary beings] are primary, for if they did not exist, nothing would exist.  
1050b18-20

Aristotle locates his notion of contingent beings in the context of contingent motion, and goes on to suggest that because there is something eternally in motion, motion is guaranteed. This is consistent with the idea that eternal things (i.e. in this case the Unmoved Mover) are never contingent or potential.<sup>1</sup>

When Aristotle opens his discussion of a first principle in Book Λ, he indicates that there are three kinds of substance: 1) physical and perishable, (a physical concrete particular), 2) physical and imperishable, (the heavenly spheres), 3) non-physical (the "unmoved movers"). The first two kinds belong to the study of physics and the third kind belongs to some other science, presumably metaphysics.<sup>2</sup> I will first deal briefly with kinds 1 and 2.

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<sup>1</sup>1050b20ff

<sup>2</sup>1069b2ff



Aristotle says that it is impossible to generalise in any all-encompassing way about the principles of physical substances (i.e. 1), but that at the most general level, they are analogous (αναλογον) in so far as,

a) everything has matter, form, privation [στερησις] and a moving cause [τοκινουν], (b) the causes of substances [ατωνουσιων αιτια] may be regarded as the causes of all things, since if substances are destroyed, everything is destroyed; and further (c) that which is first in complete reality [εντελεχεια] is the cause of all things.  
1071a34-7

The last point (c) harkens back to the *Physics* where it is shown that a necessary being is required to ensure continuous motion, and intimates the need for a guarantor of the First Moved Mover's motion.<sup>1</sup>

The primary reality which guarantees motion in the sense of a continuously circular locomotion is a physical being yet not the kind that is subject to generation and corruption (i.e. it is a substance of type 2). Such a substance is required because motion is eternal:

substances are the first of existing things, and if they are all destructive, all things are destructible. But it is impossible that movement should either come

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<sup>1</sup>*Physics* 266a6-9

into being or cease to be; for it must always have existed. Nor can time come into being and cease to be; for there could not be a before and an after if time did not exist. Movement also is continuous, then, in the sense in which time is; for time is either the same as movement or an attribute of movement. And there is no continuous movement except movement in place, and of this only that which is circular is continuous. (1071b5-11)

Circular movement is thought to be continuous because it has no beginning and no end point, such as movement in a straight line does.<sup>1</sup> The comparison of continuous motion to continuous time suggests that, just as there would have to have been a "time before" the first time, there would have to be a "motion before" the first motion (to get motion started). Since this is incoherent, we are seeking a continuous motion.

Aristotle goes on to show that anything which is capable of motion is, by virtue of that very capacity, capable of non-motion, and hence it is also in need of an explanation, and a guarantor:

even if we are to suppose that there is something which is kinetic and productive although it does not actually move or produce, there will not necessarily be

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<sup>1</sup>Physics 262a12ff

motion; for that which has potentiality may not actualize it. (1071b13-14)

What is equally worth our attention is the conceptual association of matter with potency.<sup>1</sup> This is suggested by the fact that Aristotle says that the ultimate guarantor of motion, "must be immaterial [ανευ υλης]; for they must be eternal if anything is."<sup>2</sup> Immaterial things are the most likely candidates for eternity because material things are divisible and therefore corruptible. An immaterial thing is subject to neither division or corruption. Matter is the source of potency, and anything with potency requires a prior actuality to cause it to be actual.

Motion is physical, and as such motion requires spaciality and consequently matter. While it is clear that the material but eternal heavens are moveable but incapable of destruction, the fact that these are composed of some kind of matter perhaps suggests to

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<sup>8</sup>cp Georgiadis, pg 13

<sup>9</sup>1071b20-3 Using the plural perhaps implies the "multiple" unmoved movers which he postulates as the explanation of variant celestial motion (see Chapter IV, Section 4). The same condition of immateriality applies to the Unmoved Mover.

Aristotle that they possess potency, and as such it is possible that they not move.

### 3. *Actuality and Final Cause*

Aristotle has said that the Platonists did not adequately account for motion and change:<sup>1</sup>

Thus it will not help matters if we posit eternal substances, as do the exponents of Forms, unless there is in them some principle which can cause change.<sup>1071b14-16</sup><sup>2</sup>

There is, as I have previously suggested, nothing in the nature of the Platonic principle(s) to indicate a propensity to cause change. In what follows, I want to suggest two things. 1) I want to suggest that there is something in the nature of the First Moved Mover that makes it cause motion and change, allowing, by a principle of the continuity of motion, for each individual substance to grow and change. Motion is

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<sup>10</sup>In an instructive passage, Ross (pg 180) summarises: "To produce eternal motion there must be (1) eternal substance. So far the Platonic Forms would suffice. But (2) this eternal substance must be capable of causing motion, which forms are not. (3) It must not only have this power but exercise it. (4) Its essence must be not power but activity, for otherwise it would be possible not to exercise this power, and change would not be eternal, i.e. necessarily everlasting. (5) Such substance must be immaterial, since it must be eternal."

<sup>11</sup>cp 1071b33ff, 1072a1ff

required for the coming to be of the concrete particular, in so far as some prior actuality must "move" in order to create or procreate. Aristotle employs his notion of the priority of the actual to argue for an actual cause of motion and change, on the basis of the ambivalence of the potential. 2) I also want to suggest that, given the claim that non-material substances are essential unities,<sup>1</sup> in the Unmoved Mover, unity, being and actuality converge as the guarantor of motion, which is really to say that being/unity/actuality is the guarantor of the existence of the *κοσμος*. In order to understand how claims 1 and 2 are so, we need to understand the relationship of the guarantor of motion to the guarantor of being.

The introduction of the importance of the priority of the actual emerges when Aristotle puts forth what at first seems to be an innocuous problem regarding potency.

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<sup>1</sup>Given the essential unity of non-material entities, we ought to expect that the guarantor of motion is actual and unitary. This leads one to wonder if we aren't back in the realm of participation in some higher formal unity again, in so far as all non-absolute unities might appear to "participate" in some absolute unity. What one sees instead is an attempt to render all formal or essential substance as a unifying principle of its particular; the concrete particular manifests that unification in terms of the matter-form union and in terms of a potency seeking the actualization of an end.

One might think, he says, that potency is prior to actuality, on the assumption that actuality is logically dependant on it. If this is the case, however, "none of the existing things will exist."<sup>1</sup> The implication is that, in the absence of a prior actual, there is no guarantee of anything existing, since anything which possesses potency also possesses potency for its opposite. To claim the priority of the potential is to disregard the need for an actual cause, or in other words, to fail to recognize the most basic application of the principle of sufficient reason.<sup>2</sup> If we accept, as Aristotle says we must, his arguments for motion requiring a circular and continuous locomotion, we must also accept the need for a cause of that motion:

And since that which is moved while it moves is intermediate, there is something which moves without being moved, something eternal which is both substance and actuality.1072a24-6

Keeping in mind the associations of matter with potency, and the immaterial with actuality, as well as the idea of

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<sup>1</sup>1071b25

<sup>2</sup>Aristotle's criticism of Plato regarding motion suggests that the Platonists cannot account for motion and change at this most primary level, and suggests that they, like Parmenides, are left with a stagnant principle of being.

an immaterial substance being an essential unity, we should expect that this Unmoved Mover is a primary unity, the primary being, the primary substance. The question remains how it causes motion.

It is my suggestion that in moving, the First Moved Mover expresses its own actuality, its own substance or *τοτιηνεῖναι*. It is a substance whose motion is an end in itself, an expression of its being, and for an end: the imitation of the Unmoved Mover that results from desire. Aristotle wants to say that in so far as the First Moved Mover acts as an agent of motion, guaranteeing motion for the whole continuous system, the Unmoved Mover acts as a final cause, a "that for the sake of which," for the First Moved Mover.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Gerson (1994) pp 86-7 maintains, "once Aristotle establishes that being is a *pros hen* equivocal, he is obliged to show that all beings are causally related to the primary being or beings. If he does not, then the unity of the science he is seeking, that is, the possibility of the science is not established." cp pp 136ff. There is, however a causal relation, one that is physical, in so far as a continuum of motion connects all substances, and the Unmoved Mover stands as a final cause and guarantor of the continuum. Further, we do not need the causality Gerson seeks if we take *pros hen* equivocality to have epistemological, as opposed to ontological force. I think that it is epistemological, since it has to do primarily with the way in which we use terms, and less to do with ontology.

This of course raises the question regarding what it is that can move without being moved, and leads Aristotle to posit the object of desire/thought as that which can do so. He does so on the ground that desire results from an opinion regarding some good, and thought about an object is what initiates desire. Thought is moved by the intelligible, and substance is the primary instance of what is intelligible, and the most simple and the most actual instance of substance is primary. Hence the Unmoved Mover is the guarantor of the subsequent circular locomotion, since it is always actual, always unitary and unmoved. The perfect example of being is that for the sake of which the First Moved Mover moves and as a consequence sets everything else in motion.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>Randall (pg 141) says, "Aristotle argues that the perfected functioning of the highest activity in the world is the only justification, the only 'reason why' for the world's existence." I do not agree, however, with his idea (pg 143) that "God is immanent in the world as its intelligible order, and transcends the world as its ideal end: God is both formal and final cause." The idea of the Unmoved Mover as a final cause seems to work well enough in what follows without making it a formal cause. The usual place to find succour for the claim of immanence is in the analogy of the Unmoved Mover as a general to the universe as an army (1075a11ff). Aristotle suggests that the good of the universe is both something separate and the orderly arrangement of its parts. Just as an army finds its good both in the order the general imposes and the general himself. The general is said to be independent of the order, whereas the order depends on him. However, this is  
(continued...)



Aristotle's explanation of all this is hardly satisfactory. Here is what he actually says:

that for the sake of which [οὐ ἐνεκὰ] is both that *for* which and that *towards* which, and of these one is unmoveable and the other is not. Thus it produces motion by being loved, and it moves the other moving things [δεῖ τ' ἄλλα κινεῖ] (1072b3-5)<sup>1</sup>

Note here that in the case of immovable things, e.g. an Unmoved Mover, final causality implies a good which is the end of some action<sup>2</sup> (e.g. that of a First Moved Mover), whereas by default, a final cause as a good for something applies to moving things. The Unmoved Mover

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(...continued)

an inaccurate analogy, since a general would not be a general without an army to lead, whereas the Unmoved Mover would be the Unmoved Mover whether the cosmos exists or not. Georgiadis (pg 15) suggests, "We are supposed, I presume, to retain only the relevant similarities in the metaphor, and not the dissimilarities. It is to be noted that only the order of the world is at issue, and there is no suggestion that the world owes its origin to God. Rather, the suggestion is that God and the world exist independently of each other." Fuller (pg. 142) suggests, rightly, I think, that "the passage is more than counterbalanced by a tendency to regard God as essentially being outside the natural order."

<sup>1</sup>Trans Barnes. Tredennick translates, "the final cause is not only 'the good for something,' but also 'the good which is the end of some action.' In the latter sense it applies to immovable things, although in the former it does not; and it causes motion as being an object of love, whereas all other things cause motion because they themselves are in motion."

<sup>2</sup>ie in the sense of end, not beneficiary. cp Broadie, pg 2.

then, is an object of love and causes motion in this way, whereas everything else causes motion by being in motion (i.e. in a cosmological continuity of motion).

Other things are in motion primarily because of a continuity of motion. Further, their being and unity do not result from a desire to "imitate" or understand the Unmoved Mover.<sup>1</sup> Physical or natural (φυσικαι) substances which are changeable concrete particulars require motion for their coming to be; they are nonetheless capable of manifesting their own unity and being in virtue of substantial form. If the Unmoved Mover is an immaterial and immutable (ακίνητος), it manifests being and unity all the more perfectly. In short, all substances bear being and unity because that is what they do. Since Aristotle critiques Plato about the lack of causal efficacy in the theory of Forms, it would be odd to suggest that the Unmoved Mover has an equally mysterious causal connexity which is similarly metaphysical, i.e. pertaining to being and unity. Substances do not convey being and unity to other substances because substances themselves have their

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<sup>1</sup> Except of course in the case of other rational souls, and perhaps the secondary unmoved movers.

own being and unity. We can maintain that corruptible substances require motion for their generation, but not that the Unmoved Mover conveys being and unity to them.

The function of the Unmoved Mover is to guarantee motion,<sup>1</sup> as a perfectly actual entity that functions as a final cause for the motion of the First Moved Mover. This is not explained other than this, and we are left to speculate what Aristotle might mean. The standard view, surmised by Broadie, is the following:

The [First Moved Mover] as an expression of love gives rise to a physical image of eternal contemplation -- which physical image is the eternal movement of the sphere.<sup>2</sup>

The immediate difficulty seems to be that the actuality of the potency for motion of the First Moved Mover ought

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<sup>1</sup>The fact that the function of the Unmoved Mover, as such, is to guarantee motion is clear from the way in which Aristotle approaches a demonstration of its non-material nature, based on certain principles from Chapter VIII of the *Physics*. The existence of an eternal, immoveable and separate substance has no magnitude because it causes motion for an infinite time. Nothing finite has an infinite potency, but there is no actual infinite. Consequently that which causes infinite motion, or motion over an infinite tract of time can have no magnitude at all. Of course the fact that it has no magnitude suggests that it is non-material and non-physical.

<sup>1</sup>Broadie, pg. 2

to be in something other than it,<sup>1</sup> but I have suggested that κίνησις is the ἐνέργεια in the case of this being - it's actuality *is* motion. In a sense, the First Moved Mover "imitates" in its own (material/physical) way the perfection of the Unmoved Mover.<sup>2</sup>

The Platonic conception of imitation is a problem because the separation of matter and form leaves the material instance with no mechanism with which to

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<sup>2</sup>i.e. in so far as Aristotle's analysis of the continuity of motion concludes that the actuality the motion of an agent is in a patient.

<sup>3</sup>Ross (pg 181) suggests that "God is the efficient cause by being the final cause, but in no other way. Yet he is the final cause not in the sense of being something that never is but always is to be. He is an ever living being whose influence radiates through the universe in such wise that everything that happens...depends on Him. He moves directly the 'first heaven'; i.e., He causes the daily rotation of the stars round the earth. Since he moves by inspiring love and desire, it seems to be implied that the 'first heaven' has soul." What I am suggesting is that the idea of efficient cause, in this case where there is no physical contact with the thing physically moving, and where such a cause of motion is not co-extensive with the *energeia* of the mover, it makes sense to speak of efficient and final cause as the same thing, i.e. as performing the same function since the *energeia* and *kinesis* of the First Moved Mover are collapsed. I would resist, I think, (on common sense grounds or for want of the mechanics for Aristotle to explain), the idea that the Unmoved Mover's influence "radiates" through the universe. Aristotle does have a perfectly good set of mechanics without needing metaphors such as "radiation"; If being and unity are borne by each substance, this explains their act-potency union and their processes of actualisation, and the physical continuum explains motion.

imitate. Aristotle asks "what is it that works, looking to the forms?" In Aristotle's metaphysic, however, imitation is not the same kind of problem, since it is not "participatory" imitation, but an attempt to "be like" an object of desire. What I am suggesting is that in this extraordinary doctrine of first principles, Aristotle has an extraordinary sense of end, namely an *exemplary* final cause.

Because the Unmoved Mover is an object of desire, the First Moved Mover which desires it, expresses that desire in the form of imitation. It imitates the perfect actuality in the most perfect way that it can, namely perfect physical actuality or circular motion. That is what its desire of an exemplary end results in. Knowledge of the object leads to desire to be like the object as much as possible, within the confines of the physical limitations of the imitator. Hence if the First Moved Mover loves the Unmoved Mover, and wants to be like it, it actuates its own version of perfection, namely circular motion.

The obvious objection, the one that Broadie makes,<sup>1</sup> is that an *actually existing* exemplary cause is not needed for such a process of actualisation to occur in the imitator. Why is the *existence* of such a final cause needed? We could simply *hypothesise* its existence. Indeed, part of Aristotle's solution to the problem of separate forms was to reintegrate form and matter so that the would-be "imitator" already has all that it needs (ontologically) to actualise and procreate. There are several important considerations here. 1) In the first place, the reason Aristotle posits a perfectly actual Unmoved Mover is that anything in motion has by definition a potency, and that potency may never be actualised. But given the contention that, just as a first instance of motion makes no sense, an external actuality is a necessity of the system of continuous motion he has constructed. 2) Secondly, if "illusion" is possible for the First Moved Mover (i.e. if its actual motion is guaranteed on the delusion that an Unmoved Mover does exist) then the dispelling of illusion is equally possible; at such time as a disillusionment takes

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<sup>1</sup>Broadie, pg. 3., Also, Gerson (1994), pg 139.

place, the motion of the cosmos is threatened or extinguished. Moreover, if the Unmoved Mover does exist, and the First Moved Mover is deluded into thinking it doesn't, then motion is extinguished. Hence the very possibility of illusion appears to be an unacceptable thesis. 3) Finally, the difference between imitation in Plato and imitation of an exemplar in Aristotle makes all the difference. In Plato's case, "imitators" of "universal-substances" do not have what is necessary to be like their exemplars - they lack a "full set of equipment" so to speak - they lack form or substance. In Aristotle's case, both the imitator and the imitated have a "full set of equipment." If Plato's physical objects had a "full set of equipment," they wouldn't need to imitate forms to acquire the full set.<sup>1</sup>

Particular instantiated paradigms or exemplars, like a *phronimos*, or Unmoved Mover, can be imitated, and can be objects of desire; the concepts of habit and

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<sup>1</sup>This is not to imply, however, that the First Moved Mover is identical with the Unmoved Mover when the former is actualised. One may ask what differentiates the thought of a fully actualised First Mover from that of the Unmoved Mover. The answer has to do with what each is, and not actuality *qua* actuality. The First Moved Mover's thinking is that of a fully actualised sensible substance, whereas the Unmoved Mover's thinking is that of a fully actualised immaterial substance.

virtue in the *Nichomachean Ethics* demands it. Plato's forms fail to account for motion because there is nothing substantial in the physical thing that could do the work of imitating the paradigm. Aristotle, through a reintegration of matter and form is allowed imitation because of the reintegration. To say, however, that the being and unity of the imitator is metaphysically derived from the being and unity of the first principle is to present a metaphysical scheme that Aristotle associates with the Platonic metaphysical hierarchy, and he would reject this. This is why I think it is incorrect to say, as some scholars have, that Aristotle once proposed the idea of a 'gradable univocity' of being. I take up this issue in the next section.

#### 4. *Gradable Univocity*

Some scholars<sup>1</sup> have suggested that a particular passage in *Metaphysics* II indicates that Aristotle once believed in a metaphysical causal link between the being of the Unmoved Mover and that of particular things. On such an account, (gradable univocity) there is one notion

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<sup>1</sup>Gerson (1994), pg 333; 339ff.



of being, and a perfect example of it. Other things have the same kind of being in degrees that are "graded" in accordance to their conceptual "distance" from the truest example of being. This interpretation is hardly warranted, and, I think, inconsistent with some key aims of the *Metaphysics*. The passage in question reads:

Now we do not know a truth without its cause; also, of things to which the same predicate belongs, the one to which it belongs in the highest degree is that in virtue of which it belongs also to the others. For example, fire is the hottest, for fire is the cause of hotness in the others. Likewise, therefore, that is most true which is the cause of truth in whatever is posterior to it. Accordingly, the principles of eternal things are of necessity always the most true; for they are not merely true sometimes, nor is there anything which is the cause of their being, but they are the cause of the being of the other things; accordingly as each thing is related to its being, so is it related to truth. 993b23-31

The suggestion that the principles of eternal things are the cause of the being ( $\alpha\iota\tau\iota\omicron\nu\ \tau\omicron\upsilon\ \epsilon\iota\nu\alpha\iota$ ) of other things makes sense I think in terms of actuality guaranteeing motion, and one need not make this a causal link of the type implied by a gradable univocity.<sup>1</sup> Note that what is

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<sup>27</sup>Gerson, (1994) pp 333ff.

caused by the *αἰτιον του εἶναι* could simply refer to the cause of the generation of substances as it does in the *Nichomachean Ethics*.<sup>1</sup> All that is needed to render the passage just cited consistent with our account is to suggest that there is in the above passage a suppressed premise, namely that the principles of eternal things cause the being of other (non-eternal) things by ensuring motion, a premise which is consistent with both the *Physics* and the *Metaphysics*. Not only does this solve worries over the relative dating of *Metaphysics* II, but it avoids the difficult problem of imposing on Aristotle a type of almost "participatory," causality, a gradable

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<sup>1</sup>*Eth Nic.*, 1161a16, 1162a7, 1165a23. Gerson (1994) rejects this possibility because 1) the principles of eternal, unlike fathers, (the example in the *Nichomachean Ethics*) do not have a cause of being and 2) because cause of being is obviously not equivalent in this passage to "cause of coming to be". But Aristotle doesn't say that the principles have a cause of being, nor is it implied by my interpretation, and no reason is given for why 2 is obvious. While Gerson is right to point out that the eternal participate with the father in coming to be, and not their principles, if the eternal principle is sought in relations governing the Unmoved Mover and the First Moved Mover, these are ultimately causes of the genesis of other things, in so far as motion is required for that genesis, and motion is what is guaranteed by such a relation. In the end Gerson concedes that something like efficient causality is intended, but he imposes on this the notion of univocal graded causality, while failing to realise the role that final causality plays in guaranteeing efficient causality or motion as a whole in the system.

univocity, which runs counter to the dependence of being and unity on substance.

One may well ask about the relation of accidents to concrete particulars, in so far as their being seems to depend on the being of concrete particulars. The fact that accidents are dependent upon substance does not mean that their being is derivative - it only means that the meaning of accidental being is derives from the meaning substantial being. In this regard, something Hussain suggests about *pros hen* equivocity is helpful:

Items in all categories are genuine onta, accidental being is a mode of being. Real dependence does not, as it does in Plato, signify a loss of being and reality.<sup>1</sup>

Not only accidents, but other senses of substance, generated, inanimate, and eternal, exist in their own right - the differences have to do with whether they exist dependently or independently, eternally or contingently. The Unmoved Mover is not (like fire in *Metaphysics II*) the "emanative" cause of material substances.<sup>2</sup> It is only their final cause, in that

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<sup>1</sup>Hussain, pg. 218.

<sup>2</sup>Nor is it an efficient cause. Something Georgiadis (pg 14) says in this regard is instructive: "Aristotle makes the  
(continued...)"

special sense that Aristotle has laid out for it and arguably, of the contemplation that is the highest actuality of the human soul. Once the process of motion is engaged for the continuum of the material world, the motion necessary for generation is guaranteed; once generation has taken place, the substance has its own being and unity.

## 5. Conclusion

I find it useful to summarise my thinking in this section against the backdrop of the Platonic/Parmenidean questions raised. The Unmoved Mover acts as a guarantor of motion for the first eternal, circular motion spoken about in the *Physics*. The Unmoved Mover is desired by the First Moving Mover, but not by all things, except perhaps, in the case of the Unmoved Mover being an exemplary cause for man's contemplation. Man may well have an elevated status in so far as man finds actuality

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(...continued)

parenthetical point that we desire something because it is good; it is not good because we desire it. Thought is the principle. Thus objective value and its rational recognition are the basis for Aristotle's argument regarding the First Mover. It is also to be noted that only final causality, and not efficient causality, seems to be the causal modality of the First Unmoved Mover."

in contemplation of the Unmoved Mover. To suggest that the unity or being of other things is conveyed by the Unmoved Mover, or that they seek a being and unity that transcends them is to place one back in the realm of Platonic forms and imitation. Hence it makes more sense to say that substances manifest being and unity because they are substances and that is what substances do.

In re-integrating form and matter Aristotle stands in contrast to the Platonic metaphysical hierarchy. To suggest that other things get their unity by imitating something else is in fact quite superfluous, once we understand substances as the "bearers" of being and unity. In other words, just as Aristotle can say to Plato that his forms are superfluous, he can say that the Unmoved mover is not necessary to convey being and unity to things - that is a function of their substance.

Corruptible substances manifest unity and being, just as incorruptible substances do. Of course they manifest unity and being in different ways, in so far as they are different types of substance, but in so far as they are substances, that is what they do. However the Unmoved Mover is needed to guarantee motion. Motion in

turn guarantees the being of other things, since motion is required for technical production and natural procreation. The existence of motion allows the primary movements to occur which filter down to the exercise of act-potency relations, which without generation could not occur. We would do well to keep in mind what Aristotle says at 1036b27-30:

it is impossible to define [a living creature] without reference to movement and consequently without reference to parts in a certain condition.

What Aristotle has effectively done, is provide us with a kinetic system whereby there is a guarantor of motion because there is something whose actuality is motion. He has further provided a mechanism for imitation that gives the imitator something to "imitate with" - Aristotle allows the participant to participate.

Hence the key physical and cosmological issues are answered in terms of substance, its relation to the First Moved Mover in terms of motion, and the kinetic actuality of the First Moved Mover in relation to the Unmoved Mover in terms of exemplary mimesis. Again, what the Platonic metaphysical hierarchy lacked was something which could cause motion by its very nature. Aristotle's commitment

to the continuity of motion means that a guarantor of motion must be in motion itself. His commitment to the primacy of actuality means that a guarantor of motion needs a completely actual guarantor that is immoveable. His commitment to the primacy of substance means that each substance conveys being and unity in virtue of its own substantiality, but that this substantiality requires a physical and a metaphysical guarantor. One guarantees the coming to be of the concrete particular, and the other guarantees the motion necessary for that genesis. It is no small point that both of these cosmological guarantors of actuality and of motion are causes or explanations that are particular, unitary entities. Ultimately, Plotinus will reject such an approach to cosmology.

## CHAPTER IV - Theology or Ontology?

### 1. *Introduction*

This chapter examines certain details of Aristotle's cosmological first principles, and the Unmoved Mover. In each of the three sections that follow, I first offer an interpretation of an aspect of Aristotle's cosmology; I then attempt to say briefly what I think Plotinus identifies as the primary difficulty with that aspect of the principle. This prepares us for Part II, in which (among other things) I attempt to give an account of how Plotinus critiques Aristotle's metaphysics and asserts a revised Platonic metaphysical hierarchy.

In Section 2, I attempt to say what it means to characterise the Unmoved Mover as "thought thinking itself." I suggest that the Unmoved Mover, as substance *par excellence*, manifests unity and being most perfectly. However, both the fact that the primary being "is" and



the fact that it "thinks itself" allows Plotinus to say that it admits of duality.

In Section 3 I suggest that by taking the Unmoved Mover as the primary example of substance, we mediate the confusion regarding whether the proper subject of metaphysics is theology or ontology. In so far as all other substances depend on the primary exemplar of being and unity (which guarantees motion and hence their generation), the Unmoved Mover is their principle and cause. This is a key point for Plotinus, who thinks that the principle of being and unity should not itself be a being or a unity.

In Section 4, I suggest that Aristotle's theory of multiple unmoved movers, intended to deal with questions of planetary variance, is inconsistent with the conception of individuation that Aristotle builds on assumptions about sensible substances. I maintain that Aristotle falls prey, at this cosmological level, to something like Parmenideanism himself, since, without matter, or a prior principle of unity, his movers are indistinguishable. In the *Enneads*, Plotinus takes him to task on this very issue.

## 2. *Thought Thinking Itself*

It is well known that Aristotle's Unmoved Mover is said to be engaged in self-thinking. The Unmoved Mover is a perfect Mind which thinks itself. As we have seen, Aristotle has suggested that those things that have no matter are essential unities, and the Unmoved Mover is such a unity. I have already intimated the relationship between matter and potency in Chapter III. A lack of matter indicates the absence of potency for change or movement, and therefore the Unmoved Mover cannot change from one thought to another. The Unmoved Mover is a pure, unitary, actuality. It is unchanged throughout eternity, and it manifests the best activity - it thinks itself. One might say that its being, its unity, and its thought are the same.

Aristotle says that the life of the Unmoved Mover is like the best that we temporarily enjoy, and that it must be in that state always since its very actuality is pleasure.<sup>1</sup> As Aristotle regards that which we most enjoy to be contemplation, the implication is that the Unmoved Mover thinks:

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<sup>1</sup>1072b14ff

Now thinking in itself is concerned with that which is in itself best, and thinking in the highest sense with that which is in the highest sense best. 1072b16-20

It is thinking that is the highest form of life, and is pure actuality.<sup>1</sup> Aristotle goes on to say that the Unmoved Mover thinks itself eternally, and suggests that the Unmoved Mover's thinking and thought are identical:

thought thinks itself because it shares the nature of the object of thought [αὐτὸν δὲ νοεῖ ὁ νοῦς κατὰ μεταληψιν τοῦ νοητοῦ]; for it becomes an object of thought in coming into contact [γίγνεται θιγγανὼν] with and thinking its objects, so that thought and the object of thought are the same [ταὐτὸν νοῦς καὶ νοητὸν]. For that which is capable of receiving the object of thought, i.e. the substance, is thought [τὸ γὰρ δεκτικὸν τοῦ νοητοῦ καὶ τῆς οὐσίας νοῦς]. And it is active [ἐνεργεῖ] when it possesses this object. 1072b20-4<sup>2</sup>

Aristotle himself questions whether the identity of νοῦς and νοητὸν is a valid conception of thought, since for the most part thought and its object are two different things. This is the very objection that Plotinus raises against Aristotle's conception of the

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<sup>1</sup>cp Tredennick, (X-XIV) pg. 149

<sup>2</sup>Trans Barnes

Unmoved Mover. Plotinus answers the question negatively, and as such makes the Unmoved Mover the *second* principle in his hypostatic system. I will have more to say about this in Part II. What Aristotle maintains is that in "some cases" the knowledge "is" the object:

As, then, thought and the object of thought are not different in the case of things that have not matter [μη ὑληχει], they will be the same [το αὐτο εἶναι], i.e. thinking will be one [μία] with the object of thought [το νοουμένω]. 1075a3-5<sup>1</sup>

The question becomes what the thought of this self-thinking would be like. Often I think we conceive of Aristotle's first principle as narcissistic, e.g. that it loves itself and thinks only itself because nothing else is worthy of its thought. Norman argues that the idea of a "narcissistic" self-thinker is incorrect and comes from a misunderstanding of what is meant by a mind thinking itself.<sup>2</sup> According to him, the idea of a mind thinking itself is best grasped by an examination of De Anima III,4.<sup>3</sup> There we see two types of thinking, and the

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<sup>1</sup>Trans Barnes

<sup>2</sup>cp Norman, pg 93

<sup>3</sup>*ibid*, 93-4

criterion of difference is whether the mind is in potency to something external or something internal. These two types of thinking are: 1) mind in potency to external forms, and 2) mind in potency to itself when it knows all of the forms:<sup>1</sup>

Once the mind has become each set of its possible objects, as a man of science has...its condition is still one of potentiality, but in a different sense from the potentiality which preceded the acquisition of knowledge by learning or discovery: the mind is able to think *itself*. (De Anima 429b5-9)

The first type of thinking suggests that the intellect is potential because it does not "possess" its object. The second suggests that it is actual, in so far as it does "possess" its object.<sup>2</sup> Says Norman,

in [potential intellect] intellect *becomes* identical with the objects of thought, whereas in [actual intellect] it is *already* identical with them before it thinks itself.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>De An, 429b5 Note that in both cases the mind is in potency to something, either an external form, or to itself, both of which suggest that there is a bifurcation or duality in thinking, that it has two components, thinker and object of thought. This duality forms the core of Plotinus' critique of Aristotle which I examine in Part II.

