

Transcendental Considerations in Plotinus

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This paper examines from a transcendental perspective three discussions in Plotinus, in which he considers what we can today call a transcendental approach. To do this it should first be clarified to what the term *transcendental* here refers, and second, to what the *transcendental perspective* relates. As to the first, the examination does not concern the Kantian system as a whole, which is neither considered by Plotinus nor anticipated by him. More than 1500 years separate the two philosophers, creating a gulf the overcoming of which exceeds the purposes of the current research. The term transcendental here relates rather merely to a single insight, which is quite central to the transcendental tradition, namely, the role of the *principles* of the philosophy. The transcendental approach, established in Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* and used by him, his followers and opponents, delineates the boundaries of reason. Thus, it shows that metaphysical discussions about the existence of God, the eternity of the soul, and the creation of the world all deviate from the realm of reason. By virtue of the limitations of reason, God and the soul, like all principles recognized in this philosophy, are considered mere conditions for the possibility of our experience. They are thus denied any ontological or transcendent standing, and are considered rather *transcendental*, i.e., necessary conditions for a possible experience.¹ Thus, the transcendental considerations discussed here relate merely to this insight regarding the standing of the principles, whether they are to be regarded as realities, or merely principles auxiliary to the philosophical explanation. As to the second, the examination of Plotinus' considerations shall be made from the viewpoint of the transcendental tradition.

1 Cf. for example *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* B 352-353.

This will include arguments from Kant and Fichte bearing some resemblance to the arguments examined in Plotinus. The transcendental perspective involves both discussing the question to what extent Plotinus' argument can indeed be viewed as involving transcendental considerations, and if Plotinus refutes this argument, whether this rejection is valid from a transcendental point of view, that is, whether his rejection constitutes an internal critique, which uses the transcendental method itself, or an external critique, which uses different considerations.

Since the considerations to be examined here pertain to the place and standing of the system's principles, in Plotinus' case it concerns the three hypostases, i.e., the Soul, the Intellect and the One. In general, the hypostases have two systematic functions: they are used as both ultimate ontological realities and explanatory principles.² The transcendental considerations are, therefore, discussions where Plotinus raises the possibility of reducing these hypostases to mere auxiliary principles for the sake of philosophical explanation without any ontological/real sense. This reduction is, of course, rejected by Plotinus in favor of the reality of the hypostases. However, through his accounts of this rejection we can examine to what extent Plotinus indeed examines the transcendental insight and whether his rejection constitutes an internal or external critique on it.

The transcendental question is to be clearly distinguished from both the issue of realism vs. idealism and that of materialism vs. idealism. These issues concern questions such as the extra-mental reality of things, the relation between epistemology and ontology, and the validity of our sensual and intellectual perceptions.³ The

2 Cf. L. P. Gerson (1994) 2-3.

3 These are discussed, for example, at V.5.1.19-20: "that which is known by sense perception does not apprehend the thing itself: for that remains outside"; IV.6.1.19-32: "Most important of all: if we received impressions of what we see, there will be no possibility of looking at the actual things we see, but we shall look at images and shadows of the objects of sight, so that the objects themselves will be different from the things we see". See J. Bussanich (1994) 21-42, M. Wagner (1985) 269-292; (1986) 57-83 and F. V. Pistorius (1952) 118.

transcendental question discussed here, on the contrary, focuses first and foremost on reason itself, i.e., it concerns primarily philosophical inquiry and structure. The question is thus not the reality of the world or the extent to which we can trust our senses, but rather how the principles of the system itself are to be viewed: are they to be accorded reality, or are they mere auxiliary principles for the sake of philosophical explanation. Scholarship has rarely discussed the connection between Plotinus and the transcendental tradition. Oosthout (1989) simply presumes that the two are totally compatible, when he titles his translation and commentary to *Ennead* V.3 “Modes of Knowledge and the *Transcendental*”.⁴ On the contrary, Halfwassen⁵ and Flasch⁶ not only see Plotinus as opposed to this tradition, but also recognize in Plotinus an internal critique of the transcendental approach, specifically to the transcendental insight discussed here. The present paper shall show that Plotinus indeed approximates to some extent this transcendental insight, though he denies it altogether. Furthermore, it shall be demonstrated that from a transcendental viewpoint, his rejection does not constitute an internal, but solely an external critique.

To show this, we review here three discussions, in which Plotinus most significantly considers what we call here the transcendental insight. Each of these discussions shall first be extensively analyzed in order to recognize this insight, and then examined from a transcendental point of view. For that examination, Plotinus’ arguments shall be compared with parallels from Kant and Fichte. The first two discussions relate to the hypostasis of the One and are thus closely related. The first is *Ennead* VI.9.1, where Plotinus considers that the source of unity might be the soul, and hence

4 H. Oosthout (1991). See Oosthout’s explanation to his use of the term ‘transcendental’ to translate τοῦ ἐπέκειντα in p. 28.

5 J. Halfwassen (2004) 34-36, the same discussion can be found in J. Halfwassen (2007) 166-168.

6 K. Flasch (1973) 339. Flasch only treats Plotinus together with Nicholas of Cusa, regarding a critique of the priority of thinking. His view does not relate to the term ‘transcendental’ as it is discussed here, and therefore shall not be discussed further.

unity is subordinated to the soul and loses its independence as a separate hypostasis. To reject this, Plotinus distinguishes this unity from a higher concept of unity. We shall consider that this distinction resembles Kant's distinction between the two systematic roles of unity. We shall see that in contrast to Kant, Plotinus ascribes externality, and thus transcendence, to the higher concept of unity. The second discussion relates to VI.6.12-13 and involves Halfwassen's reading, which recognizes here an internal critique of the transcendental view. We shall see that this reading fails both argumentatively and interpretatively. Instead, we shall see that this discussion involves again the distinction between the two concepts of unity, and that Plotinus' presumptions already deny this approach without criticizing it. The third relates to a discussion concerning the intellect in II.9.1, where Plotinus raises the possibility that the distinction between the hypostases is not real but merely conceptual, within thought (*ἐπινοία*). Through a comparison with Kant and Fichte, we shall see in what sense this possibility resembles the transcendental insight, and that its denial constitutes an external rather than internal critique of this insight. The first and second discussions deal with subjecting the One to the soul, and thus differ from the third which discusses the division of the Intellect; however, the thread that links them together is the consideration of reducing the hypostases, whether the One or the intellect, from real entities to explanatory principles.

1. VI.9.1 [9]: ESSENTIAL AND ACCIDENTAL UNITY

The first discussion we shall review is *Ennead* VI.9.1. The passage begins by addressing the connection between the concepts of *unity* and *being*. Specifically, it opens by stating the precedence of unity over being (line 1): "It is by their unity that all beings are beings". Unity is the criterion or the principle which constitutes the being of the different things. Following this statement, the first part of 1 (lines 1-16) treats of different kinds of beings and their dependence upon their unity. An army, a choir, a flock, a house and a ship, says Plotinus, are all entities by means of their unity.

Such assertions are to be found in other places as well.⁷ What makes the current discussion unique is that, in the second part of 1 (lines 17-end), Plotinus reflects on this very assumption, and thereby on his approach as a whole. Plotinus considers here the possibility that unity is itself something which the soul applies to what it perceives. If so, instead of reducing every being or thinking to its unity, unity itself should be reduced to the soul, which is allegedly its source. Here it is already apparent that this consideration can be compared with the *transcendental* insight discussed here, since instead of ascribing reality, transcendence and independence to unity, unity is subordinated to the soul as its source. Regarding such a possibility Plotinus asks (17-20):⁸

Is it true then that, since the soul brings all things to their one by making and moulding and shaping and composing them, we should, when we have arrived at it, say that it is this which provides (χορηγεί) the one and this which is the one?⁹

The presumption here recognizes the soul's role, which by perceiving outside impressions, turns them into a unified whole (συντάττουσα). That means that all the examples from the first part, e.g., an army, a choir or a flock, receive their unity through the soul, that is, through its application of unity to them. This active role of the soul begs the question whether the soul applies unity because the soul itself is the source of unity. Does this act of applying unity necessarily lead to the conclusion that unity originates from the soul itself? This possibility leads Plotinus to the radical assertion that, in this case, the soul is itself the One (αὕτη ἐστὶ τὸ ἓν).

⁷ Cf. VI.6.13.50-51: "there is nothing which is not one", and the discussion on this passage below. See also: V.3.15.12-15.

⁸ Unless otherwise noted, all English translations are from Plotinus, *Enneads*, trans. A. H. Armstrong, 7 vols., Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge: Harvard University Press).

⁹ Ἄρ' οὖν, ἐπειδὴ ψυχὴ τὰ πάντα εἰς ἓν ἄγει δημιουργοῦσα καὶ πλάττουσα καὶ μορφοῦσα καὶ συντάττουσα, ἐπὶ ταύτην ἐλθόντας δεῖ λέγειν, ὡς αὕτη τὸ ἓν χορηγεῖ καὶ αὕτη ἐστὶ τὸ ἓν;

To avoid such consequences, which subordinate the concept of unity to the soul, Plotinus uses a two-stage argument. First he denies the *necessity* of this conclusion by formulating an alternative understanding, and then, to decide in favor of the other alternative, he denies the first alternative's *plausibility*. Therefore, he first turns to formulating the alternative, which rejects the necessity of this conclusion (20-26):

Rather we should consider that, just as with the other things it provides for bodies, it is not itself what it gives, shape and form for instance, but they are other than it, so, even if it gives the one, it gives it as something other than itself, and that it is by looking to the one that it makes each and every thing one, just as it is by looking to [the form of] man that it makes something man, taking the one in it along with the man.¹⁰

Unity, then, is not necessarily an *internal* part of the soul which the latter applies to the objects. Unity may also be considered an *external* concept, which the soul takes from the outside. To strengthen this alternative conclusion, Plotinus uses here the example of shape and form (μορφή και εἶδος). Plato's doctrine of Ideas may be used here as a model for such externality. The soul can indeed recognize an object as a man. However, that does not mean that the form (or idea) of man is internal to the soul. The form of a man can be viewed as lying beyond the soul, as "other than itself" (ἕτερον). According to this conception, the soul "sees" the form which is beyond it, and then applies it to the objects. Both the forms and the objects are external to the soul. Accordingly, the soul's role is merely to mediate between these two external factors. The soul perceives the form of a man from the outside (the Ideal World, for example), and then is able to apply it to a man whom it perceives as an object. It follows that the role of the soul in applying the forms does not *necessarily* imply that the soul is the source of the forms, since we can alternately claim that the soul perceives unity from outside it.

10 Ἡ ὥσπερ τὰ ἄλλα χορηγοῦσα τοῖς σώμασιν οὐκ ἔστιν αὐτὴ ὁ δίδωσιν, οἷον μορφή και εἶδος, ἀλλ' ἕτερα αὐτῆς, οὕτω χρή, εἰ και ἐν δίδωσιν, ἕτερον ὄν αὐτῆς νομίζειν αὐτὴν δίδοναι και πρὸς τὸ ἐν βλέπουσαν ἐν ἕκαστον ποιεῖν, ὥσπερ και πρὸς ἄνθρωπον ἄνθρωπον, συλλαμβάνουσαν μετὰ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου τὸ ἐν αὐτῷ ἐν.

Now, after rejecting the necessity of identifying the soul with the One, Plotinus turns to the second stage, namely, rejecting the *plausibility* of seeing unity as internal to the soul. The implausibility of identifying the soul with the One stems from the fact that the One (30-31): “is somehow incidental (συμβεβηκός) to soul,¹¹ and these things, soul and one, are two, just like body and the one. And what has separate parts, like a chorus, is furthest from the one”.¹² To reject the plausibility of identifying the soul with the One, Plotinus uses the *Aristotelian* distinction between essence and accident. Accidental unity is unity within multiplicity, unity of different parts. Plotinus claims in a few places¹³ that such unity necessarily presupposes an absolutely simple unity without any parts. Plotinus explains later in this passage that “the soul is many, even if it is not composed of parts; for there are very many powers in it, reasoning, desiring, apprehending, which are held together by the one as a bond” (40-41). The soul is then ascribed multiplicity not because it is “composed of different parts”, but rather due to the different powers or acts that it performs. In order for these acts to all be united as acts or powers of the soul, the soul must be one. However, since this unity is *of* different parts, i.e., a unity within multiplicity, it is not unity by essence but rather by accident. Now, since according to Plotinus an accidental unity presupposes a unity by essence as its source, therefore it is not plausible to argue that the soul, which has accidental unity, is the source of unity. The other alternative, i.e., that the soul perceives unity from the

11 Cf. P. A. Meijer (1992) 79: “For the soul is one and has its one in a way by participation”; see also his discussion on the meaning of συμβεβηκός, pp. 81-82.

12 Καὶ δὴ καὶ ψυχὴ ἕτερον οὐσα τοῦ ἑνὸς μᾶλλον ἔχει κατὰ λόγον τοῦ μᾶλλον καὶ ὄντως εἶναι τὸ μᾶλλον ἓν. Οὐ μὴν αὐτὸ τὸ ἓν· ψυχὴ γὰρ μία καὶ συμβεβηκός πως τὸ ἓν, καὶ δύο ταῦτα ψυχὴ καὶ ἓν, ὥσπερ σῶμα καὶ ἓν.

13 Cf. V.3.16.10-16: “and that which is before Intellect and generates it could not be an intellect and an intelligible world, but simpler (ἀπλοῦστερον) than intellect and simpler than an intelligible world. For many (πολύ) does not come from many but this [intelligible] many comes from what is not many: for this would not be the principle (ἀρχή) of it if it was also many itself, but something else before it. There must therefore be a concentration into a real one outside all multiplicity and any ordinary sort of simplicity, if it is to be really simple.”

outside, is more plausible.¹⁴ Hence, even if the soul supplies unity to the object it perceives, since the soul itself consists of different parts, it cannot be the source of the concept of unity. Rather, the soul must draw this concept from the outside (like it does with form and shape), that is, from the essential unity of the One.