<sup>2</sup>*ibid* pp 94-5

<sup>3</sup>*ibid* pg 95

I take it here that the word "before" should be understood in terms of logical priority and not in terms of temporal priority. For we must grant that if the Unmoved Mover "thinks itself" *eternally*, temporal distinctions are out of place. It is clear enough, though, that if a mind stands in potency to an external object, some kind of κίνησις is required for it to "possess" that object.<sup>1</sup> It would, however, be wrong to suggest that the Unmoved Mover stands in any kind of potency to any thought since, unlike material substances, it contains no potency, but is always actual.

From the distinction drawn from *De Anima*, Norman also suggests the following about Aristotle's approach in Λ9,

The question [what the Unmoved Mover thinks] is posed in the form which of the two kinds of thinking does it engage in? Is it intellect (i.e. the capacity for thought) or thinking, potentially or actually, is the object of its thought something external, or the mental concepts that constitute its own mind? If the former - i.e. if its essence is not thinking but potentiality - then its state will be determined by something other than itself,

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<sup>1</sup>1074b28

viz. its external object of thought, and so it will not be the highest reality.<sup>1</sup>

The usual interpretation of the Unmoved Mover's self-thinking is that the Unmoved Mover is the best thing there is, and consequently nothing else is worthy of its thought. This interpretation is imposed upon Aristotle by requiring that the idea of the Unmoved Mover thinking itself excludes other things. Here is what Aristotle says:

It must think either itself or something else; and if something else, then it must think the same thing always, or different things at different times. Then does it make any difference, or not, whether it thinks that which is good or thinks at random? Surely it would be absurd [ατοπον] for it to think about some subjects. Clearly then, it thinks that which is most divine and estimable, and does not change; for the change would be for the worse... (1074b3-8)

All that we observe here is that it would be "out of place" for the Unmoved Mover to think of *some things*. Self-thinking need not be represented as entirely exclusive however. Any actualised mind that thinks theoretically, and not about external objects, is engaged

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<sup>1</sup>Norman, pg 98

in self-thinking.<sup>1</sup> There is nothing to prevent it from being engaged in continuous abstract thought; all of its thinking is theoretical, and its theoretical thought is distinguished from human thought by its eternity.<sup>2</sup> If the Unmoved Mover thinks the thoughts that it has without the help of external objects, then it is engaged in self-thinking, but this does not mean that it has only to think itself. It is not possible for it to think about particular contingent things, presumably, since they come into being and pass away; knowledge of a thing existing at time T1 and not existing at time T2 would entail a change in what it thinks. Further, since the Unmoved Mover is completely actual, it may not change what it thinks in any way, since thinking about 'x' while being able to think about 'y' places the mind in a potency to 'y'.

The Unmoved Mover thinks itself, since this Unmoved Mover is the highest being, or the most unified

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<sup>1</sup>. This is certainly what Plotinus thinks about Aristotle's Unmoved Mover, and it is why he nonetheless "demotes" him.

<sup>2</sup>. "when it is said that the Prime Mover 'thinks itself,' what is meant is not 'self-contemplation,' but simply that identity of intellect and object of thought that characterises all abstract thought." Norman, pg. 97



unity, the primary substance. Since the Unmoved Mover thinks about itself and it is the primary example of being and unity, it seems to follow that *it thinks about being or unity in the most unqualified sense*. The thinking on thinking is a thinking of being and unity. In the next section, I want to suggest that this exemplar of substance so understood establishes a continuity between theology and ontology in Aristotle's philosophy.<sup>1</sup>

Plotinus sees in Aristotle, (as Plato perhaps saw in Parmenides<sup>2</sup>), that to assert that the primary unity "is," is to assert multiplicity of the first principle. To suggest that it "thinks itself" also implies multiplicity. What I will suggest in Part II is that, in *his* metaphysical hierarchy, Plotinus will "demote" Aristotle's Unmoved Mover to the second level of his hypostatic ladder, that which thinks the Forms, Nous.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>This is not to say that ontology is "reducible" to theology, or even that it "culminates" in theology; rather it indicates that an important aspect of ontology has to do with its highest principle, the divine Unmoved Mover, which is an exemplar of substance *par excellence*.

<sup>2</sup>At, esp *Parmenides* 142d, and throughout.

<sup>3</sup>Plotinus' identification of the Unmoved Mover with Nous may in part in part derive from a passage in the *De Anima*, where Aristotle says, "It was a good idea to call the soul 'the place of the forms' though (1) this description holds  
(continued...)"

### 3. *Theology and Ontology*

Some scholars have maintained that Aristotle is inconsistent in his different statements regarding the proper subject matter of metaphysics. In Book Γ of the *Metaphysics*, the claim is made that metaphysics is about being *qua* being; In Book E, we find the claim that it is theology. Here is what Aristotle says in Γ:

Clearly, then the study of things which are *qua* being, also belongs to one science. Now in every case knowledge is principally concerned with that which is primary [του πρώτου], i.e. that upon which all other things depend, and from which they get their names. If then, substance [ουσία] is this primary thing, it is of substances that the philosopher must grasp the first principles [τας αρχας] and causes [τας αιτιας].<sup>1003b15-19</sup>

In E, he says the following:

the primary science treats of things which are both separable [χωριστα] and immutable [ακίνητα]. Now all causes must be eternal, but these especially; since they are the

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<sup>3</sup>(...continued)

only of the intellective soul, and (2) even this is the forms only potentially, not actually." (*De An.* 429a27-8. Plotinus will maintain that any thinker is always composed of two parts, the νοῦς and the νοητόν, and that there is potency and multiplicity in such a being.

causes of what is visible of things divine [των θειων]. Hence there will be three speculative philosophies [φιλοσοφiai θεωρητικαι]: mathematics, physics, and theology [θεολογικη] - since it is obvious that if the divine is present anywhere, it is present in this kind of entity; and also the most honourable science must deal with the most honourable class of subject.

The speculative sciences then, are to be preferred to the other sciences, and theology to the other speculative sciences.  
1026a

It is interesting to note, however, that E opens with the statement that, "It is the principles and causes of the things which are that we are seeking."<sup>1</sup> In the passage I have just cited from Γ, Aristotle seems to be saying the same thing: "it is of substances that the philosopher must grasp the first principles [τας αρχας]". This perhaps suggests that the "two conceptions" of metaphysics are not as far apart as one might think. It is quite plausible that we will learn something very important about the "principles" and "causes" of beings in looking at the most excellent substance, the Unmoved Mover.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>1025b1

<sup>2</sup>The fact that *plural* principles and causes are mentioned  
(continued...)

Further, while the principles and causes of things undoubtedly refer to Aristotle's famous four, the Unmoved Mover *is* also a cause of beings (plural).

Some attempts to rectify the apparent discrepancy in E and Γ take up issues of dating the text. Natorp for example, says that attempts to identify theology and first philosophy are interpolations of a "later hand." However, since Book K (Chapters 1-8) summarises books B, Γ, and E, it means that Book K is also a later interpolation,<sup>1</sup> and the question of why the "later hand" saw no inconsistency between E and Γ remains unanswered.

Jaeger, on the other hand, suggests just the opposite, that theological references are to an "earlier, Platonising stage." According to Jaeger, first philosophy

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<sup>2</sup>(...continued)

perhaps leaves room for Aristotle's First Moved Mover as well as the theory of multiple movers (which I take up in the next section). I think it significant that Aristotle at one point summarises his reflections on the Unmoved Mover in the following manner: "Such then is the first principle [ἀρχή] upon which depend the sensible universe and the world of nature." (1072b13) cp. 1073a23.

<sup>1</sup>e.g. as Patzig argues, pg. 35

as theological and Platonic stands in sharp contrast with the later vision of first philosophy.<sup>1</sup>

Both the inclusion of  $\Gamma$  and  $E$  in the summary in Book  $K$ , and the consistency of  $\Gamma$  with the opening remarks of  $E$ , indicate that Aristotle may not have seen "metaphysics as theology" "and metaphysics as ontology" as inconsistent. If the Unmoved Mover functions as the first principle and primary example of being and unity, and, via the First Moved Mover, is the ultimate cause of substances,<sup>2</sup> then in order to grasp the causes of substances, we have to understand that substance which is most excellent.<sup>3</sup> All that is required is that the Unmoved Mover be the primary exemplar of substance, and I have been maintaining this at any rate. Patzig says, about  $E$ , that

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<sup>1</sup>Jaeger, pg. 218.

<sup>2</sup>e.g in so far as all sensible substances require motion for their generation, which motion is guaranteed by the First Moved Mover whose motion is in turn guaranteed by the Unmoved Mover.

<sup>3</sup>It would be odd that Aristotle's theology spent all of its time talking merely about a self-thinking unity; this would place us back into the science of Parmenides, and even he talks about more than just this.

it is clear from these remarks that the embarrassing contradiction between a 'first philosophy' which is universal ontology and a 'first philosophy' which, as theology, investigates only the subject of God did not exist for Aristotle. First philosophy...is theology of so special a kind that it is *as such at the same time* ontology. Aristotle is envisaging here a philosophical discipline that is both a first and a general philosophy, and a substance that is so superior to all other substances that it can be called in a certain sense substance in general.<sup>1</sup>

The suggestion is that the Unmoved Mover is the primary example of substance, upon which all other substances depend. Again, this is consistent with the idea that substances are (in ontological abstraction)<sup>2</sup> essential unities. It is also consistent with the claim, made both at  $\Gamma$  and  $E$ , that we are looking for the principles and causes of substance.

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<sup>1</sup>Patzig, pg 38. I fully recognise that it would be absurd to say that the *Metaphysics* is primarily about God. This does not mean, however, that understanding the role of the Unmoved Mover is not essential to grasping the nature of being *qua* being, since the primary example of being is also the principle of all beings.

<sup>2</sup>I say "ontological abstraction" to distinguish from epistemic abstraction, or the recognition of separate components in a concrete particular. This notion I take from Aristotle's musing at  $H$  6, where Aristotle says that things that have no matter at all are essential unities (1045b23-4).

Patzig holds that, for Aristotle, metaphysics is a "doubly-paronymous science," or that there are two levels of *pros hen* equivocity going on in the *Metaphysics*. What this means is that, in Patzig's view, all sensible substances stand in a *pros hen* equivocal relation to the Unmoved Mover, just as attributes stand in a *pros hen* equivocal relationship to sensible substances. However, we need not assume that *pros hen* equivocity is anything but intra-categorical; there is no good reason to assume that it does apply to different types of substance (sensible, eternal material, non-material); given the fact that all substances bear being and unity, we ought to think that all of these substances qua substances are meant as such bearers. The predication of being and unity in the case of the Unmoved Mover is more precise, whereas in the case of sensible particulars, being and unity is spliced with material recalcitrance. This introduces potency into the prior actuality of sensible substance, causing impediments to the actuality and resulting in differentiation. This does not mean that "substance" in the case of concrete particulars is used "equivocally," however.

One difficulty with the Platonic metaphysical hierarchy is that it denies substantiality to concrete particulars. Aristotle grants substantiality to the paradigm and the sensible particulars. As a paradigm, the Unmoved Mover does better what it is that all substances do - it manifests being and unity; given the absence of matter, and the claim that all formal substances are essential unities, it is most fully being and unity.

I should perhaps note that Patzig does not seem to think that the account of substances in the central books of the *Metaphysics* is consistent with what he envisions as the "doubly-paronymous" structure. He suggests,

the three so-called books on substance of the *Metaphysics*...cannot be fitted into the account of the doubly-paronymous ontology that I have outlined. It is true that in these books beings in the other categories are still related to substance as the 'first being'; but there is no trace of an essential reference in the analysis of natural substance to the doctrine of the 'prime mover.'<sup>1</sup>

However, if we say that the "job" of substance is to stand as the primary, ontologically efficacious bearer of being and unity, and this happens at both the level of the Unmoved Mover and sensible substance, the difficulty

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<sup>1</sup>. Patzig, pg 46.



seems to vanish. The sense of substance as bearer of being and unity in the Unmoved Mover and in sensible substances is the same; the Unmoved Mover "bears" being and unity most perfectly; sensible substances manifest being and unity, only less perfectly.

Moreover, once one realises the necessity of the Unmoved Mover as a guarantor of the motion of the First Mover, which in turn is necessary to guarantee the motion of the system that is necessary for sensible substances to come to be in the first place, it makes no odds that Aristotle does not refer to the Unmoved Mover in the central books. Indeed one may take the central books as a focused discussion of sensible substances that is premised on the entire metaphysical structure of movers that Aristotle erects, or thinks is implied by sensible substances.<sup>1</sup>

The larger difficulty, implicit in Plotinus, is that Aristotle has a *particular thing* as the primary cause and principle of his system. The Unmoved Mover, the principle and cause of substances, is itself a substance.

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<sup>1</sup>i.e., it is implied because sensible substances are corruptible and come to be. Their genesis and corruption requires motion and that is what the system of cosmological movers guarantees.

One of the driving forces of Plotinus' rejection of Aristotle is that the cause of substantiality should not itself be a substance; the principle of unity should not be a unity, and the principle of being should not be a being. Plotinus, in seeking a principle of being and unity, looks in fact to his understanding of Plato's Good, which is said to be "επεκείνα της ουσιας."

#### 4. *Unmoved Movers*

It seems clear that Aristotle posits an Unmoved Mover as the guarantor of motion. A separate, but not entirely unrelated, difficulty occurs when Aristotle tries to account not only for the movements of the celestial spheres, but for the regular variations of planetary movement which one observes. The introduction of a multiple number of Unmoved Movers in  $\Lambda 8$  is directed to this problem of planetary variance. Such was, in part, the project of Plato's *Timeaus*, and of much of the important work of Academics like Eudoxus and Callipus, whom Aristotle discusses in  $\Lambda 8$ .<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>1073bff; cp G. Lloyd 148.

For Aristotle, the fact that the Unmoved Mover has no matter, and is completely actual, ought to indicate that there is only one such being. This is suggested by the fact that all things which are many in number have matter, or as we have seen, material substance plays an important role, *although it is not the primary cause of*, individuation. In cases of sensible substances, "man" applies to many men, but Socrates is one, distinct from the universal "man" and other men because the substantial form in him is individuated by matter/form.<sup>1</sup>

The primary essence has no matter because it is a complete *energeia* in the highest sense and is therefore one, in both formula and number (λογω και αριθμω).<sup>2</sup> What becomes more difficult for Aristotle to explain, in the absence of matter/potency, is the existence of many "Unmoved Movers."

In the main, it seems that Aristotle in the *Physics* and the *Metaphysics* would prefer to simplify matters by having a system with one ultimate mover as a

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<sup>1</sup>1074a34-5

<sup>2</sup>1074a35ff

unitary teleological/exemplary cause. At *Physics* 259a he says,

Nevertheless there is something that comprehends [all the movers of non-eternal beings], and that as something apart from each one of them; and this is the cause of the fact that some things are and others are not and of the continuous process of change; and this causes the motion of the other movers, while they are the causes of the motion of other things. Motion, then, being eternal, the first mover, if there is but one, will be eternal also; if there are more than one, there will be a plurality of such eternal movers. We ought, however, to suppose that there is one rather than many, and a finite number rather than an infinite number. *Physics* 259a3ff.

Here Aristotle mentions the possibility of more than one Unmoved Mover, which Jaeger suggests is a later addition to the text by Aristotle, in order to accommodate the considerations of *Metaphysics* Λ8.<sup>1</sup> However, Aristotle seems hesitant posit more than one unmoved mover, citing his preference for only one. It is unclear why such hesitation would present itself if this passage was meant to accommodate his (late) considered position. A better

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<sup>1</sup>Jaeger, pg. 346ff. But see Owens, pg. 282. Indeed Jaeger suggests that this chapter is a late and hardly finalised interpolation. Aristotle's own hesitance regarding the final number of Unmoved Movers suggests as much, although the fact that in both the *Physics* and *Metaphysics* he is willing to entertain the idea of many Unmoved Movers shows that he was not unaware of the difficulty of celestial motion.

suggestion might be that Aristotle was unclear on the issue. We shall see Plotinus takes him to task for this.

Aristotle begins the discussion of multiple Unmoved Movers by saying that the first principle and primary reality (αρχη και το πρωτον των οντων) is unmoveable both essentially (καθ'αυτο) and accidentally (συμβεβηκος), and that it excites the primary form of motion which is eternal.<sup>1</sup> We also observe other eternal spatial movements which must be accounted for:

there are other spatial motions - those of the planets - which are eternal (because a body which moves in a circle is never at rest - this has been proved by our physical treatises): then each of these spatial movements must also be excited by a substance (ουσια) which is essentially immoveable and eternal. For the nature of heavenly bodies is eternal, being a kind of substance, and that which moves is eternal and prior to the moved; and that which is prior to substance must also be a substance. It is therefore clear that there must be an equal number of substances in nature eternal [την τε φυσιν αιδιους] essentially unmoveable [ακινητους καθ'αυτας] and without magnitude [ανευ μεγεθους].  
1073a26-1073b1

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<sup>1</sup>1073a23-6

The position that Aristotle reached in his investigations (in the form it has come down to us at least) is wanting; part of what is wanting, I think, is that Aristotle's notion of "individuation", such as it is, is built up from his examination of concrete *material* particulars. Form is the primary principle of individuation, as I have argued, but in material particulars, form stands in relation to some commensurate matter, and in virtue of its commensurability, it is distinguishable from other forms. In the case of multiple unmoved movers, where each one is entirely actual (and hence not commensurate with any potency), it is not clear how Aristotle will distinguish them.

Aristotle goes on to argue that there is only one heaven, which appears to be inconsistent with the argument about a multiple number of movers,<sup>1</sup> and more importantly, since the argument used appeals to the need for matter to individuate a number of heavens, one is left wondering how the multiple movers are individuated.

Evidently there is but one heaven. For if there are many heavens as there are many men, the moving principles, of which each

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<sup>1</sup>Proof perhaps that  $\Lambda 8$  is a late interpolation. cp. Tredennick, XII, 8, pg 160, note b.

heaven will have one, will be one in form but in number many. But all things that are many in number have matter. (1074a32-4)

Presumably, Aristotle would distinguish them on the basis of the 'order' (ταξις) in which they stand, an order which corresponds to the spatial motions of the heavenly bodies:

it is clear that the movers are substances [ουσιαι] and that one of them is first and another second and so on in the same order [ταξις] the spatial motions of the heavenly bodies. (1073b1-3)

The difficulty, however is that these 'substances' ought to be prior to the order in which one finds evidence for their existence (e.g. planetary movement) since it is the movers that explain that order, and not the other way around. Hence the order cannot be appealed to as an explanation of the individuation of the movers. Given our examination of sensible substances, one might suggest that the unmoved movers, since they are substances, are self-individuating. But unlike sensible substances, these eternal substances are completely *actual* - they have no commensurability with potency whereby they differ from one another. Hence it remains unclear how Aristotle can

explain their individuality. The consequence seems to be that Aristotle falls prey to the difficulty of distinguishing immaterial particulars. Jaeger says,

If matter is the principle of individuation...either the movers of the spheres cannot be immaterial, since they form a plurality of exemplars of a genus, or Aristotle refutes himself by retaining his doctrine of immateriality, since this excludes individual multiplicity. In either event he falls into contradictions with the presuppositions of his own philosophy.<sup>1</sup>

Jaeger treats of matter as the principle of individuation, whereas my own interpretation treats of the substantial form in the concrete particular as the principle of individuation. My thinking is that Aristotle in fact builds up a notion of individuation based on the material concrete particular. This conception of individuation is incapable of dealing with immaterial concrete particulars. Again, one might think that if the substantial form was the individuating feature, then this ought to pose no problem for Aristotle. However, his notion of substantial form is based on an analysis of the concrete material particular, wherein the commensurability of substantial form with matter in a

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<sup>1</sup>Jaeger, pg. 352.



matter/form union is what individuates. Hence one comes to the same conclusion as Jaeger, namely that the Unmoved Movers are indistinguishable on Aristotle's own principles.

Plotinus, as I have suggested, takes Aristotle to task on this very question of the individuation of many "Unmoved Movers." This also points to the larger question of being and unity, because we cannot forget that Aristotle is asserting, on the one hand, that separate immaterial substances exist, and on the other, the incoherence of Platonic χωρισμος. One key reason for denying separation is, as we have seen, that Aristotle thinks it leads to Parmenideanism. Aristotle's move is to make being and unity convertible, universal, posterior to, and predicated of, particulars.

When Aristotle has to individuate non-material particulars, he can appeal to neither unity nor being, since these being and unity are *posterior* to their substantiality. If unity were prior to immaterial substances, then they could be individuated, since unity would "bear" or provide this particularity for them. A prior principle of unity could be appealed to as an

explanation of why immaterial things are nonetheless unities. But since for Aristotle, substances must "bear" being and unity, there is no coherent appeal to unity as a cause of individuation. Aristotle's 'immaterial substances' fall into the trap of Parmenideanism.

Plotinus points out that Aristotle's multiple movers are indistinguishable, and one wonders if, in light of this difficulty, he is motivated to reassert the priority of unity, to use the idea of a prior principle of unity to ground the multiplicity of Forms in his second principle, *Nous*. Cast in this light, it makes sense for Plotinus to affirm what Aristotle had denied, namely that Forms are dependent upon a prior principle of unity for their existence.

#### 4. *Conclusion*

The three key points I have raised in this chapter indicate the types of things that Plotinus will want to say in response to Aristotle's metaphysics. Plotinus wants to say 1) that a self-intellecting thing is by its very nature multiple, and that an existing thing is by that very nature multiple, 2) that a principle of unity

ought not to be a specific thing, a unity or being itself, and 3) that the idea of a number of immaterial principles won't work unless there is a prior principle of unity to ground their individuality.

What follows in the second part of the thesis is an attempt first to examine some later interpretations of Plato and Aristotle that seem to have influenced Plotinus. This, coupled with an investigation of the influence of Plato and Parmenides on Plotinus, lays the groundwork for a more detailed examination of Plotinus' rejection of Aristotle's conceptual scheme of convertibility, and the reconstruction, in a new key, of a Platonic metaphysical hierarchy in the *Enneads*.

## PART II - PLOTINUS

## INTRODUCTION TO PART II

### 1. *Thematic Introduction*

One useful way of understanding the history of Greek metaphysics is in terms of a series of shifts in the perceived role of being and unity in various metaphysical systems. Parmenides attempted to show that an "abstract" notion of unity was the ground of the cosmos, and that it was identical with the cosmos at the same time. Plato postulated the existence of transcendent unitary grounds or Forms, all of which are grounded by an ultimate grounding unity, the One or the Good. The "abstract" notion of unity is separated from the Forms which it grounds, and Forms are separated from the particulars which they ground. Aristotle suggests that particular things in the cosmos ground their own being and unity, and that a particular substance, the Unmoved Mover grounds the continuum of motion, and consequently the substances in the cosmos.

In the first half of this thesis I have tried to indicate the direction of Aristotle's metaphysics against the backdrop of his critique of the Platonic metaphysical hierarchy. I have also identified three main difficulties within Aristotle's metaphysical position that Plotinus seems to react against: 1) The Unmoved Mover, conceived of as thought thinking itself engenders multiplicity and cannot function as a unitary first principle. 2) Aristotle's theory of multiple movers lacks a coherent mechanism for their individuation. 3) The first principle is itself a unity and a being, which, as I shall attempt to show, requires (in Plotinus' eyes) a principle and a source.

In this half of the thesis, I intend to examine Plotinus' metaphysical system and some of its influences. My primary concern with his system is with the relations of the first two "hypostases" of that structure, the One and *Nous*. In looking at Aristotle I spent a considerable amount of time dealing with the relations of being and unity in particular substances, since that is where Aristotle sees the importance of the relations of unity and being. For Plotinus, what is of primary import is the

meeting of being and unity in Nous, as they emerge from a transcendent unity. Hence the focus of my discussion of Plotinus will be on that set of relations. It is no small point that Plotinus, in trying to establish a revised sort of Platonic metaphysical hierarchy, should care less about the being and unity of particular substances and more about their relations to each other as formal principles. Another concern is to shed some light on why he postulates a principle which is beyond being or the Nous, which he identifies (conceptually) with Aristotle's Unmoved Mover.

My suggestion in what follows will be that we find in Plotinus the recognition that a "thinker thinking" himself cannot function as the primary unity of a coherent metaphysical system, that there must be something which grounds the unity of anything which has two components, for even a self-intellecting Unmoved mover has two components, thinker and object of thought. This led him to reassert the transcendence of a first unity, and this transcendence is a transcendence not only of thinking, but of being as well. What this in effect

gives rise to in the thought of Plotinus is an attempt to explain not only the order, but the source of being.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Rist, "The One of Plotinus and the God of Aristotle,"  
pg. 83.



## 2. Plotinus' Hypostatic System

In my exposition of Plotinus' metaphysical system, I shall concentrate on two primary issues: 1) the reasons for projecting a unitary ground, the One, that is beyond being, and 2) what it means to say that the One is beyond being. I will, at present, give a brief overview of Plotinus' view of the cosmos, and then turn to an examination of some of the views which influenced his position.

Plotinus believes that the cosmos is grounded by a principle of unity, the One, which is beyond both being and thought. This perfect and complete principle gives rise to a second primary principle or hypostasis,<sup>1</sup> Nous,

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<sup>1</sup>Much argument has been passed about the nature of "hypostasis," in Plotinus. Gerson (1994), pg. 2 notes that the term is applied to "wisdom," "matter," "love," "numbers," "relation," "time," "motion," and so on. The reason people want to say that Plotinus has "Three Primary Hypostases" is because Porphyry in editing called *Ennead V.1* by this title. While some have suggested that this is no good reason to assert that Plotinus in fact has them, I think that Porphyry probably knew what he was talking about; however it should be noted that the title Porphyry chose was the *Three Primary Hypostases*, which should suggest that Plotinus depends on the functional notion in more than these primary ways. Common sense dictates that anyone who engages in a discussion about Plotinus knows very well that for the most part discussion of Hypostases refers to the One, Nous and Soul, and hence we seem to be able to communicate just fine with a bracketed understanding. The debate between Deck and Anton as to whether the One is "properly" hypostasis is interesting, in so far as  
(continued...)

by a process of emanation,<sup>1</sup> wherein it first produces unlimited being, which is then limited by intellection. The combination of an unlimited outflow of being, and the limiting nature of thought, is Nous, the second hypostasis, which Kenney calls a monadology of self-

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(...continued)

it engages the question of whether a hypostasis entails being or not. Both articles are reproduced in Harris, ed., The Structure of Being. (For more on *σῶσις*, cp Bussanich, "Inner Life," pg. 164 ff.) I use the term "hypostasis" to refer to the three primary ones, and I believe that the One is a hypostasis which is beyond being.

<sup>1</sup>Armstrong (1937) pg. 62 suggests that "emanation" is taken over from a Stoic notion of material emanation, and meant to do non-material work. He notes, however that an account of the capacity of the individual to receive unity which Plotinus gives in VI.4-5 is substituted for emanation, wherein each thing participates in the One according to its capacity. (Architecture, pg. 60) Lee suggests that this "receptiveness" ought to be seen as an aspect of integral omnipresence. ("The Doctrine of Reception," pg. 96). What is positively fascinating, is that where Armstrong (1937) and (1960) sees a particular account of Emanation (VI.4.7) as Plotinus all but deconstructing the emanation theory, Sells (1994) takes the same passage as an example of apophatic reasoning. For my discussion of Plotinus' philosophy, nothing stands or falls on this, but I think that Sells may be right in so suggesting. Gerson (1994) pg. 27, in calling "emanation a category mistake" suggests, "I suspect the attraction of emanationism as an interpretation of Plotinus' metaphysics derives in part from supposing that this is the best way to explain the derivation of multiplicity from unity or complexity from simplicity. In order to remove this attraction, we need only to consider that this *αρχή* of all is known only by its effects, which are all cases of complexity. Accordingly, there could be no derivation of multiplicity from unity in the sense of a strict demonstration."

intellecting forms. This is, I think, a very useful notion. Says Kenney:

Plotinus' realist theology is. . . at base a monadology, for the world of being exhibits upon examination a collective unity of monadic intellects. . . Just as nous as a whole thinks itself, and 'this thinking is idea,' so also the intelligible character of each form is a function of its own exercise of intellection.<sup>1</sup>

The idea of calling Nous a "monadology " is to suggest that each of the forms in Nous is a unity unto itself that is in harmony with all of the other forms, and that in its self-intellection, it reflects all of the other forms as related to itself, much as each monad in Leibniz's system refers to every other monad in terms of an infinite number of true predicates. That each form is a monad, and the collection of forms in Nous a monadology, also stresses the interconnectedness and harmony of the expressions of unity that each form represents, as well as the individuality of each form. One gets a sense of this in the following lines from Enneads V.9.8:

If, then, the thought [of Nous] is of what is within it, that which is within it is

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<sup>1</sup>Kenney, pp 148-9

its immanent form [το εἶδος το ἐνόν], and this is the Idea [ἡ ἰδέα]. What then is this? Intellect [νοῦς] and intelligent substance [ἡ νοερά οὐσία]; each individual Idea is not other than Intellect, but each is Intellect. And Intellect as a whole is all the Forms, and each individual Form is an individual intellect, as the whole body of knowledge is all its theorems, but each theorem is a part of the whole, not as being spatially distinct, but as having its particular power in the whole. This Intellect therefore is in itself and since it possesses itself [ἔχων ἑαυτόν] in peace is everlasting fullness [ἐν ἡσυχίᾳ κορος αἶν]. (V.9.8, 1-8)

Nous is a unity of multiplicity, which perceives directly and immediately all of the forms, which also perceive themselves directly and immediately. This One-Many, Nous, gives rise to a third Hypostasis, Soul, which thinks discursively, and can be seen to have an upper soul which apprehends and conveys order to the material realm below it, by creating "place holders" of a sort for bodies. Soul also has a lower component which gives life and sense perception to the places marked out by upper soul. Human souls have a part of them that resides with Nous, while the rest of them is engaged in the bodily. The aim of life in this hypostatic system is to disengage

the soul from material concerns, or weak expressions of unity, and to recollect the true unity of the self that always resides with Nous. If the soul is able to turn inward and actualise itself, it ascends to the level of Nous, from which it may attempt a mystical union with the One which is beyond being.

We have seen that some of the key objections which Aristotle raises against separate Forms are as follows:<sup>1</sup>

- 1) Forms fail to account for motion and change.
- 2) Forms don't help the existence of particulars, since they are not in particulars.
- 3) Forms cannot both be particulars and have separate existence, if they are predicated of other things.

Plotinus' hypostatic, emanative metaphysics seems to be able to offer an answer to these questions while retaining (if not amplifying) the essence of the Platonic metaphysical hierarchy: Unity - Being - particulars. The concept of emanation in part deals with the question of motion and change, for the living continuity of the cosmos speaks to the continuity of motion that Aristotle suggests is required; further the *εὑρημία* that emerges

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<sup>1</sup>cp 1079b15-18

from the One shows the One to be source and guarantor of the cosmos. The question of the existence of concrete particulars is solved by making them emanative projections of particular forms at the hypostatic level of Soul. The division into genera and species is the result of a corresponding increase in the intrusion of a material principle on an emanating prior Unity, or viewed conversely, the result of the weakening of the emanative force of the One. The general problem of the *χωρισμός* is also mediated by the theory of emanation, whereby the being and unity are emanated from a first principle in a kosmos which is a living "unity of multiplicity, a living being."

When we examine Plotinus' critique of Aristotle, we see that he uses Aristotle's own understanding of the relation of being and unity and, his conception of thinking, to undermine the first principle of the Aristotelian system. What Plotinus ultimately concludes, I think, is that the ultimate principle of being and unity is not an exemplar of being and unity, or a paradigm *per se*; rather the One is, in the spirit of Platonism and *contra* Aristotle, beyond being and knowing.

Aristotle's unitary principle is a unitary being, and in Plotinus' eyes, the unity of this being requires a principle and a source.

### 3. *Structural Introduction*

Part II of the thesis has the following chapters:

In Chapter V, I want to connect Plotinus more explicitly with Plato and Parmenides, in the hope of establishing conceptual links that help explain what Plotinus is doing with his metaphysics, and why he rejects Aristotle's position on being and unity

In Chapter VI, I will examine some key themes and interpretations of Plato by the Middle Platonists, with an eye to locating Plotinus conceptually within the Platonic/Pythagorean tradition. The developments in Platonism, also shed light on why Plotinus understands Plato and Aristotle in the way that he does.

. In Chapter VII, I focus on some implicit and explicit criticisms Plotinus makes of Aristotle, as well as remarking briefly on the kinds of innovations Plotinus takes over from Aristotle in order to make his own theory work.

Chapters VIII and IX discuss the metaphysics of Plotinus proper. Chapter VIII discusses the relationship of being and unity in the hypostatic system in terms of some of some of the 'axiomatic' assumptions Plotinus makes. The emphasis is on the relation of the One to Nous. Chapter IX explains why the One has to be beyond both thinking and being.

The second half of the thesis, then, has several goals, including: 1) understanding how Plotinus locates himself conceptually within the Greek metaphysical/philosophical tradition. I think that grasping his position on being and unity provides valuable insights into this. 2) Examining the general drift of some of Plotinus' Middle Platonic predecessors, so as to render more accessible his interpretation of Plato and his critique of Aristotle. 3) Seeing how Plotinus reinstates the Platonic metaphysical hierarchy, and what this means for the transcendency of his first principle, the One.



## **Chapter V- Parmenides and Plato**

### *1. Introduction*

In this chapter, I propose to look at some of the specific comments Plotinus makes about Plato and Parmenides. What emerges from this investigation is the sense that Plotinus views himself as the heir to Platonism, and that he is giving a true account of Plato. That his account varies from Plato's considerably is in part accounted for by the revisions and innovations of later Platonists from whom Plotinus inherited his understanding of Plato.<sup>1</sup>

In Section 2 of this chapter, I look briefly at some of the comments Plotinus makes about his presocratic predecessors. From these remarks it is clear that he places himself in a "Pythagorean" lineage, and that he regards unity as the key problem to which all of his predecessors were seeking a solution.

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<sup>1</sup>I discuss some of these in Chapter VI.

In Section 3, I examine the remarks made in the *Enneads* about Parmenides of Elea. Plotinus appears to follow Plato in assessing the "One Being" of Parmenides as a multiple, and not a unitary entity. This way of assessing being has important consequences for Plotinus' charge that Aristotle's Unmoved Mover is multiple.

Section 4 discusses several ways in which Plotinus' key doctrines were influenced by his interpretation of Plato's texts. The result of the discussion is that we move closer to explaining Plotinus' metaphysics of hypostases via Plato. Again, it is important to keep in mind that some of these Platonic notions have undergone revision (or have been made explicit by Middle Platonist interpreters) by the time they have reached Plotinus.

Finally, in Section 5, I assess briefly the thesis of E.R. Dodds, that Plotinus' philosophy takes a great deal of its conceptual framework from Plato's *Parmenides*.

## 2. A Pythagorean Lineage

It is important to point out some general considerations regarding how Plotinus "divides" the thinkers whom he discusses. In *Enneads* V.1, he ends his discussion of previous thinkers by remarking on the incoherence of Aristotle's system of multiple movers. He goes on to say the following:

For this reason [the problems with Aristotle's system of movers] those of the ancient philosophers who took up positions closest to those of Pythagoras and his successors and Pherecydes held closely to this nature [of a singular first principle of unity]. (V.1.9, 28-30)

This passage comes on the heels of a critique of difficulties surrounding Aristotle's multiple Unmoved Movers. The difficulties that one finds in Aristotle's first principle are said to be the reason (without any real explanation) that the "Pythagorean" notion of unity was adopted by most thinkers. The tone of the passage suggests that Pythagoras was on the right path, and that Aristotle strayed from that path.

This tendency to attribute authority and validity to thinkers or their thoughts in accordance with their supposed concomitance with Pythagoras arguably goes back to the Old Academy itself, and the tradition survived

until Plotinus' time. Plotinus sees a Pythagorean lineage<sup>1</sup> in Parmenides and Plato, and having dealt with the "true views" of these thinkers, he goes on to mention Anaxagoras, who "neglects to give an accurate account because of his antiquity,"<sup>2</sup> Heraclitus, who in a passing reference is said to have maintained that "the One is eternal and intelligible,"<sup>3</sup> and "Empedocles for whom "Love is the One."<sup>4</sup> The references to these thinkers are courteous albeit cursory, and they suggest only that Plotinus sees in them a recognition of the need to say something about a principle of unity.

It is Aristotle, on the other hand, who strays from the "positions closest to Pythagoras," and who, in Plotinus' eyes, makes unity multiform without

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<sup>1</sup>Dillon (pg 51) suggests, "The view that Plato is essentially a pupil, creative or otherwise, of Pythagoras grows in strength and elaboration among all classes of Platonist, attaining its extreme form among those who unequivocally declared themselves to be Pythagoreans. Nevertheless, despite all the variations in doctrine that emerge, we can observe in this period the growth of a consistent body of thought, constituting a Platonic heritage that could be handed on...to Plotinus and his followers..." cp *ibid.* pg 38; on Plotinus' attitude towards Plato, cp Armstrong (1980), pg 206, pp 213ff.

<sup>2</sup>V.1.9, 1-3

<sup>3</sup>*ibid.*, 4

<sup>4</sup>*ibid.*, 5

establishing an acceptable principle of unity. In other words, Plotinus includes himself in the Pythagorean/Platonic lineage, and identifies Aristotle's non-Pythagoreanism as the absence from his system of a true principle of unity. Part of the forthcoming discussion of Aristotle (Chapter VII) attempts to explain why this is the case.

### 3. *Parmenides of Elea*

The idea of a soul which has forgotten the source of its unity, being, and goodness (which is the One) provides the impetus for Plotinus' examination of his hypostatic system in *Enneads* V.1.4. The treatise begins by asking why it is that souls forget their father and maker, and goes on to investigate the universal principles which govern the sense world. The second highest of such principles is Nous, the intelligible realm which contains the forms that ground the sensible cosmos:

if someone admires this *κοσμος αισθητον*, observing its size and beauty and the order of its everlasting course, and the gods in it, some of whom are seen and some of whom are invisible, and the spirits, and all animals and plants, let him ascend to its

αρχετυπον and truer reality and there see them all intelligible and eternal in it, in its own understanding and life, and let him see pure Intellect (Νοῦν) presiding over them . . . (V.1.4, 1-9)

In Plotinus' subsequent descriptions of Nous, he regards it as the identification of being and thought. Every idea in Nous is Intellect and Being, and Nous itself is universal νοῦς καὶ οὐ, "το δὲ οὐ τῷ νοεῖσθαι τῷ νῶ διδόν το νοεῖν καὶ το εἶναι"<sup>1</sup> This identification of Being and Thought is reminiscent of Parmenides' famous fragment "το γὰρ αὐτο νοεῖν ἐστὶν τε καὶ εἶναι,"<sup>2</sup> and Plotinus says as much in a subsequent chapter (V.1.7). It is interesting to note the similarities of expression between that fragment and the manner in which the identification of being and intellect is expressed by Plotinus. One wonders if he is anticipating his subsequent reference to Parmenides by explaining what the identification of being and thought

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<sup>1</sup>"Intellect making being exist in thinking it, and Being giving Intellect thinking and existence by being thought." (V.1.4, 28-9).

<sup>2</sup>(DK 3) "To think and to be are one and the same," or (better) "To think and to think being are one and the same." Note that Ennead V.1.7 is one of the sources for this fragment, but it is also cited by Clement and Proclus. cp Coxon, pg 54.

mean for the Eleatic.<sup>1</sup> Plotinus goes on to say that Parmenides also touched on a view like his own, in that he identified Being and Intellect and saw that Being/Intellect was not among the things perceived by the senses,

when he said "το γὰρ αὐτο νοεῖν ἐστὶν τε καὶ εἶναι." And he says that being is unmoved, though he does attach thinking (το νοεῖν) to it - taking all bodily movement (σωματικὴν πᾶσαν κίνησιν) from it that it may remain always in the same state, and likening it to the mass of a sphere (οἰκω σφαίρας) because it holds all things in its circumference and because its thinking is not external but in itself. (V.1.8.16-22)

We see again, when Plotinus articulates his monadological conception of Nous in V.9, that he calls upon Parmenides:

Intellect therefore really thinks the real beings, not as if they were somewhere else...So [the statement is correct] that "thinking and being are the same thing [το γὰρ αὐτο νοεῖν ἐστὶν τε καὶ εἶναι]... (V.9.5, 26-9)

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<sup>1</sup>It is also clear that Plato's *Sophist* and *Parmenides* are in Plotinus' mind here, since he goes on to derive, in his description of Nous, the five primary genera. Says Plotinus, "but this one [Nous] is two things - Intellect as thinking and being as thought: For there could not be thinking without otherness, and also sameness. These then are primary: Intellect, Being, Otherness, Sameness; but one must also include motion and rest." (V.1.4, 32-7) cp *Enneads* V.8.3-4, VI.7,13; cp *Sophist* 254dff, *Parmenides* 145eff.

There are further similarities between Plotinus' conception of being in Nous to the being of Parmenides.

At VI.4.2, Plotinus says the following about Nous:

The whole totality [of being] cannot be lacking of itself, but is filled in itself and equal to itself. And where the totality is, there it is itself, for it is the totality... It does not leave itself, for Being cannot be in non-being...It cannot be cut off from itself, and the reason its being is said to be omnipresent is clearly this, that it is in being, thus in itself. (VI.4.2, 15-25)<sup>1</sup>

This language reminds us of Parmenides comparison of being to a sphere in Fragment 8:

But since there is a furthest limit, it is bounded on every side, like the bulk of a well-rounded sphere, from the centre equally balanced in every direction; for it needs must not be somewhat more here or somewhat less there. For neither is there that which is not, which might stop it from meeting its like, nor can what is be more here and less there than what is, since it is all inviolate; for being equal to itself on every side, it rests uniformly within its limits. (DK 8:42-9)

A few lines earlier, Parmenides too indicates that he does not think it possible for that being to be "cut off" from itself:

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<sup>1</sup>Of course much of this type of language also occurs in the *Parmenides* of Plato; cp. O'Meara, "Omnipresence," pp 66-7, Jackson (1967), pg. 317, Strange (1992) pg. 483.



Nor is it divisible, since it is all alike;  
 nor is there more here and less there,  
 which would prevent it from cleaving  
 together, but it is all full of what is. So  
 it is all continuous; for what is clings  
 close to what is. (DK 8:22-6)

It is also Plotinus' contention that when Parmenides said being was one, he was open to criticism, since in fact his being was multiple.<sup>1</sup> What Plotinus has in mind here, is that if being and intellect are in the same entity, there is multiplicity - all of the other "primary kinds" (sameness, difference, motion, rest) may be derived from it; this is quite similar to the tack that Plato takes in the *Sophist* and *Parmenides*.

It is significant that there is a radical difference between Plotinus' and Aristotle's understanding of unity and being in Parmenides' philosophy. Aristotle maintains that the logical consequence of Parmenides' philosophy was that all being was one. Plotinus sees instead, following Plato, that the consequence of Parmenides' philosophy is that being is multiple. The difference in interpretation reveals

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<sup>1</sup>ὅθεν δε λεγων εν τοις εαυτου συγγραμμασιν αιτιαν ειχεν ως του ενος τουτου πολλα ευρισκομενου. " (V.1.8.23-4)

something of the fundamental difference about between Plotinus and Aristotle regarding being and unity. Aristotle sees "one being" as stagnantly one; Plotinus sees "one being" as pregnant with all. Aristotle sees "one being" as "one predicated of being," and therefore one; Plotinus sees "one being" as a "being participant in unity" and therefore multiple. What is interesting from the standpoint of Plotinus' philosophy is that both the Unmoved Mover and Parmenides' being are subject to the charge of multiplicity.

Plotinus rejects the idea that Parmenides' being is a perfect unity, and suggests that it is a multiplicity. He says the same thing about his own 'being,' Nous, that it is a "one-many";<sup>1</sup> he also says the same thing about Aristotle's Unmoved Mover. Plotinus maintains, almost tongue in cheek, that the Parmenides of Plato "speaks more accurately," distinguishing the threefold levels of 1) One (the One), 2) One-Many (Nous), and 3) One and Many (Soul), "and in this way he too

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<sup>1</sup>This phrase, "ἐν πολλὰ" is itself taken over from Plato's *Parmenides*.

[Plato's character Parmenides] agrees with the doctrine of the three natures [hypostases]."<sup>1</sup>

#### 4. *Plato*

The influence of Plato on Plotinus is of course far reaching and profound.<sup>2</sup> I have already dealt (in Chapter I) with the Platonic metaphysical hierarchy that I think Plotinus is trying to revise. Plotinus' identification of his hypostatic system with Plato's philosophy reminds us that he is not merely extracting a concept from another thinker, but is attempting to produce a metaphysics that is consistent with Plato's key metaphysical postulates. It is significant that Plotinus, in handling passages of Plato which seem to conflict with his own doctrines, treats them as interpretive problems,

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<sup>1</sup>V.1.8, 24-30. This is obviously what lends a great deal of support to Dodds' thesis about the *Parmenides*, but Gurtler responds rightly, I think that "Plotinus is giving a brief parallel between his three Hypostases and characteristics of unity found at specific junctures in the argument of Plato's great dialogue. He is not however, making the claim that Plato was actually talking about his metaphysical hierarchy." Gurtler (1992) pg. 444.

<sup>2</sup>Armstrong (1980) pp 213-4, remarks that Plotinus takes little or no interest in Plato's political thought. Very little is taken from the Socratic dialogues. In the main, the key passages are from *Republic VI & VII*, *Phaedo*, *Symposium*, *Timeaus*, *Sophist*, *Parmenides* and *Epistle II*.

and not as flaws in Plato's argument.<sup>1</sup> Plotinus believes that his three hypostases represent Plato's doctrine, and speaks of his hypostatic system with reference to Plato, as in the passage below:<sup>2</sup>

Plato knew that *Nous* comes from the Good, and Soul from *Nous*. And [it follows] that these statements of ours are not new; they do not belong to the present time, but were made long ago, not explicitly, and what we have said in this discussion has been an interpretation of them, relying on Plato's own writings for evidence that these views are ancient. (V.1.8, 9-14)<sup>3</sup>

It would be another task altogether to embark on an exhaustive account of Plato's influence on Plotinus. For the purposes of our enquiry into unity, I propose to discuss Plotinus' employment and/or revised interpretation of five main Platonic concepts: 1) It is

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<sup>1</sup>Katz, pg. 2, (pg. 4): "While Plato's *dixit* is subject to interpretation only, Plotinus feels free to criticise the other philosophers." cp. Armstrong, (1980) pg. 206, 213, ff.

<sup>2</sup>For support he refers to *Epistle II*, 312e1-4 in *Enneads* V.I.7, cited also in *Enneads* I.8.2 & VI.7.42 and alluded to in III.5.8 He also refers to *Epistle VI* 323d2-5 and *Timaeus* 34bff & 41d4-5, at V.I.7.

<sup>3</sup>Again it is interesting to note the appeal to authority and antiquity that colours this kind of remark. I do not, however, agree with Armstrong's idea (1980, pg 171) that Plotinus calls upon the ideas of the ancients as a minister might call upon Scripture. In Plotinus case, the appeal to authority has reverence, but it is not unreflective or dogmatic.

extremely useful to see Plotinus as firmly grounded in a Platonic motif of degrees of reality. 2) Plotinus uses the logic of degrees of unity to postulate a transcendent theory of the One which grounds Formal existence as well as the material world. 3) Plotinus interprets the *Timaeus* along middle Platonist lines, arguing that "ideas are not outside the intellect." 4) The ideas in the intellect are given sustenance and unity by a monadology of sorts which calls upon the "primary genera"<sup>1</sup> of the *Parmenides* and *Sophist*. 5) Finally, it is useful to understand the projection of the One beyond being (so as to ground the multiplicity of forms in Nous) in relation to the consequences drawn in the *Parmenides* regarding a "one which has being,"<sup>2</sup> and the claim in the *Republic*,<sup>3</sup> so often cited by Plotinus, about the Good being "επεκεινα της ουσιας."

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<sup>1</sup>Rist (1967), pg. 32.

<sup>2</sup>O'Meara states, (pg. 52), "The ultimate cause as identified by Plotinus matches the 'one' which Plato discusses in the second part of the *Parmenides*(137c-142a)."

<sup>3</sup>509b

#### *4.1 Degrees of Reality*

Plato's own intuition regarding the Forms was that they enjoyed a higher ontological status and a logical priority to the realm of becoming because they were more real, and not subject to change or corruption. The Forms, then, can be seen to exist to a greater degree than their imitative instantiations in the realm of becoming.<sup>1</sup> The same holds true for Plotinus; indeed he extends the scope of this tenet by applying it to his triadic system of hypostases. The general rule that he observes in accounting for hypostatic declension or hypostatic ascent is that the closer one gets to the One on the hypostatic ladder, the more reality, and the more being something has.

Plotinus regards the One as the principle of all reality, and the Nous which is grounded in this principle expresses the One in a way that is more real and less "diminished" than Soul, that which takes its reality ultimately from the One, but mediately through Nous. When we arrive at the level of particular material things,

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<sup>1</sup>*ibid*

they all seem to share the same amount of being,<sup>1</sup> but their prior formal instantiations increase in reality at the level of Soul, and are more real yet again at the level of Nous. Implicit in this is a position that traces all the way back to Plato's divided line, where images are less real than beliefs, beliefs are less real than mathematical objects, mathematical objects are less real than Forms, and all of them are grounded in an ultimate principle, the Good.<sup>2</sup>

#### 4.2 Eidetic Inversion

Another key point of connection between Plato and Plotinus is that, what are intuitively predicates or types become true substances, while their instantiations are demoted to dependent beings, relying on an

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<sup>1</sup>i.e., at VI.2.11, 14-21. cp, however, the general claim at V.3.15, 17ff.

<sup>2</sup>"Assume these four affectations occurring in the soul: intellection or reason [νοησιν] for the highest, understanding [διανοιαν] for the second; assign belief [πιστιν] to the third, and to the last, picture-thinking or conjecture [εικασιαν], and arrange them in proportion, considering that they participate in clearness and precision in the same degree as their objects partake of truth and reality [ωσπερ εφ οις εστιν αληθειας μετεχειν, ουτω ταυτα σαφηνειας ηγησαμενος μετεχειν." *Republic* 511d

ontologically prior and "more real," formal unity for their derived existence.<sup>1</sup> For example, in the Republic, Plato says the following:

we predicate [φάμεν] 'to be' [εἶναι] of many beautiful things and many good things, saying of them severally that they are and so define them in our speech...And again we speak of a self-beautiful [αὐτοκαλόν] and of a good that is only and merely good [αὐτοαγαθόν], and so, in the case of all things that we then posited as many, we turn about and posit each as a single idea [ἰδέαν μίαν] or aspect, assuming it to be a unity [μίας] and call it that which really is [οὐσὶν]. (*Republic* 507b)

This kind of "eidetic inversion," of making the Ideas more real than their instances, is of special import for Plotinus, since it helps explain the acceptability of the logic employed to justify the One as the ultimate source of unity. Plotinus takes the Forms, in that monadology<sup>2</sup> which is Nous as unities whose unity comes from something prior, just as in Plato's Republic, Forms get their unity from something prior; further, sensible

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<sup>1</sup>Findlay, J.N. "The Logical Peculiarities of Neoplatonism," In Harris, R.B., ed., The Structure of Being, SUNY Press, Albany, 1982, pg. 1. cp Strange (1992), pg 486.

<sup>2</sup>See Part II Introduction, Section 2.



particulars get their natures from something prior, i.e.. the Forms. This suggests an "eidetic inversion," where any group of things stands in a dependent relation to a prior "eidetic" principle. It is eidetic because for the most part the "prior" is formal. It is "inverted" because it is counter intuitive (and contra Aristotle) in so far as the more familiar sensible objects play less of a role in the explanation of our experience than our experience leads us to believe.

Plotinus' One, precisely because of its ontological primacy in this eidetically inverted conception of reality, is implied by the being and intelligibility of every Form, and in the participant existence and discursive perceptibility of every instantiation of a Form in the Plotinian universe.<sup>1</sup> In other words, you invert the logic of predication, making "predicates" prior ontological principles, and those things which Aristotle takes as substantive (concrete material particulars) are understood as instantiations of what are truly substantive (Forms). In Plotinus, the conceptual approach to the One, as the "source" of all

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<sup>1</sup>Findlay, pg. 7.

reality, is an extrapolation of this principle - Forms are grounded in a supra-ontological, supra-noetic prior principle. The unity which emanates from the One is manifest in any existent thing; in order to be, a thing must be one.

The problem that Aristotle introduced regarding participation as a source of motion and change is in Plotinus answered by appeal to the causal efficacy of the One's superabundance. Its power "overflows," so to speak, and produces the next hypostasis, as a result of the kind of principle that it is.<sup>1</sup> Things participate in unity because a principle of unity is their ontological source. Indeed in a unified, vitalist conception of the cosmos such as Plotinus', the causal connexity is guaranteed by the unity of the system, just as Aristotle's account of motion in *Physics* requires a spatial contiguity. Hence, in a new key, the unity of all things, both Formal, and material, is participant, not predicative.

This is not to suggest, however, that the One is a sort of "Form of Unity."<sup>2</sup> Nothing can participate

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<sup>1</sup>This is the subject of chapters VIII and IX.

<sup>2</sup>On this cp Gerson's (1994) insightful comments, pg 36

directly in the One, and the unity and being which it conveys has to be mediated by the circumscribing unity and being of the Forms and Nous. No participant in the One is properly an "instance" of it, because the One, such as it is, cannot give its nature to anything. This would be the trap of Parmenideanism that Aristotle accuses Plato of falling into.<sup>1</sup> When the logic of eidetic inversion is projected by analogy to a higher level, the One, unity is seen as derived from the One; the One is not predicated of anything. Plotinus accounts for this derivation in terms of emanation.

#### 4.3 *Ideas not Outside the Intellect*

In the treatise entitled, by Plotinus' editor Porphyry, "That the Intelligibles Are Not Outside the Intellect, and On the Good," (V.5) Plotinus writes:

One must not . . . look for the Intelligibles [τὰ νοητά] outside, or say that there are impressions of the real beings in Nous, or by depriving it of truth make the Intelligibles unknowable and non-

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<sup>1</sup>See Chapter II, Section 3.

existent and finally abolish Intellect  
itself. (V.5.2, 1-5)

We have seen that Aristotle had attempted to render the "Intelligibles" (ontologically) non-existent, by denying independent ontological status to the Forms. One way in which Plotinus attempts to get them back is to place them in a "mind." In the next chapter, I will discuss certain Middle Platonist interpretations of the *Timaeus*' account of the *Demiurgos*' relation to the Forms. These interpretations provide succour for Plotinus' position that the Ideas exist in the mind of the *Demiurgos*, despite the fact that the *Timaeus* itself does not explicitly say that they should be so placed. Plato in fact says the following:

Now if so be that this Cosmos is beautiful  
and the constructor [δημιουργος] good, it is  
plain that he fixed his gaze on the eternal  
[προς το αιδιον εβλεπεν]. (*Timaeus* 29a)

Plato does say that "[the cosmos] has been constructed after the pattern of that which is apprehensible by reason and thought and is self-identical,"<sup>1</sup> which could refer to the mind of the δημιουργος, but the fact that he

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<sup>1</sup>*Timaeus* 29a

"gazes" upon this pattern suggests that it is outside his mind. So too, in *Philebus*, the mind which orders is simply that, a cause of order; no mention is made of him being the sole immediate conceiver of the paradigm used to order.<sup>1</sup> Whether or not Plato's considered position is that Ideas belong in the mind of the *Demiurgos* is somewhat peripheral, however, since, as we shall see in the next chapter, the Middle Platonists interpreted Plato as suggesting that Ideas are demiurgic thoughts. I am of the opinion that the notion of "ideas in the Intellect" is implicit in Plato, an professed doctrine in Middle Platonism, and an adamant position in Plotinus.<sup>2</sup>

At V.I.8, and elsewhere, Plato's *Demiurgos* is regarded as *Nous*, that which "thinks the Forms," in Plotinus' system. This is clear in Plotinus claim that for Plato, things are threefold, meaning the Good (One), the craftsman (*Nous*), and the World-Soul (*Ψυχη*). Says Plotinus "Nous is his craftsman," who makes Soul in his

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<sup>1</sup>*Philebus* 23dff, 22c, 28d, 30c

<sup>2</sup>I take this up in some detail in the next chapter.

mixing-bowl. "And the father of *Nous* he calls the Good and that which is beyond intellect and beyond Being."<sup>1</sup>

In part, Plotinus wants to grant eternity to forms in order to deny arbitrariness to the selection of forms as grounds for the material world, and as such he cannot leave them open to the arbitrary selection of the *Demiurgos*, (*Nous*) nor does he want them to be merely "thoughts of god." He seems to fear that allowing the *Demiurgos* to do the choosing allows too much contingency to enter what he takes to be an eternal and necessary result of emanation from an unchanging principle. At the immaterial level of *Nous*, there ought to be fixed natures.<sup>2</sup> *Nous* supplies the vehicle for forms to be apprehended in an unmediated, eternal and unitary way by some mind.<sup>3</sup> If no mind grasps ideas immediately, then truth, an immediate grasping of Form, will be threatened by the fact that all knowledge is mediated knowledge:

If one grants that the objects of thought  
are as completely as possible outside the  
Intellect, and that Intellect contemplates

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<sup>1</sup>V.1.8, 1-8

<sup>2</sup>V.9.7, 13ff

<sup>3</sup>cp Alfino, pg. 278.

them as absolutely outside it, then it cannot possess the truth of them and must be deceived in everything it contemplates. For they would be the true realities; and on this supposition it will contemplate them without possessing them, but will only get images of them in a knowledge of this sort...So if there is not truth in Intellect, then an Intellect of this sort will not be truth, or truly Intellect, or Intellect at all. But then truth will not be anywhere else either. (V.5.1, 51-69)

One can see in this the driving force behind Plotinus' treatise that the ideas are not outside the intellect.

The need to have the Forms apprehended immediately and unitarily, however, gives rise to a distinct difficulty, (or perhaps a difficulty of distinction). How will the Forms be individuated, if they are all apprehended at once, and by one mind? Plotinus gets around this difficulty because he has within the second hypostasis, Nous, a monadology of sorts, wherein Ideas think themselves, and Nous thinks the ideas in one unified, undifferentiated glance. In self-thinking, a limiting of being by thought, each Form is distinct, and derives its unity and distinctness from the prior principle of unity, the One. This preserves both the ontological primacy and identity of each Form. At the

same time, Forms compose, the self-thinking mind that is Nous, a macrocosm of this limiting of Being by Thought. The unity of Forms, their ontological primacy, and the guarantee of truth via unmediated apprehension are Plotinus' ingenious interpretation of Plato's story of the *Demiurgos*.

#### 4.4 *The Genera of Being*

That each Form is self-intellecting has certain logical corollaries for Plotinus, and the thesis, itself an innovative revision of Plato's doctrine, relies on another key Platonic notion for those corollaries, that of the primary genera or kinds. As we saw in the section on Parmenides, Plotinus employs Plato's derivation of the "primary kinds," from a one which has being, in several places in the *Enneads*, in order to explain how Nous emanates from the One. In Nous, Intellect and Being are a unity,<sup>1</sup> but this unity is two things, "Intellect as thinking and Being as thought."<sup>2</sup> From this notion, Plotinus then derives "primary kinds" of Plato's *Sophist*

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<sup>1</sup>"μια μὲν οὖν φύσις τὸ τε ὄν ο τε νοῦς" (V.9.8, 17-8)

<sup>2</sup>. V.1.4



(254); one finds there a derivation similar in style to that made in the *Parmenides*. Says Plotinus,

there could not be thinking without otherness, and also sameness. These then are primary, Intellect, Being, Otherness and Sameness; but one must also include Motion and Rest. (V.1.4, 34-7 )<sup>1</sup>

Not only can each Form be seen to partake of these primary "kinds," in their self-intellection, but Nous can be seen as a macrocosm of this generic derivation, in so far as the emanation of Nous from the One is explained as a higher order case of this kind of Platonic derivation. Nous has motion (emanation from the One) rest (limitation of being), sameness (it expresses the One) otherness (it is different from the One) and being (it is the primary instance of limited being).

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<sup>1</sup>Plotinus discusses this at greater length in what appears to be a close reading of the *Sophist* at *Enneads* VI.2, 6ff.

#### 4.5 *Unity Beyond Unity*

The question which remains is of course the ultimate source of unity for the monadological One-Many that is Nous. It is a general Plotinian axiom that any multiplicity stands in need of an explanation of its components. Plotinus' emanative principles require that the source of emanation is more simple and more real than the product of emanation. A glimpse of this kind of thinking is afforded us at V.3.16, where Plotinus says that things which are generated move further towards multiplicity, and the source of each product of emanation is simpler and more real than the product. By this reasoning, says Plotinus,

that which makes the world of sense could not be a world of sense itself, but must be an intellect and an intelligible world; and that which is before this and generates it could not be an intellect or an intelligible world, but simpler than intellect and simpler than an intelligible world. (V,3,16)

The Forms and Nous, are in need of an explanation, and it is to Plato that Plotinus looks for an answer. He finds the ground of multiple Forms and of Nous' unity in Plato's notion of the Good, that which is (ostensibly)

beyond being.<sup>1</sup> It is significant, I think, that Plotinus often refers to this passage in tandem with the derivation of genera from the *Sophist*. There is a One which is beyond being, the principle and source of Nous. Nous exemplifies or possesses the primary kinds.