The argumentation here consists of three concepts of unity in hierarchical order: (1) unity which the soul supplies to the objects it perceives; (2) the unity of the soul itself, which is accidental since the soul consists of different powers; and (3) the essential simple unity, which is thus external to the soul. The first unity leads Plotinus to consider that unity is internal and thus subordinate to the soul. To reject that, Plotinus turns to the unity of the soul itself, and characterizes it as a unity of different powers, that is, an accidental unity. Since it is accidental, the soul's unity cannot be the source of unity. The source should rather be an essential simple unity, which is external to the soul.

To examine to what extent this discussion indeed corresponds to the transcendental insight discussed here, we shall first review Kant's distinction between two concepts of unity, and then compare it with Plotinus' discussion here. As part of the Transcendental Deduction in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant distinguishes clearly between unity as category of the understanding, which the latter applies to the objects, and the unity of apperception, which is the unity of understanding itself. In § 15 he says (*Kritik der reinen Vernunft* B 131):

Diese Einheit, die *a priori* vor allen Begriffen der Verbindung vorhergeht, ist nicht etwa jene Kategorie der Einheit [...]; denn alle Kategorien gründen sich auf logische Functionen in Urtheilen, in diesen aber ist schon Verbindung, mithin Einheit gegebener Begriffe gedacht. Die Kategorie setzt also schon Verbindung voraus.

The category of unity is one of the understanding's categories (alongside causality, possibility, etc.) applied to appearances,

14 Cf. P. A. Meijer (1992) 82: "the oneness of the soul must come from the outside, from a higher form of oneness."

whereas the extra-categorical unity must be presupposed for the possibility of any application of the categories. In relation to the understanding, the first can be viewed as directed toward the outside (toward the objects), while the latter is an internal feature of the understanding. In contrast to the categorical unity, Kant characterizes this higher unity as the “synthetic unity of apperception” (ibid., p. 135). It is synthetic because it combines the representations in one consciousness. Kant says further that this synthetic unity of apperception is the highest principle of human cognition and identifies it with the understanding itself (Kritik der reinen Vernunft A p. 119): “Die Einheit der Apperception in Beziehung auf die Synthesis der Einbildungskraft ist der Verstand.”

Plotinus’ concept of the soul and Kant’s concept of the understanding are of course not to be compared here. However, if we focus merely on the *function* that the concept of unity fulfills here, the two arguments can be paralleled. Just as for Kant, since the understanding supplies the category of unity, it should be considered the source of unity, so in Plotinus, since the soul supplies unity to the perceived objects, it should be viewed as the source of unity. Now, Plotinus recognizes, like Kant, that this lower unity necessarily presupposes a higher unity, namely the unity of the soul itself. However, here Plotinus goes two steps further: first, he identifies the unity of the soul as *accidental* and distinguishes it from essential unity; and second, he claims that the higher, essential concept of unity is therefore *external* to the soul, that is, the soul must perceive it from the outside. These two claims are rejected by Kant. First, by claiming that *synthetic* unity is the highest principle of human cognition, Kant already denies Plotinus’ hierarchy between accidental and essential unity. For “*synthetic* unity” is another name for a unity of different parts, and since this unity is claimed to be the highest principle, obviously there is no place for a higher essential unity which is absolute simplicity without any parts. Second, from what we already saw, it is clear that Kant opposes also ascribing *externality* to the higher unity. The synthetic unity of apperception is so internal and immanent to the understanding, that Kant even identifies it with understanding

itself: "Und so ist die synthetische Einheit der Apperception... dieses Vermögen ist der Verstand selbst" (Kritik der reinen Vernunft B 133). More broadly, externality is synonymous with *transcendence*, whereas internal is synonymous with *immanent*. The two philosophies diverge, then, with respect to understanding the concept of unity which both characterize as "higher", i.e. the unity of the soul for Plotinus and of the understanding for Kant. From Kant's perspective, then, Plotinus' discussion here can be seen as partly approaching the transcendental view. His recognition of the soul as supplying unity to the objects, his conclusion that unity might be subordinated to the soul, as well as the distinction between this unity and the higher unity are indeed compatible with the transcendental view. However, Plotinus' claim that the unity of the soul lies in a higher concept of unity which is to be considered *external* to the soul is the point at which they part ways. Positing an absolute simple unity which is external to the soul deviates from the boundaries of reason as delineated by the transcendental philosophy. This discussion shall be further developed in the next part, where it will be examined in relation to VI.6.12-13.

2. VI.6.12-13 [34] AND HALFWASSEN'S INTERPRETATION

The second discussion we shall review is VI.6.12-13 [34]. The text here refers again to the two concepts of unity and the precedence of unity over the soul. However, section 13 has already received an interpretation from a transcendental perspective, namely Halfwassen (2003, 2007), who establishes on this passage his claim that Plotinus considers the transcendental approach and fashions an alternative to it. We shall first review Halfwassen's claim and then take a closer look at the text.

According to Halfwassen, in this passage Plotinus aims at demonstrating the falsehood of the precedence of thinking over unity, which Halfwassen ascribes to the transcendental view. Furthermore, Halfwassen says that Plotinus proves this by using a kind of transcendental argument. It follows that Plotinus uses the transcendental method itself to undermine its own premises. Thereby, Halfwassen recognizes in Plotinus'

discussion an *internal* critique of the transcendental approach, in which the system's own method is used to prove its fallacy. To do that, Plotinus begins by considering the two alternatives to understand the precedence of unity in our thinking.¹⁵ Halfwassen quotes the following passage from section 13 to demonstrate that Plotinus considers these two alternatives:

obgleich es Vielheit ist, doch nicht Vielheit sein läßt, so macht es irgendwie auch hier die Einheit offenbar, entweder indem es selbst die Einheit verleiht, welche die Vielheit nicht hat, oder es führt, indem es mit seinem Scharfblick die in der Ordnung liegende Einheit erkennt, die Wirklichkeit des Vielen zur Einheit zusammen (VI.6.13.19–23).¹⁶

Using Halfwassen's terminology, unity is either actively applied by the subject to the multitude, or passively recognized by the subject within the multitude. The two possibilities are accordingly either to understand the nature of unity as *subjective*, as a category that the subject applies to or gives to (*verleiht*) the external objects it perceives, or as ontological and *objective*, as something in the things, and then the concept of unity precedes the subject's use of it. How is Plotinus to decide between the two alternatives? At this point Halfwassen claims that Plotinus conducts a "quasi-transzendente" analysis of the conditions of the possibility (Möglichkeitsbedingungen) of our thinking, in order to ensure the reality (Realitätshaltigkeit) of the concept of unity (p. 35). As part of this analysis, Halfwassen claims, Plotinus shows that we can only think by presupposing that each of the two, the knowing subject and the known object, is one. Now, if unity conditions the subject and the object, then unity cannot be a *product* of the act of thinking. Rather, it must *precede* this act. It follows, says Halfwassen,

15 J. Halfwassen (2004) 34: "Plotin formuliert also klar die Alternative, die Einheitsvoraussetzung unseres Denkens entweder subjektiv zu interpretieren, als eine Setzung des Denkens selber, oder realistisch und ontologisch als das Erfassen des Einheitscharakters des Seienden an sich, der sich in seiner Geordnetheit zeigt."

16 καὶ πλῆθος ὃν οὐκ ἔαι πλῆθος εἶναι· ἢ διάνοια δῆλόν που καὶ ἐνταῦθα ποιεῖ ἢ διδοῦσα τὸ ἓν, ὃ μὴ ἔχει τὸ πλῆθος, ἢ ὀξέως τὸ ἓν τὸ ἐκ τῆς τάξεως ἰδοῦσα τὴν τοῦ πολλοῦ φύσιν συνήγαγεν εἰς ἓν·

that the concept of unity must *ontologically* exist independent of and prior to subjective thinking. In Halfwassen's words,

das Eine ist keine Setzung unseres Denkens, weil jeder Denkart selber nur unter Voraussetzung des Einen möglich ist. Das Eine ist darum ursprünglicher als das Denken, also deren Prinzip; durch sein Einheitsbedürfnis findet das Denken in sich selbst die Notwendigkeit, sich sein Prinzip immer schon vorauszusetzen. Die logisch-noematische Priorität des Einen vor dem Einheit immer schon voraussetzenden Vollzug des Denkens sichert für Plotin die ontologische Gültigkeit unseres denkenden Einheitsvorgriffs. Weil das Eine auch von jedem denkbaren Seinsgehalt immer schon vorausgesetzt wird, ergibt sich damit zugleich die ontologische Priorität des Einen vor dem Sein, die das Eine als das Prinzip des Seins erweist. (2007, p. 169)

To summarize this reading, Plotinus argues that our thinking necessitates the presumption of the concept of unity as its condition. Therefore, unity is not posited by thinking, but constitutes rather an initial principle of any thinking. This precedence implies that unity has ontological priority over thinking. In this way Plotinus manages to prove this priority and the ontological validity of the concept of unity using transcendental inquiry. Therefore, his critique forms an inner critique of this approach.

Nevertheless, this commentary is to be criticized both *argumentatively* and *interpretatively*. Regarding the argument, Halfwassen says that Plotinus inquires into the conditions of the possibility of thinking. However, according to Halfwassen, this inquiry does not result in the conditions of thinking, but rather in an ontological substance which precedes thinking. This transition from a condition to a substance is neither addressed nor mentioned by Halfwassen. Nevertheless, such a transition contains a logical fallacy. The term 'conditions of possibility' (Möglichkeitsbedingungen) is taken from the transcendental tradition and is characteristic of transcendental inquiry.¹⁷ Now,

¹⁷ Cf. for example Kritik der reinen Vernunft A 787 / B 815: "synthetische Bedingung der Möglichkeit des Gegenstandes". This term relates to the function of synthetic judgements *a priori*. See also (Kritik der reinen Vernunft A 111): "die Bedingungen der Möglichkeit der Erfahrung überhaupt sind zugleich Bedingungen

once the discussion is characterized as searching for conditions of possibility, it is no longer possible to reach any ontological and realist conclusions. For once the argument looks for conditions, the boundaries of the analysis are defined from the outset, the reason being that this method uses *abstraction* and *isolation* in order to recognize those conditions.¹⁸ These acts of abstraction and isolation are themselves acts of thinking, that is, an immanent part of the reflecting subject. Every result is, therefore, necessarily an immanent and integral part of the experience from which it is abstracted. Hence, the attempt to draw any ontological conclusion from such inquiry betrays its nature and method. The results of such inquiry cannot ensure the ontological validity (ontologische Gültigkeit) of the principle which conditions our thinking. The turn from an inquiry into conditions to conclusions of substance, or in other words from a transcendental inquiry to transcendent conclusion, is therefore false.

However, Halfwassen's reading is also *interpretatively* problematic. For in section 13 Plotinus expressly denies that the preceding factor may be seen as *mere* condition. Instead he stresses the ontological sense of this precedence (43-51):

If, then, it is not possible to think anything without the one ... how is it possible for that not to exist (μη εἶναι), without which it is not possible to think or speak? ... But that which is needed everywhere for the coming into existence of every thought and statement must be there before (προϋπάρχειν) statement and thinking ... But if it is needed for the existence of every substance – for there is nothing which is not one – it would also exist (εἶη) before substance and as generating substance.¹⁹

der Möglichkeit der Gegenstände der Erfahrung, und haben darum objektive Gültigkeit in einem synthetischen Urteile a priori".

18 Cf. Kant's formulation at Kritik der reinen Vernunft B 36: "In der transzendentalen Ästhetik also werden wir zuerst die Sinnlichkeit *isolieren*, dadurch, daß wir alles absondern, was der Verstand durch seine Begriffe dabei denkt".

19 Εἰ τοίνυν μηδέ τι νοῆσαι ἔστιν ἄνευ τοῦ ἐν ἡ τοῦ δύο ἢ τινος ἀριθμοῦ, πῶς οἷόν τε ἄνευ οὐ οὐχ οἷόν τε τι νοῆσαι ἢ εἰπεῖν μη εἶναι; Οὐ γὰρ μη ὄντος μηδ' ὅτι οὐδὲν δυνατὸν νοῆσαι ἢ εἰπεῖν, λέγειν μη εἶναι ἀδύνατον. Ἄλλ' οὐ χρεία πανταχοῦ πρὸς παντὸς νοήματος ἢ λόγου γένεσιν, προϋπάρχειν δεῖ καὶ λόγου καὶ νοήσεως: οὕτω γὰρ ἂν πρὸς τὴν τούτων γένεσιν παραλαμβάνοιτο. Εἰ δὲ

Plotinus formulates clearly that the conditioning factor must *exist* prior to the conditioned one: since “there is nothing which is not one,” then, to perceive an object we must presuppose the existence of unity. Thereby he explicitly attributes ontological meaning to this precedence. This means that when Plotinus identifies that unity *conditions* the existence of the subject and the object, by no means does he consider it a *mere* condition. Exactly at this point, by defining the precedence as ontological, Plotinus sets himself apart from the transcendental philosophy.

Therefore, Halfwassen’s use of the term “conditions of possibility” to characterize Plotinus’ inquiry is misleading, not because Plotinus does not search for conditions, but because in contrast to the transcendental view he attributes existence and reality to these conditions. His claim that unity as a condition implies an ontological meaning is completely alien and unacceptable to a transcendental inquiry into conditions of possibility. The results of a transcendental inquiry can prove neither the reality of the hypostases nor the transcendence of the One. The One’s precedence, obtained by such inquiry, is parallel to the unity of apperception, which, as we saw, Kant describes as the highest principle of human cognition (*Kritik der reinen Vernunft* B, p. 135). This principle has, of course, neither ontological standing nor transcendence. As mentioned above, Kant identifies it with understanding itself. And since, in contrast to Kant, Plotinus *hypostatizes* the principles and attributes to them existence or being, thereby denying the transcendental view from the outset, his denial cannot be considered an inner critique. Therefore, instead of Halfwassen’s reading we shall shortly suggest an alternative reading of this text.