From these notions, Plotinus develops and projects, on the basis of the logic eidetic inversion, an apophatic characterisation of a One beyond being which would account for the unity and existence of both formal reality and material instantiation of that reality. With sensible particulars, one denies all of the aspects of physicality in order to approach an understanding of the Forms. What is left is then posited as the ground of particulars. With Formal particulars (Forms) one denies all aspects of formal being in order to approach an understanding of the One. What is left is then posited as the ground of the Forms.

This also speaks to a very important question that leads to Plotinus' main conceptual disagreement with Aristotle. Why is it that the principle of being is also a being? Why is the cause of unity itself a unity?

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<sup>1</sup>See Chapter I, Section 2.

Aristotle himself suggests that one of Plato's key failings was to make the principle of unity universally predicable. Aristotle's own unitary principle, the Unmoved Mover, is not universally predicable. Rather, it is a unitary substance. Plotinus wants to say that the unity and being of Aristotle's Unmoved Mover, and his unmoved *movers* must be accounted for. In short the principle and source of being and unity must transcend being and unity.<sup>1</sup>

#### 5. *E.R. Dodds' Thesis*

E.R. Dodds' 1928 article about the *Parmenides* is of course justifiably famous.<sup>2</sup> On Dodds' interpretation, Plotinus' One corresponds to the "one" of the First Hypothesis of Plato's *Parmenides*, which is most properly one, and is said not to be many (137c-142a). The "one" of Hypothesis II is a case of unity spread over being and therefore it is many as well as one (142b-155e), matching

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<sup>1</sup>I suspect, although I reserve judgement here, that one would draw a similar conclusion regarding Plato's Good upon reflection of Plato's presentation of it in the *Republic*. cp. Findlay, pp 368-70; but cp. Hitchcock.

<sup>2</sup>Dodds, pp 129ff. Dodds in fact notes that the "Neoplatonic" interpretation of the *Parmenides* may perhaps be traced to Moderatus of Gades, or perhaps even Speusippus.

the co-extension and circumscribed unity of Plotinus' Nous.<sup>1</sup> Findlay seems to support this thesis<sup>2</sup> but Cornford<sup>3</sup> and Gurtler have reacted strongly to the validity of such an interpretation, either of the *Parmenides*, or of Plotinus.<sup>4</sup> Jackson, while maintaining a dependence of Plotinus on the *Parmenides*, wants to point out that there are significant differences.<sup>5</sup>

Jackson maintains that Plotinus goes beyond Plato's explicit statements Good or the One in a number of ways. In the first instance, the One of Hypothesis I *is finite*, whereas the Plotinian One is not.<sup>6</sup> I think that the Good of the *Republic* ought to be understood as finite also. As I shall argue, however, Plotinus has a positive notion of the infinite that Plato does not

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<sup>1</sup>For an impressive list of all of the instances of the correspondence of Plotinus' language about hypostases and the Hypothesis of the *Parmenides*, see Jackson, (1967) pp 318-9.

<sup>2</sup>Findlay, pg. 370

<sup>3</sup>Cornford, pp. 131, ff.

<sup>4</sup>Gurtler, pg. 444 ff.

<sup>5</sup>Jackson (1967) pg 322.

<sup>6</sup>i.e. the fact that something *is* suggests that it has been formally delimited; if Plotinus' one is beyond being, then it is not so delimited. I have more to say on this in what follows.

employ. The second of Jackson's distinctions, I am not entirely convinced of. Jackson says that Plotinus posits a One beyond the top of Plato's divided line that is beyond thinking. Since Plato does suggest that the Good may be beyond being, and being is the proper object of thought for Plato, Plotinus may certainly be said to be entitled to make the reference without revising the spirit Plato. It should be noted, however, that the Good is also thought to be the "greatest thing to be learned," (μεγιστον μαθημα),<sup>1</sup> Plato does say that we have no knowledge of it. Finally, in identifying the One as the Good, Jackson says that Plotinus goes beyond Plato, in so far as the notion of unity explicitly "becomes for [Plotinus] a means of judging the relative level of the types of being."<sup>2</sup> The identity of the One of the *Parmenides* with the Good of the *Republic* may in fact be the general direction of Platonism, however, and it remains an open question how far one wishes to make this identification go. If the Good does provide the Forms

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<sup>1</sup>*Republic* 505a

<sup>2</sup>I am indebted to the account of Jackson (1967) pg 322 for these "trancendencies." cp. Cornford, pp 131ff.

with their unity, that which makes them functional as Forms, and if the Good is "higher than" Forms, it is hardly out of place to suggest that the Good is a kind of "ontological" standard to which other things stand in dependent relation. At any rate, for Plotinus, understanding the Good as the principle of unity allows unity to be a standard or measure of the goodness of things.

I might suggest that a more fundamental difference between Plotinus and Plato is that while the Form of the Good can account perhaps for the being of the Forms, Plato does not seem to want to suggest that it is the ultimate source of all being or matter; this efficacy in Plato is left to the charge of demiurgic "mixing" in the *Timaeus*,<sup>1</sup> which Plotinus identifies with Nous.

A second key difference is that if we want to say that Plotinus' One "exists," we must say that the One is infinite being<sup>2</sup> whereas, the Forms are finite beings.<sup>3</sup> But anything finite is analysable into the limit and what is

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<sup>1</sup>cp Rist (1967), pg26.

<sup>2</sup>I.3.1; I.7.2; II.9.1; III.8.11; V.4.1; V.5.9; V.6.5; V.9.2; VI.2.11; VI.5.1

<sup>3</sup>Rist (1967), pp 35 ff.

limited.<sup>1</sup> Classical Greek philosophy regards "being" as a principle of limit, finitude and good, and "infinity" as a principle of privation and unlimitedness. Plato cannot for this reason postulate an "infinite being." Plotinus, however does posit a One which is infinite in power (a *δυναμις των παντων*) and intrinsically infinite,<sup>2</sup> but it still retains a positive content, because he is able to employ both a positive and negative notion of infinity. In short, Plotinus holds to a positive *απειρον*, the One, and a negative *απειρον*, matter.

With Plotinus, privation is and can "be" positive precisely because it is a privation of multiplicity. When he describes the "production/emanation/creation" of Nous from the One, he describes it as a (logical) two step process whereby "unlimited being" flows forth from the One (which remains unaffected), and only attains limit when this unlimited being is thought:

thinking does not come first either in  
reality or in value, but is second and is

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<sup>1</sup>Gerson, (1994) pg. 18.

<sup>2</sup>I do not here address the debate between Frs. Sweeny and Clarke. On this see Rist (1967) ch 3, esp. pg 25, n 14, and Heiser, "Plotinus and the Apeiron of Plato's Parmenides," pp. 56 ff.



what has come into being to itself, and it was moved and saw. And this is what thinking is, a movement towards the Good in its desire of that Good; for the desire generates thought and establishes it in being along with itself. (V.6.5, 5-10)

In thinking, Nous "turns" and causes a circumscribing unity, actualising what is potential in the One.<sup>1</sup> That towards which thinking moves is itself unlimited, as we see in the following passage from VI.7:

if there is anything prior to actuality [ἐνεργείας] [i.e. the primary actuality of Nous or Being] it transcends actuality [ἐπεκείνα ἐνεργείας]. . . If then there is life in this Intellect the giver gave life, but is nobler and worth more [καλλίων και τιμιωτερος] than life... So when [Nous'] life was looking [βλεπούσα] towards [the One] it was unlimited [ἀοριστος], but after it looked there [βλαψασα], it was limited [ωριζετο], though that Good had no limit. For immediately by looking to something which is one the life is limited [οριζεται] by it, and has in itself limit [ορον] and bound [περας] and form [ειδος]; and the form was that in which it was shaped [μορφωθεντι], but the shaper [μορφοσαν] was shapeless [αμορφον]. (VI.7.17, 10-18)

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<sup>1</sup>The description of this that I cite seems to have shades or undertones of Aristotle's discussion of the desire that the first heaven has for the Unmoved Mover

My point in citing these passage here is to show that, in Plotinus, being only reaches the classical conception of finitude in *thought*; this is the reason why Plotinus advocates a monadology of self-intellecting forms in a self-intellecting Nous. This self-intellecting is circumscribed by unity and dependant upon an ultimate "indefinite" principle of unity, which must is prior.

## 6. Conclusion

The upshot of this chapter is that Plotinus sees himself in a Pythagorean lineage in which he places both Parmenides and Plato, and that Plotinus' own philosophy may sometimes depend on direct interpretation of Plato's dialogues. It is odd that Plotinus does not mention with any regularity those figures we will discuss in Chapter VI. Part of this may in fact have to do with what Dillon<sup>1</sup> calls "Pythagorism," the attribution of current ideas to Pythagoras. Plotinus' contention that his ideas come from Plato and Pythagoras suggests that he thought that those who came after them were merely preserving and refining their doctrines. Minor figures were of less

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<sup>1</sup>Dillon, pp 37-8.

interest to Plotinus' aims,<sup>1</sup> since the core of his beliefs were to be found in Plato's dialogues.

It also should be remembered that the interpretations of Plato are coloured by the developments in Platonism which immediately preceded Plotinus' period, and that he was engaged in readily accepted interpretations of the time. This does not detract from the fact that Plotinus does have a legitimate and interesting interpretation of Plato. He is intimately familiar with Plato's texts and the texts of his predecessors; indeed he is to a great degree right in his assessment of the history of Greek metaphysics as a search for a principle of unity, and a way to articulate it coherently. This is interesting, since Aristotle, albeit in more detail and somewhat more systematically, does not see the history of Greek philosophy so much as a search for unity as he sees in it a search for causes. The Platonists whom we will examine in the next chapter seem to concur with Plotinus; at any rate, the question

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<sup>1</sup>This is not to say that Plotinus was disengaged or did not take seriously contemporary philosophical movements; for example, he was familiar with and reacted against the Gnostics, and some proponents of Gnosticism are suspected to have been part of Plotinus' circle.

of the status of the unitary first principle never leaves the Platonic discussion that spans the 600 or so years between Plato's death and Plotinus' *flourit*.

## CHAPTER VI - Developments in Later Platonism

### 1. *Introduction*

Approaching the philosophy of Plotinus after that of Aristotle is a different task than approaching Aristotle after Plato, or Plato after Parmenides. There is a considerable temporal gap between Aristotle and Plotinus which does not exist between Parmenides and Plato, or Plato and Aristotle. There are a number of different ways to approach this problem.<sup>1</sup> One may take the approach of Armstrong, who in both his *Architecture of the Intelligible Universe*, and (to a lesser extent) the *Cambridge History*, sees Plotinus' metaphysics arising out of Neopythagorean and Middle Platonist sources. As Gerson points out, while "source finding" of this sort is useful (and undoubtedly of great interest to the philosopher and historian alike), source finding will not

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<sup>1</sup>Some scholars have accepted and extended Dodds' view of the Importance of Plato's *Parmenides*, others maintain the importance of Philo, or Albinus, or Alcinous or Numenius, or the Stoics, or the Gnostics. A list of these positions is compiled in Jackson, (1967) pg. 315.

ultimately replace an examination of Plotinus' arguments. Gerson, on the other hand, in *God and Greek Philosophy*, sees Plotinus' main positions emerging in polemic with Aristotle and the Stoics, and downplays the Platonic element in Plotinus' thought. The difficulty with this approach is that on the central question of understanding Plotinus' Nous, we are left with wondering why Plotinus retains the type of system he does once he shows the difficulties with Aristotle's position on the Unmoved Mover. This retention can only be properly understood against the backdrop of the development of Neo-Pythagorean and Middle Platonic developments. I do not, however, think it necessary to embark on a detailed examination of these thinkers; in many ways it is enough (and, in the light of often scanty evidence, responsible) to be cognizant of certain movements within Platonism. Kenney's extremely valuable approach in *Mystical Monotheism*, is to show such a development, but he does so at the cost of underestimating the importance of Plotinus' arguments against Aristotle.

My own approach is to suggest that there is a core of Platonism with which Plotinus is consistent, and that

this "core" is the Platonic metaphysical hierarchy. In order to grasp how Plotinus' metaphysics is consistent with Platonism, and how it contrasts with Aristotelianism, it becomes useful to examine (albeit briefly) certain philosophical developments in the period between Aristotle and Plotinus.

It is not my aim here to write a history of unity in Greek philosophy, but rather to see how the principle of unity in Plotinus' system transcends Aristotle's first principle. Consequently, I will not offer, since they have less bearing on the subject, a discussion of Gnostic or Stoic views, except to remark in passing that Plotinus does in places adopt a Stoic approach to a hierarchy of unity, and strongly opposes Stoic materialism. For my purposes, these elements of Plotinus' thought can be understood in their own right, without muddying the waters by considering their relation to the Stoics and Gnostics. Since I am not doing a history of unity, but a comparative study, I think this is excusable. A further remark, that Plotinus seems to express the nature of multiplicity in a manner similar to that of Philo Judaeus, is worth mentioning in so far as Plotinus may

have been influenced by him, but again this is beyond the scope of the current project.

In this chapter, I discuss some general trends in Platonism, Neoplatonism and Neopythagoreanism that seem to have a common approach to being and unity, and a common Pythagorean lineage. Sections 2 and 3 highlight some important developments in, or one might even say new interpretations of, "Platonic" doctrines.

In section 2, I discuss the emergence of belief in a single first principle, as opposed to the Pythagorean or Platonic "dualistic conception," where the cosmos is referred to two principles, the Limit and the Unlimited, or the Monad and the Dyad. In later interpretations of Speusippus we see a tendency to interpret his "One" as beyond being. This way of interpreting Speusippus suggests a movement towards a cosmology that has a single *primary* cosmological principle. Plotinus will maintain with full force that such a principle transcends being absolutely. Another important Middle Platonic interpretation of Plato is the conceiving of the Platonic Ideas as the thoughts of a divine mind. This notion may be implicit in Plato, and it



is possible that an explicit interpretation of Plato's *Demiurgos* as thinking the Ideas began with Xenocrates; in any case, it is an established doctrine by the time we get to the *Didaskalikos* of Albinus. Understanding this doctrine is important for grasping (in part) Plotinus' statement that the *Demiurgos* corresponds to *Nous* in his system.

Section 3.1 embarks on a detailed discussion of one of the few complete Middle Platonic texts that survives intact, the *Didaskalikos*. I want to suggest that, by this time, the notion of Ideas in the mind of god is a fixed doctrine. There is also a distinction between a first god and a second "demiurgic" one. Further the *Didaskalikos* engages in the type of apophatic reasoning about god that we see in Plotinus. Section 3.2 suggests that Numenius gives us a sharper distinction between the first god and the demiurge, as well as a triadic system of hypostases. Thinking and being, which reside with the *Demiurgos*, are secondary to a more unitary first principle. These developments help us see why, in the *Enneads*, Aristotle's Unmoved Mover, which is

an existent thinker, is placed at the level of Plotinus' second hypostasis, Nous.

## 2. *From Dualism to Monotheism and Ideas in the Mind of the Demiurgos*

It is instructive that Plotinus sees as his main influences Plato and Aristotle, and that he does not mention the Neopythagoreans or Middle Platonists with any regularity, although it is clear that his thought has been greatly influenced by them. It has been remarked by Kenney that Plotinus produces the definitive statement of Hellenic philosophy on philosophical monotheism,<sup>1</sup> and it is thus useful to look briefly at some aspects of Platonism and Pythagoreanism after Plato, in order to see how Plotinus does in fact employ certain later interpretations of Plato's thought. I want to begin with two of these: the first is a shift from a "dualistic" Pythagoreanism to a "monotheistic" Pythagoreanism, and the second is the understanding of Plato's Forms as ideas in the mind of the *Demiurgos*.

Later Pythagoreanism and some Platonism can be seen to observe two different theories regarding the nature of the ultimate unity. The position which for all intents and purposes was held by fifth century

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<sup>1</sup>Kenney, pp 91-2.

Pythagoreanism entailed the application of two principles, the Limited and the Unlimited.<sup>1</sup> Also Plato, in the *Philebus*, regards the Limited and the Unlimited as the first two classes (γενη) in his account of the cosmos:

The first, then, I call infinite [απειρον], the second limit or finite [περας], and the third something generated by a mixture of these two [εκ τουτων τριτον μικτην και γεγενημενην ουσιαν]. And should I be making any mistake if I called the cause of this mixture and creation the fourth? Certainly not. (*Philebus* 27b-c)

Xenocrates, and similarly Speusippus (both of whom come under fire in Aristotle's attack on Platonic first principles), held to a notion of dualistic forces as the ultimate source of the cosmos, with the difference that Xenocrates employs the notion of a *Demiurgos* who thinks Plato's forms, and Speusippus was thought by later Platonists to posit a One beyond the *Demiurgos* from which an infinite Dyad emerges.<sup>2</sup> Indeed we have several

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<sup>1</sup>cp Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 985b23 ff. Kenney, pg. 33 notes that this type of opposition was also a concern of both Plato and the Old Academy.

<sup>2</sup>Kenney, pg. 34, Armstrong, (1960) pg. 395.

fragments from Speusippus where the One is said to be superior to being, a position to which Plotinus adheres.

A cautionary note is extremely important here. I say that Speusippus is *thought by later sources* to espouse a doctrine of a transcendent One. I have already remarked in Chapter I that he did not hold this position, in agreement with Taran. It is significant that the two passages we are about to examine, both of which purport to be quotations, are at odds with one another. What is most important, however, is that the people who "cite" Speusippus believed that Speusippus thought the One was superior to being. They may even have believed this because of Aristotle's comments about Speusippus.<sup>1</sup> I am here interested in what later philosophers *thought* Speusippus was doing, because it bears on Plotinus' thinking. I propose to look at two of these fragments. The first of these is a "citation" in Proclus' *Commentary on the Parmenides*:<sup>2</sup>

Holding the One to be superior to Being and the source from which Being springs, they freed it even from the status of a principle. And so, considering that if one

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<sup>1</sup>See Chapter I

<sup>2</sup>Klibanski, pp 38, 31-41,10.

took the One in itself, thought of as separate and alone, adding no other element to it, nothing else at all would come into being, they introduced the Indefinite Dyad as the first principle of beings.<sup>1</sup>

The "status of a principle" is not granted to the One, apparently on the grounds that it had no ontological efficacy, that it could not cause being. It is higher than being. Indeed if this is what a principle must do, then Aristotle's Unmoved Mover lacks the nature of a principle in the same way, (with the exception that the Unmoved Mover is a being). It may cause the coming into being of beings, but it does not itself cause being. Plotinus, as we shall see, suggests that a One, not entirely dissimilar to that of (Proclus') Speusippus, causes being by a process of emanation.

The second "fragment" of Speusippus, from Iamblichus, differs from what we read in Proclus,

Of mathematical numbers one must postulate two primary and highest principles, the One (which one should not even call Being, by reason of its simplicity and its position as principle of everything else, a principle being properly not yet that which those are of which it is the principle); and another principle, that of Multiplicity, which is able itself to

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<sup>1</sup>Cited in Dillon, pg 12.

initiate division, and which, if we are able to describe its nature most suitably, we would liken to a completely fluid and pliable Matter.<sup>1</sup>

In this account the One, while it is "not yet that of which it is the principle" is nonetheless a principle, since it is somehow considered to impose limit on the unlimited. In the passage from Proclus, only the Dyad a principle of things. Proclus' Speusippus seems to represent the shift from a dualistic conception to a monotheistic one, whereas Iamblichus' Speusippus is interpreted in terms of the older dualistic conception. In both passages, however, there is the implication that Speusippus is reaching for something; Plotinus articulates fully what he was (thought to be) reaching for, namely that the One is beyond being. This is not to say that Speusippus expressly said that the One was beyond being; it merely indicates a general tendency in later sources to represent Speusippus as asserting the dependence of formal being on some higher more unitary source.

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<sup>1</sup>Iamblichus, pg 15, 5-18. cp, Dillon, pg 14.

Dillon maintains that Plotinus was the next Platonist after Speusippus to adhere to the idea of a One beyond being.<sup>1</sup> This of course would be refuted by Taran, who says that Speusippus did not hold this view ; however, I think that Dillon puts his finger on a general trend in Platonism in saying this about Speusippus. Many Platonists may in fact have been reaching for such a "One," and this comes out in their interpretations of their predecessors and their own thought. Speusippus is just one example. It seems that Eudorus also posits a One which is superior to the opposing principles Monad and Dyad.<sup>2</sup> Moderatus of Gades, Simplicius tells us, establishes a unitary principle beyond being and multiplicity, which gives rise to something akin to hypostases of unity in succession. Further, Moderatus' materialistic principle is neither positively derived

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<sup>1</sup>"Not until Plotinus is [the idea of a One beyond being] again clearly claimed for the supreme principle..." Dillon, pg. 18

<sup>2</sup>Simplicius, *In Phys*, 181.10 ff.



from, nor co-existent with, the first principle, but is seen as a sort of privation.<sup>1</sup>

Regardless of who was the "first" to maintain it clearly, it is evident that the notion of a primary One beyond and not directly engaged in ontological efficacy, emerges sometime between the 1st Centuries B.C. and A.D., against the backdrop of the older Pythagorean dualistic conception of cosmic derivation.<sup>2</sup> However, justifications for these positions may (at least implicitly) be traced back in some way to Plato, who himself speaks of the Good as beyond Being in the *Republic*. One wonders whether all of this may have come out of Aristotle's misrepresentation of Speusippus, which would speak volumes about the sensitivity of Platonists to the importance of the relationship of being and unity. If nothing else, there is a general trend in Platonism towards the explicit contention in Plotinus, that there is a One beyond being.

A second important notion for Plotinus' predecessors is the explicit placing of the Platonic

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<sup>1</sup>Kenney, pp. 38-9.

<sup>2</sup>*ibid*, pg. 35.

Ideas into the Mind of the *Demiurgos*. I have already suggested that it is probably right to say that Plato never explicitly says this, although there is at least one passage in which he seems to imply it.<sup>1</sup>

In the period between Plato and Plotinus, perhaps through Philo of Alexandria,<sup>2</sup> or through Xenocrates,<sup>3</sup> or through Antiochus or other Stoicising Middle Platonists, Plato's Ideas get put into the mind of the *Demiurgos*.<sup>4</sup> What is clear is that by the time we get to Albinus, the *Nous* which thinks itself and all ideas subsumed under that unity, is identified with the *Demiurgos* of Plato. In the next section I will look in detail at Albinus' second century A.D. "school handbook", which treats the thesis

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<sup>1</sup>See Chapter VI, Section 4.3

<sup>2</sup>Although it is clearly a concept which Philo uses, Kenny doubts that it originated with him.

<sup>3</sup>cp Dillon, pp 24ff. Dillon thinks that whereas Speusippus would maintain that the One is superior to God and Intellect, Xenocrates declares that this "One," the Monad, is a *Nous*. Furthermore, in the words of Dillon, "It seems inevitable that what Xenocrates' monad contemplates is the sum total of the Idea-Numbers, which form the contents of his mind." (Pg 29) Dillon goes on to say that the doctrine that the ideas exist in the mind of God can with great probability be attributed to Xenocrates, but at any rate, it was a doctrine of the Old Academy that was established by the time of Antiochus.

<sup>4</sup>Kenny, pg. 32.

of divine thoughts as an established doctrine. By the time we get to Plotinus, we find him writing a treatise entitled (by Porphyry) "That Ideas are Not Outside the Intellect" in response to Porphyry's contention that they are.<sup>1</sup>

The two notions, 1) of a transcendent unitary principle, and 2) of the Platonic Ideas as thoughts of the Demiurgos, take on a revised and polished form in the thought of Plotinus. This is not to say that Plotinus necessarily takes these views as they were understood by the Neopythagoreans or Middle Platonists, but rather that the modifications of Neopythagoreans and Middle Platonists may have paved the way for his interpretation of Plato, on a sort of sliding scale of acceptable interpretations.<sup>2</sup>

It is interesting in this regard that Plotinus reportedly remarked about Longinus' commentary on the *Timaeus* that "Longinus is a scholar, but certainly not a

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<sup>1</sup>Vita, Chapter 18.

<sup>2</sup>Gurtler (1992) notes the ambivalence of Plotinus regarding the Platonic demiurge (pg. 447) as does Schroeder (1980), (pp 38-42). There is a sense in which demiurgic functioning plays a lesser role in the *Enneads*, given the more powerful generative vehicle of emanation.

philosopher."<sup>1</sup> Armstrong has suggested<sup>2</sup> that Longinus was presenting a close, textual consideration of the "authentic" doctrine of the *Timaeus*, which was certainly not Plotinus' project.<sup>3</sup> My own thinking regarding Plotinus is along the same line, as I take it that while he may (appear to) claim that he is simply interpreting Plato, he in fact applies Platonic ideas and expressions to concepts of his own, that he is using Platonism as a starting point. In a sense, as Dodds remarks, Plotinus found what he was looking for in the Good of the *Republic* or the One of the *Parmenides*, because he had his One already.

### 3. *Albinus and Numenius*

In Albinus and Numenius, we have a clear indication that the Mind which thinks the Platonic Ideas is secondary to a more primal god. This seems clear

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<sup>1</sup>Vita, XIV

<sup>2</sup>Armstrong, (1960), pg. 394.

<sup>3</sup>We glean from Porphyry's "Life" that the notion that ideas are not outside the intellect was one of Plotinus' chief disagreements with Longinus, and that Porphyry himself once held to Longinus' position, and that Plotinus wrote the treatise as a corrective for Porphyry. Vita, Ch's 18-20, cp. Armstrong (1960) pg. 394.

enough in the *Didaskalikos*, and the distinction is even sharper in the philosophy of Numenius, who also has a triadic system of hypostases similar to that of Plotinus. In both of these systems, Albinus' and Numenius'. The fact that the demiurgic god in Albinus is secondary is especially interesting, in so far as we see a blending of the first principles of Aristotle and Plato in his thought. For Albinus the first god, the "Unmoved Mover" is also the "Platonic Good." By contrast, Plotinus identifies the Unmoved Mover, and the god that thinks Plato's ideas, with Nous in his own system. He demotes the demiurge and the Unmoved Mover to "second rank," and he identifies the Platonic Good with his first god, the One.

### 3.1 *The Didaskalikos*

Albinus, (b. circa 100 A.D.) taught at Smyrna in the second century, and Galen the physician tells us that he went there to study with him and the physician Pelops.<sup>1</sup> Proclus lists him second, after Numenius, among the "superstars" of the Platonists who commented on Book

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<sup>1</sup>Wallis, pg 30; Reedy, pg 9; Dillon, pg 267, notes that Galen would have studied with him between 149-157.

X of the *Republic*. We have two intact works from him, the brief *Eisagoge*, an introduction to Plato's dialogues, and the *Didaskalikos*, or "Handbook of Platonism."<sup>1</sup>

In looking at the *Didaskalikos*, I do not want to maintain that Plotinus was *directly* influenced by the work. Witt maintains that, "that he had much importance for Plotinus is unlikely."<sup>2</sup> He says so on the grounds that Albinus does not anticipate Plotinus in producing an original system, that he displays a lack of the personal mysticism of Plotinus, and that he is not connected with the Alexandrian school of thought.<sup>3</sup> Witt is right in denying a *close* association between Albinus and Ammonius Saccas, Plotinus' reputed teacher. However, (without reading too much into Witt's comment) it is another thing

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<sup>1</sup>There has been some controversy over the true authorship of the *Didaskalikos*. It has come down to us under the name Alkinoos, but in the 19th Century a German scholar, J. Freudenthal discovered that Alkinoos was really a manuscript corruption of Albinoos. The matter of the authorship of the *Didaskalikos* seems to have rested there for some time. Dillon, writing in 1977 still cites Freudenthal as authoritative, as does Reedy in 1991. This view has been challenged however, by John Whittaker in 1974, and John Kenney in 1991, both of whom argue in favour of the manuscript's identification of Alkinoos as the author. The issue is for us somewhat peripheral, and I shall refer to the author as Albinus.

<sup>2</sup>Witt, pg 144.

<sup>3</sup>Witt, pp 142-4

altogether to say that Albinus had little importance for Plotinus. I suggest that if the Middle Platonists had much importance for Plotinus, which I think is undeniable, then a proponent of a significant variant interpretation of Plato's doctrine, such as we find in the *Didaskalikos* must be of profound importance. Moreover, the *Didaskalikos*, apart from Plutarch's writings, is the only fully intact work of Middle Platonism we have until Plotinus.<sup>1</sup> When we look at the history and preservation of ancient texts, one gets the sense that those texts which were considered most important survived, either because of wider distribution, or because they were held in high esteem, or both. The fact that the *Didaskalikos* has survived points to its importance at some level, as does the reputation of its author among the ancients. He is thought to be one of the more useful commentators on Plato in the *Canones*,<sup>2</sup> and as I have mentioned, he was held in high regard by Proclus.

Albinus' importance for someone like Plotinus extends at least as far as the assumption that Plotinus

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<sup>1</sup>Reedy. pg 11.

<sup>2</sup>*ibid* pg 9

would have inherited certain developments in the interpretation of Plato from the influence of the *Didaskalikos*, especially if the work was a "school handbook," as many think it is.<sup>1</sup> If the work was an introduction to Platonism, which many Platonists read, then it stands to reason that the way in which Plato was understood was coloured by one's introduction to Plato's philosophy. If one wants to maintain that Plotinus was more "original," this merely speaks to the fact that, as a superior philosopher, he grew and developed from his influences and could see some of the flaws in his own tradition. Since the excising of flaws in later Platonism, and the rejection of Aristotelianism seem to be important for Plotinus' account of the first principle in his system, the fact that the *Didaskalikos* gives us a well-preserved example of "Aristotelianising" Platonism helps us understand not only the flaws Plotinus saw in his own tradition, but also the critique of Aristotle that Plotinus offers in the development of his own system.

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<sup>1</sup>e.g. Dillon, pg 268; Reedy, pg 9.



The structure of Albinus' work is (roughly) as follows:<sup>1</sup> Introduction (Chapters 1-3), Dialectic (4-6), Mathematics (7), Theology, (8-11), Physics (12-26), Ethics (27-39).<sup>2</sup> What I am primarily interested in for are Chapters 8-11, where we see several things of significance: 1) a clear intact text that states that ideas are in the "mind of God"; 2) the incorporation of a Aristotle's theology into Platonism, in so far as a self-contemplating Unmoved Mover (First God) stands above a Second God that thinks the Platonic ideas; 3) an apophatic description of the first God. As we look at the relevant texts, I want to suggest that these *ideas* influenced Plotinus, but not necessarily the text under scrutiny. For my larger project, what I am attempting examine are trends in Platonism which shed light on Plotinus' particular understanding of Plato and Aristotle.