It is quite striking that Halfwassen quotes the rather vague text of VI.6.13.19–23 to show that Plotinus considers what Halfwassen calls the subjective and the objective alternatives. Plotinus formulates the two alternatives much more clearly at the

καὶ εἰς οὐσίας ἐκάστης ὑπόστασιν – οὐδὲν γὰρ ὄν, ὃ μὴ ἔν – καὶ πρὸ οὐσίας ἄν
εἴη καὶ γεννῶν τὴν οὐσίαν.

beginning of section 12, where he says: “But if someone says that the one and the unit have no real existence (μὴ ὑπόστασιν) – for there is nothing that is one which is not one thing – but the One is rather the way the soul is affected (πάθημα δέ τι τῆς ψυχῆς) in regard to each of the real beings [...]” (1-3).²⁰ The idea here is that since unity is always a character of *one thing*, then possibly, unity is not in things but merely part of the soul’s perception, or “the way the soul is affected” by things. Plotinus’ way of refuting this is to show the priority of unity over thinking and thereby over the soul’s thinking. Since, as we saw, priority bears for Plotinus an ontological sense (and not the sense of mere condition), then priority means substantiality. Now, to illustrate the priority of unity, Plotinus points out that both the soul and its object must be one *prior* to the application of the category of unity (VI.6.13.14-16): “And then what speaks [= the soul] is *one* before it says ‘one’ of something else, and that about which it speaks [= the object], is *one* before anyone speaks or thinks about it.” If we say “this is something,” we see it as one thing just in virtue of saying that. However, we do not create the unity of the object by saying it, but only relate to the unity that exists before we speak. In the same way, the unity of the soul is necessarily presumed in order for us to speak at all. Both the soul and its object must each be a unity in order for perception to be possible. Thus, unity precedes both the soul and the object. Since precedence or priority are understood ontologically, therefore, unity is not subjected to the soul (“the way the soul is affected”) but rather an ontological entity or hypostasis which precedes the soul and its perception.

Obviously, at no point does Plotinus consider that this pertains to mere conditions. In contrast to Kant’s concept of the *a priori*, which indeed pertains to mere conditions, the precedence here is distinctly ontological. Furthermore, the discussion here is strongly reminiscent of the one we saw in VI.9.1 The main difference is that while there Plotinus’ interest is to ensure that unity is *external* to

20 Ἀλλ’ εἰ καὶ τὸ ἓν καὶ τὴν μονάδα μὴ ὑπόστασιν λέγοι ἔχειν – οὐδὲν γὰρ ἓν, ὁ μὴ τι ἓν – πάθημα δέ τι τῆς ψυχῆς πρὸς ἕκαστον τῶν ὄντων

the soul, in order to show that the soul is not the source of unity, here Plotinus demonstrates the *substantiality* of unity in order to exclude that it is a mere condition. However, externality and substantiality are two sides of the objectivity that Plotinus wishes to prove in both discussions. Both sides express the *transcendence* which sets Plotinus apart from the *immanence* of the transcendental view. In conclusion, as in the former discussion, it appears that Plotinus considers the transcendental insight discussed here to a limited extent. As in the former discussion, he distinguishes that the unity which the soul applies to objects is necessarily conditioned by a higher unity which precedes it. However, in understanding this precedence as ontological, Plotinus reveals that he does not consider the transcendental approach to its full extent. In contrast to Halfwassen's interpretation, Plotinus does not conduct a transcendental inquiry and its result cannot be seen as inner critique of this approach, since Plotinus clarifies that from the outset he presupposes that precedence implies an ontological and not solely a conditional sense. Therefore, in contrast to Kant's unity of apperception, Plotinus' highest unity is not only the highest *condition* but also the highest *hypostasis*. The next discussion we shall review leaves the realm of the soul and the two concepts of unity, reflecting instead on the hypostasis of the intellect and the concept of ἐπινοία.

3. II.9.1 [33]: ΕΠΙΝΟΙΑ AND THE TRANSCENDENTAL APPROACH

The third and final text we shall discuss in which Plotinus considers the transcendental approach is *Ennead* II.9.1, part of the treatise "Against the Gnostics". Plotinus deals here with the Gnostic argument that the intellect could not be considered one hypostasis, but should rather be divided into two. Accordingly, instead of a structure of three hypostases, like the one to which Plotinus adheres, they argue for a structure of four. The Gnostic claim for this division is established upon the dualism involved in the phenomenon of self-thinking, which is ascribed to the intellect. Plotinus elaborates on this issue in V.3, where he also discusses and refutes this division of the intellect. The discussion there deals more

extensively with what can be seen as the *reflective* understanding of self-consciousness.²¹ According to this approach, self-consciousness consists of two stages and thus is dualistic: in the first stage there is an unaware knower, which in the second stage turns to reflect upon itself and thereby becomes aware of itself. Accordingly, the self-conscious intellect should be viewed as consisting of two parts: a knower-intellect (pre-conscious), and a known-intellect (conscious). The result, according to the Gnostics, is that we cannot relate to the intellect as one hypostasis, but rather as two separate ones: an unconscious initial intellect, which thinks, but does not think itself, and a known intellect, which thinks that it thinks, i.e., thinks itself, and comes to being only in the second stage.

Nevertheless, adhering to the structure of exactly three hypostases – not less and not more – Plotinus is determined to reject this division of the intellect. To ground this rejection, he considers the different meanings that this division could bear. One of the possible senses considered is that the division is not real (ontological, objective), but merely conceptual, merely in thought (II.9.1. 41-42: ἄλλ' εἰ ἐπινοίαι φήσουσι). To designate this character Plotinus uses the term ἐπινοία, which can be translated as *conceptual* or *notional*.²² The term ἐπινοία may bear some resemblance to the insight discussed here, since instead of turning the philosophical distinctions into real entities, i.e., into hypostases, Plotinus considers that the distinctions are valid only within the realm of thought. This is the case, for example, in VI.2.13.28, where the term ἐπινοία serves to inquire about the formation of the numbers, i.e., whether their existence is real or merely notional. In our case the conceptual (ἐπινοία) division of the intellect would mean that the division between the thinking intellect and the self-thinking intellect does not create two entities, two

21 Such a “Reflective Theory” is discussed in D. Henrich (1966) 188–232.

22 S. Gertz (2017) defines the ἐπινοία division as “conceptual distinction, in opposition to a real difference in things” (pp. 111-112), T. Kobusch (2007) 1-20 stresses (p. 6) that in Plotinus ἐπινοία stands in contrast to the doctrine of hypostases. See also P. Kalligas (2014) 375, and O. Becker (1940) 33-34.

substances, but rather two concepts which have sense not in reality but only within the philosophical inquiry, within consciousness.

Plotinus' rejection of this conceptual (ἐπινοία) division of the intellect consists of four arguments. The first argument relates to the general consequences that the ἐπινοία approach might imply for the system of hypostases in general, while the other three relate specifically to the intellect and the meaning of its division. In this way, the second refutes the concept of "unconscious intellect", which is a result of the division, by demonstrating its implausibility. The third rejects this concept by arguing for the primacy and indivisibility of the concept of self-consciousness, and the fourth demonstrates the logical problem involved in the division of the intellect. We shall see that at least three of the four arguments include some analyses that consider and relate to the transcendental approach.

The first rejection is, then, the only one that concerns the *general* consequences of such a concept of ἐπινοία. Plotinus says here that this concept concerns not only the intellect but all three hypostases. The restriction to the realm of thought (ἐπινοία) implies "abandoning the idea of a plurality of hypostases" (lines 41-42).²³ Since this methodology necessitates remaining within thinking, it denies the *reality*, that is, the validity external to thinking, of the distinctions. The hypostases are thus not real entities, but mere conceptual constructions, part of a structural system lacking any substantiality. Instead of three hypostases, we are left with one hypostasis – either the intellect or the soul – in which these distinctions are made. Moreover, even this one hypostasis might be denied any reality, since its substance is also a creation of thought. Any such restriction of the philosophical inquiry to the realm of ἐπινοία might destroy from the ground up the foundations of any system of real hypostases. It seems that in arguing this, Plotinus believes the Gnostics to be no less interested in avoiding transferring the distinctions to the realm of ἐπινοία. So little do the Gnostics wish to annul the objective

23 πρῶτον μὲν τῶν πλειόνων ὑποστάσεων ἀποστήσονται

and ontological existence of the hypostases, that they even want to add another such hypostasis, namely by splitting intellect into two. The conclusion is that the ἐπινοία inquiry, together with the conceptual division of the intellect, should be rejected.

From a transcendental perspective, this first rejection shows the pertinence of the term ἐπινοία to the transcendental discussion. As we saw above, the transcendental approach does not view its philosophical principles as real substances, but rather as conditions. From this point of view this rejection of the term is clearly not an argument against the transcendental approach. It solely points out the consequences of such a claim, namely restricting the philosophical inquiry to mere ἐπινοία. Therefore, regarding the transcendental view, this critique is to be considered *external* rather than internal. It does not criticize the transcendental view, but demonstrates the damage it would cause to the reality of the hypostases.

In his next objections to the conceptual division of the intellect, Plotinus leaves the general consequences of restricting the inquiry to the realm of ἐπινοία, in order to focus on the plausibility and possibility of this division. The second problem Plotinus finds in it concerns the components created from this division. As mentioned, the division creates a self-thinking intellect, and an intellect which thinks but is unaware of its own thinking. Plotinus claims that such intellect would be witless (ἄφροσύνης). He establishes this critique on a comparison between the intellect's thinking and *our* thinking.²⁴ 'Our' refers here to the concept of the 'we', which is our consciousness as human beings who think both the objects outside us and ourselves. Such comparison between the intellect's thinking and our thinking is discussed in detail in other places (cf. I.1, V.3.3-4), and is based on the difference between the intellect and us, who "are not intellect" (V.3.3.32). In V.3.1-6, Plotinus shows that self-thinking in the strict sense belongs to the intellect

24 Cf. S. Gertz (2017): "this sentence contrasts the true intellect with human thinking" (p. 111).

and not to us, who are part of the soul. The difference between us and the intellect is reflected in the fact that the intellect *always* and *necessarily* thinks itself, whereas we think ourselves only from time to time, when we cease to think the outside objects and turn to ourselves. The argument here uses this difference between the intellect's and our self-thinking to show the implausibility of such a concept of 'unaware intellect'. Regarding our thinking, Plotinus says, claiming that someone is thinking, but lacks of self-thinking (i.e., does not know that he thinks), would be equal to saying he is witless. Even if this is the case with our own thinking, he continues, it would be unreasonable to claim that about intellect. The claim here is not to be understood as saying that every thinking is witless unless it includes self-thinking. Such a strict claim would cancel the difference between the intellect and the 'we'. The argument rather assumes that every thinking *can* become aware of itself.²⁵ Based on this ability, Plotinus claims: If 'we' who, in comparison to the intellect, have a lower degree of consciousness, have the ability to become aware of our thinking, it would be unreasonable to assume such of intellect, which indeed thinks but by definition *cannot* think that it thinks, and thus would need another intellect, which in turn would add its awareness to it. If we refuse to ascribe to ourselves such an inability to become aware of ourselves, how can we ascribe it to the intellect, which is defined by self-awareness? For this reason, the division of the intellect which creates this concept of unconscious intellect is itself unreasonable.

Beginning this argument by saying "Then we must consider if we can make distinctions in thought" (ἔπειτα δεῖ σκοπεῖν, εἰ καὶ αἰ ἐπινοοῖαι χῶραν), Plotinus expresses some hesitation whether this rejection of the division is valid to a discussion characterized as ἐπινοία. The reason is that the argument here lies on a comparison between the intellect's and our self-consciousness. Now, as long as the division of the intellect is merely conceptual (ἐπινοία), it is not clear that such a comparison between a conceptual element and our

25 This resembles Kant's famous formulation that (Kritik der reinen Vernunft B p. 131) the 'I think' must be *able* to accompany all my representations.

real and everyday consciousness is justifiable. Witlessness might well describe a real man, who is unable to become aware of its own thinking, but in what sense does it characterize a conceptual element which is a result of a division of the intellect's self-consciousness? It seems that due to this ambiguity regarding the way that such a conceptual element might be described, Plotinus has reservations in regard to this argument. For this very reason, from a transcendental point of view, such an argument, which ascribes witlessness to a mere concept, seems irrelevant. However, this is not the case in relation to the two following arguments.

The third and fourth arguments against the conceptual division of the intellect are complementary: the third is a direct proof and the fourth is an indirect proof of the same assertion, i.e., that self-thinking is a basic indivisible element.²⁶ The third claim demonstrates this indivisibility, while the fourth shows that assuming the divisibility of the intellect leads to a contradiction. We shall now proceed to the third one. Against the Gnostics' claim that the self-conscious intellect is to be reduced to an unconscious intellect and a self-consciousness intellect, Plotinus says that even

in its primary thinking (πρώτως νοεῖν) it [= intellect] would have also the thinking that it thinks, as an existent unity (ὡς ἔν ὄν); and it is not double, even in thought, there in the intelligible world (τῆ ἐπινοίᾳ ἐκεῖ) (51-52).²⁷

Of course, within an argument restricted to the realm of ἐπινοία, a term like 'an existent unity' (ἔν ὄν) cannot refer to an ontological existence, but merely to the idea that it is a simple unit which, like an atom or a monad, cannot be split, even conceptually.²⁸ The reason is that intellect's self-thinking is not a composition of

26 Regarding this claim and its relation to Aristotle's concept of 'unmoved mover' see L. P. Gerson (1997) 153-155.

27 ὁρῶν δ' ἑαυτὸν οὐκ ἀνοηταίνοντα, ἀλλὰ νοοῦντα ὁρᾷ. Ὡστε ἐν τῷ πρώτῳ νοεῖν ἔχει ἂν καὶ τὸ νοεῖν ὅτι νοεῖ ὡς ἔν ὄν· καὶ οὐδὲ τῆ ἐπινοίᾳ ἐκεῖ διπλοῦν.