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<sup>1</sup>cp Reedy, pp. 10-11

<sup>2</sup>On the divisions of philosophy and its possible sources, see Armstrong (1967), pp 64-5.

### 3.1.1 Ideas as Thoughts of God

Chapter VIII of the *Didaskalikos* opens a discussion of "the principles and precepts" of theology, "(των αρχων τε και θεολογικων θεωρηματων)"<sup>1</sup> with a treatment of matter (υλη). In IX, we are told that there are other principles. He mentions: 1) the paradigmatic first principle, that is the ideas, and 2) God the father and cause of all things. Albinus refers to "the Idea" (singular) as "the thought of this god," which I take to refer to the "Father". A second passage a few lines down refers to the "Ideas," (plural) which are grounded in the first intelligible, as "thoughts of God," which take to refer to the paradigmatic principle. Here is the first passage:

There is also God, the father and Cause of all things. The Idea is, in relation to God, his thought; in relation to us, it is the first intelligible; in relation to matter, it is measure, in relation to the sensible world, it is a model; in relation to itself, it is reality. (IX)

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<sup>1</sup>Witt (pg. 68) suggests that this "...is an indication that the subject to be discussed is rather metaphysics...than 'theology' in the narrower sense, which is, however given its due place (Chapter X)."

In the second passage, the notion that the Ideas are the thoughts of god is offered as a proof (the first of several) for the existence of Ideas:

For Ideas are the thoughts of God which are eternal and perfect in themselves. Platonists justify their belief that ideas exist in the following way: whether God is mind or being endowed with mind, He will have thoughts, and they will be eternal and immutable. But if this is so, the Ideas exist. (IX)

I suggest that the "thoughts of god" here are the thoughts of a "being endowed with mind" who is the demiurge. The thoughts of god who is simply "Mind" would then refer to the first god.<sup>1</sup> In the first passage, where the Idea is the thought of God, the first god, we are talking about a "perfectly unitary" Platonic Good. Albinus maintains that the Ideas are thoughts of god with certainty, and presents the thesis as a conception held by Platonists in general. This suggests that the notion

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<sup>1</sup>For a slightly different interpretation see Kenney, pg 75. Treating Idea and Ideas separately makes more sense than Witt's (pp. 69-76) apparent conflation of the two. The primal god cannot have Ideas (plural), given his simplicity; something else must have Ideas. Witt seems to assume that Idea (formal cause) is the same as "Ideas", and that the formal cause is different from whatever the first god thinks. But the distinction Albinus makes between whether God is a mind or a being with a mind makes more sense if we take Ideas (plural) to belong to the being with a mind, and Idea (singular) to belong to a mind.

was already a fixed doctrine by the time he wrote the *Didaskalikos*.<sup>1</sup>

The god that thinks the Ideas also seems to refer to the World-soul. In Chapter X, Albinus says that the primal God is the Father because:

He is the author of all things, and he guides the celestial intelligence and the world soul to Himself and His thoughts. In accordance with his will he has filled all things with himself, quickening the world soul and turning it towards Himself, since he is the source of its intelligence. It is this Intelligence which, after being set in order by the father, orders the whole nature in this world.(X)

The distinction is between the primal god and the world soul. The latter has as its source the first or primal god. We should not be worried by the fact that here Albinus refers to the thoughts (plural) of the primal God. All this suggests is that when they are conveyed to the world soul, they are plural. The account which precedes this passage speaks of the primal god as a complete unity, described apophatically as:

eternal, self-sufficient, that is without need, eternally perfect, that is perfect for all times, and all perfect, that is perfect in every respect. He is Divinity,

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<sup>1</sup>Cp Armstrong, (1967) pg 66.

Substantiality, Truth, Symmetry, The Good.  
 I do not mean that these are to be taken  
 separately but that they are conceived to  
 form a complete unity. (X)

I will have more to say about this passage later. Right now I want to point out that if Albinus speaks of the thoughts (plural) of the first god, it means that things "below" him would see them as plural, but that in him they are Idea.

What is most interesting for our study of Plotinus is that he himself wrote a treatise (*Enneads* V.5) which Porphyry titles "That the Intelligibles are Not Outside the Intellect, and On the Good." What is, by the time of Albinus a fixed doctrine, that Ideas are the thoughts of God, is in Plotinus the subject of an adamant treatise - for Plotinus it has become a key doctrine of the Platonic tradition.

Again, we should keep in mind that the parallels need not imply the direct influence of Albinus, for it seems likely that this way of conceiving the Ideas was a commonplace among Platonists of the time of Albinus and as late as Plotinus. However it is useful to see a complete text like this in the context of second

century Platonism, since it is less odd to find Plotinus maintaining this with vigour later. What we will come to see is that the Platonic Ideas immediately apprehended by the mind of God is the way in which Plotinus conceives of *Nous*, the second God is in his system. As I have suggested, the god that thinks the Ideas is in Albinus, is a second God. However, Albinus' first god looks nothing like Plotinus' One; instead we see Aristotle's Unmoved Mover.

### 3.1.2 *An Unmoved Mover*

Is in Book X of the *Didaskalikos*, the description of the first god is a blending of Plato and Aristotle; it is as if Albinus takes Plato's Good is in *Republic* VI and characterises it as the Unmoved Mover of *Metaphysics* A.<sup>1</sup> It is useful, before we look at this characterisation, to see why Albinus thinks that there is something (metaphysically) prior to the mind that thinks the ideas. He argues in a previous chapter (IV) that there are "first sensibles," and based on this, he argues that there must also be first intelligibles:

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<sup>1</sup>cp Kenney, pg 77; Witt, pg 10.

If intelligibles exist and they are neither sensible nor do they participate in the sensible world but is in certain first intelligibles, then there exist first intelligibles in an absolute sense just as there are also first sensibles. (X)

The notion of participation here is interesting. Albinus uses it to suggest that the intelligibles are not grounded in the sense-world, but rather in "first intelligibles," bringing to mind, perhaps, the idea of the forms participating in the Form of the Good. This makes sense, given that the discussion opens with the claim that Plato thought this first god was "almost ineffable". Whereas humans do not know the intelligibles perfectly, but often are hindered by materialistic conceptions of them (Albinus says "they often add, for example, size and shape and colour"), the gods know the intelligibles immediately and without sense perception. But there must be a cause of this knowing:

Since mind is superior to soul, and mind is in act knowing all things simultaneously and eternally is superior to mind in potentiality, and since the cause of this and whatever else might exist above these is still more noble, this would be the primal God, the cause of everlasting activity of the mind of the whole heaven. (X)

Here we have merged into Aristotelianism. The notions of act and potency are employed, and the first god is described as causing the eternal activity of the whole heaven. The fact that the knowing of all things simultaneously is seen as caused by the primal god suggests that the thoughts of the second god are caused by the first; but this second god seems also to be the mind of the whole heaven. The mind that knows all things simultaneously cannot be the first god, because it is itself caused by the first god. Nor can it be different from the first heaven, since then it would be a third god, and there is no mention of this. Hence it seems that the second god and the mind of the heaven are two parts of the same thing.<sup>1</sup> This is also suggested by what Albinus says next:

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<sup>1</sup>This I think is better than Armstrong's suggestion (1967), pg 66: "The actual intelligence [Albinus] identifies sometimes with the supreme god, but sometimes he distinguishes a god who is the cause of intelligence and, instead, or along with the triad god-ideas-matter establishes another: first god-intelligence-soul." When we come to examine Numenius, we see that the second god actually splits into two, one of which is a formal intelligence, the other being involved more intimately with matter and perhaps demiurgic functioning. It seems like something of this nature is going on in Albinus - there are not two triads, but some ambiguity about the roles of the second god in Albinus. Kenney's (pg 77) interpretation is closer to my own.



Although without motion himself, the primal God acts upon the cosmos as the sun does on the sight of one looking at it or as the object of desire arouses desire while remaining motionless itself. Thus also will this mind set in motion the mind of the whole heaven. (X)

The primal god is an "unmoved mover" that sets the heaven in motion as an object of its desire. This conception merges with Plato's analogy of the sun, wherein the Form of the good grants intelligibility to its objects. A plausible interpretation of the passage is that the Ideas in the second god come from the Idea of the first god. This primal god thinks itself, and the argument reflects that of *Metaphysics* A:

Since the primal intelligence is extremely beautiful, the object of its knowledge must also be extremely beautiful, but nothing is more beautiful than God. God must, therefore, contemplate Himself and his own thoughts, and this activity is Idea. (X)

Again we see that the "thoughts" of the first god are spoken of in the plural but, given the apophatic expression of this god's unity, it again makes sense to interpret this as "plural" from our perspective but unified from his.

When we come to examine the philosophy of Plotinus, we shall see that what is actually "plural" is in Nous is a potency, a *δυναμικων παντων*, is in the One. Further, for Plotinus, the first God is not a being which thinks itself at all, although it does stand in a similar relation to Nous as Albinus' primal god stands in relation to the world soul. As I have suggested, Albinus maintains that we must understand his first god apophatically, or by means of a sort of *via negativa*, so as to grasp its unitary nature.<sup>1</sup>

### 3.1.3 Negative Theology

I now want to revisit the *via negativa* of the *Didaskalikos*, and to plant the suggestion that Plotinus retains this kind of negative theology. In fact he demotes Albinus' primal god, and Aristotle's Unmoved Mover to the "second rank," in consonance with the kind of negative theology we see in the *Didaskalikos*. Of course what happens is that the "world-soul," which

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<sup>1</sup>It is clear that Aristotle thinks his God will be a unity, in so far as it is completely actual. Albinus seems to think that this type of unity can be asserted of a self-intellecting first principle, whereas Plotinus does not. We will see why in our examination of Plotinus' critique of Aristotle. (Chapter VII)

bears the similarity of demiurgic functioning and thinking of its prior takes on the "third rank," the Soul of Plotinus' system. As we have seen, Albinus describes the primal god as follows:

The primal God is eternal, ineffable, self-sufficient, that is without need, eternally perfect, that is perfect for all times, and all perfect, that is perfect is in every respect. He is Divinity, Substantiality, Truth, Symmetry, the Good. I do not mean that these are to be taken separately but that they are conceived to form a complete unity. (X)

There are similarities to Plotinus' One here, and there are differences. For Plotinus, the epithets "Truth" and "Substantiality" belong to Nous, for Nous is the primary instance of Being and Thought. Plotinus sees his own first principle as conceptually aligned with "the Good" and he would accept a characterisation of the One as ineffable, eternal, self-sufficient and perfect. The question for Plotinus is whether or not Thought and Being can properly be said of the One, even as a "complete unity." What I will attempt to show is in my analysis of Plotinus that Being and Thought are for him, inconsistent with "complete unity." The method he often uses is

similar to that of Albinus, that of apophasis. Here is another example of Albinus' approach:

God is ineffable and apprehensible by mind alone, as has been said, because he is neither genus nor species nor specific difference. We cannot predicate of him evil...or good...Nor does he experience anything indifferent...We cannot predicate of God qualities since His perfection is not the result of having received qualities, nor can we say he lacks qualities since he has not been deprived of any quality that befits Him. God is neither a part of something else nor having parts...Our first notion of God will be that which results from abstracting the above mentioned attributes. (X)

What we will see is in Plotinus' philosophy is a tendency to preserve and refine this kind of apophatic approach to the first principle. Taken to its logical extreme, apophasis dictates his rejection of the identification of the One with being or thinking. We shall see in Chapter VII that he explicitly rejects Aristotle's first principle because it is a thinking being. In his rejection of Aristotle, Plotinus also rejects the kind of Aristotelianising Platonism that has crept into the "school handbook," of Albinus. We may keep in mind then, that Plotinus is trying to keep his Platonism "pure", to rid it of elements that are incommensurate

with it. If this is so, it lends support to my thesis that Plotinus remains true to the Platonic metaphysical hierarchy. For his rejection of the Unmoved Mover as a first principle is grounded in Plotinus' Platonic understanding of the relation of being and unity, and this is the metaphysical core with which Aristotle's metaphysic is inconsistent. Before we get to this, however, we must look at some further development in Platonic/Pythagorean thinking, in Numenius.

### 3.2 *Numenius of Apamea*

That there is some significant similarity between Plotinus and Numenius is attested to by Porphyry's account of how Plotinus was accused of plagiarising him.<sup>1</sup> It is Numenius who presents us with a triadic system of hypostases of a sort, standing in successive dependent relations to one another.<sup>2</sup> In addition, we see in

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<sup>1</sup>We also know from Porphyry that in Longinus' opinion, Numenius was expounding a doctrine similar to that of Plotinus, but he lacked Plotinus' philosophical accuracy. Amelius wrote a book on the difference between the two, which he dedicated to Porphyry. Vita XVII.

<sup>2</sup>It appears that both Numenius and Plotinus use Plato's *Second Letter* (312e) as a justification for this (Armstrong, 1967, pg 98). Kenney (pg 59) notes that the tendency towards a  
(continued...)

Numenius a conception of ethics striking in its similarity to Plotinus. The chief aim of the soul is to free itself from its descent into body and seek a likeness to God.<sup>1</sup> The notion of an "ascent to the Good" is also part of this ethical picture.<sup>2</sup>

Numenius' system has three divinities: a "First God," which is simple, indivisible<sup>3</sup> and self-directed, a "Second God" of which the first is the Idea, and which is initially unified but divides as a result of its involvement with matter, and a "Third God," which is roughly equivalent to a World-Soul.<sup>4</sup> The basic scheme is represented fairly succinctly, (albeit incorrectly) by Proclus:

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<sup>2</sup>(...continued)

triadic system of this sort was already present in Moderatus of Gades. cp Dillon, pg 46.

<sup>1</sup>cp *Enneads* I,2; cp. Dillon, pg 366

<sup>2</sup>Frag 2; Dillon, pg 372

<sup>3</sup>I take it that Kenney's claim (pg. 60) that it is "divisible," is a typographical error.

<sup>4</sup>With regard to my interpretation of Albinus, Armstrong's (1967, pg 100) interpretation of Numenius is perhaps instructive in that, to my mind, it characterises both Numenius and Albinus equally well: "The first god is the Idea...of the second god who can also be referred to as a second intelligence or as artificer...Instead of speaking of a third god we should rather say that he is a double one."

Numenius proclaims three gods, calling the first 'Father', the second 'Creator' and the third 'Creation'; for the cosmos according to him, is the third god. So according to him, the Demiurge is double, being both the first god and the second, and the third god is the object of his demiurgic activity - it is better to use this terminology than to use the sort of dramatic bombast that he employs, naming them respectively Grandfather, Son and Grandson.<sup>1</sup>

Dillon suggests rightly, that Proclus has made the division of the *Demiurgos* incorrectly, that the *Demiurgos* is divided between the second and the third gods, and not the first and the second. This seems to be clear from Fragment 11:

The First God, existing in his own place, is simple and, consorting as he does with himself alone can never be divisible. The second and third God, however are in fact one; but in the process of coming into contact with Matter [τη ὑλη], which is the Dyad, [the second God] gives unity to it, but is Himself divided by it, since matter has a character prone to desire and is in flux. So in virtue of not being in contact with the Intelligible (which would mean being turned in upon himself), by reason of looking towards Matter and taking thought for it, He becomes unregarding of Himself.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>In *Tim* I, 303, 27ff=Fr 21.

<sup>2</sup>Τω ουν μη ειναι προς τω νοητω...δια το την ὑλην βλέπειν, ταυτης  
(continued...)

And he seizes upon the sense realm and ministers to it and yet draws it up to His own character [ἡθος], as a result of this yearning [επορεζαμενος] towards Matter.<sup>1</sup>

It should perhaps be noted that many Pythagoreans (and Albinus also) draw a distinction between the supreme God and the Demiurgos,<sup>2</sup> but with Numenius, the distinction is somewhat sharper. This sharp distinction between an active second principle and an ultimate source of unity,<sup>3</sup> was perhaps fuelled by Gnostic concerns about the ultimate source of evil. Part and parcel of this "sharp distinction," is what Kenney calls the "demotion of the demiurge." The First God is entirely self-directed and self-intellecting, whereas the Second God now performs extrinsically directed intellective and demiurgic functions. The Second God has thought which is

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<sup>2</sup>(...continued)

επιμελουμενος απεριοπτος εαυτου γιγνεται." Des-Places (pg 52): "N'étant pas attache a l'Intelligible,...parce qu'il regarde la materiale, il s'en preoccupe et s'oublie lui-meme."

<sup>1</sup>Frag 11, Trans Dillon

<sup>2</sup>Dillon, pg 367

<sup>3</sup>Kenney (pg 60), suggests, "There is no question that the systematic intent of this theology is to distinguish quite sharply between the principle that actively exercises the function of cosmic production and the ultimate first principle of the system."



related both to what is above it and to what is below it in the hypostatic chain. Many scholars claim that Plotinus held to a theory similar to Numenius in an earlier treatise (V.5.2), wherein Numenius' First God is like the One, in that it retains some kind of intellection.<sup>1</sup> In later treatises, as we shall see, Plotinus explicitly denies that the One is intellective.<sup>2</sup> Further, Plotinus' Nous never becomes "unregarding of itself" in the way that parts of his third hypostasis, Soul do. The notion of "self-forgetting" is key to Plotinus' account of embodied souls.<sup>3</sup> Plotinus' second god, Nous, is (usually) a distinct hypostasis from Soul. They are not, as they are in Numenius, one. However the distinction in Numenius between the second and third gods may suggest a desire to maintain a purely formal realm, one that does not suffer the encroachment of matter, or bear the responsibility for creating matter.

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<sup>1</sup>Rist, *Road*, pp 42-4; Dodds, "Numenius and Ammonius," pp 19-20; Armstrong, *LCL*, vol 5, pg. 146 n.1. (For a different view see Bussanich, "Inner Life," pp. 165 ff)

<sup>2</sup>It is useful to note that Armstrong (1967), pg 101. suggests that, "when Numenius describes his first god as thinking, Plotinus must have considered it the same error which Aristotle had committed."

<sup>3</sup>cp Armstrong (1967), pg 101.

Numenius makes great steps towards the "demotion of the demiurge," to a secondary principle enhances the tendency (already present in Moderatus of Gades) to impose a hypostatic understanding on Platonic metaphysics.<sup>1</sup> In an interesting passage, one which appears to have influenced Plotinus' interpretation of Plato, Numenius speaks of *Plato's* Demiurge as the second god, which is lower than an "aloof" first god:

Since Plato knew that among men the Demiurge is the only divinity known, whereas the Primal Intellect, which is called Being-in-Itself, is completely unknown to them, for this reason he spoke to them, as it were, as follows: 'O men, that Intellect which you imagine to be supreme is not so, but there is another intellect prior to this one which is older and more divine.'<sup>2</sup>

What we will see when we come to Plotinus is the identification of the *Demiurgos* with the Unmoved Mover, and the reserving of a non-intellective and non-proactive position for Plotinus' One.

#### 4. Conclusion

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<sup>1</sup>In fact Numenius declares his triadic distinction to be the teaching of Socrates. cp. Dillon, pg 367.

<sup>2</sup>*On the Good*, VI (Frag 17)

In both Numenius' philosophy and the *Didaskalikos* the ultimate source of being and unity is still engaged in thought, and, in some sense, being. For Plotinus the source of being is beyond thinking and existing. While the "activity," of the Numenian First God or the active teleological first principle of the *Didaskalikos* would no doubt be of some consternation for the metaphysics of Plotinus, there are significant similarities. In the *Didaskalikos* we see a tendency towards apophatic description of the complete simplicity of a first principle which transcends the Ideas that exist in the Mind of the demiurgic second principle. We see in Numenius a triadic hypostatisation and in his attempt to seek a transcendent non-generative, non-demiurgic first unity. Further, there is his tendency to bifurcate the demiurgic and purely formal functions of the second principle. The movement in later Platonic and Pythagorean thought was towards a "demotion" of mind as an ultimate principle, which laid the groundwork for a less anthropomorphic understanding of "god" than that of Plato or Aristotle.<sup>1</sup> This should perhaps not be stated too

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<sup>1</sup>On the anthropomorphism, see Rist, pg 75.

strongly, for it is clear that thinking holds a place of primary importance in Plotinus' *Enneads*, and why that should be the case is arguably as much of an anthropomorphic principle as anything in Plato or Aristotle.<sup>1</sup> The key, however, is that Plotinus puts his primary principle beyond this, wherein the noetic plays more of an instrumental, rather than a direct causal role.<sup>2</sup> It is through thinking that the Forms "become being," so to speak, and through participation in Forms that the rest of the cosmos derives its existence.

This brief overview of some general movements in those who considered themselves followers of Plato and Pythagoras is helpful, I think, for understanding several of the moves that Plotinus makes in his own metaphysical thinking. It helps explain, to some extent, the kind of Platonism that had developed by the time he began philosophising, and it also helps explain why he thinks that he is offering an acceptable interpretation of Plato in the *Enneads*.

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<sup>1</sup>Gerson (1994) pg. 21.

<sup>2</sup>*ibid*, pp 29 ff.

When one sees that the general philosophical movements of the tradition in which Plotinus found himself pointed to a principle which transcended thinking and being, it becomes easier to understand why he finds Aristotle's First principle unacceptable. Ultimately, I think that both the "first god" of Plotinus' Middle Platonic predecessors, and Aristotle's Unmoved Mover are unacceptable because they cannot be rendered commensurate with the Platonic metaphysical hierarchy, where unity is prior to being, and being is prior to particulars. The identity of thinking and being in the Pythagorean tradition, in Parmenides, in Plato, and in Aristotle's Unmoved Mover, mean that whatever is understood as thinking is, for Plotinus, *posterior* to a unitary principle which grounds it.

## CHAPTER VII - Aristotle

### 1. *Introduction*

Some scholars such as Kenney<sup>1</sup> see Plotinus as reacting not specifically to Aristotle, but to Middle Platonists or Neopythagoreans holding a first principle which admits of duality. These are not mutually exclusive options, however. In some cases Plotinus is reacting specifically to Aristotle,<sup>2</sup> and in others to the integration of Aristotle into Platonism, and in others both. Plotinus frames a significant portion of the approach to his first principle in reference to Aristotle, and our examination of later Middle Platonism and Neopythagoreanism reveals a tendency in those schools to combine a Platonic cosmos with an "Aristotelian" god.

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<sup>1</sup>Kenney, pg xxx, and Chapter 3.

<sup>2</sup>Gerson (1994a) pg 8, suggests that Plotinus argues for the tenets of his system by arguing against Aristotelian principles. He goes on to say, "The *Enneads* is the first and even up to the present day one of the very few attempts to appreciate Aristotle's arguments and to defeat them on their own ground."

In the end, the result of Plotinus' attack is the same - a first principle cannot admit of any multiplicity, and as far as Plotinus is concerned, Aristotle's Unmoved Mover is as multiple as Parmenides' being.

It should be stated at the outset that Plotinus, though "demoting" the Aristotelian first principle, does so while retaining much of value in Aristotelian thinking, or at least its incorporation into Middle Platonism and Neopythagoreanism.<sup>1</sup> A wide range of Aristotelian (and Stoic) terminology is employed by Plotinus, especially the concepts of actuality and potentiality.<sup>2</sup> One also gets the sense that Plotinus retains the notion of *pros hen* equivocity,<sup>3</sup> in so far as the meaning of being in Soul and material particulars is derived from the meaning of the being of Nous. However, *contra* Aristotle, there is an ontologically efficacious continuity of the "being" that emerges from the One, finds its primary sense in Nous and equivocal senses in

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<sup>1</sup>It seems clear that Plotinus does not distinguish between the Active Intellect and the Unmoved Mover; but neither did Alexander of Aphrodisias.

<sup>2</sup>e.g. II.5.1-3

<sup>3</sup>VI.1.25, 17-18. Cp Gerson, pp 8-9; Hadot, pg 129.

all other beings.<sup>1</sup> It is also important that the identity of νοησις and νοητα in Aristotle's *De Anima* III,4 is central to Plotinus' epistemology and theory of Nous.<sup>2</sup> Interestingly enough, as some scholars have observed, because Plotinus incorporates this epistemology, he is able to undermine Aristotelianism on its own terms.<sup>3</sup>

In the next three sections of this chapter, I will attempt to evaluate some key aspects of Plotinus' critique of Aristotle, taking my cue from the difficulties I outlined in Chapter V.

In Sections 2 and 3 I examine some of the explicit statement Plotinus makes regarding Aristotle in *Enneads* V.1.9. This is an interesting and useful place to start because we find Plotinus placing his critique of Aristotle's first principle(s) in the context of a "historical" survey of Greek principles of unity. In

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<sup>1</sup>It is my contention that, in Aristotle, *pros hen* equivocality is not intercategorical, whereas in Plotinus it is hypostatic, or applies to the three primary hypostases.

<sup>2</sup>Armstrong notes that a direct application of the Aristotelian notion is perhaps not possible, but clearly some version of it is employed. ("Background," pg. 401) It is clear that Aristotle warns against a *strict* identity of νοϋς and νοητα at *Phys* 220a20-b22. cp. Alfino, pg 276.

<sup>3</sup>Katz, pg. 4; O'Meara, pp. 49-50; Gerson (1994), pp 192ff



Section 2, I discuss Plotinus' attack on the Unmoved Mover as a first principle, on the ground that it is multiple and not properly unitary, as it should be. Section 3 discusses Plotinus' critique of Aristotle's "multiple movers." I suggest that Plotinus' claim that the Unmoved Movers are indistinguishable shows the flaw of rendering being and unity convertible when dealing with immaterial substance.

Finally, in Section 4, I examine Plotinus' response to the general thesis of the convertibility of being and unity that Aristotle wants to put forth, and suggest that his rejection of Aristotle's convertibility thesis also implies a conceptual allegiance to the Platonic metaphysical hierarchy.

## 2. *The Unmoved Mover*

Plotinus follows Plato in attempting to show that attributing being to Parmenides' first principle results in that principle being multiform.<sup>1</sup> Hence when Aristotle places at the head of *his* metaphysical system a thinking, "unitary" *being*, there is plenty of room for Plotinus to

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<sup>1</sup>V.1.8, 23-4

assert that it is already multiform, in virtue of its being and its thinking. Much of what Plotinus has to say about the Unmoved Mover focuses on thinking, so I propose to start there:

Later Aristotle makes the first principle [το πρῶτον] separate [χωριστον] and intelligible, but when he says that it knows itself (νοεῖν... αὐτο) he goes back again and does not make it the first principle [το πρῶτον]; (V.1.9, 8-9)<sup>1</sup>

Plotinus' ontological perspective requires that the first being be *absolutely* simple, and he maintains that an entity which is self-intellecting is not absolutely simple, but in a way manifold.<sup>2</sup> He agrees with Aristotle that the first principle must be without potency, but in so far as thinking *always* ought to imply the potency of the thinker to the object of thought, he maintains that there is potency within the Unmoved Mover.<sup>3</sup> By Aristotle's own lights then, an actuality is required that is *prior* to thinking, in order to guarantee

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<sup>1</sup>cp, V.1.9; V.3.11-4; V.6; VI.7.35-7

<sup>2</sup>cp O'Meara, pg. 50.

<sup>3</sup>Indeed this is the case in De Anima III,4, which we discussed in Chapter IV.

the act of thinking that in turn guarantees motion.<sup>1</sup> Consequently, Plotinus would maintain that those who say that the divine intellect is simple, and that this Unmoved Mover is the primary unity which generates multiplicity do not realise that the principle of being and unity must itself be *beyond* being and unity.<sup>2</sup>

As I have suggested, the general movement in Platonism to identify Nous in his system with Aristotle's Unmoved Mover is something which Plotinus inherits. Since we know that what he thinks about Nous is what he thinks about the Unmoved Mover (at a general level), we may elucidate the terse statement made about the Unmoved Mover in V.1.9 by examining Plotinus' reflections on Nous. At V.3, he says:

If then Nous is Nous because it is multiple, thinking itself [νοεῖν αὐτο], even

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<sup>1</sup>Gerson, (1992) pg 22.

<sup>2</sup>Gerson (1994a), pg 9, suggests that Plotinus' refutation of Aristotle has 2 parts; "First, Plotinus aims to show that what Aristotle regards as the *arche* of all, the unmoved mover or 'thinking thinking about thinking,' cannot be the absolutely first principle. It cannot be absolutely first because it is not self explaining. That it, it must have a principle or cause outside of itself. The second stage of the strategy is to demonstrate the existence of the true first principle, and to deduce its properties, none of which can be possessed by Aristotle's god."

if it derives from Nous, is a kind of internal occurrence which makes it many. That which is absolutely simple and first of all things must be beyond [επεκεινᾶ] Nous; but if it is Nous, it will be multiplicity. [πληθος εἶναι]. (V.3.11, 26-31)

Any self-thinking thing then, is multiple, and any multiplicity requires a unity which explains it.<sup>1</sup> This is further suggested by the following:

But that which is before [intellection and being] is their principle, not as immanent in them; for it is not that from which something comes which is immanent, but the parts of which it is constituted; but that from which each individual thing comes is not an individual thing, but other than all of them. It is not then, one of all things, but before all things, so that it is before Nous...It must not be one of the things before which it is, and you are not to call it intellect; not even the Good then: no, not even this if "the Good" means that which is not before all things; but if it means that which is before all things, let the name stand. (V.3.11, 16-25)

The two previous passages are from the relatively the late treatise (49th in Porphyry's chronology) "On the Knowing Hypostases and That Which is Beyond" (V, 3).<sup>2</sup> I

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<sup>1</sup>cp III.8.9, 6-7; VI.9.2; V.1.5, 1-19. Cp Gerson (1994a), pg. 10.

<sup>2</sup>Says Armstrong, (1980) vol V, pg 69, "The treatise shows, perhaps more clearly than any other in the Enneads, the stimulation of the thought of Plotinus by critical reflection (continued...)"

propose now to look a little further into this treatise to see how Plotinus treats Nous there; this affords us further insight into his critique of the Unmoved Mover. The treatise begins by enquiring into what can properly be said to think itself. Plotinus argues that the human soul does not properly "think itself," but rather takes its intellection from Nous and sense-perception, the former by way of an "imprint" on its reasoning faculty and through the comparison of external αἰσθητά with these imprints - what Plotinus says we should call the ἀναμνησις of the soul.<sup>1</sup> The human soul stands in a kind of "middle realm," halfway between Nous and the material world, and it bridges the gap between the two:<sup>2</sup>

The activities of Nous are from above in the same way that those of sense-perception are below; we are this, the principal part of the soul, in the middle (μέσον) between two powers, a worse and a better, the worse that of sense-perception, the better that of Nous. (V.3.3, 36-40)

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(...continued)  
on what Plotinus says about Intellect and exposition of Aristotelian doctrine by...Alexander of Aphrodisias."

<sup>1</sup>V.3.2, 1-14.

<sup>2</sup>This is not to deny, however, that a part of the soul is always in contact with Nous.

In a more poetic rendering, Plotinus says, "αἰσθησις δὲ ἡμῖν ἀγγελος, βασιλεὺς δὲ πρὸς ἡμᾶς ἐκεῖνος [νοῦς] ."<sup>1</sup>

Whereas the soul is not engaged in what might be called self-intellection proper, one might suggest that in so far as soul "ascends" to the level of Nous it understands itself non-discursively.<sup>2</sup> However, only Nous (and the Forms) can properly be said to be properly self-intellecting, in so far as there is an identity of οὐσία and ἐνέργεια; Nous, νοητὸν and νοησις are one:

If then [Nous] is actuality and its substance is actuality, it is one and the same with its actuality; but being and the intelligible are also one with the actuality. Altogether are one, Intellect, intellection, the intelligible [νοῦς, νοησις, τὸ νοητὸν] . If therefore, Intellect's intellection is the intelligible, and the intelligible is itself, it will think itself: for it will think with the intellection which it is itself and will think the intelligible, which it is itself. In both ways then, it will think itself, in that intellection is itself and in that the intelligible is itself which thinks in its

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<sup>1</sup>V.3.3, 45-6

<sup>2</sup>At V.3.4, 13-4, Plotinus says that the better part of the soul is "περὶ νοῦς," recalling *Phaedrus* 246 ff. cp. Armstrong (1988), pg 83 n1. Re discursive thinking, cp. Armstrong (1991), pg 120.

intellection and which is itself. (V.3.5, 41-50)

In the end, Plotinus concludes from his analysis of the thinking of Nous that it is "being" in the primary sense: "ο μὲν δὴ λόγος ἀπεδείξεν εἶναι τι τὸ αὐτὸ ἐαυτοῦ κυρίως νοεῖν."<sup>1</sup> Again Plotinus' assessment of being is such that any sense of being entails multiplicity.

The being of Nous is an activity (ἐνεργεία) which is directed onto itself because Nous does not will the existence what is below it, but rather remains in its own self-contemplating satisfaction:

The thinking is different when it is in soul but is more properly thinking in Nous. For the soul [we observed] thought itself as belonging to another, but Nous did so as itself, and as what and who it is, and [it started its thinking] from its own nature and thought by turning back to itself. For in seeing the real beings [ὄντα] it saw itself, and in seeing it was in act [ἐνεργείᾳ], and its actuality was itself: for Nous and intellection are one; and it thinks with the whole of itself, not one part of itself with another. (V.3.3, 2-8)

Given the characterisation of Nous as that whose actuality is thinking, whose thinking and object of

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<sup>1</sup>V.3.6, 1-2

thought are one, it is no surprise that Plotinus identifies this principle with the Unmoved Mover of Aristotle. But this kind of being, which is capable of self-intellection, must be multiform, having two capacities, its thinking and its existence as thing thought. To say that the "seeing" (=thinking) of Nous is its substance (*καὶ τὴν οὐσίαν αὐτοῦ ὁρᾶσθαι*)<sup>1</sup> indicates two terms, the being and the thought:

we ought to repeat that this Nous needs to see itself, or rather to possess the seeing of itself, first because it is multiple, and then because it belongs to another, and must necessarily be a seer, and a seer of that other, and its seeing is its substance; for the existence of something else is a necessary condition of seeing, and if there is nothing else seeing is useless. There must be, then, more than one, that seeing may exist, and the seeing and the seen must coincide, and what is seen by itself must be a universal multiplicity. (V.3.10, 9-18)

Once the distinction can be articulated about the being and thought, Plotinus indicates the possibility of deriving, (as he does in Enneads V.1), the Platonic

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<sup>1</sup>V.3.10, 13.



primary kinds of the *Parmenides* and *Sophist*.<sup>1</sup> His One, on the other hand, is an entirely simple *principle* of unity, and in so far as it is beyond both thought and being, it has no need of thinking itself or explaining itself, or understanding itself. "...that which is absolutely different remains itself by itself (αὐτο πρὸς αὐτο), and seeks nothing about itself; but that which explicates (ἐξελιπται) itself must be many."<sup>2</sup> We should understand this "self-explication" as a sort of monadology,<sup>3</sup> wherein the "one-many" which is Nous is a self-intellecting unity composed of self-intellecting Forms.

Plotinus also suggests (in V.3.12), on the basis on an analysis of thinking, that the act of thinking is dependent on something prior. The tack here is analogous to the idea that being, *qua* multiple, requires a prior actuality that is unitary. Since thinking and being are extensionally the same in Nous, thinking requires a prior actuality, just as being does. If, says Plotinus, the activities of the simple principle came into being

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<sup>1</sup>V.3.10, 24 ff

<sup>2</sup>V.3.10, 51-3

<sup>3</sup>Introduction to Part II, Section 2.

because it started to be active at some point, then the principle itself will be multiple, containing both principle and act or potency for act.<sup>1</sup> By the same token, because thinking is an act that is essentially directed toward something, it implies deficiency on the part of the thinker, (i.e. logically, not temporally),<sup>2</sup> and hence thinking cannot be determined to be the first act. As O'Meara puts it, "Thinking reaches toward and therefore cannot be, absolute self-sufficiency."<sup>3</sup> If the primary activity of thinking is identified with the first principle, the first activity would have nothing to think,

and again it could not have one part of the thing [which it wanted] and not have another, for there was not anything at all to which the impulse could be directed.  
(V.3.12, 33-4)

That towards which the "impulse" is directed is the *ενεργεια εκ της ουσιας* of the One, the potency of the One's

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<sup>1</sup>V.3.12

<sup>2</sup>See Lloyd, pp. 258. ff.; Alfino, 275.

<sup>3</sup>O'Meara, pg. 50; cp. Katz, pg. 40. (cf. *Enneads* V.3.10; V.6.5)

emanative force to be limited by thought.<sup>1</sup> This also suggests that, although the Ideas are not outside the intellect, Nous does not arbitrarily think what it chooses with the consequence of bringing things into existence arbitrarily:

For it is not true that when [Nous] thought a god, a god came into existence or when it thought motion, motion came into existence. It is then, incorrect to say that the Forms are thoughts, if what is meant by this is that when Intellect thought this particular Form came into existence or this particular Form; for what is thought must be prior to this thinking [of a particular Form]. Otherwise how would it come to thinking it? Certainly not by chance, nor did it happen on it casually. (V.9.7, 13-19 )

If the Good is thinking, then there is a distinction between the Good in itself and the Good that is thought.<sup>2</sup> Therefore the first principle must, says Plotinus, remain in "its own proper state." Plotinus wants to say that being, unity, and thought are prior to any *particular* and further that anything which possesses being or unity (or thought), no matter how simple is multiform. Anything which is multiform, cannot stand as "first cause."

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<sup>1</sup>See Chapter V, Section 5; on *ἐνεργεια ἐκ τῆς οὐσίας*, see Chapter IX, Section 2.

<sup>2</sup>VI.7.15. cp. Gerson (1994), pg. 21

The upshot of the discussion is that it is impossible for a first principle to think, act or even "be"<sup>1</sup> because these characteristics indicate multiplicity. In thinking there is an active and a passive part, or if the object of these acts be other than itself, it implies a lacking on the part of the first principle. If the first principle engages in an activity towards something external, there is nothing for it to engage at any rate, for as first principle it is all that exists, and there is nothing but itself to act upon, unless it decides to forge out into nothingness in a kind of "objectless" urge. This goes to the heart of Plotinus' reaction to Aristotle, since, in a coherent account of thinking, the being of anything is prior to the thought of it. Knowing and being for Plotinus have their place not with the One, the first principle, but with a second principle, that of Nous. In order to account for the unity/multiplicity of Nous, a prior

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<sup>1</sup>This is not to suggest that the One does not exist, but rather it is beyond the "being" that emerges as its ενεργεια εκ της ουσιας, or the finitude or limit that being takes on in Nous or Soul.

principle is needed. It is this, which according to Plotinus, Aristotle failed to accommodate.

### 3. *Unmoved Movers*

I opened the discussion of Plotinus' critique of Aristotle's Unmoved Mover with a passage from V.1.9. Immediately following that passage, Plotinus' goes on to take Aristotle to task for positing a plurality of immaterial substances. Aristotle himself appears to be speaking as a "layman"<sup>1</sup> about the correct calculations regarding the number of motions that need to be accounted for, suggesting that the issue of demonstrating the necessity of the matter will be left to more powerful thinkers.<sup>2</sup> Plotinus takes him to task for this:

and by making many other intelligible realities, as many as the heavenly spheres, that each particular intelligible may move one particular sphere, [Aristotle] describes the intelligible world in a way different from Plato, making a probable assumption which has no philosophical necessity [οὐκ ἔχον ἀνάγκην]. But one might doubt whether it is even probable: for it would be more probable that all the spheres, contributing their several movements to a single system should look to

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<sup>1</sup>Lloyd, G.E.R., pg. 153.

<sup>2</sup>*Metaphysics*, 1074a14ff.

one principle, the first [το πρωτον].  
(V.1.9, 9-15)

While it is clear that Plotinus dislikes the idea of the Unmoved Mover as a first principle, the existence of more than one intelligible principle raises other difficulties. Plotinus seems to think that there is an ambiguity in the use of "πρωτον" to describe Aristotle's "first" mover.<sup>1</sup> This presents two options. Aristotle could mean: (1) the many intelligibles derive from the one (τα πολλὰ νοητα ἐκ ἐνός) as the primary principle, or (2) that there are *many* primary principles (αρχαί) in the intelligible world. If (1), then the "containment" of the spheres by the outmost sphere ought to be enough to solve all of the problems of variant movements, since they would all be directed by the One:

if they derive from the one, the situation will clearly be analogous to that of the heavenly spheres in the sense-world, where each contains the other one, and one, the outermost dominates [μίας δὲ τῆς ἐξω κρατουσῆς]; so that there too the first would contain others and *there will be an intelligible universe* [κοσμος νοητος]; and just as here in the sense world the spheres are not empty, but the first is full of heavenly bodies and the

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<sup>1</sup>V.1.9, 16 ff

others have heavenly bodies in them, so there also the moving principles [τὰ κινουντα] will have many realities in them, and *the realities will be truer.* (V.1.9, 18-24)

What I have italicised indicates that Plotinus may be thinking of a principle that dominates other principles as playing the role of his Nous. He sees the "outermost sphere" as containing the "truer realities," in a κοσμος νοητος and this seems to refer analogously to Nous. The predilection to see the Unmoved Mover as Nous also suggests this kind of conceptual association.

There is, of course, a second possible interpretation of "πρωτον" that Plotinus raises. If Aristotle means (2), i.e. if the movers are all αρχαι, then there will be a random assembly (συντυχιαν) of principles, and the order of the spheres and their movements will be arbitrary:<sup>1</sup> "why will they be a community and in agreement on the one work, the harmony of the whole universe?"<sup>2</sup> Further, says Plotinus, if these

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<sup>1</sup>V.1.9, 23-4

<sup>2</sup>V.1.9, 24-5

other movers are immaterial, then they are undistinguishable:

And how can the intelligibles even be many, when they are incorporeal [ασώματα] as they are, and matter does not divide them [υλης ου χωρίζουσης]? (V.1.9, 27)

It is interesting that Plotinus seems to take matter as a principle of individuation.<sup>1</sup> As I have suggested, it is more likely that Aristotle is required to assert that the commensurability of form with matter individuates. However, Plotinus' point stands whether he sees matter as a principle of individuation or not. If he sees Aristotle as holding to "commensurability," this itself is based on material particulars, ie. a matter-form union. This is consistent with Plotinus' realisation that if he (Plotinus) is to have many intelligible principles, they must be individuated by their derived being and unity, and not by their involvement with matter.

Plotinus does derive the unity of substances from a prior source, and this is possible because unity is

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<sup>1</sup>Armstrong (1988) pg 44 n 1., notes that the critique here is similar to that made by Theophrastus at *Metaphysics* II, 7, 9, "but the resemblance is not close enough for us to assume that Plotinus had read Theophrastus."



treated as prior to being. As I suggested in Chapter IV, Aristotle cannot derive unity from something prior, since for him, unity is predicable of and posterior to substance. Because, for Aristotle, being and unity are convertible and have to be predicated of something whose individuation is presupposed, he cannot point to being or unity or matter in order to individuate his movers. This was not a problem for a plurality of material substances, but it becomes a problem for a multiple number of immaterial substances. Aristotle's account of substance is such that the form (ontologically) abstracted from matter is an essential unity. Thus I have suggested that he succumbs to Parmenideanism at the level of immaterial unities.

The upshot is that if Aristotle wants a first principle and numerous immaterial principles that derive from it, the Unmoved Mover ought to "contain" the other ideas as it does in Plotinus' system. The identification of Nous with the Unmoved Mover in the Platonic tradition, as well as Aristotle's own notion of the νοησις/νοητον identity of the Unmoved Mover, (and of theoretical knowledge and the theoretically known at *De Anima* 430),

means that Nous, and Aristotle's Unmoved Mover as Plotinus understands it, is a one/many. The "one" is accounted for by Nous' unity with Forms which it derives from the One, and the "many" is accounted for by the monadology of self-intellecting Forms which derive their own unity from the One .

I want to suggest that Plotinus gets around the Aristotelian problem by denying that being and unity are convertible. Plotinus can say that if being is dependent on unity, i.e. if a thing must be one in order to be, then its individuation is guaranteed by a prior principle of unity. In the next section I want to examine Plotinus' rejection of the convertibility thesis. This rejection suggests that a revised Platonic metaphysical hierarchy is present in Plotinus' conceptual scheme.

#### 4. *Being and Unity*

A further important critique of Aristotle's metaphysics can be seen in Plotinus' attempt to distinguish (ontologically) a thing's existence from its unity. We have seen in some detail Aristotle's attempt to render being and unity convertible; my suggestion is that

Plotinus wants again to separate them, and deny the convertibility thesis, on the grounds that a principle of unity is required for being. To place the principle of the existence of a substance in the substance as an account of its unity and being, as Aristotle does, is to beg the question regarding the source of being and unity in the bearer of that being and unity, the substantial form. Where do unity and being come from?

At VI.9.2 Plotinus argues against the Aristotelian conception of the convertibility of being and unity. Plotinus begins by putting the question this way:

Is it, then, true that for each of the things which are one as parts its substance (ἡ οὐσία) and its one (τὸ εἷς) are not the same thing, but for being and a substance as a whole substance and being are the same thing? So that anyone who has discovered being has discovered the One, and substance itself is the One itself: for example if intellect (νοῦς) is substance, intellect is also the One since it is primary being (πρωτως οντα) and primarily one, and as it gives the other things a share in being, so in the same measure it gives them a share in the One. (VI.9.2, 1-9)

Others have suggested that Plotinus is responding here to Origen or Ammonius,<sup>1</sup> and not with Aristotle. However, we should keep in mind that Plotinus frames the question in terms of whether someone who has discovered being has discovered the One.<sup>2</sup> Further, Aristotle's first principle is "substance itself," i.e. substance *par excellence*, and is so regarded by Plotinus. The "example" used to illustrate the question of whether finding the one amounts to finding unity is given in terms of  $\nu\upsilon\upsilon\varsigma$  (that which Plotinus understands the Unmoved Mover to be) and  $\sigma\upsilon\sigma\tau\alpha$ , or substance. Finally the convertibility of being and unity is suggested by the idea that "same measure" of being and unity is shared among things that have them. This sounds very similar to a picture of Aristotelian

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<sup>1</sup>cp Armstrong, (1988) pg 306 n.1.

<sup>2</sup>As well, the relation of the unity of the parts to the unity of a substance are said to be different, as they are in Aristotle.

convertibility.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, what Plotinus says next is *definitely* suggestive of Aristotle:

For what can anyone say that [the One] is besides being and intellect? For it is either the same as being - for 'man' and 'one man' are the same thing - or it is like a kind of number of the individual; you say 'one' of a thing alone just as you say 'two things.' Now if number belongs to the real beings, it is clear that so does the One; and we must investigate what it is. But if numbering is an activity of soul going through things one after another, the One would not be anything factual. But our argument said that if an individual thing loses its one it would not exist at all. We must therefore see if the individual one and individual being are the same thing, and universal being and universal One [το ὅλως ὄν καὶ τὸ ἐν]. (VI.9.2, 9-16)

The analysis of "man" and "a man" is the same example that Aristotle uses to assert the convertibility of being and unity in the *Metaphysics*. What Plotinus goes on to say about universal unity and being hearkens back to the similar statement made in the *Metaphysics* where Aristotle

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<sup>1</sup>With the exception that there seems to be a causal relation implied by the "sharing out" of being that I do not think is present in Aristotelian *pros hen* equivocity. However, Plotinus thinks that the unmoved Mover won't work in any case, and the notion/assumption that the source of unity for particulars and Nous is the same may suggest that the critique encompasses this lacuna in Aristotle's metaphysical explanation, for it is an explanation that suggests that concrete particulars are explanatorily basic in terms of the source of their being and unity.

suggests that Plato falls victim to Parmenideanism. Plotinus' subsequent rejection of the convertibility thesis implies an acceptance of a "universal one" and a "universal being," and, given the priority of unity to being, it suggests a conceptual allegiance to the Platonic metaphysical hierarchy:

But if the being of the individual is a multiplicity, but it is impossible for the One to be a multiplicity, they will be different from each other. At any rate, "man" and "living being" and "rational" are many parts and these many are bound together by that one. "Man" and "One" are therefore different, and one has parts and the other is partless. And further, universal being, which has all the beings in it, will still be more many and different from the One, and will have the One by sharing and participation. (VI.9.2, 17-24)

Plotinus goes on to connect universal being with Nous which includes the forms, and he says that this is not the first principle: "ὅλος δε το μεν εν το πρωτον, ο δε νους και τα ειδη και το ον ου πρωτα". The conclusion is that Nous, and therefore the Unmoved Mover as he understands it, is not the One. The way in which Plotinus arrives at this conclusion has important ramifications for the convertibility thesis. "Man" and "a man" are *not* the

same. Being and unity are ontologically distinguishable, both at the level of the particular and at the level of primary being and primary unity. Further, being participates in a prior unity. This suggests (with a new set of emanative criteria to effect the causal mechanics of participation)<sup>1</sup> that Plotinus once again asserts the Platonic metaphysical hierarchy of Unity, Being, particulars.

Whereas Aristotle would maintain that the difference between being and unity is only conceptual in this case,<sup>2</sup> Plotinus maintains that their difference is real. The difference between "man" and "a man," in this case is that "a man's" existence is preserved by its unity, a unity which ultimately derives from the One.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>In this regard, Dillon (1988), pg 350 suggests that, "We cannot really think of an Ideal Horse any more. What subsists in Intellect [Nous] is a certain quasi-mathematical formula, which is also a field of force, programmed to take on this configuration when projected onto Matter according to a prearranged pattern - the mysterious προυπογραφή."

<sup>2</sup>*Metaphysics* 4.2.1003b22-34, 8.3.1043b1-3, 7.17.1041b11-33. Gerson (1994) pg 7; Gerson (1990)

<sup>3</sup>Gerson (1994a), pp. 14-5, suggests that the positing of the One above the forms makes Plotinus differ from Aristotle because for Aristotle, being and ουσια are identical, e.g. being is unqualifiedly separate form. However I say that to on is predicated of ουσια; this accounts for the predicative, (continued...)

The existence of every and any thing is dependent upon the One.<sup>1</sup> At the most general level, Being is dependent upon the One.<sup>2</sup>

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(...continued)  
epistemological distinction, that is ontologically unreal. The conclusion we reach is the same, however: since, for Plotinus, forms depend ontologically on something prior for their being (to on), there is no longer any ground for ontological identity. In Plotinus, there is a dependency of το ον on το εν, and of particulars on to on and το εν, in this order: Unity - Being - Particulars.

<sup>1</sup>Hadot, pg 134, puts this nicely: "Every ordered multiplicity, every 'system,' presupposes the transcendent One whose unity grounds the possibility of that order."

<sup>2</sup>. Gerson (1990) pg 203, goes so far as to say that Plotinus' proof for the existence of the One depends upon this refutation of Aristotle's conflation of being and unity. This is an extremely important observation, although I do not think, as Gerson does that the philosophy of the One stands or falls with it. While it is true that unity must be prior to being, it may be enough to say that Plotinus makes the distinction because he wants his notion of unity to be indivisible. In short he does not want to say that the One "exists" if this would admit of a distinction between the One and the One's existence. Deck's position, that the nature of Nous demands the One is a more general application of Gerson's specific thesis about "man" and "a man", and when Plotinus does offer "proofs" of the One (III.8.9, 1-13; III.8.11.7-10) it is clear that metaphysically he regards the "proof of the One" to stand or fall on an understanding of Nous/Being via Plato's *Parmenides*. It is philosophically significant, (though Deck, pg 8, disagrees) that Plotinus is a mystic. For the One is often discussed without formal proofs (II.9.1; V.8.5; V.2.1; V.4.1; V.4.2) and ultimately, appreciating the ineffable nature of the One, though it may be philosophically implied, cannot be fully accomplished without taking seriously the fact that some experience is ineffable. I shall have more to say about this in Chapter IX.



## 6. Conclusion

Plotinus frames his own position regarding the first principle in relation to his critique of Aristotle. The Nous of the Platonists and the Unmoved Mover, as self-intellecting entities, are by definition multiple, since they are analysable into a thinker and an object of thought. This multiplicity (indeed any multiplicity), requires a prior unity. Since the Nous or Unmoved Mover is taken by Plotinus as the primary being, being needs a primary unity. If being depends on unity, it is certainly not convertible with it; hence Plotinus rejects the convertibility thesis. The dependence of particulars on being, and being on unity reflects the re-emergence, or perhaps the sustained faithfulness of Plotinus to the Platonic metaphysical hierarchy. In the next two chapters I will attempt to articulate in further detail the relationship of being and unity in Plotinus, in the new key of emanationism. I shall also attempt to give some meaning to Plotinus' claim that his one is beyond being.

## CHAPTER VIII - "Axioms" of Unity

### 1. *Introduction*

Thus far in the second part of the thesis, I have tried to give an account of some of the important elements that influenced Plotinus' metaphysical position. Although clearly the account is not exhaustive, it gives us enough grounding to understand Plotinus' approach to being and unity in what follows.

It is often remarked that Plotinus' position does not change much throughout the *Enneads*, because, as Porphyry tells us,<sup>1</sup> he began writing at a later stage of his life.<sup>2</sup> While there are refinements to positions, much that appears at first sight to be contradictory in the *Enneads* can be seen as either metaphorical attempts to say the ineffable, or as different perspectives on, or approaches to, the same thing. Hence I feel comfortable with an eclectic thematic exegesis of the *Enneads*. Of

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<sup>1</sup>*Vita*, Ch's 3 & 4.

<sup>2</sup>cp Gerson (1994), pp. 191-2.

course it is inevitable that certain treatises get more attention than others because of my focus. For the most part the next two chapters deal with texts in Enneads V and VI, since much of what Plotinus has to say there is key to understanding the issue of unity and its relation to being.

In this chapter, I want to identify some elements of Plotinus' thought, which I loosely term "axiomatic". These "axioms" help us to focus Plotinus' approach to being and the principle of unity which grounds it; all of them have to do with hypostatic procession and ontological relations. I give them my own names for ease of reference. In the end, much of Plotinus' understanding of unity will have been discussed in the explanation of the axioms themselves.

## 2. *Positive Production*

The notion of "positive production," as I call it, has a long lineage in Greek notions of causality. It is useful here, as we begin, to note what Katz says about the idea of cause (αἰτία/ποίησις) in Greek philosophy:

In the notion of cause (*aitia*, *poiesis*)  
[the doctrines of Greek philosophers] in

consequence of the search for order and unification find a major focus. The common sense notion of the fecundity and power of the cause to produce its affects never loses its sway over ancient (and modern) thought. It is mirrored in the Pythagorean concept of the 'evolution' of the one into many, of the point into lines, planes and solids. It is mirrored in the doctrine of Ideas, the Stoic "seminal reasons," (logoi spermatikoi), and reaches a culmination in Plotinus' One...<sup>1</sup>

For Plotinus, whenever any entity possesses a degree of completeness or unity, it produces an "overflowing" of itself.<sup>2</sup> This applies to hypostatic levels as well as to "organic" functions, such as for example, the procreation of living beings when they reach perfection. Says Plotinus:

Now when anything...comes to perfection, we see that it produces, and does not endure to remain by itself, but makes something else. (V.4.1, 27-9)

This notion of production, perhaps in combination with the Platonic notion<sup>3</sup> of the generosity of the Divine,<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Katz, pp 10-1; cp. O'Meara, pp 47 ff.

<sup>2</sup>Deck, pg. 13.

<sup>3</sup>cp. *Timaeus* 29e

<sup>4</sup>O'Meara, pg. 63.

finds expression in Plotinus conception of a highest perfection which "gives of itself." We must be careful here. The One does not "give of itself" so as to *diminish* itself, nor does Nous - both remain unchanged and unaffected in their giving. We have seen this kind of "distancing" of the One from the cosmos in later interpretations of Speusippus, in the *Didaskalikos*, and in Numenius. Plotinus' third hypostasis, Soul, does change, and engages in demiurgic functioning similar to the "split god" in Numenius (and arguably in Albinus). With regard to that similarity, it should be noted that Soul has a part of it which retains formal unchangeableness, and a part which engages in matter. We see the distinction clearly drawn at Enneads V.2., in a passage that also gives one a sense of the continuity of being throughout the cosmos, from the One to Nous, Nous to Soul, and Soul to the physical world:

the One, perfect because it seeks nothing, has nothing, and needs nothing, overflows, as it were, and its superabundance makes something other than itself. This, when it has come into being, turns back upon the one and is filled, and becomes Intellect by looking towards it. Its halt and turning towards the One constitutes being, its gaze upon the One, Intellect. Since it halts and turns towards the One that it may see, it

becomes at once Intellect and Being. Resembling the One thus, Intellect produces in the same way, pouring forth a multiple power - this is a likeness of it - just as that which was before it poured forth. This activity springing from the substance of Intellect is Soul, which comes to be while Intellect abides unchanged: 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 and so brings forth an image. It looks to its source and is filled, and going forth to another opposed movement generates its own image, which is sensation and the principle of growth in plants. Nothing is separated and cut off from that which is before it. (V.2.1, 7-23)

In this example of hypostatic positive production, Nous, which is ontologically posterior to, dependent on, and inferior to the One, is produced by a positive outflowing from the One. Again we see the two stages involved in the production of Nous: first an outpouring of what appears to be unlimited being-in potency (in so far as it is unlimited, I take it it is not yet being proper); second, there is a "turning," a metaphorical expression of the limiting aspect of Thought.<sup>1</sup> This limiting should be

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<sup>1</sup>See Chapter V, Section 5.

understood as the self-intellecting Forms and the self-intellecting hypostasis that is Nous.<sup>1</sup>

By allowing a principle of unity to provide, via emanation or energetic "outflowing," the source of both being and thought, Plotinus is in fact positing a *dynamis* for thinking that is directed at a *dynamis* for being. The "unlimited being" is a *dynamis* for "limited being", as it were, precisely because it is not initially limited by thought.<sup>2</sup> It becomes actual or limited being when it is circumscribed by the formalising principle of self-intellection that is thought. By the same token, the "thought" which is implicit in the overflowing "*energeia*" of the One is potential until in its limiting of unlimited being, it becomes the monadology that is Nous.

While Plotinus makes distinctions of logical priority, whereby unlimited being is prior to thought (since thought requires a prior actuality in order to occur) we ought to think of being and thought as simultaneously implicit or contained in the One's

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<sup>1</sup>See Introduction to Part II, Section 2.

<sup>2</sup>cp. VI.9.6, 11ff.

ἐνεργεια ἐκ τῆς οὐσίας,<sup>1</sup> that "force" which emanates eternally from the first principle. Taken together, thought and being (in the primary sense) are extensionally identical as the second hypostasis, Nous. The important thing to note is that not only does the One stand as a principle of being and unity, it also provides a mechanism for unification in supplying, via emanation, the means for that unification by providing "being" to be thought, and thinking to limit being.<sup>2</sup>

In explaining positive production, Plotinus often uses the image of the sun giving off light while the source of the light remains unchanged.<sup>3</sup> The result of this "radiation", with regard to any hypostasis, is the production of a lower image of itself; the result is an

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<sup>1</sup>See below.

<sup>2</sup>Again, Plotinus believes that some kind of Nous is the unity that Aristotle wants to ground his system. What is interesting in the idea of thought being directed at being in the emanation of Nous from the One is that it speaks to one of Plotinus' key charges against the Aristotelian Unmoved Mover, which Plotinus claims is multiple because distinctions may be made regarding the thinker/thinking and the thought, indicating a need to explain this multiplicity in terms of a prior unity.

<sup>3</sup>V.1.6, 30-3



effect different than, but related to, its cause.<sup>1</sup> One might think of the difference in this relation as the difference between the "internal" activity of an entity and that which is the inevitable consequence of that activity, a secondary, unwilled effect.<sup>2</sup> Plotinus makes a distinction of this sort in *Enneads* V.4, where he speaks of the *ενεργεια της ουσιας* (the internal activity) and the *ενεργεια εκ της ουσιας* (the secondary "outflowing" effect).<sup>3</sup> In the following passage, Plotinus explains the emanation of Nous from the One in these terms:

But how, when [the One] abides unchanged, does Intellect come into being? In each and every thing there is an activity which belongs to substance (*ενεργεια... της ουσιας*) and one which goes out from substance (*εκ της ουσιας*); and that which belongs to substance is the active actuality which is each particular thing, and the other activity derives from that first one, and must in everything be a consequence of it, different from the thing itself... (V.4.2, 26-30)

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<sup>1</sup>It should be noted that emanation, as Plotinus is well aware, is a material process, and is used only metaphorically by Plotinus to represent what happens at "higher levels". Hypostatic emanation functions as an image of these material processes, but it is not these processes. (III.4.3) cp. O'Meara pg. 61.

<sup>2</sup>Gerson, (1994), pp. 214 ff; see Chapter IX, Section 2.

<sup>3</sup>V.4.2, 28-39; cp *Physics*, 257b9

For Aristotle, the Unmoved Mover is so "self-contained," as it were, that it is difficult to see an ontological link to the Unmoved Mover other than the guarantee of motion that it provides. The claim that all things have an *επεργεια εκ της ουσιας* and an *επεργεια της ουσιας*, gives both the One and the eternal and unchangeable intelligible world (Nous) productive force<sup>1</sup> while allowing them to remain unchanged in themselves. And because the efficacy of all material existents is grounded in the first principle,<sup>2</sup> there is a causal connexity, via Nous and Soul, of all things to the first unchanging One. In the following passage Plotinus compares the radiation of all

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<sup>1</sup>Gerson (1994), pp. 24-5, suggests three texts of Plato's which may have motivated the modification of a distinction between God's first and second *energeiai*. The first is that in the *Republic* the Form of the Good is interpreted as affecting Forms outside itself (509b6-10). The second is the notion of a good and ungrudging demiurge (*Timaeus* 29e), and the third is the idea of the Good as the source of beauty in the *Symposium* (206-12). For whereas Aristotle's *θεος* stands as an exemplary teleological principle, (as does Plotinus', I suggest, in so far as all things act on a principle of desiring the One, not the least of which humans) as a guarantor of motion, Plotinus' *ev* also has a *productive* function, or ontological efficacy.