28 Cf. V.3.13.13: "...thinking itself is thinking in the primary sense".

'thinking' and 'being directed to the self'. On the contrary, self-thinking is the basic element on which thinking is based. Such a division of the intellect, which aims at finding its basic elements, fails to recognize self-thinking as an indivisible and a basic element. Plotinus elaborates on this claim in V.3.5. In short, Plotinus establishes the argument there on the *active* or *actual* (ἐνέργεια) character of the intellect and its thinking. Since the object of the intellect is itself the activity of intellection, then this activity is itself knower and known. As long as the known object is static, it is necessarily different from the activity of thinking. The fact that within the intellect the known object is itself activity enables thus the identity of both. It follows that self-consciousness is one indivisible unity, an indivisible identity of knower and known.

From a transcendental point of view, this claim is similar to Kant's argument, formerly discussed, that the unity of apperception is the highest principle of human cognition. Highest *principle* (Grundsatz) means that it is not conditioned by another principle, nor can it be divided into more basic elements. In the former discussion we saw that Plotinus ascribes to the conditioning principle an ontological existence, and that in this respect Plotinus' view is opposed to the transcendental one. However, since the current discussion is solely conceptual (ἐπινοία), the meaning of the 'principle' is reduced to its conceptual meaning alone. Thereby Plotinus' argument regarding the primacy of self-consciousness expresses an idea which can be found in the transcendental tradition. The term self-consciousness is indeed not to be regarded as present here to its full extent, but merely with respect to the indivisible element recognized in it both by Plotinus and the Kantian tradition. Along with Kant, who formulates self-consciousness, expressed through the terms like "I think" and "apperception", as the highest principle of human cognition, self-consciousness gains a more extensive analysis by Kant's followers.²⁹ Fichte expresses the priority of self-consciousness over

29 Cf. the epilogue of M. Frank (1991).

any other consciousness by the formulation (Gesamtausgabe I 4 p. 271): “Alles Bewusstseyn ist bedingt durch das unmittelbare Bewusstseyn unserer selbst.” This immediate consciousness (unmittelbare Bewusstseyn) of ourselves is the highest condition or principle of every other consciousness. Since it establishes the highest principle, it is self-evident that it cannot be divided into more elementary components or principles. It expresses the initial unity of consciousness, which cannot be reduced to more elementary principles. Furthermore, the similarity between Plotinus and Fichte in this respect does not end here. Like Plotinus, Fichte expresses this immediate self-consciousness in terms of *activity*. He characterizes this self-consciousness as *Tathandlung*, a verb which includes two activities (*Tat* and *Handlung*) or as *esse in meru actu*, a pure act. Like Plotinus, Fichte explains that the active character is what enables the identity between the knower and the known.

It seems then that by claiming that self-consciousness is a conceptually indivisible principle, rather than a composition of thinking and being directed to the self, Plotinus' view is similar to the transcendental view. However, this proximity should be taken with a few reservations, both from the side of Plotinus and from the side of the transcendental tradition. First, further research is needed to show the extent to which the concept of self-consciousness overlaps in both traditions. Such research goes beyond the limits of the current paper, which deals solely with the standing of the philosophical principles. Second, Plotinus indeed sees the intellect's self-thinking as a higher element than any other thinking; however, in contrast to Kant and Fichte, he stresses that this is not the *highest* principle. As well known, for Plotinus this role is preserved for the One. Third, Kant and Fichte, for their part, do not express through the “I think” any *real* self-thinking. It does not relate to our everyday thinking of ourselves, but rather to a mere condition abstracted and isolated from our everyday experience. Indeed, as long as Plotinus' argument is merely conceptual (ἐπινοια), allegedly the self-thinking it expresses is not real either. However, when Plotinus ascribes witlessness to this element, as we saw in his former argument, he seems to ascribe

a sort of reality to an element which is supposed to be merely conceptual. Fourth, the proximity between the ἐπινοία character and the transcendental approach becomes even less apparent, when we consider Plotinus' next claim. Plotinus tries to reinforce his third argument against the division of the intellect by stating,

And further, if it is always thinking what it is, what room is there for the distinction in thought (ἐπινοία) which separates thinking from thinking that it thinks? (II.9.1.52-54)³⁰

Plotinus' argument here against the division of the intellect states that if the intellect *always* thinks itself, how can it be reduced to an element which lacks this quality? Supposedly the temporal persistence of self-consciousness does not leave room for an unaware component. However, by subjecting the conceptual elements to temporal terms, it seems that the discussion steps back from the transcendental insight discussed here. Allegedly, since in the framework of ἐπινοία the unconscious intellect is merely an abstract concept, it is not subjected to time. The fact that the intellect *always* thinks itself does not deny the possibility of conceptually dividing it into a concept which lacks awareness. Indeed, since we do not know much about the Gnostics' view other than through Plotinus' discussion here, it is difficult to fully comprehend Plotinus' intentions here. Nevertheless, from a transcendental point of view, subjecting a conceptual principle to time, which in turn is viewed as a form of sensuality, is of course false. Since Kant's unity of apperception is the highest principle of the understanding, it is not subjected to sensuality and its forms, and that includes space and time. With these reservations concerning the similarity of this third argument to the transcendental view, we turn to the fourth and last argument against the conceptual division of the intellect.

The fourth objection completes the third one with a proof by contradiction. While the third argument says that self-consciousness is a basic element which cannot be further divided, now Plotinus

³⁰ Εἰ δὲ καὶ ἀεὶ νοῶν εἴη, ὅπερ ἔστι, τίς χώρα τῆι ἐπινοίαι τῆι χωριζούσῃ τὸ νοεῖν ἀπὸ τοῦ νοεῖν ὅτι νοεῖ;

wishes to prove that assuming the opposite leads to absurdity. Specifically, presuming that self-consciousness can be further divided into more basic elements leads to an *infinite regress* (47-58):

But if one even introduced another, third, distinction in addition to the second one which distinguished “thinking that it thinks,” i.e. “thinking that it thinks that it thinks,” the absurdity (ἄτοπον) would become even more apparent. And why should one not go on introducing distinctions in this way to infinity?³¹