<sup>2</sup>This I think may be the reason why emanationism is a preferred term, at least imagistically, in so far as the "outflowing" that is the second *energeia* is distinguishable from the intrinsic activity that is Plotinus' One, although Gerson (1991), pg 333ff, seems to think that there is no distinction to be made between creation and emanation.

things from the One to the heat that comes from fire. One might think of the heat of, or within the fire as its *ἐνεργεια της ουσιας*, and the heat that it passes on to people or objects near it as its *ἐνεργεια εκ της ουσιας*:

as in fire there is a heat which is the content of its substance, and another that comes into being from that primary heat when fire exercises the activity which is native to its substance in abiding unchanged as fire. So it is in the higher world, and much more so there, while the Principle abides "in its own proper way of life," the activity generated from the perfection in it and its coexistent activity acquires substantial existence, since it comes from a great power, the greatest of all, and arrives at being and substance: for that Principle is beyond being. That is the productive power of all things, and its product is already all things: therefore "beyond being"; and if the product is all things but the One is before all things and not on equality with all things, in this way too it must be "beyond being". (V.4.2, 30-43).

In another passage, in *Enneads* V.1.6, we again see the comparison of positive production to material emanation, where the "producer" is unchanged:

How did [νους] come to be then, and what are we to think of it surrounding the One in its repose? (*πως ουν και τι δει νοησαι περι εκεινο μενον*;) It must be as a radiation (*περιλαμβν*) from [the One] while [the One] remains unchanged, like the bright light of the sun which, so to speak, runs round it

(περιθεον), springing from [the sun] continually while [the sun] remains unchanged. All things which exist, as long as they remain in being, necessarily produce from their own substances, in dependence on their present power, a surrounding reality directed to what is outside them. a kind of image of the archetypes from which it was produced: fire produces heat which comes from it; snow does not only keep its cold inside itself. Perfumed things show this particularly clearly. As long as they exist, something is diffused from themselves around them, and what is near enjoys their existence. And all things when they come to perfection produce; the One is always perfect and therefore produces everlastingly; and its product is less than itself. (V.1.6, 30-9)<sup>1</sup>

We see here also the idea of things which retain their being producing from the unity of their substances a lower image of themselves. I say that it is the unity of the substance which produces because it is the *επεργεια της ουσιας*, a substantial concentration of unity,

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<sup>1</sup>We should not worry here about the apparently predicative claim that Plotinus makes about the One, by adding the epithet "perfect" to it. This will not undermine its simplicity, for, as we shall see in Section IV of the next chapter, Plotinus draws an important distinction between "speaking the One" and "speaking of the One." The former is impossible because the one transcends rational thinking and consequently predication. Any predicative statements we make about the One fall under the category of "speaking of the One", and this reflects the multiplicity in our thinking, and not in the One. I have suggested something like this in my treatment of the *Didaskalikos*.

hypostatic or otherwise, that gives off the ενεργεια εκ της ουσιας.

A summary, then, of principles involved in positive production might include the following:<sup>1</sup> 1) The agent is more powerful than the product,<sup>2</sup> and all things are ultimately grounded in the all-powerful One; 2) the generator is prior to and sustains what is posterior to it;<sup>3</sup> 3) the generator is of a higher actuality than what is generated;<sup>4</sup> 4) the power to generate requires a degree of substantive, concentrated unity; 5) the activity of generation is compatible with rest, since the end of its activity is always achieved and not planned.<sup>5</sup> What I mean by this last is that the emanative power of "generation" is not deliberative or kinetic, but rather the ontological consequence (mediately or immediately) of the efficacious energeia of the One.

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<sup>1</sup>cp Katz, pp. 11 ff.

<sup>2</sup>III.5.3; V.2.2; VI.4.10

<sup>3</sup>III.9.3; V.V.6; V.6.6

<sup>4</sup>II.5.3

<sup>5</sup>V.4.2, V.1.6; V.2.1

Positive production applies not only to the emanation of Nous from the One, but also explains the production of Soul from Nous, material things from Soul, and the effects of material things from them. One suspects that at the level of "material emanation," the unity of material things is too weak (i.e. not unitary enough) to produce any substantial emanation. The whole process of emanation, from the One to the material effects of things seems to involve the generation of successive stages of declining unity. The stages of Nous and Soul are "hypostatic," by which I mean that they are clearly demarcated levels of unity. We have seen this tendency towards hypostatisation in Numenius. The fact that each hypostasis conveys a lesser degree of unity on what it unifies leads to another Plotinian axiom, that of "indexed unity". This axiom applies to hypostases only and not material things, so before I examine "indexed unity," it is useful to discuss yet another axiom first, one which is seen more clearly in terms of material things, and this is the axiom of "non-convertibility".

### 3. *Non-Convertibility*

A second "axiom" that is important to keep in mind is that being and unity are not convertible. We have already seen this in Plotinus' critique of Aristotle. While the amount of reality a hypostatic relation possesses is "indexed" to the amount of unity it possesses, being is always dependent on unity.<sup>1</sup> What I mean by "indexed" in this context is that the "closer" to the One a hypostasis or particular is, the more real it is. Says Plotinus,

But we exist more when we turn to [the One]  
and our well-being is there, but being far  
from him is nothing else than existing  
less. (VI.9.9, 12-3)

The goal of human life is to "unify" the self in higher and higher degrees, culminating in a unity with our principle and source, the One. This suggests, then, that the more unified we are, the more real we are. But, as we saw in Plotinus' critique of Aristotle's convertibility

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<sup>1</sup>Gerson (1994, pg 198) says the following: "Being must have some sort of unity...although unity need not have being...To put this more exactly, finite being and finite unity are convertible, but finite being is not convertible absolutely with being. The dependence of being on unity and the independence unity has of being is the simplest expression of the fundamental consequence of Plotinus' critique of Aristotle." I think it makes more sense to say (contra Gerson) that finite being and finite unity are: 1) hypostatically indexed (for which see the next section), 2) not indexed in material things, 3) not convertible.

thesis, being is dependent on unity. So while being and unity are "indexed," there is always a dependent relation of the former on the latter, even at the hypostatic levels of Nous and Soul.

Plotinus also seems to want to deny a clear indexing of being and unity at the level of the material particular. Material particulars are corruptible, and their unity and being are also in flux, whereas hypostases do not suffer the encroachment of a material principle (or a distancing from the One) to the extent that their unity and being is subject to indeterminacy.<sup>1</sup> Particulars, especially "ensouled" human particulars, are engaged in a moral/metaphysical pursuit of ever increasing unity. Hence, concrete particulars may have the same degree of existence but vary in terms of their unity:

a thing is not...one in proportion to its being, but it is possible to have no less real existence but to be less one. For an army or a chorus has no less being than a house, but all the same it is less one. It seems then that the one in each thing looks more to the good, and in so far as it attains to the good it is also one, and being more or less one lies in this; for each thing wishes not just for being, but

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<sup>1</sup>VI.3.2, 1-4.



for being together with the good. (VI.2.11,  
14-21)

In this passage, it is clear that the existence of material things is *dependent on*, not *convertible with* unity, and it is from unity that their existence receives its goodness.<sup>1</sup>

Plotinus is speaking of material particulars at the same "level" of reality, such as the unity of a house or the unity of an army. In the case of material things, each thing has the same degree of existence, although it may be unitary in better or worse ways depending on its susceptibility to division. A house made of many bricks has more unity since its unity is more stable than a unity of such things as an army or choir, which are unitary only in so far as their members stay together. The fact that *people* have aims other than those of the aggregate they composed whereas *bricks* for the most part do not (although they may break and threaten the integral unity of the house), suggests that the unity of a choir or army (composed of "autonomous" humans) is less stable,

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<sup>1</sup>At V.9.2, 15, Plotinus says that, "if an individual loses its one, it will not exist at all."

that their parts are more distinct than those of a house.<sup>1</sup>

If a thing exists as a magnitude it will have parts by definition, and the parts must tend to unity in some way if the magnitude is going to be an entity. "So through magnitude and as far as depends on magnitude [a thing] loses itself; but as far as it possesses a one, it possesses itself."<sup>2</sup> In fact, says Plotinus, while one may wonder at the infinite variety in the universe, it is good (καλον) because it has been circumscribed by unity, and has not been left to "escape to infinity" (φυγειν εις την απειραν)".<sup>3</sup> This notion of goodness also applies to Nous, where everything is equally substantial because it is "contained" concomitantly within the monadological system of self-intellection. The higher degree of unity within Nous accounts for its higher degree of being, and its unity is found through the limiting of being by

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<sup>1</sup>Armstrong (1988), pg 142 notes that this is a "Stoic scale of degrees of unification." The very same notion, using chorus, army and ship (which Plotinus uses in VI.9.1) is found in Philo's *On Genesis*, I,15.

<sup>2</sup>VI.6.1

<sup>3</sup>*ibid*

thought. The lack of material recalcitrance at the level of Nous means also that there is less susceptibility to division in Nous. Its being and unity are eternal and unchanging.

The fact that concrete particulars are corruptible means that their unity is susceptible to dissolution, and when corruptible things lose their unity (the principle of all existent things) they no longer exist. This axiomatic assumption of non-convertibility is consistent with the belief that the cosmos cannot stay in existence of its own power. The physical world, its immediate source, Soul, and in turn its source, Nous all require a completely unified source superior to them.<sup>1</sup> Nothing can exist without both deriving its unity from the One and striving to attain the unity of the One in its own way. All things, says Plotinus, "originate from the One and strive towards the One."<sup>2</sup>

The axiom denying the convertibility of being and unity is not (in the passages we have cited here) a response to Aristotle *per se*, but rather an attempt to

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<sup>1</sup>Katz, pg. 39

<sup>2</sup>VI.2.11

engage a hierarchy of the dependence of things on unity. However, the rejection of the convertibility thesis, in conjunction with the multiplicity of the Unmoved Mover, shows that Aristotle's first principle is (in Plotinus' eyes) inadequate, since it stands in need of explanation. The implication of this is that *a being cannot be the principle of being*.<sup>1</sup> What Plotinus ends up doing, in effect, is re-establishing what convertibility denied, namely the Platonic metaphysical hierarchy, albeit within a different metaphysical structure of emanationism and the utter transcendency of the One.

#### 4. Indexed Unity

As for *hypostatic levels* or degrees of reality, (in contradistinction to material particulars) it seems undeniable that there is a *proportionate* indexing of being, unity and goodness. Nous is less or worse than the

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<sup>1</sup>Cp Gerson, pp 200-1. My primary disagreement with Gerson is that where he believes that the *pros hen* equivocal nature of substance ought to be causal, I think that it was not meant to be so in Aristotle. It is causal in Plotinus, but I think that Plotinus' approach to non-convertibility is due more to seeking prior unity than seeking causal links to the Unmoved Mover, although the latter does play a role. The axiom of positive production is cast in terms of passing on unity, and subsequently being, and hence the question is more importantly one of unity as opposed to one of being.

One (though not bad or evil) because it has multiplicity, and Soul is lower than Nous for the same reason,<sup>1</sup> and material particulars are worse yet again:

all things try to represent the same [One]  
but some attain only a remote resemblance,  
some come nearer and attain it already more  
truly in Intellect: for soul is one and  
Intellect and being are still more one.  
(VI.2.11, 9-12)

Given Plotinus' predilection to see the One as the Good and to make comparative claims about the hypostatic levels of reality, it follows that the further away from the One a hypostatic level is, the less good it is.<sup>2</sup> This is the consequence of setting Unity as the standard of all existence.

Plotinus then can be seen to hold to a conceptual corollary of the "indexed" nature of Being, Goodness, Reality and Unity<sup>3</sup> at the hypostatic level. Deck notes that Plotinus uses 'reality' in a non-technical sense, usually in the broader sense of meaning simply "non-

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<sup>1</sup>O'Meara, pg. 49.

<sup>2</sup>VI.2.11, 26-9; VI.9.9, 12-3.

<sup>3</sup>cp. Gerson (1994), pg. 9.

fictitious";<sup>1</sup> "Being," however is a technical term, which Plotinus uses "in the classic Greek philosophic sense of that which is eternal, changeless, limited, internally one."<sup>2</sup> At the hypostatic level, the more unity a thing has, (i.e. the closer it is to the ultimate source of its unity, the One) the more real, good, and existent it is.

This however is not to suggest that, the One is a "paradigm" of Being and Unity; the One is a principle which is beyond these categorisations. The transcendence of the ground of all things means that all relations, even the "otherness" of the Nous and the One are non-reciprocal;<sup>3</sup> The One cannot be "other" than anything, for this would predicate of the One one of the "primary genera," which would undermine its simplicity:

For since the nature of the One is generative of all things it is not any one of them. It is not therefore something or qualified or quantified or intellect or soul; it is not in movement or at rest, not in place or in time, but itself by itself of single form, or rather formless, being before all form, before movement and before

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<sup>1</sup>Deck, pg. 16. n 23.

<sup>2</sup>*ibid.* However, as I have already noted, Plotinus does employ a sense of "unlimited being" as well.

<sup>3</sup>Gerson (1994), pg. 34.

rest; for these pertain to being and are what make it many. (VI.9.3, 40-5)

The axioms I have been discussing are derived from considerations of relations of hypostases and particulars to the One. The "nature" of the One is induced<sup>1</sup> by an apophatic abduction to a first principle that explains these hypostatic and entitative relations.<sup>2</sup> But to say that the One has "more being" or that it is "more unified," suggests that the One can be compared to Nous or Soul as if they are on equal footing, and this would in some sense deny the utter transcendence of the One. On the other hand, given the non-technical sense of reality in Plotinus, it may be acceptable to say (in a qualified, metaphorical, sense) that the one is "more real."

## 5. *The Priority of the Simple*

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<sup>1</sup>V.3.15; V.3.17; VI.4.10; VI.7.23; VI.8.18

<sup>2</sup>It is indeed an odd thing that Plotinus has so much to say about the ineffable One. Rist (1967), pg. 32 helpfully suggests, "...the very fact that Plotinus can argue to [the One's] existence from its effects, can demonstrate all these finite beings which exhibit a 'trace' of the One that there must be a One itself indicates that there is some manner in which we can know something of the One, even if we cannot grasp it essentially."

The last axiom I wish to consider with regard to the function of unity in Plotinus' system is the idea of the priority of the simple, or as O'Meara calls it, "The Principle of Prior Simplicity". We have also seen this concept at work in Plotinus' critique of Aristotle, in so far as any multiplicity is grounded in a prior unity. Plotinus says in a plethora of participles at III.8.9 that, "τουγαργεννηθεντοςπανταχουτογεννωναπλουστερον."<sup>1</sup> This axiom may be seen from two sides. In the most general sense, the priority of the simple is an example of a Platonic "one over many" relationship (or eidetic inversion),<sup>2</sup> whereby many instances of something are related to something which is ontologically prior:

for there can be no many if there is not a one from which, or in which these are, or in general a one which is counted first before the others, which must be taken alone, itself by itself. (V.6.3, 2-5)

Hence Nous, as a composite of self-intellecting forms, must be explained by the One which is prior and simple, and the many instances of material unity must be explained (via Soul) by the existence of Forms in Nous,

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<sup>1</sup>III.8.9, 43

<sup>2</sup>see Chapter V, Section 4.2.



which is more real and simple than its material instantiations.<sup>1</sup> The other side of this axiom, given the axiom of positive production, is that that which is simple is also capable of producing and sustaining its instantiations. One sees this in the opening lines of V.4, entitled, "How That Which Comes After the First Comes From the First":

If there is anything after the First, it must necessarily come from the first; it must either come from it directly, or have its ascent back to it through the beings between, and there must be an order of seconds and thirds, the second going back to the first, and the third to the second. For there must be something simple before all things that come after it, existing by itself, not mixed with the things that derive from it, and all the same able to present in a different way to these other things, being really one, and not a different being and then one... (V.4.1, 1-9)

The One emanates Nous, and Nous emanates Soul, and Soul gives rise to material entities. This does not mean that all things are "contained" in the One, if by this we are tempted to conceive all material entities and forms existing concretely in the One. Rather, it is to suggest that lesser instantiations of a prior simple depend on

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<sup>1</sup>V.6.3, 5-25

that (more) simple actuality in order to exist at all. The manifold expressions of unity in the kosmos, from material things to Nous itself, are mediately accounted for and sustained by their immediate prior, and ultimately accounted for by the primordial simple, the One, in an emanative causal series.

The implications of this axiom are that the One cannot be the same as being, that which it grounds, since if it is identical with being, it will be multiple,<sup>1</sup> since being, a monadology of all the Forms, is multiple; if something is many there must be a one before the many. If the One is all things, says Plotinus, it must either be each separate thing, or it will be all of them collected. But if it is all of them collected, then unity will be posterior to the unities of which it is composed. If being as a whole is a multiplicity and if unity is simple, then, *contra* Aristotle, unity must be different than being.<sup>2</sup> Neither can unity be identical with the being of any one thing, as we saw in Chapter VII, since if things are to be distinguished from each other, they

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<sup>1</sup>V.6.3.10

<sup>2</sup>VI.9.2.17-9, 21-4; see Chapter IV, Section 4; Chapter VII, Section 3.

must have unity as well as their distinguishing feature; otherwise nothing will distinguish them. Hence there must be a prior unity in which all things participate.<sup>1</sup> Says Plotinus:

For all things [together the totality of being] are not an origin, but they came from an origin, and [the One] is no more all things or one of them; [if it is, it will not be of such a kind] that it can generate all things, and not be a multiplicity but the origin of multiplicity; for that which generates is always simpler than that which is generated. If this, then, generated Intellect, it must be simpler than Intellect. But if anyone should think that the One itself is also all things, then either it will be each one taken separately or all of them together. If, then, it is all of them collected together, it will be posterior to all things; but if it is prior to all things, all things will be other than it, and it will be other than all things, but if it and all things are simultaneous, then it will not be an origin. But it must be an origin, and exist before all things, in order that all things, too, may exist after it. (III.8.9, 40-50)

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<sup>1</sup>III.8.9, 48 ff.

If something is many, such as Nous, or indeed the cosmos,  
there must be a one before the many which is "αὐτομόνον  
εἶναι."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>V.6.6, 10 ff.

## 6. Conclusion

Our four axioms point in the direction of a One which grounds the unity, being and multiplicity of the cosmos. Positive production supplies a continuity to being that emanates, via the lower hypostases, to the sense world. The denial of convertibility suggests that being is dependent upon unity and suggests a faithfulness to the Platonic metaphysical hierarchy. The idea of indexed unity shows that the closer one is to the principle of the cosmos, the more unity, goodness, being and reality it has. The priority of the simple, finally, shows that the principle of all is beyond multiplicity, and since being is by its very nature multiple, the principle of all is beyond being. It should be relatively clear by now that a key element in Plotinus' system is to reveal the inadequacy (in his eyes) of a metaphysics proposed by Aristotle as an alternative to Platonism. The movement towards a "One beyond being", grounded in the preceding conceptual axioms reflects a desire to transcend Aristotle's transcendent, to seek a principle of unity that grounds being.

With some understanding of these axioms in hand, we are now prepared to examine some of the implications of Plotinus' conception of unity for his first principle, the One. My approach in the next chapter will be to show why unity must be "beyond being," and "beyond knowledge," then discuss what it means to "be" beyond being and to "know" beyond knowledge. By the time I get to discussing a One "beyond being," however, my arguments to those who would suggest that the One is really not "beyond being" should be clear; the number of times throughout the *Enneads* that Plotinus repeatedly and uncompromisingly states that the One is beyond being, however, ought to satisfy even the most strident of equivocal interpretations of this notion. I do believe that negative claims about the ineffable One ought to be taken as having more weight than metaphorical expressions of its "existence" that result from the paucity of language.

## Chapter IX - Unity

### 1. Introduction

Our considerations of Plotinus' "axioms," and his responses to his predecessors, show that being is dependent on unity. The "One" of Parmenides, the various gods of the Middle Platonists, the first principle of Aristotle are all *beings*. Further, the Unmoved Mover in Aristotle, or its analogue in various Middle Platonic metaphysical systems, is a *thinking being*. Plotinus maintains that any being is by its very nature multiple, and, in accordance with the principle of prior simplicity, multiplicity requires a prior unity which grounds it. He also maintains that thinking is by its very nature multiple, and (in accordance with the same aforementioned axiom) requires a prior unity which grounds it. Plotinus therefore thinks that whatever grounds the being and thinking of the cosmos (i.e. the *existent cosmos*) cannot itself be a being, or a thinking being.

Plotinus believes that there is duality in the very notion of thinking as the Greek philosophers (especially Aristotle) understand it, for it implies a thinker and a thought.<sup>1</sup> It is also hard to deny that being itself is multiple, when one understands it as "limited", for this implies both a limit and the limited, and the primary genera that go along with being. Plotinus is willing to grant that there can be a great deal of unity in being or thought; this kind of philosophising yields the unchangeable One-many that is Nous. Since being and thinking are multiple, they cannot serve as such a principle. Plotinus also thinks, in accordance with the axiom of positive production, that the principle of unity must be a source and a ground of being. Further, to his mind, all of Greek philosophy is seeking a principle of unity which grounds multiplicity. One gets a good sense of Plotinus' approach to the thought of his predecessors in his summary of earlier philosophers in *Enneads* V.1, which stands in stark contrast to Aristotle's summary in *Metaphysics* A. In the *Enneads* Plotinus claims that his predecessors sought a principle

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<sup>1</sup>cp Gerson (1994, pp 194 ff.



of unity; in the *Metaphysics*, Aristotle claims that they were seeking the causes of being. One may argue that these amount to the same thing, in so far as For Plotinus, unity is the ultimate cause of being. But for Plotinus, the ultimate cause of being, the principle of unity is *beyond being*, and the source of being. As he says in *Enneads* V.1:

For the soul now knows that these things must be, but longs to answer the question repeatedly discussed also by the ancient philosophers, how from the One, if it is such as we say it is, anything else, whether a multiplicity, or a dyad or a number, came into existence, and why it did not on the contrary remain by itself, but such a great multiplicity flowed from it as that which is seen to exist in beings, but which we think it right to refer back to the One. (V.1.6, 2-8 )

The "question" asked here is framed in terms similar to those of Proclus' Speusippus. It also speaks to Aristotle's question of how Plato's One and Forms are ontologically efficacious. Aristotle's solution was to make substance the ground of being and unity, and to posit being and thought *par excellence* as a remote final cause. Given Plotinus' conviction, that True Being and True Thought have their source in something *other than*,

and *prior* to them, he must explain how his One is beyond both knowing and being.

What I propose to do in this chapter is threefold. In section 2, I want to look at Plotinus fusion of negative and positive theology. I suggest that the Platonic notion of "eidetic inversion"<sup>1</sup> is the "positive" side of his theology, whereby the multiplicity of Nous is "projected" onto the One without affirming of the One the characteristics of Nous. The fact that Plotinus denies characteristics to the One points to a desire to assert its simplicity. In so far as the One is the source of multiplicity and a sort of "unified potency for limited being", positive theology (productive power) meets negative theology (apophatic simplicity).

Section 3 discusses Gerson's suggestion that the One is the primary sense of being, and that Nous is to be understood equivocally in relation to it. This is an interpretation of Plotinus in terms of a sort of *pros hen* equivocality. I suggest that because Plotinus maintains that the One is beyond being, he would not accept such an

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<sup>1</sup>see Chapter V, Section 4.2.

analysis. This section also serves to show what Plotinus means by saying that the One is beyond Being.

Finally, in Section 4, I discuss Armstrong's attempt to say that the One is a "one-many," like Nous. Armstrong is not suggesting that Plotinus explicitly says this; rather he thinks that it is a logical conclusion of Plotinus' reference to the One's *οὐσιᾶ*. In response to this, I suggest that Armstrong's position assumes we can have rational knowledge of, and make discursive distinctions about, the One. I point to Plotinus' distinction between "speaking the One" and "speaking of the One". "Speaking the One" is not possible, for the One is ineffable; "Speaking of the One" is what we do, and in so far as we, limited minds, do it, we only know of the One, but we do not know the One itself.

The upshot of this final chapter, then, is that we can only refer to the One, but we cannot know it. The One is at best a principle that is necessary for the grounding of the cosmos, and we know of it only in virtue of the logical necessity that requires unity to explain, ground, and sustain multiplicity.

## 2. Positive and Negative Theology

Armstrong remarks<sup>1</sup> that Plotinus mixes the elements of positive and negative theology together in "a most disconcerting way."<sup>2</sup> Indeed at V.2.1, Plotinus says that,

The One is all things and not a single one of them: it is the principle [αρχη] of all things, not all things, but all things have that other kind of transcendent existence; for in a way they do occur in the One; or rather they are not there yet, but they will be. How then do all things come from the One, which is simple and has in it no diverse variety, or any sort of doubleness [διπλοης]? It is because there is nothing at all in it that all things come from it: in order that being may exist, the One is not being, but the generator of being.  
(V.2.1,1-8)

Unlike Armstrong, I do not find Plotinus the least bit disconcerting.<sup>3</sup> I believe that we make some sense out of

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<sup>1</sup>Armstrong, (1970), pg. 1.

<sup>2</sup>Plotinus says that the One is and is not (VI.7.38; VI.8.8), subsists and does not (VI.8.20; VI.8.11), is act and is not (VI.8.20; III.8.11), is free and is not free (VI.8.20; VI.8.8) has life and does not have life (V.4.2; V.7.17).

<sup>3</sup>Bussanich notes that the overwhelming evidence is in favour of an emphasis on the negative conception of the One. ("Inner Life," pg. 163). A thought from Deck (pg 1) here is also useful, but it cannot be the whole truth: "The One is or has all these, to the extent that neither they nor the being or having of them involves duality. When Plotinus denies an attribute of the One, he does so to affirm the simplicity of the One; when he affirms an attribute, he shows that the One, although simple, is not negative." It is true that Plotinus wants to deny duality, but since this implies both being and  
(continued...)

why he makes these apparently contradictory claims. In the above passage, Plotinus makes a number of claims. To make an assessment of the passage above manageable, I will split it into two halves and deal with each half by calling upon some of the axioms and influences we have discussed in the previous chapters.

**1) "The One is all things and not a single one of them: it is the principle [ἀρχή] of all things, not all things, but all things have that other kind of transcendent existence; for in a way they do occur in the One; or rather they are not there yet, but they will be."**

This may be explained in terms of the monadological approach to Nous, and it is also useful to keep in mind Albinus' apophasis. The monadological approach to Nous is such that the Forms and Nous have their individuation through self-intellection, or the limiting of being by thought. There is no such limitation of the One, since it beyond both being and thought. Hence it is "all things" in a kind of "positive potency". This

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<sup>3</sup>(...continued)

its characteristics, the denial of what would normally be attributes of being is much more significant than I think Deck admits. Saying that the One has "attributes" is a metaphorical claim at best; it certainly does not "have" them in the way that Nous, Soul or material beings do, and we must think of the One having attributes via analogical "projection" from our philosophising about Nous.

is, as Gerson suggests, a potency for finite being, the limiting that occurs in Nous. Says Plotinus:

All things are the one and not the One:  
they are he because they come from him;  
they are not because it is in abiding by  
himself that he gives them. (V.2.2, 25-7)

Hence the One is all things because it is potentially all things, where potency is a sort of productive capacity. This productive capacity comes from its perfection, in accordance with the axiom of positive production. The One is "not a single one of them" because it is not limited in the way that being is limited, or by the way that thought limits. Now, before we proceed to the next claim, I should say a little more about this idea of "positive potency."

That the One "is" all of the beings which come after it suggests that it may be regarded as an *επεργεια*. For in order for it to be "all of them", there must be some positive or actual "nature" that the One possesses. The *επεργεια* of the One is to be understood as a higher activity than that of substance.<sup>1</sup> We have already briefly

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<sup>1</sup>cp. Gerson (1994) pg. 22; although characteristically Plotinus denies this apophatically in an attempt to respect the simplicity of the One. V.7.17; V.8-16; VI.8.20

seen Plotinus' distinction between the *ενεργεια της ουσιας* of the One and its *ενεργεια εκ της ουσιας*, and I shall return to this notion in more detail in a moment. The One's *ενεργεια της ουσιας* may be said to be "all things" in so far as it is the cause of them all, and they could have come from no other cause. The effect, which is the *ενεργεια εκ της ουσιας* that becomes Nous, (and via Nous, Soul and the rest of the cosmos) implies that there is an *actual* cause of that effect, and that cause is the *ενεργεια της ουσιας*.

To say that the One is *not* Being, or Forms, or Soul, or concrete particulars, but is their sustainer and source, suggests that it is a sort of *δυναμις*,<sup>1</sup> that it stands in potency to these limited actualities because they are limited and it is not. Professor Armstrong notes that *δυναμις* in Plotinus does not always carry with it the negative connotations that it does in Aristotle's notion

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<sup>1</sup>V.3.15; III.8.10; V.1.7; V.3.16; V.4.1; V.4.2; V.5.12; VI.7.32; VI.7.40; VI.8.9; VI.9.5

of *δυναμις*, but that it ought to be regarded instead as "productive power."<sup>1</sup>

In Enneads III.8.10. In response to the question, 'what is it that is not one of all things but before all things,' Plotinus answers "*Δυναμις των παντων*," and Armstrong translates: "the productive power of all things."<sup>2</sup> Again Armstrong renders *δυναμις* thus in VI.7.32:

Therefore the productive power [*δυναμις*] of all is the flower of beauty, a beauty which makes beauty. For it generates beauty and makes it more beautiful by the excess of beauty which comes from it, so that it is the principle [*αρχη*] of beauty and the term [*περας*] of beauty. But since it is the principle of beauty it makes that beautiful of which it is the principle, and makes that beautiful not in shape; but it makes the very beauty which comes to be from it to be shapeless, but in shape in another, but by itself shapeless. Therefore that which participates in beauty is shaped, not the beauty. (VI.7.32, 32-39)

The fact that beauty by itself is "shapeless" and comes to be "shaped" by participation of posterior instantiations, suggests that the One as *δυναμις*, is

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<sup>1</sup>Armstrong, (1988), vol III, pp 394-5.

<sup>2</sup>III.8.10, 1



δυναμις, precisely because it is not limited in the way that Forms or Nous or Being are limited. Hence Gerson's suggestion that the One is a potency of "finite ενεργεια" is apt.<sup>1</sup> As Gerson puts it, finite being is contained within the One, but not as finite being.<sup>2</sup> This sense of δυναμις helps us to make sense of the odd use of tense in the main passage we are examining. Plotinus says that all things "occur in the One; or rather they are not there yet, but they will be." The use of tenses to draw logical distinctions is commonplace; what makes Plotinus' use of tenses unusual in this case is that the notion of δυναμις as "potency of finitude" he is employing is not so commonplace. All things are 'not in the One yet' because in the One they are indistinct and unlimited. In the act of limiting Being (thinking), Nous looks towards the One, yielding a "rational" or "Formal" version of what is before the rational. Now, if there were no Nous, it would be impossible to claim that all things are "in the One", for there would be no distinctions, no plurality, no

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<sup>1</sup>Gerson, 1994, pg 214

<sup>2</sup>*ibid*

many. Only *after* the limitation of infinite being by Nous is such a claim possible. Hence "all things" only make their appearance in the "future," when Nous allows for the distinction and limitation of the things that "in a way, occur in the One."

There is another distinction that helps us make sense of the first half of our passage. It is the distinction between the *ενεργεια της ουσιας* and the *ενεργεια εκ της ουσιας*. The *ενεργεια της ουσιας* of the One must be understood as the unlimited source of all things. This stands in potency to the limitation of its *ενεργεια εκ της ουσιας* by and in Nous. Things which are "in" the One (although this is metaphorical at best) are in it "dynamically."

At VI.8, where Plotinus is discussing the "freedom" of the One, he speaks of the *ενεργεια* of the One as its *υποστασις θετεον*, a kind of metaphorical expression of its "existence", an existence which is explicitly said to be free of *ουσια*. Hence the notion of the *ενεργεια της ουσιας* of the One is also metaphorical at best; the One

has no ουσια properly speaking, if we understand ουσια as limited. Drawing a distinction between the ενεργεια της ουσιας and the ενεργεια εκ της ουσιας may be a useful way to contrast the unlimited and unchangeable nature of the One with its effect (which is limited by the monadology that is Nous). We must not take the idea of the One's ουσια too literally. Says Plotinus:

Nor should we be afraid to assume that the first activity [ενεργειαν] is without substance [ανευουσιας], but posit this very fact as his, so to speak, existence [την οιον υποστασιν θετεον]. But if one posited an existence without activity, the principle would be defective and the most perfect of all imperfect. And if one adds activity, one does not keep the One. If then the activity is more perfect than the substance, and the first is more perfect, then the first will be activity. In his activity, therefore, he is already the first, and it cannot be that he was before he came to be, but already altogether was. Now certainly an activity not enslaved to substance is purely and simply free [ελευθερα]. . ." (VI.8.20, 9-19)

In short, then, Plotinus is attempting to articulate a notion of ενεργεια that is beyond any normal conception of that term. Normally we expect that an activity has as its

source in some kind of ουσία. While Plotinus does refer metaphorically to the εὐεργεία τῆς οὐσίας of the One, the explicit claim that it is ἀνευ οὐσίας carries more weight, I think, since an absolute denial ought to be taken more literally than the use of analogous terms in cases where we are dealing with the ineffable.<sup>1</sup> Since οὐσία *qua* οὐσία is limited, the εὐεργεία is affirmed of the One in such a way as to render it "free" of the limitation that οὐσία implies.

We may now turn to the second half of our "split passage".

**2) "How then do all things come from the One, which is simple and has in it no diverse variety, or any sort of doubleness? It is because there is nothing at all in it that all things come from it: in order that being may exist, the One is not being, but the generator of being."**

When we appeal to our axioms, we see that our One is metaphysically prior because it is absolutely more powerful (positive production), absolutely more simple (prior simplicity), absolutely independent, that on which being depends absolutely (non-convertibility), and

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<sup>1</sup> I shall have more to say about this in Section 4.

absolutely more Good (indexed unity). In short, the application of these axioms through Plotinian spectacles requires that the One be absolutely more powerful, immutable, self-sufficient<sup>1</sup> and simple than that which it grounds.<sup>2</sup> The things which it grounds are not self-sufficient, and therefore strive after the unity that the One grants. By contrast, there is nothing the One could or would seek:

A principle is not in need [ἐνδεής] of the things which come after it, and the principle of all things needs none of them. For whatever is in need is in need as striving towards its principle; but if the One is in need of anything, it is obviously seeking not to be one; so it will be in need of its destroyer; but everything which is said to be in need is in need of its well-being and its preserver. So that there is nothing good for the One; so then it does not wish for anything; but it transcends good, and is good not for itself

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<sup>1</sup>On self-sufficiency, I note elsewhere that the One is beyond it; but here again we must take account of the distinction between speaking the one and speaking of it. (Section 4) Plotinus suggests the One is self sufficient at: I.8.2; II.9.1; V.4.1.. etc.) cp Gerson (1994) pg. 17.

<sup>2</sup>This is not, however, to "predicate" these "absolutes" of the One. We can only speak this way from the perspective of Nous looking towards the One. (See Chapter VIII, Section 4.) This kind of comparison is, as it were, unidirectional, or knowledge by projection of attributes known by limited reason onto the unlimited one. Hence too, we can "speak of the One," but we cannot "speak the One." (See Section 4).

but for others, if anything is able to participate in it. (VI.9.6, 34-43)

Plotinus seems to base the idea of a principle being in need on the presumption that needful things need something which will benefit them, or will be good for them. (One may think in terms of the Socratic paradox of 'no man doing wrong knowingly' - we might think we need false apparent goods, but in reality, they are not what we need.) The idea of needing good suggests the basic assumption that things do not seek their own destruction. By defining need as "need for some good," Plotinus suggests that anything "in need" participates (gets what it needs) from some higher, more unified good (in accordance with the axioms of indexed unity and prior simplicity). Nous participates in the One, but there is nothing higher than the One in which it participates, hence it is not in need. The dialectical move which Plotinus makes, i.e. saying that if the One needed anything, it would need its destroyer, suggests that nothing but the one is truly unified. One is reminded of Parmenides of Elea's claim that if being needed anything "it would need all," reflecting the fact that the only

thing "being" could need is not-being.<sup>1</sup> For Plotinus, the only thing the One could need (the only thing it does not have) is "not one," or multiplicity.

Since that which "participates" in the One is (along with the rest of the cosmos) the monadology of Being and Thought, understood as the unification of Forms and *in* Forms, of Mind and *in* Mind, the One is more simple and more powerful than Being, Mind, and Forms. This is the positive side of Plotinus theology. On the negative side, all those things which are predicated of Nous and of Forms, which make them multiple, must be denied of the One. We cannot *predicate* being, life, thinking, quiddity, οὐσία, or anything that gives rise to multiplicity of the One.<sup>2</sup> In fact the One should not even be called "one," says Plotinus, but we give it a name because "we want to indicate it to ourselves as best we can." (V,5.6, 25-6)<sup>3</sup> The primary difficulty, it seems, is that to predicate anything of it is to "import duality" into it:<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>DK 8:33-4

<sup>2</sup>cp. Rist, "The One of Plotinus," pg. 83.

<sup>3</sup>cp V.3.14, 1-6; VI.9.3, 49-55; VI.9.5, 30-46.

<sup>4</sup>Gerson, God and Greek Philosophy, pg. 213.

Ἡ ἐστὶ μὲν τὸ μὴδὲν τούτων ὧν ἐστὶν ἀρχή, τοιοῦτο  
 μέντοι οἷον μὴδενὸς αὐτοῦ κατηγορεῖσθαι δυναμένου,  
 μὴ ὄντος, μὴ οὐσίας, μὴ ζώης, τὸ ὑπὲρ πάντα αὐτῶν  
 εἶναι. (III.8.10, 27-31)

It is not one of those things of which it  
 is the principle; certainly it is similar,  
 though of it nothing can be predicated, not  
 being [of any sort] or substance [of any  
 sort], not life [of any sort], such that it  
 is above all these things.<sup>1</sup>

The question is how we are to understand the One  
 as the "ἀρχή" of being. Emanation is the process by which  
 the One "gives rise to being," but what is it that  
 actually gives rise to that process? The axiom of  
 positive production suggests that anything which is  
 perfect creates. The axiom of prior simplicity indicates  
 that it is absolutely simple. The logic of the eidetic  
 inversion shows that if the One is to ground Nous, Nous  
 and the things within must in some way be like

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<sup>1</sup>My translation. I find Armstrong's translation somewhat  
 misleading. His translation reads: "It is certainly not one of  
 the things of which it is origin; it is of such a kind  
 [τοιοῦτο μέντοι], though nothing can be predicated of it, not  
 being, not substance, not life, as to be above all of these  
 things." Armstrong's translation of τοιοῦτο μέντοι as "it is of  
 such a kind" is consistent with the normal use of τοιοῦτο as  
 referring commonly to the foregoing phrase (cp Liddell and  
 Scott, "τοιοῦτο") but this makes the One similar in kind to the  
 "things of which it is origin". I think all that Plotinus is  
 saying is that it is not completely disconnected with them.



"instantiations" of the One, on the analogy of material things as instantiations of Forms.<sup>1</sup>It would be wrong to say that the One is being, or Form, or Mind, or contains them. Instead, I think that we ought to think of the One's power to produce as a projection of the concepts of unity, actuality and thought that exist in Nous to a logically required source which is a completely simple principle:

What then could the One be, and what nature could it have? There is nothing surprising in its being difficult to say, when it is not even easy to say what being or Form is; but we do have a knowledge based on the Forms. (VI.9.3, 1-4)

Thinking of Nous as a monadology, is, as I have been suggesting, extremely helpful in seeing how that multiplicity-in-unity attains an identity of its forms through monadological self-intellection. Denying being and thought of the One also removes the ability to keep what it produces and grounds separate from each other. For one may wonder how the "Ideas in the Intellect" do not all collapse into one, since Nous is a Unity. The reason Forms can be separate in Nous is that they are

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<sup>1</sup>cp Katz, pg. 14, 37-8.

self-intellecting. If one removes both limited being and thought from a conception of Nous, one is left with an approximation of the indefinite *επεργεια* of the One, an *επεργεια* which "contains all things." One gets a sense of the idea of projection to a ground, linked to the idea of apophasis, in the following passage:

Why then, if [the One] is not in movement is it not at rest? Because each or both of these must necessarily pertain to being, and what is at rest is so by rest, and is not the same as rest; so rest will be incidental to it and it will not be the same as rest. For to say that it is the cause [αιτιον] is not to predicate something incidental to it, but of us, because we have something from it while that One is in itself; but one who speaks precisely should not say "that," [εκεινου] or "is" [ουτος]. (VI.9.3, 45-52)

Plotinus is here denying motion and rest, two of Plato's "primary kinds," of the One. Implicit in the denial is that those things which would be predicated of it (if we follow his way of thinking) would be prior to it, in accordance with a Platonic way of thinking about predication as participation. We see also the idea of "projecting" predicates which belong properly to being onto the One. Plotinus is careful to complete the thought

by denying limiting references of quiddity or being to the One. We have then two strains of thought in Plotinus' discussion of the One. One strain, a negative, apophatic one, asserts its simplicity; it is a denial of everything that may be asserted of thought or being. At the same time, there is a second, positive strain, which draws on the idea that some kind of actuality is needed to produce the effect that is Nous and subsequently Soul and the cosmos). The upshot is that when the power of the One meets the simplicity of the One, positive theology synergises with negative theology.

But the question still remains how we are to explain the claims that the One is beyond being and beyond knowing. One way to do this is to consider how the implications of Plotinus' understanding of the relationship of being and unity are inconsistent with attempts by several modern commentators to say that the One *is* and that the One is *knowable*.

### 3. *A One Beyond Being*

Given the considerations about the relationship of positive and negative theology in Plotinus' philosophy,

we might conceive of the One as an undifferentiated, simple power.<sup>1</sup> Plotinus does say that it is infinite, and this infinity stands in contrast to the limiting of being by thought in Nous:

it must be understood as infinite [απειρον]  
not because its size and number cannot be  
measured or counted, but because its power  
[δυναμειως] cannot be comprehended. (VI.9.6.  
11-13)

This again suggests that in the One "actuality" is not limited by the monadological system of self-intellection (comprehension) that is Nous. At V.3.15, Plotinus suggests that the One possesses all things in such a way as not to be distinct:<sup>2</sup>

What then are "all things"? All things of  
which that One is the principle. But how is

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<sup>1</sup>cp. Sells, pg. 25, "[Plotinus] evokes an act so utterly complete and instantaneous that the subject is fused into the act to the point of no longer existing."

<sup>2</sup>On all forms indistinctly, (μη δικοκκριμενα): V.3.15; V.2.1; V.4.2; VI.7.32; VI.8.21. When compared to the "Numenian" V.4.2, where the one is self-differentiated, one might say that the difference between V.4.2, where the One is a self-differentiated, and V.3.15, where the One is not self-differentiated, one might resolve Bussanich's consternation ("Inner Life") by suggesting that in V.4.2, Plotinus is talking about the fact that the One is different from Nous, whereas, in V.3.15, the One does not admit of inner distinction because it is different from Nous in precisely such a way as to deny the distinctions that arise in Nous. In other words, the One is beyond monadological being.

that One the principle of all things? Is it because as principle it keeps them in being, making each one of them exist [εκάστον αὐτῶν ποιήσασα εἶναι]? Yes, and because it brought them into existence. But how did it do so? By possessing them beforehand. But it has been said that in this way it will be a multiplicity. But it had them in such a way as not to be distinct: they are distinguished on the second level, in the rational form [τῷ λόγῳ]. For this is already actuality; but the One is the potency of all things [τοῦδε δυνάμις πάντων]. Not in the way in which matter is said to be in potency, because it receives: for matter is passive; but this [material] way of being a potency is at the opposite extreme to making [τῷ ποιεῖν]. (V.3.15, 27-36)

This passage gives a very clear sense of the "δυνάμις" of the One that we have seen already in the last section. It is a positive δυνάμις, one which "makes". Again we see that in Nous, the "indistinctness" of the One is prevented by the monadology of self-intellecting (comprehending) Forms in a circumscribing self-intellecting (comprehending) Nous.<sup>1</sup> Nous is the primary level of being, the primary level of rational form, but it is the second hypostasis. We are still left with the

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<sup>1</sup>cp. VI.8.13.

question of how to understand the "existence" of the First hypostasis, the One.

Gerson's solution<sup>1</sup> to the problem of how the One can "be" if it is beyond being, is to say that the primary sense of being is the One, and that the "being" of Nous is an equivocal use of the word being. Plato's conception of the "existence" (becoming) of material entities works like this in a sense, since to say that a material entity "exists" is to say that it "is" in a sense, because of its participation in Formal reality, which is the true sense of existence. Hence the "existence" of material entities is different but derivative from, and hence related to, the true existence of Forms.

Gerson, I take it, envisions that the "existence" of Nous is different but derivative from, and hence related to, the existence of the One. I do not think this is a valid position, and an appeal to the relation of unity and being in Plotinus' metaphysics bears this out. Plotinus says that being is dependent on unity, and he says that the principle of unity (the One) is independent

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<sup>1</sup>Gerson, God and Greek Philosophy, pg. 212 ff.

of being. Further, because the One is not a genus or a kind,<sup>1</sup> but beyond genus and kind, it cannot legitimately be compared to genera or kinds. Hence it cannot be related equivocally to other beings either. The One which grounds multiplicity cannot be a one among other ones, for this leaves unanswered the question of why simples and composites can be one. If the grounding unity were simply one thing among others, we should have to look for το υποκειμενον of the composite that is αυτο καθ' εαυτου. But if you "see" unity in other things, there must be unity *simpliciter* - a source for that unity.

The composite relies on the simples of which it is composed, and the simples themselves, must be explained in terms of a prior principle of simplicity. In other words, if the simples (parts) of the composite unity only exist in a composite, then the unity of the composite remains unexplained. If the simples can exist apart, then their simplicity (unity) must be explained. If there are many or a One-Many (Nous) there must be a One before the many. For if we are to find a source of unity in being,

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<sup>1</sup>Because then it would be divisible into species and hence not one but many (VI.2.9) cp. Jackson, (1967) pg. 321.

unity must be prior to it; it also must be prior to the Forms, which can be distinguished from one another in the noetic apprehension that is Nous.

In some sense, the idea that to predicate of a unity is to make it multiple<sup>1</sup> rules out the possibility of the One being the highest *genus*, since if the One were a genus, it would have many things which were species of it, and one would again be looking for the source of the unity of the genus.<sup>2</sup> Consequently, the "nature" of the One is at best a metaphorical or analogical projection from the nature of Nous.<sup>3</sup> Plotinus' account of the emanation of Being and thought from the One, in accordance with the axioms of positive production and degrees of reality, indicates that the limited  $\epsilon\upsilon\epsilon\rho\gamma\epsilon\iota\alpha\epsilon\kappa\tau\eta\varsigma\omicron\upsilon\sigma\iota\alpha\varsigma$  of the One is Being, and that being is something less than the One, and dependent on it. In short, being is dependent on unity, and the principle of being, *contra* Aristotle, cannot be a being.

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<sup>1</sup>VI.9.3

<sup>2</sup>VI.2.10

<sup>3</sup>cp Gerson (1994), pg. 13.



Viewed from the perspective of infinity, if one accepts the infinity of the One as the primary sense of being, this denies the classical, finite sense of being to the Forms which "annihilates" all else, since if Forms are not to be taken as being primarily, what else can possibly exist? Hence I disagree with Gerson.<sup>1</sup>

When one takes into account the fact that Being is used by Plotinus to mean finite limited being, except when he explains the process of emanation, where emanated limitless being is prior to noetic formal limiting, it becomes clear that the One itself is not the primary referent of Being, but that the primary referent of being is Nous. Plotinus' project is to explain how existence is possible at all. The existence of anything affords the opportunity to distinguish the thing's nature from its existence, and hence to derive multiplicity via the technique of the *Parmenides/Sophist*, just as much as self-intellection affords the ability to derive multiplicity from the Unmoved Mover, or Nous. Hence it is clear that both Thought and Existence must be denied of

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<sup>1</sup>Interestingly enough, this kind of move, suggests Rist was made by later commentators with nearly disastrous results. cp Rist (1967) pg. 33 n29, and 34.

the One. Thought and existence are derived from the One emanatively in Nous, but are not found ontologically in the One itself.

The "Good" which gives rise to Nous must be simple, self-generating and without need (*αὐτάρκης*), and given that it is without need, it cannot need thinking. Further "the One cannot be all things, since Intellect is all things; and it cannot be being, since being is all things."<sup>1</sup> Again this is why Being, Nous and (Plotinus' understanding of) Aristotle's Unmoved Mover qualify as Second in Plotinus' system; they are all seen as dependent upon that which is not itself being or a being. It is also why an Aristotelian god will not sit comfortably in a Platonic system like that of Albinus. The One is then, "beyond being."

#### 4. *A One Beyond Knowing*

I suspect that Armstrong's attempt<sup>2</sup> to show that Plotinus is obliged to attribute to the One a multiplicity of sorts is the result of assuming that one

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<sup>1</sup>VI.9.2

<sup>2</sup>Armstrong, A.H., The Architecture of the Intelligible Universe, pg. 3.

can discursively explain the features of the One. Armstrong believes that in making the One an *ενεργεια*,<sup>1</sup> Plotinus makes it an *ουσια*.<sup>2</sup> Plotinus does suggest this by referring to the *ενεργεια της ουσια* of the One, but I have suggested that this is metaphorical at best, given his explicit denial of the One's *ενεργεια* that is said to be "*ανευ ουσιας*".<sup>3</sup> Here is what Armstrong wants to say:

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<sup>1</sup>At V.3.12, Plotinus maintains that the One is not one in *ουσια* and many in *ενεργεια*, because such a one would not be complete unless its substance were expressed in act, and since such an act would be multiple, the substance as completed will be multiple. cp. Jackson, pg. 321

<sup>2</sup>It should be noted, however (as Armstrong is no doubt aware) that one cannot place too much faith in a disciplined technical use of any term in Plotinus, since he often speaks metaphorically, or uses the same term analogically at each hypostatic level, and in the material realm. cp. Lloyd, pg 263; Bussanich, "Inner Life," pg. 165. Bale's Arguments in "Plotinus' Theory of the One," I think fail because they place too much emphasis on this. cp. Gerson, (1994), pg. 310, n 92. The key to understanding Plotinus, I think, is to work through his imagery and analogies, and allow for a sympathetic reading without trying to place too much weight on the terms. This is sensible, I think considering the way that Plotinus is reported by Porphyry to have written his treatises. He wrote in a single sitting, in a kind of "white heat of inspiration" (Sells, pg. 14), and refused to revise. Hence to expect too much out of terminology is expecting too much given this consideration.

<sup>3</sup>VI.8.20, 10 (See Section 2)

however much [the One] may transcend the beings which we know...if [it is] an ουσία, then [it is] a one-in-many. It becomes a being to which predicates can be applied and about which logical distinctions can be made.<sup>1</sup>

This however is only to suggest that when a finite mind attempts to understand the One, it makes distinctions at a lower level than the One, and analogically<sup>2</sup> at best.<sup>3</sup> Again the *Didaskalikos* comes to mind. If we take Plotinus' mysticism seriously, it amounts to accepting that no words are adequate to give an account of the nature of the One:<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Armstrong, (!970), pg. 3.

<sup>2</sup>Rist (1967), pg. 32 ff. on analogy

<sup>3</sup>cp. O'Meara, pp. 57-9; Schroeder, "Saying and Having," pg. 75.

<sup>4</sup>Says Bussanich on this point, "On Plotinus' normal view, neither the positive nor the negative conceptions of the One can tell us anything about the One in itself. This is because an affirmation and negation operate through the ineluctable duality of human thinking which cannot penetrate the transcendental absolute. The inadequacy of positive theology derives from the attribution to the One of terms that are strictly speaking applicable only to the lower realities of  
(continued...)

The perplexity arises especially because our awareness of that One is not by way of reasoned knowledge [κατ' επιστημη] or of intellectual perception [κατα νοησιν] as with other intelligible things, but by way of a presence superior to knowledge [κατα παρουσιαν επιστημης κρειττονα]. The soul experiences its falling away from being one and is not altogether one when it has reasoned knowledge of anything; for reasoned knowledge is a rational process [λογος] and a rational process is many. (VI.9.4, 1-6)

It is useful to note that Plotinus draws a distinction between "speaking the one" and "speaking of the one".<sup>1</sup> We cannot speak the one, but we may speak of it. To predicate of the One is to "speak of it," but not to "speak it," or actually say what it is, since the predication implies duality. If we were to try to speak it, which we cannot in fact do because of our own noetic or discursive reasoning, we would fail. Further, in so far as "conceiving" may be taken as grasping the essence of something apart from its existence and the One's "essence" is indistinguishable from its "existence" one

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<sup>4</sup>(...continued)  
Intellect and Soul." "Inner Life," pg. 163.

<sup>1</sup>V.3.14, 1-8; cp. Gerson (1994) pp. 25-26.

cannot "conceive" the One.<sup>1</sup> In this regard O'Meara notes succinctly that,

Our language relates to the varied world in which we live; it cannot apply to what is presupposed by and other than this world.<sup>2</sup>

Where Plotinus speaks at length in dualistic terms about the One he often opens and or closes the discussion with a warning. For example, at VI.8.13-18 he tells us he will speak "οὐκ ὀρθῶς" and must use words which depart "from the rigour of knowledge".<sup>3</sup> Plotinus says things like this throughout the *Enneads* and any example of this kind of statement could serve as a rejoinder to Armstrong:

But we have [the One] in such a way as to speak about it, but not to say it itself. And we say what it is not; what it is we do not say. So that it is from what is posterior [to it] that we speak about it.

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<sup>1</sup>"Plotinus' explanation of the One's perfection as owing to its οὐσία shows the natural connection in Greek philosophical vocabulary between the terms τελειον and οὐσία. We might say that the One is analogically speaking perfect because it is analogically speaking an οὐσία. The meaning is that in the unique first principle, where essence and existence are only conceptually distinct, there can be nothing that this first principle could be that it is not." Gerson (1994), pg. 17.

<sup>2</sup>O'Meara, pg. 56.

<sup>3</sup>Deck, pg. 10.

We are not hindered from having it, although we do not say it. But like those who are inspired and become [divinely] possessed, if they manage to know that they have something greater in themselves, even if they do not know what, from that through which they are moved and speak, from this they acquire a sense of the mover, being different from it, thus we do appear to relate to [the One]. (V,3.14, 5-14)<sup>1</sup>

The One is not something to be thought, or to exist, but to be *unified with*, in a process of mystical ascent and the jettisoning of the restrictions of thought and being. That which Aristotle saw as the height of human activity, rational contemplation, is for Plotinus merely a stepping stone to the true end of human existence. The first step in the ascent is to jettison the restrictions of discursive thinking to obtain an intellectual position of immediate intuition of Formal reality, the level of Nous.<sup>2</sup> The second step is to jettison even those restrictions, and seek what is prior. In an instructive passage in V.5, Plotinus reflects on the difficulty of expressing how he envisions the One, and suggests that a kind of 'apophasis' or 'negation' of even the name "εἷν"

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<sup>1</sup>cp. III.8.9

<sup>2</sup>cp. Sells, pg. 22.

is necessary to truly represent the One. He explains this in terms of that word which Glaucon utters after Socrates tells him that the Good is *επεκεινα της ουσιας*:

But we in our travail do not know what we ought to say, and are speaking of what cannot be spoken [*λεγομεν περι ου ρητου*], and give it a name [*ονομαζομεν*] because we want to indicate it to ourselves as best we can. But perhaps this name "One" contains only a denial of multiplicity. This is why the Pythagoreans symbolically indicated it to each other by the name Apollo [*Απολλωνα*], in negation of the multiple [*των πολλων*]. But if the One - name and reality expressed - was to be taken positively it would be less clear than if we did not give it a name at all: for perhaps this name [One] was given it in order that the seeker, beginning from that which is completely indicative of simplicity, may finally negate [*αποψηση*] this as well. (V.5.6, 23-33)

In terms of Plotinus' mysticism, Rist suggests, rightly, I think that "Our aim is not to see the One but to be 'oned', as later mystics would have translated."<sup>1</sup> The interdependence of reference and existence is a product of the unification of Form and thought in what is posterior to the One, the result of the One's production. Indeed the laws of the excluded middle and non-

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<sup>1</sup>Rist, *Road*, pg. 221.



contradiction do not apply to the One.<sup>1</sup> Knowledge can only have as its object something finite, and the One is not an existent thing, or something delimited by a Form. It is not finite but infinite.<sup>2</sup> The question of the referent of the non-existent is not the concern of Plotinus. Nor was it really Plato's concern, for it is clear from the *Parmenides* that as much can be asserted of a "one which is not," as can be asserted of "a one which is". It is in Nous, and through Nous that truth takes on the delimiting characteristics of being and intellectual identity. Hence it is a mistake to apply posterior conditions to what is prior.

Deck is right I think<sup>3</sup> in denying knowledge of the One for purposes of affirming its simplicity in so far as knowledge on Plotinus' account implies duality.<sup>4</sup> It is clear that even the unity of knower and its objects in Nous is not the unqualified One,<sup>5</sup> and the One's

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<sup>1</sup>Sells, pp 20-1.

<sup>2</sup>O'Meara, pg. 55.

<sup>3</sup>Deck, pg. 17

<sup>4</sup>III.8.11, 12-4; V.3.12, 49-50; V.6.4, 1-2.

<sup>5</sup>Deck, pg. 17.

possession of noetic capacity is often denied.<sup>1</sup> But it should be noted in this regard that the One cannot properly be called ignorant either, since as Deck puts it, "in a case of ignorance there is the object which is not known."<sup>2</sup> Deck's suggestion that "perhaps Plotinus means that the One can not know *insofar as* knowledge implies duality,"<sup>3</sup> is true, but all it says, given Plotinus' account of knowledge, is that the One doesn't have it:

But what is beyond being must be beyond thinking; it is not then absurd if he does not know himself; for he has nothing in himself which he can learn about, since he is one. (V.6.6, 30-2)

Decks' solution, to posit a quasi super-noesis for the One,<sup>4</sup> is a similar move to that of Gerson regarding being. Deck makes knowledge in the primary sense the knowledge that the One has, and all other senses are equivocal. Hence we must have recourse to our notion of "projection," and say that the One is the measure because

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<sup>1</sup>e.g. III.8.11; III.9.9; V.3.11, V.3.12; VI.7.37-41.

<sup>2</sup>Deck, pg. 17. (Cf. VI.9.6, 42; VI.7.32, 23-8.)

<sup>3</sup>*ibid*, pg. 18.

<sup>4</sup>*ibid*.

it is the source, and the pregnant common term of everything, while denying the validity of comparison, because our ability to compare is either discursive or noetic, but the one is "henetic."

With regard to the One's state of "consciousness" Rist has the interesting suggestion, that Plotinus needs a term which stands for a "total transparency," which Plotinus finds ultimately in the Epicurean notion of *επιβολή*". However, Rist himself admits that this term, or others such as *κατανοησις*,<sup>1</sup> or *υπερνοησις*,<sup>2</sup> do not tell us very much.<sup>3</sup> However Plotinus may shed some light by saying that the One is "*παντη διακριτικον εαυτου*"<sup>4</sup> in so far as this suggests not a dual knowing, but a clear immediate apprehension that *is* the One. In the end I think that something like this notion of transparency or perhaps Troulliard's "*une parfaite lucidite*,"<sup>5</sup> is best to

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<sup>1</sup>V.4.2.17

<sup>2</sup>VI.8.16

<sup>3</sup>Rist, "One of Plotinus," pp. 81-2

<sup>4</sup>V.4.2, 16

<sup>5</sup>Trouilliard, J, La Procession Plotinienne, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1955, pg 102.

describe the One's "state of consciousness".<sup>1</sup> The essential point is that the One's consciousness is such that subject-object poles are not legitimate distinctions to make regarding the One. I am inclined then to agree with Sells, who suggests a kind of "disontology" at this level, a fusing of subject-predicate dualism through apophasis, necessary to overcome propositional thinking.

Says Sells,

This disontology consists of a continual fusing of the subject-predicate dualism, and a continual displacing of the tendency to revert to simply an opposite of duality and thus be reified within a dualistic relation.<sup>2</sup>

## 5. Conclusion

Plotinus' first principle then, is not a being, but is rather beyond being and is its source. It is this necessity of positing a unity beyond being and giving the notion a coherent place in a metaphysical system that is the crowning glory of Plotinus' philosophy, his philosophical system, and in a way, is the articulation of what Greek philosophy had sought since it began - a

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<sup>1</sup>On senses of consciousness in Plotinus, see Warren.

<sup>2</sup>Sells, pg 214.

principle of unity. It a projection of what we know as delimited form and being to an infinite *δυναμις* of those limited "participants" fused with a denial of the limits that makes knowledge and being possible in the first place. Being as limit, and thinking as "limiter," are denied of the One in so far as these are multiple and require a source. To assert them of the One would be to engage an infinite regress of seeking the principle and cause of being and unity.

Plotinus' One is more than just the culmination of his own philosophy. It is the culmination of a tradition, because it is the result of reflection on that tradition by one of its most profound minds. Whether or not he is in fact correct in his assessment of that tradition, he regards himself as its product, or at least the defender of a line of that tradition which he believes to be right, and which he defends against the prime metaphysical alternative to that tradition, the metaphysics of Aristotle. Plotinus reasserts and re-engineers, with a good degree of coherence, and a great deal of appreciation for the goals of his tradition, a

Platonic metaphysical hierarchy some 600 years after  
Aristotle had said that such a hierarchy was unworkable.

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