If we assume that conceptually self-thinking is not an indivisible element, but it can rather be reduced to the basic elements of mere thinking (without an object) and thinking that it thinks, then, says Plotinus, this phenomenon is not exhausted by these two. Due to the circular nature of self-consciousness, which can turn to itself over and over again, we can find more elements within it. Namely, the self-conscious intellect can become again conscious of its self-consciousness. Now, since the ἐπινοία approach, as Plotinus understands it, divides the intellect according to the different components that it finds in it, and since the self-conscious intellect can be itself again an object to consciousness, then we have here a third division, which is to be considered a third intellect. This third intellect is the one who is aware of the self-awareness: “thinking that it thinks that it thinks”. Of course, due to this circularity, the division does not stop here, as Plotinus states: “And why should one not go on introducing distinctions in this way to infinity?” The ability to become aware again and again leads the division in its ἐπινοία version to an infinite regress. To avoid this, Plotinus concludes, the intellect’s conceptual division must be rejected altogether. Self-consciousness is to be considered a basic, indivisible element, and since the intellect is itself self-consciousness, therefore the intellect is an indivisible unity.³²

31 Εἰ δὲ δὴ καὶ ἐτέραν ἐπινοίαν τις τρίτην ἐπεισάγοι τὴν ἐπὶ τῇ δευτέρῃ τῆμιλεγούσῃ νοεῖν ὅτι νοεῖ, τὴν λέγουσαν ὅτι νοεῖ ὅτι νοεῖ ὅτι νοεῖ, ἔτι μᾶλλον καταφανὲς τὸ ἄτοπον. Καὶ διὰ τί οὐκ εἰς ἄπειρον οὕτω;

32 Plotinus’ concern here, as is clear from the end of the passage (lines 58-64), is to reject adding an intermediary principle between the intellect and the soul.

To this fourth argument, like the former one, we can find an equivalent in the transcendental tradition, again in Fichte. In line with the above reservation that we do not find the concept of self-consciousness in total in the two traditions, but only specific features of it, we can demonstrate that just as both Plotinus and Fichte claim that self-consciousness forms a basic, indivisible element, so both use the regression argument as a proof by contradiction to demonstrate their claim. Fichte's version of the argument of infinite regress is again to be found, *inter alia*,³³ in his *Versuch einer neuen Darstellung der Wissenschaftslehre*. Fichte aims there at demonstrating that self-consciousness is inexplicable unless we assume the unity of knower and known as its basis. Specifically, as long as self-consciousness is understood merely through the terms of subject and object, then the subject knows only the object and not itself as subject. In order for the subject to be known, we must assume another subject that knows the first. But then again, the second subject knows the first and not itself. Fichte's conclusion is "auf diese Weise lässt das Bewusstseyn sich schlechthin nicht erklären" (Gesamtausgabe I 4 275). Due to this absurdity, says Fichte, self-consciousness must presuppose a unity of knower and known, subject and object: "es giebt ein Bewusstseyn, in welchem das Subjective und das Objective gar nicht zu trennen, sondern absolut Eins und ebendasselbe sind" (ibid.). The immediate self-consciousness must be presupposed in order for consciousness to be possible. Instead of reducing self-consciousness to subject and object, Fichte, like Plotinus, argues that they should be reduced to the immediate unity of subject-object, i.e., the indivisible unity of self-consciousness.

The proximity between Plotinus and Fichte regarding this regression argument, which is mentioned in scholarship by Düsing³⁴

Such an attempt could be conducted either in reality or conceptually (as ἐπινοία).

33 Some other versions of the regression paradox are to be found at Gesamtausgabe IV 2 p. 30 and II 8 pp. 304-307.

34 K. Düsing (1995) 7-26.

and Halfwassen,³⁵ demonstrates that despite the possible differences regarding self-consciousness, Plotinus' discussion, which adheres to the ἐπινοία character, indeed resembles the transcendental philosophy. By searching for the basic *conceptual* elements rather than for *real* entities, Plotinus comes to formulate self-consciousness as a basic element which cannot be reduced to more basic ones, just like Kant and Fichte. Like Fichte he characterizes it as activity, and like him, he uses the argument of infinite regress to prove it.

In conclusion, the discussion in II.9.1 aims at rejecting the conceptual (ἐπινοία) division of the intellect. Thus it enables us to examine the proximity of this ἐπινοία term to the transcendental insight. We saw that only Plotinus' first claim, namely, that the ἐπινοία character implies conceding the reality of the division between the hypostases, aims at rejecting this approach altogether, while the other three argue within the realm of ἐπινοία. Our discussion showed that from a transcendental perspective this first rejection forms merely an external critique in relation to the transcendental approach. The second argument, i.e., that the unconscious intellect would be witless, relies on a comparison between the intellect and our thinking. This comparison undermines somewhat the identification of the ἐπινοία with the transcendental approach. Nevertheless, the last two arguments against the conceptual division of the intellect are more compatible with this approach. In the third one, Plotinus argues, like the transcendental tradition, that self-consciousness is an indivisible element. This proximity becomes even more apparent since both Plotinus and Fichte characterize this element as activity or actuality. The fourth argument illustrates even more clearly the similarity between these two philosophers, since both Plotinus and Fichte use the proof by contradiction to demonstrate the notion that self-consciousness is an indivisible element. Therefore, although Plotinus rejects the ἐπινοία approach in general, in this specific aspect he comes closer to the transcendental insight.

35 J. Halfwassen (2002) 261-277.

CONCLUSION

The Critical Revolution takes the form of a critique of metaphysics, more precisely, of dogmatic metaphysics. The transcendental insight discussed here plays an important role in this critique. However, neither Kant himself, nor other philosophers from this tradition, adjusted this critique to each tradition in the history of philosophy so as to analyze each of them from this perspective. As shown throughout this paper, by examining Plotinus in light of this specific transcendental insight, which relates to the principles of philosophy not as real entities, but rather as concepts auxiliary to the philosophical explanation, some arguments can be found in which this insight is considered and rejected. From the above it is needless to say that Plotinus neither adopts nor represents this insight. In contrast to Oosthout's identification of Plotinus with the transcendental tradition, such an interpretation should be treated with extreme caution. Neither is it the case that Plotinus offers an internal critique of the transcendental view, as claimed by Halfwassen. Plotinus merely considers to some extent what we called here the transcendental insight, in the sense of reducing the hypostases to mere auxiliary elements. This is expressed both in recognizing the part of the soul in supplying unity to the perceived objects, in distinguishing it from the higher concept of unity, and in the *ἐπινοία* discussion, especially in detecting the indivisible element within self-consciousness. However, in those places where Plotinus considers this insight, it is rejected by him in order to maintain the reality of the hypostases. In none of them does Plotinus *argue* for this reality; he rather simply *presumes* it without further ado. In this way, it is the proximity between the Neoplatonic and the transcendental traditions that reveals the essential difference between them; these considerations demonstrate that even this insight alone, not to mention the transcendental philosophy as a whole, is considered solely to a limited extent. Since this research is merely preliminary and deals with the most significant places where Plotinus considers what we can today view as the transcendental insight, to fulfill it, a broader inquiry is required, which includes a systematic comparison between the two traditions.

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